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The Untold History of Japanese Game Developers

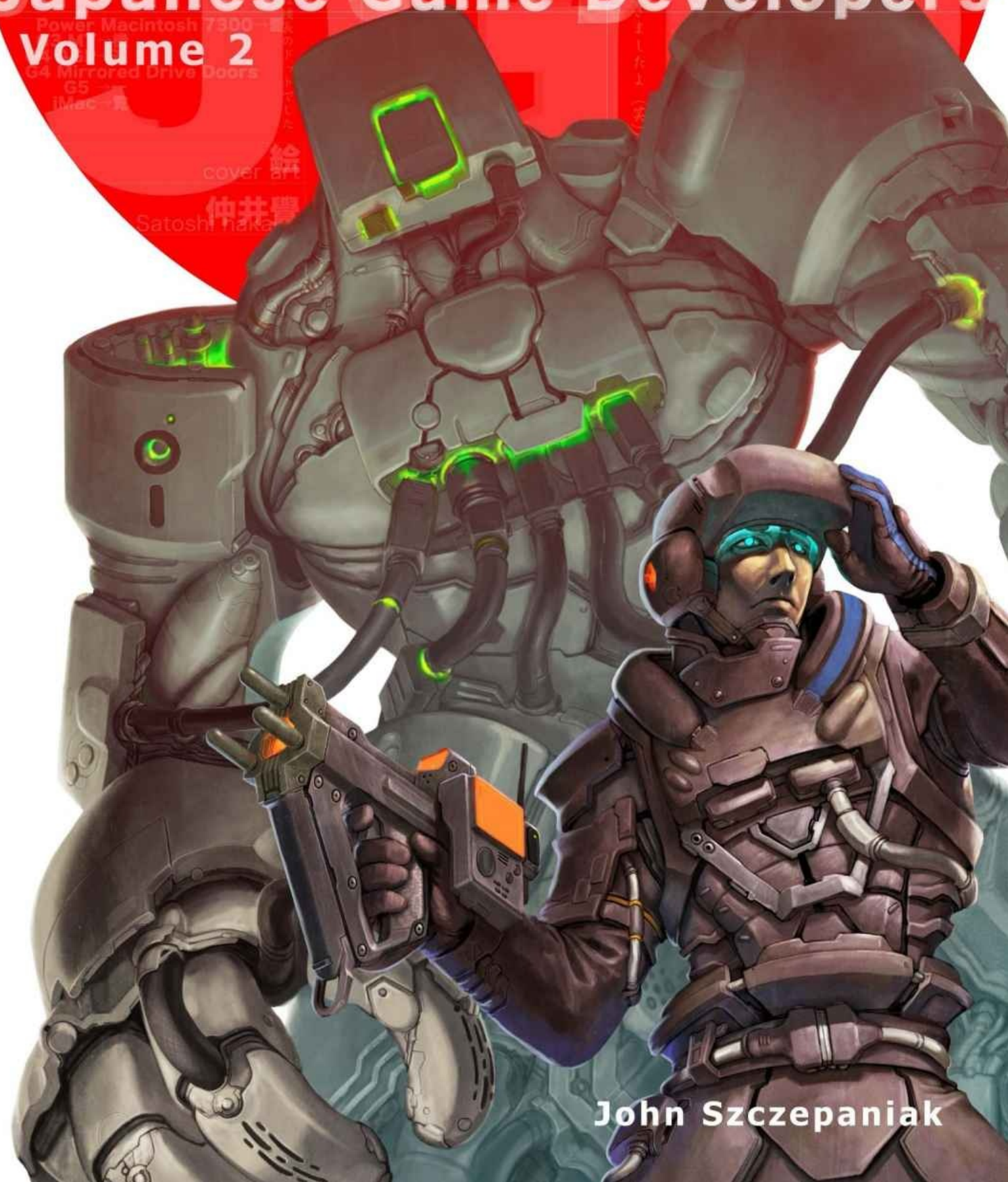
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cover art

仲井 賢

Satoshi Nakamura

John Szczepaniak



The Untold History of Japanese Game Developers

Volume 2

Monochrome

Written by
John Szczepaniak

Published by SMG SZCZEPANIAK

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To my dad,

Thanks for the monthly stipend, and use of the summer chalet



The front cover by Satoshi Nakai, featuring his **PC ENGINE GOLEM**, as it evolved over time. See the [Masaya interview](#) for more on its creation.



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mysterious Osaka based developer which twice changed its name, and had a reputation for being yakuza affiliated, physically beating its staff, and creating some of the strangest computer games in Japan. None of them reached the West, but they're all fascinating, and have strong connections to Falcom. Detailed discussion on the creation of *Dios*, and what might be the only true PC-88 CD-ROM game in existence, which as yet has never been found.

[Professor Hiroshi ISHIKAWA interview](#)

A reprint from Hardcore Gaming 101, detailing [Kagirinaki Tatakai](#) and [Brain Breaker](#) for Japanese computers.

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[Westone Entertainment chapter](#)

A detailed look at the company's history, including the *Wonder Boy* and *Monster World* series (and canonical *Monster Boy* sequel), plus titles like *Dark Half*, *Willy Wombat*, *Appare! Gateball*, *Princess Maker 4* and *Jaws* (with Atlus secrets!). Discusses the company's shift away from action platformers to focus on visual novels. Includes plenty of artwork by Ms Ohzora, including hidden graphics from *Aurail*, and a rare photo of Sega's Digitizer machine, used to create graphics. Also a group photo and signatures from all staff before the company sadly closed. One for the fans. **Interviews with:**

[Ryuichi NISHIZAWA](#)

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Reprint from Unseen 64. Interview with Taito R&D manager Yukiharu SAMBE, discussing the unreleased console.

[Professor Yoshihiro KISHIMOTO interview](#)

Namco and Koei in-depth, including world exclusive staff listing for all early Namco games. Details on how Namco operated, practical jokes by staff, location testing, computer history. *Mappy*, *Pac-Land*, *Star Wars* (with scorpion Vader!), *Baraduke*, *Toy Pop*, detailed *Famista* origins and history, *Opoona* on Wii, and a very important Namco obituary.

[NCS & Masaya chapter](#)

Over 40 pages of *cognoscenti* discussion. Early Taito graphics stations, early computer games, adult games, *Last Armageddon*, the unreleased *Temple Master*, *Gynoug*, the history of *Assault Suits* and how it directly ties in with *Front Mission* (with concept art!), *Cho Aniki*,

Shubibinman, how to fake parallax scrolling and transparency on PC Engine, *Resident Evil* art, *Culdcept* series, pre-history and evolution of the *Langrisser* series, plus *much* more!

Interviews with:

[Masayuki SUZUKI and Satoshi NAKAI](#)

[Mike EBERT & Dean SHARPE](#) (*Metal Warriors*)

[Human Entertainment & Nude Maker chapter](#)

At 48 pages this is the world's most comprehensive history of Human Entertainment. Detailed info on the company's sporting games, a roundtable discussion with three staff, plus everything about the Human Creative School (with photos!). *Final Match Tennis*, *Formation Soccer*, *Septentrion / SOS*, *Clock Tower*, *The Firemen*, *Mizzurna Falls* (like a prototype *Shenmue*!), plus unreleased games for Super Famicom and Virtual Boy. Also info on *Steel Battalion*, adult games, *Infinite Space*, and Kickstarter success *NightCry*. **Interviews with:**

[Ryoji AMANO](#)

[Hifumi KONO](#), [Masatoshi MITORI](#), and [Masaki HIGUCHI](#)

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[Irem and Nazca and Granzella chapter](#)

Pre-history and evolution of Irem, which begot Nazca and Granzella (plus a *major* secret!). Detailed coverage on *Kaitei Daisensou*, *Disaster Report* series, and *Steambot Chronicles*. Trivia on a significant *Metal Slug* alteration. **Interviews with:**

[Mayumi NISHIMURA](#)

[Kazuma KUJO](#)

[Future Japan: Debunking the Downfall Myth](#)

Introduction to a series of interviews which look at both the history and future of Japanese games. Includes a list of 108 interesting titles from this previous generation.

[Rica MATSUMURA](#)

Mysterious Apple Mac games, translating *Operation Darkness* for X360, details on Agatsuma, origins and development of *Code of Princess*, the international *Nyan-Jelly* experiment, problems with Nintendo region-locking the 3DS, and a supplementary interview with Rica's son, Kazuki MATSUMURA (p339).

[Yasuo NAKAJIMA](#)

Did you know Nintendo co-funded development of an unreleased RTS game for Sony's PlayStation, via company Marigul? Plus info on *Kamaitachi no Yoru* on Super Famicom, *Shiren* on Game Boy, and *Code of Princess* on 3DS.

[Toshinobu KONDO](#)

All about Fill-in-Café and the creation of *Umihara Kawase*.

[Mikito ICHIKAWA / Micky ALBERT](#)

Working for Falcom aged 14, then at Dempa aged 16. Revolutionary patent disputes, real pinball, *MaBoShi* on Wii, *Super Chain Crusher Horizon* on PC (the second highest resolution game ever made), and the currently unreleased *Space Invaders IBM* (the actual highest resolution game in existence).

[Shinsaku OHARA](#)

All kinds of Capcom details. *Dino Crisis 2*, *Resident Evil: Gaiden*, *Steel Battalion*, *Viewtiful Joe*, *P.N.03* (detailed info!), *Under the Skin*, *Killer 7* (all kinds of crazy secrets!), plus previously undocumented info on *Dead Phoenix* and *Resident Evil 3.5*, both unreleased. Also supplementary discussion on *Mighty No. 9*.

[Taka KAWASAKI](#)

Details on how Unreal Engine is levelling the playfield for Japanese developers wanting to compete with the West.

[Volumes 1 and 3, plus other books](#)

Historical Exchange Rates & Inflation Table

Whenever an interviewee mentions a monetary value for a given year, please refer to this table to find out the equivalent in other currencies and the inflation rate for 2015. The inflation figures are for a single unit of currency. So £1 in 1975 would be the equivalent to over £6 worth of spending power today.

All data taken from www.fxtop.com



YEAR	£1 = ¥en	\$1 = ¥en	£1 = \$	¥1k in £	¥1k in \$	£\$¥ adj. inflation 2015
2015	180	119	1.58	5.30	8.39	N/A
2008	192	105	1.98	4.84	9.57	£1.16 / \$1.10 / ¥1.01
2007	236	118	2.00	4.25	8.50	£1.19 / \$1.14 / ¥1.02
2006	214	116	1.84	4.67	8.60	£1.22 / £1.17 / ¥1.02
2005	200	110	1.82	5.00	9.09	£1.25 / \$1.21 / ¥1.02
2004	198	108	1.83	5.05	9.25	£1.27 / \$1.25 / ¥1.02
2003	189	116	1.63	5.29	8.64	£1.28 / \$1.28 / ¥1.02
2002	188	125	1.50	5.33	8.01	£1.30 / \$1.31 / ¥1.01
2001	175	121	1.44	5.72	8.24	£1.32 / \$1.33 / ¥1.00
2000	163	108	1.52	6.14	9.28	£1.33 / \$1.37 / ¥1.00
1999	184	114	1.62	5.46	8.83	£1.34 / \$1.41 / ¥0.99
1998	217	131	1.66	4.63	7.68	£1.37 / \$1.43 / ¥0.99
1997	198	121	1.64	5.05	8.28	£1.39 / \$1.46 / ¥1.01

1997	198	121	1.64	5.05	8.28	£1.39 / \$1.46 / ¥1.01
1996	170	109	1.56	5.90	9.20	£1.42 / \$1.50 / ¥1.02
1995	148	94	1.58	6.77	10.70	£1.46 / \$1.54 / ¥1.01
1994	156	102	1.53	6.40	9.80	£1.49 / \$1.58 / ¥1.02
1993	167	111	1.50	6.01	9.03	£1.53 / \$1.63 / ¥1.03
1992	224	127	1.77	4.50	7.90	£1.57 / \$1.67 / ¥1.04
1991	238	135	1.77	4.22	7.44	£1.68 / \$1.72 / ¥1.07
1990	257	145	1.78	3.89	6.94	£1.81 / \$1.83 / ¥1.11
1989	226	138	1.64	4.43	7.27	£1.91 / \$1.92 / ¥1.14
1988	228	128	1.78	4.39	7.81	£2.00 / \$2.00 / ¥1.15
1987	236	145	1.64	4.23	6.94	£2.05 / \$2.09 / ¥1.16
1986	247	168	1.47	4.07	5.97	£2.11 / \$2.11 / ¥1.15
1985	307	238	1.30	3.27	4.23	£2.19 / \$2.19 / ¥1.17
1984	317	237	1.34	3.16	4.22	£2.29 / \$2.28 / ¥1.20
1985	307	238	1.30	3.27	4.23	£2.19 / \$2.19 / ¥1.17
1984	317	237	1.34	3.16	4.22	£2.29 / \$2.28 / ¥1.20
1983	360	237	1.52	2.78	4.21	£2.39 / \$2.36 / ¥1.22
1982	435	249	1.75	2.31	4.03	£2.54 / \$2.46 / ¥1.25
1981	445	220	2.03	2.26	4.55	£2.79 / \$2.67 / ¥1.30
1980	525	226	2.33	1.91	4.44	£3.18 / \$3.01 / ¥1.39
1979	465	219	2.12	2.17	4.59	£3.63 / \$3.41 / ¥1.47
1978	403	210	1.92	2.50	4.80	£4.00 / \$3.72 / ¥1.53
1977	468	268	1.75	2.14	3.74	£4.48 / \$3.97 / ¥1.61
1976	535	296	1.81	1.88	3.38	£5.21 / \$4.16 / ¥1.77
1975	658	297	2.22	1.52	3.37	£6.26 / \$4.45 / ¥1.92

~Foreword by Martyn Carroll~



Some doubted the viability of a retro focused magazine, but Martyn Carroll pushed ahead to launch Retro Gamer. Now a contributing writer, the magazine is 150+ issues strong

I want to share a story with you. In the 15 or so years I've been interviewing games people I've heard lots of great tales: some unbelievable, a few unprintable. This one is neither of those things, but it's particularly suitable here.

The story concerns Capcom's Commando and how the game – and its hero Super Joe – led the Japanese invasion of European gaming in the 1980s. Central to this tale is Elite Systems, a very British software house based in Birmingham, England. Elite produced games for Europe's most popular computers – the Commodore 64, the Sinclair Spectrum, the Amstrad CPC, the BBC Micro and others – and fully understood the value of a strong license. It had previously scored hits with a game based on the US TV show Airwolf and another featuring Brit boxer Frank Bruno.

Elite looked to the arcades and saw the success of Commando. The firm expressed an interest in licensing Commando for home computers and was invited to meet Capcom president Kenzo Tsujimoto when he visited London in August 1985. The initial plan was to

table an offer of £25'000, but rival UK publisher Ocean Software also hoped to secure the rights, so Elite stepped up with an "all in" offer of £65'000. According to Elite's Steve Wilcox there were no handshakes, just a brief "thank you" and they were asked to wait outside. Two hours later they were told that they'd got the deal and the papers were signed the very same day. It was a substantial sum to offer – Elite had previously paid just £3'000 to grab the Airwolf rights – but it was sound business as Commando went on to top the charts, selling more than 200'000 copies across various formats. Super Joe had landed in Europe.

More importantly it opened the door to the East for Elite. Wilcox travelled to a gaming event in Tokyo where Capcom, Sega, SNK, and Tehkan were showing off their latest coin-op hits. To his surprise there was no-one else from Europe there so he could take his pick of the properties. In his hand he held a note, translated into Japanese, saying who he was and how he'd just done a deal with Capcom for Commando. He was soon on a plane back to the UK along with the rights to Bomb Jack, 1942, Ghosts 'n' Goblins, and Space Harrier. Not a bad haul! These titles were all big sellers during 1986 and beyond, turning Elite into one of Europe's leading software houses. Unsurprisingly when Wilcox returned to the Japanese show the following year it was swarming with UK software people, cheque books flapping in their hands, looking to land something, *anything*. (To his credit, Wilcox still managed to snag Ikari Warriors from SNK.)

So now you know how the European release schedules became dominated by conversions of Japanese coin-op hits, and why companies like Sega, Taito and Konami were suddenly on everyone's lips (even if we weren't 100% sure how to pronounce them properly). That's just a brief, second-hand story concerning Japanese games – this impressive work contains many others, directly from those involved, concerning the games, the people, the places, the culture. Stories that you'll certainly want to share.

Martyn Carroll

Writer and founding editor of Retro Gamer magazine

T H I S A G R E E M E N T is made the 8th
day of August One thousand nine hundred and eighty five
BETWEEN CHIDESTONE LIMITED of 24 Chapel Street Luton
Bedfordshire LU1 2SE ("the Licensor") of the one part
and ELITE SYSTEMS LIMITED of Anchor House Anchor
Road Aldridge Walsall West Midlands WS9 9PW England
("the Licensee") of the other part

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rights title and interest in all the copyrights
subsisting in the Territory (as hereinafter defined) in
all the works used in the design manufacture and
operation of the electronic video amusement game
"COMMANDO" (also known as "SPACE INVASION" in West
Germany) originally developed by Capcom Co. Limited of
Osaka Japan including in particular all literary
musical and artistic works and cinematographic films
(as defined in the Copyright Act 1956 (as amended))
and computer programs used therein ("the Copyrights")
the know-how trade secrets and other information
associated therewith ("the Know-How") and in the trade
mark "COMMANDO" ("the Trade Mark") together with the
goodwill attached thereto ("the Goodwill")

~Foreword by Martin Picard, PhD~

When I started researching Japanese popular culture and videogames a while ago, I quickly noticed that knowledge and publications about Japanese videogames were terribly lacking. It was very surprising considering the importance of this industry throughout the history of the media.

Obviously, the language barrier is the main reason for this gap, but there's also other factors that have already been pointed out, which often flirt with national and cultural stereotypes. The first one relates to the supposed isolationist attitude of Japan (as a more or less isolated island), making the Japanese (people as well as companies) difficult to approach, at the same time that Japan itself is difficult to comprehend with all its richness and complexity. On the other hand, the Western-centrism of Europeans and North Americans, especially regarding the history of videogames, has meant that Japan, despite its undeniable contribution in a global industry, has often been overlooked or at least not properly considered in its local context. That is, other than through its exported and localised games, even if they were often very different from the originals. Consequently, we can also add as a factor the global aspect of the industry, since videogames exported from Japan have not often been advertised as Japanese (especially during the 1980s and 1990s), to the point where Japanese cultural products in general have been characterised as culturally "odourless", or *mukokuseki* in Japanese.¹

In short, it is obvious that the history of the videogame industry in Japan is too little known, and for a long time something needed to be done about it. Therefore, it is all to the credit of John Szczepaniak to have directly addressed this issue by embarking on a courageous adventure in the land of the Rising Sun. The importance of this project has been quickly recognized and has generated strong excitement for all fans of Japanese games, and for good reason. To go to Japan and interview former and current Japanese developers, crossing over the wall of PR, couldn't have been an easy task, but John has fruitfully shown that it was possible. And John's success was reflected through the richness of the first volume, and it is even more so for the one you have now in front of you.

What is also noteworthy is his interest (and insistence) in uncovering the computer game market in Japan, which is by far the most unrecognized aspect of the history of Japanese games - while the focus in North America and Europe has always been towards console games (which is of course understandable given that these are the products that were exported). However, one of the main consequences is that, unfortunately, Japanese computer games have remained a deeply local phenomenon.

How many times have I read, wrongly, that computer games were non-existent in Japan? But the truth is that they have always been there, and they had an undeniable economic and artistic importance throughout the history of games in Japan. This can easily be acknowledged by looking back at the beginning of game development companies such as Enix, SquareSoft, Nihon Falcom, Koei, and others; but also in the case of amateur games (or *doujin geemu*), a submarket in itself, which is also unfortunately unknown, but for several different reasons; or, for at least the last decade, the niche market of *visual novels*, which is becoming increasingly known outside of Japan; or, as a last example, the recent popularity of

online computer games, which DO exist in Japan, and for a while, again contrary to a general false belief, evidenced by the successes of *Kantai Collection* (or *KanKore*), or *Touken Ranbu*, an otome game, a subgenre that is targeted at a female audience, and which also deserves attention.

In brief, Japan has an extremely rich games industry, culture, and history that must be uncovered as soon as possible (especially before industry pioneers leave us, as John has already often pleaded). We can only hope that John's groundbreaking work brings a legacy of many more exciting discoveries.

For now, let's enjoy this volume, filled with the best of these historical treasures.

Martin Picard

Martin Picard is currently a Visiting Lecturer and Research Fellow at Leipzig University in Germany teaching and participating in research projects on Japanese videogames. He also has been a lecturer at the University of Montreal and Laval University in Canada, where he taught Japanese cinema and literature, videogame aesthetics and history, as well as game design. A few years ago, he received a year-long grant from the Japan Foundation as part of a research project on Japanese videogame culture at Wako University in Tokyo. Previously, he had completed a postdoctoral fellowship at McGill University on the same subject and obtained his PhD in cinema and literature from the University of Montreal. He has published several articles and book chapters in scientific journals and publications dedicated to videogames and Japanese popular culture. He is also a member of the executive committee of the History of Game Annual Symposium held in Montreal each year.



Dr Picard, left, with the author in Montreal 2014, at the Game History Annual Symposium

~Author's Introduction~

"If a man approaches a work of art with any desire to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it in such a spirit that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art. The spectator is to be receptive. He is to be the violin on which the master is to play. And the more completely he can suppress his own silly views, his own foolish prejudices, his own absurd ideas of what Art should be, or should not be, the more likely he is to understand and appreciate the work of art in question. [...] A true artist takes no notice whatsoever of the public. The public are to him non-existent."

– Oscar Wilde, playwright



I've started with this quote because we are entering a dark era where, thanks to online connectivity, and a perverse desire to democratise the creative process, the non-creative public now has the power to oppress the inviolability of actual creative voices. As I stated during my Kickstarter campaign, ***I am not a democracy***, I am an *autocrat* - my work follows only my own whims. Creators should lead the public, not slavishly bend to the demands of a vocal online crowd. If the current state of content creation is the new status quo, then we are all damned and undeserving of anything.

In a later chapter I debunk the ridiculous notion of Japan's creative bankruptcy, but it's important to acknowledge a legitimate threat to videogame creativity right now - the rise of social media and internet fuelled "outrage profiteers". Those who are so offended at everything they desire to lobotomise all thought so as to defang human nature. Below are some examples of how a few repressed cliques are ruining it for all of us.

Katsuhiro Harada was harassed online, regarding the Lucky Chloe character in *Tekken*; his response was to deny Americans access to her, mocking their insularity. A popular news site harassed George Kamitani about the exquisite art design in Vanillaware games, resulting in a humorous put-down that enraged the internet (pictured, ***Three Graces***). Kenichiro Takaki is forever harassed for the *Rubenesque* portrayals in his *Senran Kagura* series, but he just doesn't give a damn, is not afraid of sexuality, and openly states it's a universal language. Swery65 was targeted by an interviewer who accused him of prejudice, to which Swery65 cleverly showed the interviewer's question betrayed their own prejudice. Hideki Kamiya is bothered by and wages a one-man campaign against social media degenerates all day long. The list of Japanese developers attacked by *puritanical censors* goes on: Hideo Kojima, Suda51, Tomonobu Itagaki, and more - even Kinu Nishimura of Capcom was targeted because of her exquisitely beautiful artwork.

I would normally dismiss the pseudo-intellectual vacuity of plebeian essayists with the wave of a hand, but some developers are listening to their garbage and taking it seriously. This needs to stop. The illogical whining of the Western press and the human flotsam on social media is embarrassing. It makes us look like a troupe of pious, prejudiced, conservative imbeciles, and it is poisoning creative freedom. This is the real danger for

Japanese developers, who pay too much attention to these irrelevant viewpoints. Stop trying to coerce, manipulate, influence, or otherwise silence creators. This used to be the behaviour of *authoritarian* cretins like Joe Lieberman and Jack Thompson; when and how did we gamers - *libertarians* - allow their types into our world, handing over the reins of the media in the process?

Whether it's the hardcore beloved *Call of Duty* and *Megami Tensei*, or the story focused *Gone Home* and *Steins;Gate*. All are titles, from West and East, which see attacks from those who do not enjoy them. None of these games I personally enjoy, but I am pleased they exist, **because infinite diversity of creativity befits a medium of infinite possibility such as videogames**. Somewhere there are groups who derive joy from these games. Isn't that the most important thing for any creative work - to bring value to someone's being? Again I refer to Oscar Wilde's opening. Do not allow your narrow mindedness to destroy the work of others, instead be the violin. If you dislike a creative work, do not engage with it, do not consume it, instead create your own work. There needs to be less prejudice and more tolerance, more creativity. **The ones who should be silent are those wishing to silence creators.**

I've adopted this philosophy for Volume 2, ignoring the public to focus on *my* vision for the book. I've abandoned stylistic consistency because every interviewee is different, and so benefits from a different style of layout and font trickery. I've underlined *game names* but for other media names merely *italicised* them, because this book is about games and it makes for easier scanning. There is no Index, because after putting a lot of effort into the Index for Volume 1, I concluded there's little point in listing Famicom references when a book is hundreds of pages long and every interviewee mentions it more than once. The Contents pages provide enough specifics to direct you.

Volume 2 has taken longer, required more work, and cost more money to produce than Volume 1. **For maximum accuracy, all Japanese interviews were transcribed by a professional who retranslated the dialogue in real-time. The original spoken interpretations have been junked entirely.** This has resulted in more natural dialogue - I think the results will be immediately apparent for all interviews. All the money made from Volume 1 and the supplementary DVD were ploughed directly into Volume 2, in addition to several thousands of pounds worth of savings and loans.

As I type this introduction I cannot say if all the labour and resources were worth it. The Amazon sales for Volume 1 were nowhere near as high as needed. Kindle sales have been even lower (the death of print? More like the miscarriage of digital). I fear that the intensity of my love for Japanese games caused me to incorrectly assume there must be a sufficient number of people who felt the same, thereby making these books a viable proposition. In fact it appears there is only a very small group of fellow aficionados. Tell others about this book. Encourage more sales. Writing books is a long, gruelling, painful, and very expensive process - especially this kind of book - and Volume 3 can only begin if Volume 2 sells like a cross between *Harry Potter*, *The DaVinci Code*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

Spread the word.

~About the author~

John Szczepaniak is a journalist, novelist, and copy editor.

He's written for Retro Gamer, GamesTM, Official PlayStation Magazine, Game Developer Magazine, Gamasutra, The Escapist, GameFAN MkII, nRevolution, 360 Magazine, Play UK, X360, Go>Play, Next3, The Gamer's Quarter, Retro Survival, NTSC-uk, Tom's Hardware Guide, Insomnia, GameSetWatch, Shenmue Dojo, Pixel Nation, plus others. He was also a keynote speaker at Montreal University.



He frequently contributes to Hardcore Gaming 101, where he helped put together The Guide to Classic Graphic Adventures book, and was managing editor on Sega Arcade Classics Volume 1 book. He also once wrote a 100'000 word post-apocalyptic fiction novel.

John has been doing this for over 10 years, and has interviewed over 200 people. He also enjoyed a six month stint as Staff Writer on Retro Gamer and three years as sub-editor at Time Warner. He's licensed by the UK's Royal Yachting Association as a sea skipper, and also holds a Marine Radio Operator's license.

The nifty avatar in the upper left is courtesy of Paul Rose, of www.Digitiser2000.com (Mr Biffo is reborn!)

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Hardcore Gaming101
Arcade Classics Volume 1

Sega

Retro Gamer
Time Warner

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~Acknowledgements~

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Below are various people who helped with the book. They're in a totally random order, as I noted them down. If I forgot to thank you, my apologies. Please let me know.

Matt Fitsko - the main reason Volume 2 exists. The Forrest Gump to my Lieutenant Dan / **François-Xavier Morriset** - *un vaillant chevalier au service de la justice qui a pourfendu deux vipères* / **my mom** - for assuring me that the right will always prevail over the wrong / **my dad** - keep the shotgun loaded, you never which scumbags might fly over and show up / **my brother** - when are we raising hell again on the next road trip? / **St Jude** / **Darran Jones** / **Sandy White** and **Paul Drury** - allowing use of a photo / **Paul Birch** / **Jon Johnston** of www.hpmuseum.net for a photo / **Jonathan "Persona" Kim** / **Rob Duenas** / **The Strong Museum**, Rochester, NY, for a photo / **Leo Staton** - screenshots / **Evan Amos** - providing royalty free hardware photos to all who need them / **Morgan Ramsay** - not only was his series of books with developer interviews an inspiration (and I love the non-serif font), but he also helped in more tangible ways, including moral support from someone who'd been in the book writing trenches. If you're interested in Q&A interviews with Western devs, search Amazon for his series / **Brian Gazza** of BlameTheControlPad - screens / **Mike Bevan** / **Andrea Babich** / **Mat Allen** - scans (only one T!) / **Miikka Poikela** / **Julio Gracia** - Bee Pack photo / **Sam Derboo** - screens / **Emmanuel Deparis** - *Baraduke* info / **Trickless** - footnote on *Valusa* / everyone on the **Tokugawa Forums** (too many to name; but anyone who has ever helped anyone else out on that forum, not just me. You're keeping history alive!) / **The Cutting Room Floor** website - one of my all-time favourite websites, and a fantastic resource of all the things you're not meant to see in games / and last but certainly not least, **Casey Loe**, who provided text translation and insight into various aspects of game history. It feels good keeping alive the essence of *GameFan* magazine with not only his inclusion, but **Terry Wolfinger's** Volume 3 cover art on the back. My apologies if I forgot to include you.

Write your name here: _____

~The Artists~

Satoshi Nakai, cover artist, home.n00.itscom.net/dnb/ — **The Fraim Brothers**, comic artists, www.brosfraim.com — **Dami Lee**, comic artist, www.asperusualcomics.com — **Thor Thorvaldson**, comic artist, thormeister.deviantart.com



NANASHI, Hideo

DOB: MCMXC / Birthplace: Space Station 2CV6 / Blood Type: Cero Z

Conversation in Area 51 game bar in Tokyo

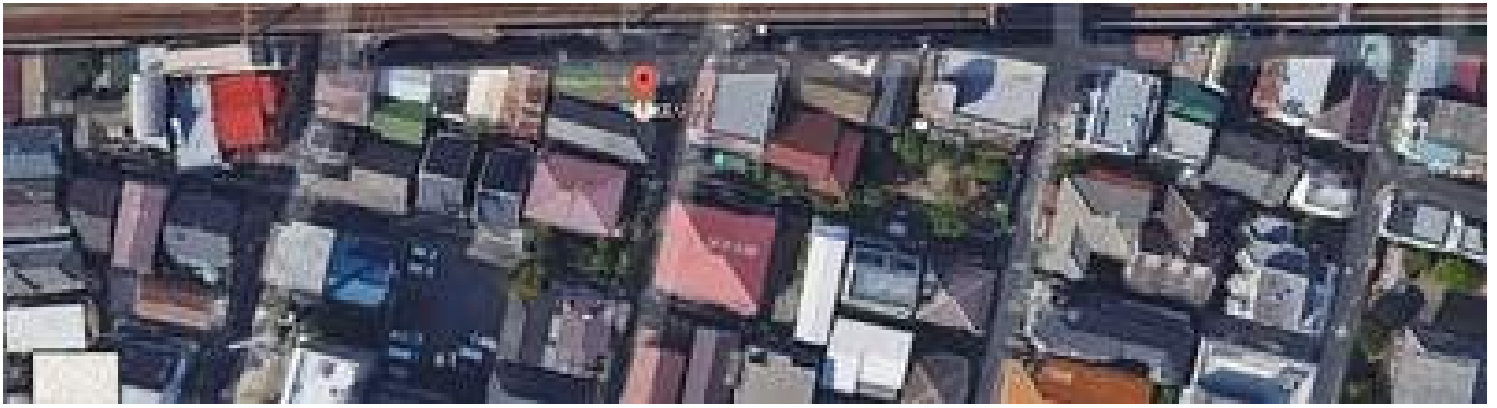
Date: 31 November 2048 / Duration: Unknown

This interview took place at Tokyo's Area 51 "game bar" - in an area filled with strangely themed bars (including a *Godzilla* one!). We chatted, drank *neon sake*, and I tried out the proprietor's Virtual Boy. He also played *Akumajou Dracula* on a large LCD TV, though most patrons were content to use the available computers to play *Phantasy Star Online*. Small and dark, illuminated by computer monitors, the walls lined with Famicom cartridges and *hentai*, it was the perfect cyberpunk environment to deck in and discuss the secrets of the megacorps... (Plus, we explain some redacted statements from an interview in Volume 1.)

Full disclosure: this chapter has become an *amalgamation of statements made by multiple interviewees*. So there's no point trying to figure out who they are. It started as a single interview at Area 51, but as the number of dangerous answers grew, I was faced with either [REDACTING] them, or publishing them anonymously. The interviewees liked the idea of running them contiguously, since it makes identification difficult. I personally verified that all speakers worked at any mentioned companies, and were involved in certain projects, but ultimately a lot had to be omitted to avoid anyone tracing the multiple sources. Interviewees read my edited version for final approval. This chapter covers *unreleased games* - for some there are *zero* records. While this makes them impossible to verify, I am certain they existed within the companies mentioned. Some were documented by the press and their details hold up.

Something which more journalists should investigate is the role of the yakuza in gaming history. Most interviewees were chilled to silence at the mere mention - but yakuza organisations are undeniably part of Japan's videogame culture. For the less savoury things discussed, notably criminal activities, *these took place nearly 20 years ago*, and it's impossible to corroborate the statements. They are presented here not as news items, but historical memoirs of interviewees, and *should not be seen as being representative of any companies today*. The companies mentioned were not contacted for comment, given that after such a long period of time the key members are no longer there.

I paid a top London law firm an astronomical amount for media clearance, receiving a detailed report which stated: "There are a number of seriously defamatory allegations contained within. There is a significant litigation risk to publishing the material." As such I have blacked out all identifying information. If you want a book without any [REDACTIONS], find a big publisher with a tough legal team, *because we live in a world where the truth is silenced*.



JS: So you worked for Sega?

HN: For a time, yes.

JS: You mentioned a license Sega tried to acquire.

HN: The Batman film license, right. This must have been around 1989, when Tim Burton's film came out?² But I was not in the games industry then - my discovery of this while at Sega happened a few years after.

JS: So you're just a secondary source?

HN: Well, it's a fairly well known set of events, internally, depending who you ask at Sega.

JS: I've heard accounts, but people are nervous talking...

HN: My name isn't going in this?

JS: Not if it means I get all the dirty secrets.

HN: Well, I wouldn't call it dirty. As you know, Konami was having talks with Warner Brothers about acquiring the Batman license. They were working on an arcade game that would be based on Burton's Batman - Konami even separately licensed the film's music by Prince, made a vehicle section, everything, the works. Anyway, Sega made a higher offer to Warner Brothers.

JS: How did Sega know about the discussions between Konami and Warner Brothers?

HN: Good question! I'm not sure - I just know that Sega approached Warner...

JS: But Konami *did* make Batman games.³

HN: That was later. When Sega came in with its higher bid, that made Warner Brothers take notice. Two companies vying for the same film license, this thing is obviously *huge*, right? So Warner Brothers calls the thing off - why sell it to Sega or Konami, or whoever, when they could get one of their own companies to make it? They'd keep all the money in-house then. So

they tried to do it themselves.

JS: Others say the same thing. I assumed it was Atari's arcade release, since both Warner Brothers and Atari fell under Time Warner. However, my other interviewee said Warner Brothers' attempt never came through.

HN: Possibly. You'd have to get Warner Brothers to answer that one.

JS: So SunSoft produced licensed Batman games for consoles, and Atari did the arcade game.⁴

HN: But with the SunSoft game on Famicom, wasn't a prototype leaked showing it originally was *not* meant to tie in with the film?

JS: Er... No? The prototype had different cutscenes, and no final Joker boss. But its preview in *Nintendo Power* #8 still looked like a tie-in to me.⁵

HN: It could have been for a different license, from DC Comics, or whoever owns the Batman franchise. It's like a giant American pie, with slices of merchandising and licensing deals. The Warner Brothers, Sega, Konami three-way was for the Tim Burton film license. It was about the movie rather than the comics or toys or whatever. If I had to guess - and this is just my theory - if the comic license was tied up with some other company, licensing the film adaptation could be like a workaround? You interviewing anyone from SunSoft?

JS: No - no time.

HN: Don't focus on who developed the game too much - any company can be hired - the best evidence is who published each title. All the publishers change around 1992, even for SunSoft's own developed Mega Drive title. The Japanese and American release? SunSoft published them. But come 1992 and the European Mega Drive release? Sega publishes that one, implying that's the switching point, sometime in 1992.⁶



Was SunSoft's Batman on NES always meant to be a license of the film, or the franchise in general?

JS: So how did Konami end up with Batman?

HN: Later on Warner Brothers went back to Konami and asked about licensing possibilities.

JS: Hence Batman Returns on Nintendo platforms.

HN: Right, right, right... Well, you'd have to check which Konami branded Batman games came out later, but they did finally get the license. But the original arcade game which Konami was working on, for use with Batman, that was long gone by then.

JS: This still doesn't explain the SunSoft connection or why the license switched hands.

Sega started publishing in 1992, but Konami only in 1993. Too many mysteries with Batman, like an unreleased PC Engine version shown in magazines, later replaced with a crappy version.

HN: Oh wait, you mean the PC Engine platformer? Yeah, I've seen scans of that one.⁷

JS: Yes, Famitsu from 1989 (right). I wonder how aware all these disparate parties were of each other.

HN: You'd be surprised. Developers talk to each other in Japan, even if their company doesn't want them to.

JS: There was a leaked ROM of a SNES Batman game by Software Creations. Like a proof of concept. Do you think it's connected at all?

HN: You want me to speculate? Like I said, absolutely no idea what the internal arrangement at Warner Brothers was, for their own attempt. That's like trying to guess what's behind a big black curtain! *<hand gesture as if parting curtains - everyone laughs>*



Atari seemingly usurped Konami in making the first arcade Batman, due to it being owned by Time Warner; it even had digitised film stills!

JS: You're not just saying that?

HN: <raucous laughter> To throw you off the trail? No, no, not at all. Licensing deals fall through. It happens. Konami and Sega wanted Batman, Warner pulled back, then later Konami and Sega got Batman. You'd have to ask someone at Konami how they arranged it.

JS: <emphasis> *You know how difficult it is to get inside Konami? They hate the press!*⁸

HN: <intense laughter> It makes companies nervous, no one likes to have their mistakes hung out for the public to talk about.

JS: Yeah, and I know you saw some crazy stuff.

HN: Now you're just trying to get me in trouble! <laughs> I was only in one particular Sega department - if you print it, people will guess who I am. The guy I worked with, who saw the Warner Brothers thing go down, liked to tell this Batman story a lot.



JS: What about other Sega departments?

HN: Consumers all like to discuss wacky decisions companies make, right? I see it on forums, on 2chan, wherever. Like they're the only people who realise some business decision is crazy. Staff at companies know this too, and the guys working there, they talk about bad

decisions. But it's not like you can personally change the course of the ship. You know what I mean, right? Sometimes you just have to do what the officers say.

JS: Sega has done some *insane* things.

HN: Right, and staff talk about it. Not to you guys, not the press, but every company is the same. The creative types just have to follow orders from management. I'm called in to oversee a project, and my task is just to make sure it's completed so they can put out a finished SKU.

JS: What about unfinished games?

HN: You know yourself there's been so many at Sega. All those Sonic prototypes, for the Mega Drive and later the Saturn. There's one you might not know about - a recent, hi-res 2D remake of Golden Axe.

JS: YouTube has a leaked video of a Golden Axe remake by Sega Australia...⁹

HN: No, no, this was different. I mean, I've seen the one *you* mean, but this one I'm talking about had graphics that looked like Odin Sphere. The characters were of that quality, and the animation had that same kind of jaunty fluidity. There's no videos anywhere.

JS: Was Vanillaware actually involved?

HN: No, no, it was internal, but followed that style. Hey, you want to see something? *<pulls out smartphone, opens email, loads stunning artwork>*

JS: MAJIDE?!¹⁰ How do you have this?!

HN: A friend of mine at Sega of America was telling me about it. They were trying to get it green lit and started prototyping the remake. He was really upset all their work was just scrapped.

JS: Compared to the Sega Australia reboot this looks like the better game.

HN: Shhh! The project wasn't released ultimately.

JS: This looks so cool. *<goes through art>*¹¹

HN: This work didn't pan out. It was really unfortunate that it wasn't released. *<laughs>* These graphics are going to be thrown away by Sega of America.



Sega of Australia's aborted Golden Axe remake; it's not the hi-res 2D one discussed, but it's better than no image at all

JS: Can I print them?

HN: No, I don't think that's possible. My friend in America would not be happy.

JS: But I can still quote you anonymously?

HN: *<laughs>* As long as you don't use the name Golden Axe.

JS: I can censor the name with asterisks.

HN: Or maybe just refer to it as "a very well-known classic game series".

JS: Maybe I'll use a pseudonym, like "Shiny Blade"!

<everyone laughs>

HN: No - they'll figure that one out!

JS: What hardware was this?

HN: Xbox 360 and PS3.

JS: This is stunning; there was a 3D version of Golden Axe but it was terrible.

HN: *<laughs>* A total disaster.

JS: Why did Sega cancel this?

HN: I don't know, it was after I left. It wasn't so long ago actually. The game looked gorgeous.

JS: On a different topic, you mentioned running afoul of [REDACTED] [REDACTED], sometime around 1997 or 1998?

HN: My younger sister was kidnapped. [REDACTED] hired some gangsters to do it. As to how I got her back... Well, as you can see I don't have the physique of the main character in *Final Fight*, and I don't have a machine gun, so I couldn't take them on directly. So I used a truck crane to pick up one of [REDACTED]'s newly released arcade cabinets and dropped it, so it smashed apart in front of their main offices. I told them, "Next time, this is going to be one of you." And after that, my sister came home.

JS: You did what?! <nearly spills drink>

HN: Yes, one of my subordinates did it.

JS: Bloody hell - I've never heard *this* before!

HN: The parent company of [REDACTED] was changed in early [year] - they do not know the [year]'s history of [REDACTED]. The former president of [REDACTED] was a man named [REDACTED]-san.¹² Guys like him, members of the board of directors, they were involved with the underworld. The buying and selling of game machines itself was mixed up in that world, because that's the kind of business that attracts the yakuza. Nowadays they're heavily involved in the pachinko industry. So the old members of the board, they would have short fingers, like the yakuza who get their fingers cut off. There were really people like that.

JS: I heard Capcom and SNK started with yakuza money.

HN: That's true for SNK.

JS: I can run this in the book - on the record?

HN: Yes, it's okay. Originally, President [REDACTED] was the president of a company named [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. But back then, people involved in overseas imports and exports almost always had shady connections.

JS: Could this interview cause problems for you?

HN: I might get murdered by [REDACTED]. Mostly the bosses behind Japanese slot machine makers are the South Korean mafia. And if [REDACTED] doesn't kill me, I could lose my livelihood. So make sure this story is an anonymous interview. I think there are many people in the Japanese games industry who strongly want to talk but cannot show their name. There are many dark stories. So your "Mr Nanashi" idea is very nice.

JS: And █████ sent thugs to threaten your sister, to prevent you from testifying?

HN: They only abducted her, but saying they *only* abducted her doesn't make it right, does it? That by itself is unforgivable. At the time, she had just graduated high school and was a university student. They did it to make me stop cooperating with Nintendo.

JS: That's one of the most shocking things I've heard.

HN: In Japan, you have these evil companies that always crop up, and unlike the West, in Japan there's a perception that "play" is bad, the opposite of hard work. So amusement-oriented industries inevitably become infested with evil companies and ties to the underworld. Take arcades, for example. In legal terms, they're covered under laws regarding the entertainment and amusement trades. So they're managed under the same laws that regulate the adult, or "pink", industry. Because of that, the underworld gets involved. The only companies that have been able to do business while staying clean are probably Nintendo and Namco.



JS: Can you share examples of those who are not?

MN: Previously, I did business with Toaplan. One time I asked them about copy protection. Not protection to prevent people from cloning the game design, but to prevent "dead copy" arcade boards and pirate versions. When I asked them about their copy protection plans, the person in charge got quiet for a minute, and then he said, "Sometimes you have to fight fire

with fire." In other words, pay some yakuza to go stamp out the other yakuza making the copies.

There's a saying by Masutatsu Oyama,¹³ the founder of Kyokushin Karate. "Force without justice is violence. Justice without force is powerless." No matter how right you are, if you do not have the means to enforce what is right, it's essentially meaningless. And when you are in that situation, Japanese society, including the police, won't do anything to help you unless you've already been harmed. Being in that kind of society, you need the underworld to protect yourself.

JS: I've read about the preventative force the yakuza can be sometimes. Almost like vigilantes.

HN: The arcades have mostly disappeared now, but in the old days, sometimes people would come in and try to open up the cabinets to check out the internals, or maybe just steal the coins from the day's profits. But if yakuza were running the arcade, some of the "employees" would catch you and beat you up. It's not a good thing, but if that never happened, how would you prevent theft and piracy? Because of the forces involved in the industry, you can't reject the idea of taking action like that. If stuff like that had never happened, the game industry wouldn't have developed as much as it did. So it's difficult. It shouldn't happen, but it does.

JS: Tell me about this crane story. It sounds like a scene from an action film.

HN: It was a truck-mounted crane. Do you have UNIC cranes overseas? It was like that.

JS: And you smashed an arcade machine?

HN: It was one of their game machines. I dropped it in front of their offices, smashed it. And I told them that one of their employees would be next. To show them that I was serious. That way they would feel ashamed of their actions, you know?

It was easy for me to get a [REDACTED] arcade cabinet cheaply, so I bought one from a distributor. I thought about robbing a [REDACTED] arcade, too, but that's much more difficult, and that would make me a criminal. With what I ended up doing, I could have been charged with something like unlawful dumping of garbage, but that's a minor offence. Whereas if I had robbed a [REDACTED] arcade, I would have been arrested. [REDACTED] was well-versed in using the underworld to get what they want, so if you're going up against them, you have to be smart. They're a big company, so if you try to fight them with ordinary methods, they'll work with the police and get the legal system to come after you. They might even pay off a politician, like a member of the National Diet. Who knows what they're capable of?

JS: When did you destroy this machine - who saw it?

HN: I just smashed it in front of their main office in the middle of the night. It was easy. The [REDACTED] headquarters are in [REDACTED] now, but back then they were near [REDACTED] Airport. Their office building was right in front of a major street, in a commercial district without any residential homes.

JS: You left a smashed machine outside their office, saying, "Next time it'll be one of your employees."

HN: Yes, although I didn't dump it myself. I had someone else do it, because I don't have a driver's license. I had him just drop the machine and dump it, so I don't know how damaged it was, but I assume it smashed apart. And then I sent [REDACTED] a letter.

JS: Wow, you threatened the gangsters.

HN: Well, I had to do something. If I took my sister back by force, maybe they would just do it again. And if I did something to [REDACTED] directly, they would use the police against me. So I had to outthink them. I really struggled over what to do. It was an extreme situation.

JS: I'm impressed. I have a lot of respect for anyone who stands against the immoral or unethical - I do it myself.

HN: *<laughs>* I think many people would do something similar in that situation. I don't know how much you know about [REDACTED], but are you aware of the "quarantine room" problem from around the year 2000? They would put employees alone in a room and give them absolutely nothing to do, in order to make them resign. [REDACTED] did that, and former [REDACTED] employees sued them and won. That's the kind of thing [REDACTED] did back then. They didn't just put people behind a partition or something, they sent them away to a completely different floor of the building.¹⁴

[REDACTED] didn't just lose a lawsuit over this, they completely tarnished their image. Nobody wanted to buy games from a company like that. It became a major social issue. *<shows Japanese news article>* Like this article, about [REDACTED] being sued for the quarantine room problem and issuing a public apology. If you search for "[REDACTED]" and "kakuribeya" in Japanese,¹⁵ you can find many articles like this.

JS: Terrible! I contacted [REDACTED], to interview [REDACTED] [REDACTED], and [REDACTED] was like, "You're not allowed to speak to her or anybody else." I tried everything!

HN: Many companies are like that, not just [REDACTED]. What is it like overseas? I feel like that's rare overseas, that they will answer you properly. Game companies are dependent on their fans, so they need to treat their fans better and be more open.

JS: Most American or UK departments will be excited to talk, because it's free publicity for them. But I also contacted SNK in Japan, and it was like, "Who are you? A book?! When did you think you'd be interviewing us?" And I said, "My schedule is flexible; anytime is OK!" And SNK said, "Sorry, we're busy on all those dates!"

HN: To put it bluntly, SNK is not that busy. That just seems stupid to me. But that's the attitude the game companies take. Even inside a company, you'll be chastised for sharing too much information.¹⁶

But if they're always taking that kind of attitude, like SNK, do they really think they'll be able to make a first-rate game that everyone can enjoy? I don't think it's possible to look down

on your fans like that, and at the same time make a really interesting and fun game. When people take that kind of attitude, ultimately it shows up in the games they create. So it should be no surprise that SNK is struggling financially. <laughs>

JS: Yes, exactly!

HN: <pointing to [REDACTED] web article> If a magazine wrote about this news, [REDACTED] would stop advertising with them.

JS: Yes, and stop giving them games.

HN: Stop new game samples, screenshots...

JS: TV and newspapers covered it, but games media went out of fear of reprisal from [REDACTED]. It's the same in England; if a score is too low they stop advertising. [Magazine name redacted] gave Winning Eleven a 7 out of 10 and Konami stopped all advertising at that publisher. After that, Konami games were better received.

HN: <laughs> And I thought this problem was only with Japanese companies!

JS: American companies like Activision and EA will also screw you badly!¹⁷

HN: In Japan, the game media didn't cover this issue of the quarantine rooms. Because if they did, [REDACTED] would pull their advertising. And in the media in England, when they gave a Konami soccer game a low score, Konami cut off their advertising. I thought only a Japanese company would do something like that! But how are you supposed to make good games by doing that? *That's absurd.*

JS: Happens all the time. <recounts corruption in UK>

[...] [...] [...] [...]

Much later on you worked at Square-Enix. What prompted the move to them?

HN: My previous company decided to shrink the size of its teams, and I lost my job. I needed to find something new, and I found one at Square-Enix.



Gun Loco (unreleased)

JS: What was the process like? Looking up vacancies and spotting one at Square-Enix?

HN: Of course I know a lot of people in the industry, so I talked to many people, made many plans, and tried at a lot of companies. Among them I could find a producer role at Square-Enix. That looked most interesting to me.

JS: Besides NieR, what other games?

HN: I was there only for a very short time. So NieR was the only one which was shipped, ultimately. I was involved in two or three other games, but they were all cancelled before release.

JS: Cancelled? Tell me *everything*!

HN: Maybe three at Square-Enix.

JS: What were the three games at Square-Enix?

HN: They were all codenamed, but... Notorious, this was developed by Gearbox in the US, the developer of Borderlands. It was a shooter; modern-day American marines timeslip into 16th or 17th century Japan, when samurai are fighting with swords.

JS: Incredible! Was that ever announced?

HN: No, it was not announced. It was killed in the middle of pre-production. So I would say

maybe 40% or 45%?

JS: That sounds *amazing*. Why was it cancelled?

HN: What I heard was - it was cancelled after I left Square-Enix - so what I heard was, Gearbox decided to stop working on it, because they were too busy. They needed to... They couldn't assign enough people to the project, even though Square-Enix wanted to continue.

Another one was Tiger House, you know, a tiger like the animal. Tiger House was a shooter...

JS: 2D or 3D?

HN: It was a 3D third-person shooter by tri-Ace.¹⁸ That was cancelled because of the quality.

And, ah! The 3rd one was announced at TGS, but I forgot the title. The codename was Nuts. <spells it out> I forgot the title, but it was a shooter, it was a third-person shooter. Something like Borderlands, futuristic fantasy, in an apocalyptic world. It was developed internally.¹⁹ (above)

JS: Square-Enix announced several games which later cancelled. <lists them>

HN: Ahh! Nuts was announced as "Gun Loco".²⁰

<interviewee appears nervous again at discussion of NDA protected Square-Enix games>

JS: I said I'll invent a fictional person for you. Attribute it to someone who does not exist - Mr Nanashi.

HN: Yes, that will help.

JS: What was NieR like? That was by Cavia.

HN: Yes, by Cavia. The same staff with Drag-On Dragoon, Yokoo-san.²¹

JS: I loved it - critics whined, but the public thought it was good. It sold through word of mouth.

HN: For NieR? I already left, but I read about the critics reactions. The score was very bad, but yeah, it seems gamers loved it.

JS: Why do you feel there was a discrepancy between review professionals and consumers?

HN: I think the scenario was very intriguing and interesting. But the gameplay was not so good.

JS: But you'd go fishing, and then it would change to a *danmaku* shooter,²² and then a

text adventure! So crazy!

HN: Yeah, yeah! *<laughs>* Like a 2D *danmaku* shooter. But you know, the animation was very simple, and just button mashing would do. Some boss fights were cool...

JS: And one of the characters was in lingerie, *all the time!*²³ Such a strange game. Cavia didn't follow any rules, they *just did it*.

HN: That's Yokoo-san's style.

JS: Did Square-Enix try to rein him in?

HN: Basically they let Yokoo-san work as he wanted. But at the same time... How can I say it? For the creativity part we gave freedom to Yokoo-san, but for the project management part we kept very strict control. So there was always an argument between creativity and schedule, what can be done, what should be done.

JS: Were there many changes to the game?

HN: The team carried out a variety of changes over its development. You know in the beginning village, where Nier lives with his daughter? There's a library on top of the hill. If you want to go to the library you can use the stairway, straight, or you can go like this. *<mimes movement up a winding path>*²⁴ Originally they only had the winding road, they didn't have any stairs. So every single time you go up to the library you need to travel the longer route. That was crazy! The scenario required players to go to the library maybe 20 times and, every time, you needed to walk like this. *<mimes laborious walk>* But they received feedback from people who played it, and some guy asked they make a straighter way, or take out the hill, and put the library in a more accessible place. So they made a stairway.

JS: There were two versions of *NieR*.²⁵ One, the player is an old man with a daughter; the other, he's a young man with a sister.

HN: That was decided at the start. That's because a middle-aged man might resonate with a Western audience, but it would never work for a Japanese audience; the younger character is too young for a Western audience, but the best fit for a Japanese audience. So they decided on two different characters for 360 and PS3. But anything else, it's the same game. So that was a bit confusing.

JS: Did you play through the game?

HN: Oh yes, of course. Many times. In order to understand the real meaning of the scenario, you need to go through it three times at least. So I don't think that's a good idea. *<laughs>* But apparently hardcore fans loved it. At Square-Enix, as I said, I was expected to know something about the Western market. So I always tried to look at Western games and what's the trend,

what's a hit.

JS: Why did you leave Square-Enix?

HN: To be honest I wasn't very happy at Square-Enix. The reason was, they're a very Japanese company, and at the same time they have a long history in the game industry. So the mixture of Japanese culture and game industry style, made the environment something like... Without some success or track record, people wouldn't hear you. People would not ask for your opinion. That was the prevailing culture at Square. I was over 30 when I joined and I thought, "OK, maybe I need to ship something first, and have a successful record to have some authorisation or opinion rights." But how long will it take? Maybe two years, maybe five years. Then I will be 40-something. I could be 50. It was like starting from scratch again. That was very disappointing, because in American companies people can speak up from day one. So long as you're saying something productive, something meaningful, people will listen to you.

JS: Japanese companies reward you for the length of time you're in the company.

HN: Yeah. So my career before, was not respected at all. I needed a career and track record at Square-Enix. That was not very exciting, and I started to feel disappointed.



Nier (PS3/X360)

Unreleased *Batman* on SNES - Ste Pickford

Given the revelations about *Batman*, I began investigating various unrelated threads; the entire franchise history is a knotted mess worthy of its own book. One angle of interest was the leaked pre-alpha SNES version by Software Creations, as documented here:

www.unseen64.net/2009/10/07/batman-sc-snes-cancelled/

www.snescentral.com/article.php?id=0955



Software Creations at one point employed the Pickford brothers, who had a hand in a variety of games over the years, including working with Rare. Starting on British home computers

the brothers moved to Nintendo hardware, credited on titles such as: *Wolverine*, *Solar Jetman*, *Equinox*, *Plok!*, *Spiderman & X-Men*, *Maximum Carnage*, *Waterworld* (VB), and *Wetrix*. Significantly, they'd personally done a lot of outsourced work and had handled both comic book and film licenses before. Software Creations' pre-alpha *Batman* seemed a possible candidate for the lost Warner Brothers game, and so I emailed **Ste Pickford**.

Only later did I realise the game contained modified sprites from *Double Dragon 3*, which Software Creations did the Mega Drive conversion of (1992). This places their *Batman* game a little too late to be connected to the Konami-Sega deal, but it was still an interesting side-quest, and so I present my findings.



JS: A Japanese developer explained that Konami and Sega were both bidding for the *Batman* film license from Warner Brothers, sometime around 1989. Because of this

Warner Brothers realised its value, pulled back and - according to my source - tried to produce the game themselves. Ultimately Atari released an arcade film-adaptation, while SunSoft produced several console titles. Meaning around 1990 or 1991 there might have been an unfinished prototype of Batman overseen by Warner Brothers themselves. The Software Creations Batman does not have a date on it. Is there any connection? As you can see, it's a bit of a mystery!

Ste Pickford: "I'm afraid we've drawn a blank with the Batman game mystery. My memory is shocking, but my brother [John Pickford] is much better at remembering stuff from back then, and even he couldn't remember the exact circumstances.

"It was definitely under development while we were at Creations, but it wasn't something either of us had anything to do with. All John could remember was that he actually played it at some point, and that it was purely speculative (ie, we didn't have a license or a contract or anything). I guess it was something Creations was doing as a demo to pitch for work, probably re-skinning Maximum Carnage as a way to knock up a quick demo to pitch for super-hero games.

"Around that time Creations had opened up a small Seattle office, and I've got a vague feeling that this might have been a prototype developed over there, rather than in Manchester, which would explain why we barely remember it. If that was the case then our John, who was producer on all projects in Manchester at this time, would have played a demo sent over from Seattle, but not been involved in its development. I don't think a great deal of work went into it."



More info on the Pickford Bros. can be found on their official website: www.zee-3.com

If you liked Plok! on the SNES, be sure to check out Ste's new, full-colour comic series!

The Time & Warner & Atari connection



The story of how Konami lost the original *Batman* arcade license is hidden behind so many corporate deals we'll likely never get the full picture. It's worth knowing that Nolan Bushnell sold Atari to Warner circa 1976, Warner owned DC Comics, and sometime around 1989 (the time of Tim Burton's *Batman* film), Time and Warner began merging to form Time Warner.

Needing an alternative source, I tracked down John Ray of Atari, via Morgan Ramsey. It took a while, and only happened *after* contacting Stu Pickford. Ray confirmed the connection between Atari and Warner Brothers, but also corrected previous reports that Warner's attempt "didn't come through". The Atari arcade release was completed and distributed.

John Ray explained that he was the team leader, Kelly Turner was the project leader and handled most aspects of the *Batman* license, and Norm Avellar was also on the project. Sadly Kelly Turner has since passed away.

As John Ray explained:

I won't be much help, but here goes... I don't know or can't remember how the *Batman* licensing rights came about. But since we were part of Time Warner, perhaps that had something to do with us getting a license.

The history of Atari is very confusing. When I joined in 1977, it was already "a Warner

Communications Company", since Nolan had already sold it. And then it went through various splits and sales throughout the years. I wonder if anybody has made a graphic for all the different machinations?!

I was at Atari from 1977 to 1984, then I came back in 1988. When I came back, I think there were two arcade development teams; I think they were Alpha and Omega. So the team I started, the new team, was named Nu. When the team leader of Omega team got promoted to be our VP, I took over his team and my combined team became NuMega. At least that's my current recollection.

When I retired/moved, I sold all my cabinets and PCBs to Scott Evans, who shows lots of games each year at California Extreme. I just looked through my notes and Batman was one of the PCBs that Scott purchased. So he might be able to provide more info including Credit and License screens.

T&E SOFT



What does the T&E acronym actually stand for? A regular explanation is that it's the names of the company's founders, Toshiro and Eiji Yokoyama; one interviewee contests this, saying it really means Technology & Entertainment; the company brochure for new employees says it means "Try & Exciting". For some it's a running joke, with the meaning changing subtly with each explanation. Whatever the meaning,

T&E Soft were an enigmatic company, producing many games which left Japan, and even more which had an influence in Japan but never left. The company even published Western games in Japan, like *The Lost Vikings* and *Rise of the Robots*, and outside of Nintendo developed the most Virtual Boy games.

Founded in October 1982 by brothers Toshiro and Eiji Yokoyama, it's part of that great pantheon of early, pioneering Japanese developers. Starting on early computers like the PC-6001 it continued to evolve, progressively moving on to consoles as the industry shifted. In 1990 it absorbed the prominent computer RPG developer Xtalsoft, making it T&E's Osaka branch; Xtalsoft is notable for the *Mugen no Shinzou* series, which predates *Dragon Quest* and in fact influenced Enix's own series. There's a lot of important history behind T&E Soft. Unquestionably its biggest contributions are Tokihiro Naito's *Hydlide* series and golf games. One of its first games in 1982 was a golf title, and the company continued making golf games through the years, until Toshiro Yokoyama left in 2002 to form Digital Golf; *Hydlide* meanwhile vies for position as the world's first Action-RPG, and the first to have regenerating health, and was hugely influential on games that followed.



This doesn't even touch upon the fact that T&E developed *Chikyuu Kaihou Gun ZAS*, the most technically impressive title on Game Boy; *Red Alarm*, the best game on Virtual Boy; the hardcore series of *Undeal* shooters; the description defying *Daiva*, one of gaming's most staggeringly ambitious sagas; or the cute but obscure PS1 platformer, *Floating Runner*. For proof of the company's prominence, glance at the 26 issues of *T&E Soft Magazine*, produced from 1983 until 1990. Apart from Nintendo, how many other developers had the clout to produce and publish their own **exclusive** magazine?

In May 2002 the company was renamed "D Wonderland", as part of a licensing deal with Disney, thereby ending the grand T&E Soft legacy. Around 2005 the old T&E Soft name was relinquished back to the founding brothers. In 2010, according to its website, D Wonderland was delisted.

The name lingers now only as a brand for golf games by Digital Golf, but the legacy of all that was wrapped up in T&E Soft can still be felt, if you know how to look. With great pleasure I present interviews with four of the company's most important creators: Tokihiro Naito, Tetsuya Yamamoto, Yasuo Yoshikawa, and Mitsuto Nagashima.





NAITO, Tokihiro

DOB: 02 February 1963 / Birthplace: Nagoya / Blood Type: A

~Selected Portfolio~

Made as a hobbyist

MZ-80K "SAMURAI" (Shooting game)
PC-8001 Computer-player "Backgammon"
PC-8001 "Jumping Frog" (action; published in *I/O Magazine*)
PC-8001 "SuperMaze" (Action)
PC-8001+PCG "ULTRA MAN JR." (action, like PAC-MAN)
PC-8001+PCG "Asteroid belt" (Shooting game)
PC-8001+PCG "Blast on" (8-way scrolling shooter)

T&E SOFT Inc. (Extract the main project)

PC8801 / mk2 "Cosmo Mutar" (Action shooter)
PC8801 "HYDLIDE" (Active Role Playing Game)
PC6001mk2 "HYDLIDE"
PC8801 "HYDLIDE II" (ARPG)
PC8801 "DAIVA" Combat action Dept. (simulation)
PC8801/MSX2 "HYDLIDE 3" Main Program (ARPG)
MSX2 "DD Club" (Graphic Pattern Editor)
NES "HYDLIDE 3" Dev. Executive (Namcot)
MSX2 "UNDEADLINE" Game Design (vert. shmup)
PC9801 "HYDLIDE 3 Super Version" Conversion dir.

PC9801 "Rune Worth 2 & 3" (ARPG)

"Runeworth 2 and 3 were originally a single game. It was an ambitious title with a richly detailed world, and a game design that eliminated the need for experience point grinding. It was a game that attempted to break away from the increasingly formulaic nature of the ARPG at the time."

PC9801 "Sword World PC" (RPG)

"A computer game version of Sword World, the king of tabletop role-playing games in Japan, and Group SNE's most famous title. Unfortunately, I had almost no involvement with this title."

SFC "The Lost Vikings" Japanese Localiser
3DO "Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Lost Dungeon" Localiser
SEGA SATURN "Virtual HYDLIDE" Director (SEGA)

E.O.Imagination Inc.

PC-Engine 1996/07 "E.O.Dragon Adventure" (Shooting game)
PC-Engine 1996/08 "DeVelo Super Sprite Editor" (Graphics Ed.)

SATURN 1997/05 "LIGHTNING GUNNER" (Vertical shmup)

"Developed as a Develo BASIC title for Saturn. It was an isometric view 3D vertical shooting game. I thought it was very well made, but the Develo project itself stalled, and so this was shelved."

PS1 1997/11 "Asuncia" Director (SRPG, Xing)

PS1 1999/04 "Dragon Money" (board game. Microcabin)

"A sugoroku-style board game, released by Microcabin. The concept was, 'Can you make 100 friends?' You find people walking around in-game and gradually add them to your group of friends. The person with the most money at the end is the winner. Unfortunately, it didn't take full advantage of the original concept."

DIGITAL GOLF Inc.

Windows 2004/04 Virtual Golf Guide, Production Director

T&E SOFT Inc.

Windows 2008/10 Virtual Golf Simulator "RoundLeader", Dir.

Flash 2008/10 niconico Medal game (provisional) "BINGO BREAK" Game Design

Simulator 2010/04 Contract production "Golf Simulator" Director

Simulator 2010/07 English version "RoundLeader" Director

Flash 2010/08 SNS Game Application Producer

CHUNSOFT Co., Ltd.

Windows 2011/05 Contract production "Toba (city) C.G.", Dir.

SPIKE CHUNSOFT Co., Ltd.

PSP 2012/10 "Fushigi no Dungeon - Furai no Shiren 4 Plus" Dir.

3DS 2013/02 "Detective Conan Marionette symphony" Development management

~Career Chronology~

1984/02/01 Joined T&E SOFT Inc.

1986/04/01 Planning & Development Div., section chief

1988/04/01 Technical Development Division 1, Head

1990/10/01 Development Director

1996/04/26 Established E.O.Imagination Inc., President

1999/09/01 Joined COMPUTER SOGOGAKUEN HAL Nagoya College. Instruction Dept.

2001/04/01 Educational affairs section, secretary

2004/04/01 Joined Deep Inc.

2004/04/01 Product Development, Project Coordinator

2006/01/01 Company name changed by Dept. merger

DIGITAL GOLF Inc. Nagoya Branch, Development department

2008/01/21 Company name was changed by spin-off

T&E SOFT Inc.

2008/02/01 Development Department Project Promotion, Section Chief

2009/04/01 Development Department Project Promotion, Section Manager

2010/08/01 Joined CHUNSOFT Co., Ltd. Contract employee

2012/01/01 Company name changed by Dept. merger
SPIKE CHUNSOFT Co., Ltd. Contract employee

2014/04/01 Joined M2 Co.,Ltd. Game Designer

M2 Co., Ltd. employee, based in Chiba-ken



Rune Worth 3 (PC-9801)

~Programming Languages~

Assembly: Z80 8080/6, 6502, 6809, V30, 80386, 65C816, MMX

BASIC variants: BASIC, Sharp MZ-BASIC, N88-BASIC

Other: FORTRAN, C, C++, Java, FORTRAN77, Microsoft Macro Assembler, Turbo Assembler, OPTASM, Borland C++ Builder 4, Microsoft Visual C++ 6.0 (MFC), Microsoft Visual C#

~Hardware / OS~

Hitachi BasicMaster Level2, Sharp MZ-80, NEC PC-6601, NEC PC-8001, NEC PC-8801, NEC PC-9801, Microsoft MS-DOS,

Microsoft Windows 95/98/NT4.0/2000/XP Win32API

MSX / MSX2 Series, NEC PC-Engine, Nintendo Famicom (AKA: NES), Nintendo Super

Famicom (AKA: SNES), Sony PlayStation,
DirectX7 / X8 / X9, Android OS



Above: Lightning Gunner (SAT). Image via www.satakore.com - they have more info and a demo

Interview with Tokihiro NAITO

03 November 2013, Nagoya / Duration: 2h 33m



The videogame creation which defines Tokihiro Naito - his Action-RPG series *Hydlide* - is known outside of Japan only through the NES adaptation of the first computer game, the Mega Drive release of the third, and the 3D procedural generation-based update for the Sega Saturn. To understand why Mr Naito is heralded as something of a rockstar developer in Japan, it's important to understand the context and era of his games. *Hydlide* came out December 1984, predating the genre-defining turn-based JRPG *Dragon Quest* by around 17 months, and also the Action-RPGs *The Legend of Zelda* (1986) and *Ancient Ys Vanished* (1987). It cannot be overstated how influential *Hydlide* was on the ARPGs which followed it, nor how popular it was on both computers and the Famicom in Japan. But it is imperative you compare *Hydlide* only to games released that same year, to fully appreciate the merit in its ideas. There were two other similar titles in 1984, *Courageous Perseus* and *Dragon Slayer*, and all three vie for position as genre precedent - amusingly, a friendly rivalry even developed with *Dragon Slayer*'s creator Yoshio Kiya, of Falcom, as over the years T&E Software and Falcom competed against each other.

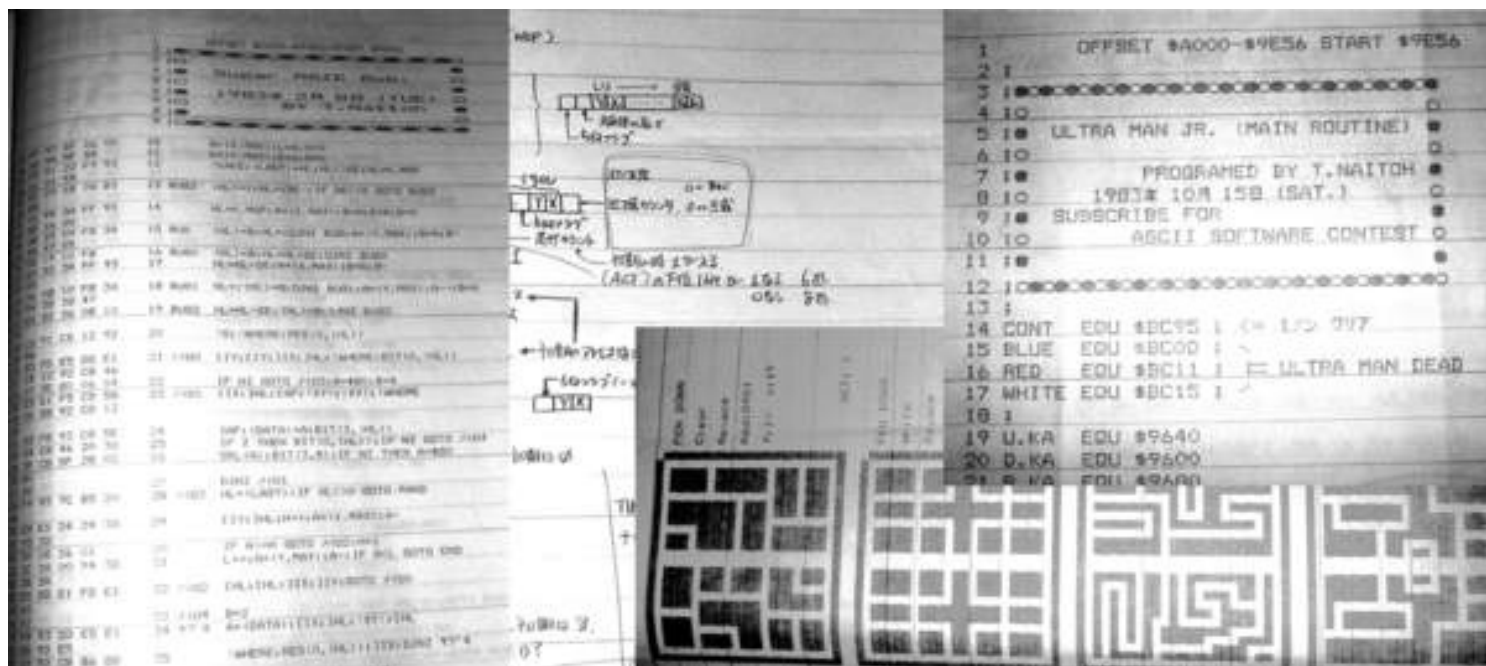
Of course Mr Naito is more than just the creator of *Hydlide*. Like many Japanese

developers his early games were published in magazines, and he later ranked 6th in the ASCII Software Contest. Starting February 1984 he was an integral figure at T&E Soft, later working on the *Daiva*, *Undeadline* and *Rune Worth* series, not to mention having a hand in bringing Japan *The Lost Vikings* and *Rise of the Robots*. He also founded E.O. Imagination and worked with the PC Engine's Develo Box. Later years brought Mr Naito in contact with companies like Xing Entertainment,²⁶ Microcabin,²⁷ and Chunsoft.²⁸ There was even a period spent at the *Computer Sogo-gakuen HAL*, a Nagoya-based university.²⁹ Without doubt Tokihiro Naito is the kind of developer this book was meant to showcase: someone much loved by Japanese players and hugely influential on other developers, including those whose games spread around the world, but with little written about in English.

I was actually put in contact via Yasuo Yoshikawa, based in Tokyo, who is also interviewed in this volume. He contacted me via social media and we arranged our own interview. I asked if he was still in contact with colleagues from T&E Soft, which led to emails being exchanged with both Tokihiro Naito and Tetsuya Yamamoto. They were both still based in Nagoya, formerly where a division of T&E Soft was and also Mr Naito's hometown, and so a daytrip for myself, Nico Datiche and Joseph Redon was arranged. In Nagoya an associate of the Japanese Game Preservation Society would join us. The original date had been for 20 October, but there was a need to find more capable interpreters, and so the meeting shifted to 3 November. Prior to our meeting and on my request for photographic material, Mr Naito went to great effort to send me 80 photographs related to his career, many of which adorn these pages. When we met he was very dapper, conveying a strong sense of refinement and sophistication. We discussed Nagoya and the joys of living in that part of Japan, and throughout the subsequent interview he was modest regarding his work, making jokes and recalling amusing anecdotes. It was easy to see why Japan found him so likeable.



An old promotional photo for Rune Worth from a magazine, showing Yasuo Yoshikawa (left) and Tokihiro Naito (right) about to play a joke on each other



TN: *<hands author a gift>* A present for you.

JS: *<Japanese>* Thank you very much! *<English>* I also have a gift for you. These are speciality sweets from Europe.³⁰ You don't have an allergy to nuts, do you?

TN: Thank you - great! I love nuts, especially with beer! *<laughs>* This is for you too, I have three copies. *<gives author a copy of "Yomigaeru PC-8801 Densetsu">* I was in this magazine.³¹

JS: *<flips through>* Oh, you and Kiya-san, dressed as knights with swords!

TN: *<English>* Yes, this is Kiya-san.

JS: We're interviewing Kiya-san on 7 November. Hopefully my books will contain all the important people from Japanese game history.

TN: You've been interviewing a lot of people.

<everyone orders drinks, extended general chatter>

JS: What was the first game you recall seeing?

TN: *Pong* by Epoch.³²

JS: When did you get the urge to make games? You sent a lot of photos of hobbyist titles you made for the MZ-80K³³ and PC-8001, such as *Samurai*, *Backgammon*, *Jumping Frog*, and *Super Maze*. When did you get an MZ-80K, and is *Samurai* the first game you ever made?

TN: I actually didn't own an MZ-80K. I wrote my first games on the display model of that

computer in the electronics section of a department store. I went there every day for a month to program it.

JS: How did you save the data - cassette or floppy?

TN: I used a cassette tape.

JS: You'd go in, work for a couple of hours, save it to tape, then return another day?

TN: Yes, exactly.

JS: The first computer you owned was a PC-8001?

TN: Yes.

JS: When did you make Samurai for the MZ-80K?

TN: I was in my first year of high school.

JS: When did you get a PC-8001?

TN: It was at the beginning of my senior year of high school. I started working part-time when I started high school, and delivered newspapers for two years to save up the money.

JS: Expensive! It was worth it because you did well in the ASCII Software Contest.

TN: I was actually 6th place.

[[image2x1]]

JS: Were you awarded prize money?

TN: I received 500'000 yen. But I spent it all on peripherals for my computer, like an external floppy disk drive, PSG sound board, colour monitor, and printer. The monitor was 160'000 yen, the printer was 120'000 yen... it was too expensive! <laughs> I must have spent around 1'000'000 yen on my PC-8001.^{[34](#)}

JS: Did coming 6th in the ASCII contest help you in becoming a game developer?

TN: Yes, definitely. I brought the source code with me when I interviewed for a job at T&E Soft. And the company president Yokoyama-san^{[35](#)} said to me, "Why don't you start work tomorrow?"



JS: Did you keep copies of your hobbyist games?

TN: No, they're all lost. Forever lost. Although I do have a printout of the source code for *Ultraman Jr.* Also, *Jumping Frog* was published in *I/O Magazine*, so it may be available in a book somewhere. I'll look for it.

JS: It's a shame when someone's creation is lost.

TN: I was still an amateur back then, so I didn't think about things like that.



JS: Early works show how a developer's creativity grew.

TN: I suppose you're right. <laughs>

[[image2x1]]

JS: The ASCII contest was in 1984, the same year you joined T&E Soft and the year Hydlide came out.

TN: I still remember it quite clearly. I joined T&E Soft on the first day of February, and in the first three months I developed Cosmo Mutar.³⁶ Over the next three months, I created Hydlide.





JS: Tell me about Cosmo Mutar. Were you told to make a game like this or...?

TN: I came up with it. There was a similar game at the arcades...³⁷ It started out as practice for me, since I was developing on the PC-8801 computer for the first time. We couldn't deliver the code to the duplicator in time because of a bug or some issue with the code, so I made the retail copies myself, using an Aiwa double-cassette recorder in the game development office.

<looking at T&E Magazine copies, a quarterly publication by T&E which started 1983 and ran until 1990, a total of 26 issues - there were also copies of Develo magazine>

TN: I wrote all of these articles. *<points to various pages>*

JS: I'd like to introduce *T&E Magazine* to readers. What was its purpose?

TN: Nominally, it was a newsletter for fans of T&E Soft. In practice, it was also a way for the development staff to unwind. Even the vice-president of the company actively contributed articles. It was fun.

JS: Were all T&E Soft staff involved in its production?

TN: I don't think it was everyone, but anyone could get involved if they wanted to.

JS: There were only 26 issues?

TN: That's right. *<points, top>* This one article is different, this was by Miura-san.³⁸ This wasn't done by me exactly. The editorial staff cleaned it up and redrew them.

JS: Charts from the development of the game?

TN: That's right. *<points>* This person is now at Nagoya HAL.³⁹ *<background noise, some dialogue inaudible - sounds like Konami is mentioned, which makes sense given that many T&E staff went to Konami>* He/she got married, and is doing a little work here and there. I don't know what they're up to now, but they were involved in various stuff. *<flips pages, pointing>* This is the second office. Our first office was an apartment building in an area called Fujigaoka, then our second office was in this building, and our third was in our own company building.



Hydlide (PC-8801)



Hydlide (PC-6601)



Hydlide (FC)

JS: Could you draw a sketch of the T&E offices?

TN: Ah! It's pretty much the same as now. I'll make a rough sketch. I don't have any photographs.

JS: What do you remember about the T&E Soft founders Toshirou and Eiji Yokoyama?

TN: There's so much, I don't know where to begin! Eiji-san was very outspoken and honest about games in development, whereas Toshirou-san didn't comment very much. Toshirou-san actually doesn't know much about videogames. Eiji-san was the technical guy, the programmer. Toshirou-san previously worked at the upscale Keio Plaza Hotel.

JS: *<shows HG101 print-out>* My friend enjoyed *Hydlide* and wrote an article with comparison screens for the PC-8801, Sharp X1, PC-6601, Famicom, MSX, and MSX2.

TN: I was involved with the PC-8801 and PC-6601 versions, but I only worked on the sound for the Famicom version. A man named Eiji Kato⁴⁰ did the MSX and MSX2 versions; Katsushi Morizane⁴¹ did the Sharp X1 version.

JS: On an MSX forum⁴² someone looked inside the code and found a message from Kato: "If you can decipher this code, please write to me." This person created a program to solve the riddle.⁴³ Did you know about it?

TN: I think Kato must have sneaked that in when creating the master copy of the game. I did not know about that [secret message] until now!

JS: <laughs> It's amazing what's hidden in old code!

TN: The PC-8801 floppy disks have 16 sectors, but there's a space called the "GAP 3" between these sectors, and there's a message embedded in the GAP 3 [of *Hydride*]. You cannot extract it with a normal disk dump. At the time, it was only accessible by using Fujitsu's floppy disk controller (FDC).

Joseph Redon: Is this known, have you ever told anyone?

TN: I think the copy dealers, the businesses that provided tools for making unauthorized copies of software, probably saw it. The message was encoded in a location that only they would normally see when reverse-engineering the software to make duplicates.

JS: Extractable using a Fujitsu FDC?

TN: That's right. You would have to dump the floppy disk using the FDC chip from a Fujitsu FM-7 or FM-77 computer, or a Sharp X1.

JS: What was the message?

TN: I don't remember exactly, but something like, "DON'T COPY THIS GAME!" <laughs> The message was used for copy protection, so it's readable in a way on a PC-8801. If the message exists, the disk is authentic, whereas if the message is missing, the disk is judged to be fake.

JS: Was copy protection made by T&E Soft, or outsourced?

TN: I created it myself up through *Hydride 3*, and it was outsourced after that. The copy protection on *Hydride 3* was extremely strong, but the disks were still pirated. We didn't have the resources to keep spending time on crafting copy protection measures, so we decided to outsource the protection after that.

JR: A company called ED-Contrive⁴⁴ made the protection for *Hydride 3*, but for all other versions, you did the protection, is that right?

TN: <points to pile of games> These were all my own copy protection. *Hydride* was unprotected, *Hydride II* had weak protection, and *Hydride 3* had strong protection.⁴⁵ <points> For the original *Hydride*, I didn't think anyone would copy it, so I didn't include copy

protection. On the other hand, for Hydlide 3 SV, the "super version" of Hydlide 3 for the PC-9801 computer, I worked together with ED-Contrive to create the copy protection. It took pirates over a month to crack the game. The reason for this is interesting. It's because the copy protection was actually embedded in the sound routine. The protection was divided into the PSG sound source and the FM synth sound source.⁴⁶ The copy dealers cracked the PSG protection, and released tools that claimed to support the copying of Hydlide 3. But the cracked copies would freeze for users who tried to play the FM synth sound, because the FM synth protection was still intact. That was the last copy protection scheme I worked on. <laughs>



Hydlide 3 (PC-8801)

JS: How were the sales of that version of Hydlide 3?

TN: Allow me to use a little colloquial Japanese: *bochi bochi*. <laughs> It means "little by little". The game sold fairly well, but I think it would have probably sold the same even if there was no protection. By that time, console games were outselling computer games significantly. For the first Hydlide, the Famicom version alone sold a million copies, whereas on the computer side, the combined sales for all the different computer platforms reached one million,⁴⁷ while this <points to Hydlide 3> didn't even reach a million. In Japan, when a successful music artist like Yumi Matsutoya⁴⁸ sells a million copies, Toshiba EMI will give you a plaque to commemorate. It's like going platinum with a music album. We received one of those for Hydlide. That may have been the only Japanese computer game to receive a plaque from Toshiba EMI.

JS: Did you receive royalties for such high sales of the computer versions?

TN: I received a special bonus of 3'000'000 yen.⁴⁹ Yay, I'm rich! *<laughs sarcastically>*

JR: It's rough, isn't it? That's just the way the system works in Japan.

TN: When I calculate it now, after the fact, I think I should have asked for more money.

JR: Such as adding another 0 to the end of your bonus?

TN: The manufacturing costs [for computer games on floppy disk] are miniscule, less than 100 yen. Even when you add other costs, the marginal cost is only a few hundred yen per copy.

JS: Can you recall the license T&E Soft had with Nintendo for the Famicom version?

TN: I don't know about that. Toshiba EMI handled this one, so T&E Soft simply gave them a license.

JS: You're famous for Hydride. Please describe its start.

TN: It just came to me. *<laughs>* At the time, I was in love with The Black Onyx and The Tower of Druaga.⁵⁰ So Hydride was roughly inspired by those. I liked action games, but I also liked role-playing games, so I tried to mix them together.

JS: Did you finish The Tower of Druaga? It's tough!

TN: No! It's too hard! *<laughs>* I think I made it to the 15th floor. There was no strategy guide for the arcade game. But I did at least complete the Famicom version.

JS: Your colleague Yasuo Yoshikawa once stated:⁵¹

"Without a doubt, the greatest crisis for Hydride was when Naito-kun saw the ad for Courageous Perseus⁵² by Cosmo Computer! His face turned a sickly colour, like the whole world was coming to an end. I remember how desperately we tried to cheer him up. Obviously he picked himself back up somehow and brought Hydride into the world, but at the time, we really felt like we were in deep trouble."



Courageous Perseus (PC-8801)

JS: Can you recall this event, and seeing Courageous Perseus?

TN: I think I saw Courageous Perseus for the first time in an advert in a computer magazine. The blended graphics looked excellent, and the game concept looked nearly identical to an Action-RPG. I remember being shocked. Later, I saw the actual game, and was relieved to discover that it went in a completely different direction from Hydlide. From my perspective, the design of Courageous Perseus was closer to an RPG, whereas the design of Hydlide was closer to an action game. Even though the games looked similar, they were actually quite different.

JS: Did you see Falcom's Dragon Slayer during development of Hydlide?

TN: I saw an advertisement in a computer magazine. Dragon Slayer was designed to draw the background in the VRAM1 plane and the characters in the VRAM2 plane, which was cheap-looking compared to Hydlide's visuals. I didn't feel threatened by it. Later, the programmer Kiya-san himself became a threat, however. <laughs>

JS: Some English websites mistakenly say Hydlide was influenced by Ultima.

TN: I really was not influenced by Ultima. I've never even seen it, except for screenshots in magazines. When I created Hydlide, I had never played any Western games at all. I think the sole exception would be a game or two for the TRS-80 computer. A little bowling game or

something. <laughs> I only started playing Western games recently, within the last 10 years or so.

JS: Early Japanese RPGs had their own unique styles. Whereas the genre became more standardised after Dragon Quest. What are your thoughts?

TN: Back then, Japanese people didn't have a well-defined sense of the RPG as a game genre. I suspect that because of this, the creators took the appearance and atmosphere of the RPG as a basic reference, and constructed new types of games according to their own individual sensibilities. In my case, I never had the opportunity to use an Apple II, so I was completely unaware of Wizardry and Ultima. Even today, I essentially know nothing about these games. I was inspired by AD&D and fairy illustrations in books from the West, and developed my own idiosyncratic view of the genre.

JS: Interesting! Did you have any other sources for medieval-style fantasy?⁵³

TN: The Black Onyx, and other Japanese role-playing games, such as Mugen no Shinzou and Lizard, which were both created by Xtalssoft.⁵⁴



Mugen no Shinzou

JS: Did they influence you?

TN: They had almost no influence on Hydlide. Since Hydlide was mainly an action game, I thought of them as different types of games. One part that might have been an influence was

the adoption of status effects such as poison. This was because the first Hydlide did not have status effects.

JS: As an RPG maker yourself, what did you think of Xtalsoft's early RPGs, like Lizard and Mugen no Shinzou?

TN: I played Xtalsoft's games a lot, including Lizard and Mugen no Shinzou. Since I didn't know what the standards of the "authentic RPG" were, I mistakenly assumed that these games were "authentic RPGs". Looking back now, it was a huge misunderstanding, but I think that's also why the JRPG carved out its own unique path.

JS: In some ways, The Black Onyx could be considered a Western game, since it was created by Henk Rogers.

TN: Yes, I know.

JS: Have you met Henk Rogers?

TN: We were professional associates, as one business to another. He might not remember my name. We met once at a *konshinkai*, or informal business party, like a mixer.

JS: I'll ask him when I interview him. Maybe I'll put your interviews next to each other.

TN: I think the readers will find it interesting if you put me and Kiya-san next to each other. <laughs>

JS: You'll be before Mr Kiya, since I interviewed you first!

TN: I win!

<everyone laughs>

JS: You can tell Mr Kiya, "You should have agreed to an interview earlier!"

TN: If I said that, I'd be afraid of his reaction. <laughs>

JR: Do you have a message for him?

TN: Nah, I can tell him myself. <laughs> We're still in contact. He's a very proud person. If you say the wrong thing by mistake, he gets scary! <laughs>

JS: Both yourself and Mr Kiya are famous for RPGs. Which do you prefer personally, Action-RPGs, or turn-based RPGs like Dragon Quest?

TN: I like them both equally. They are different types of games, which makes them hard to compare.

JS: What is the essential appeal of the RPG genre?

TN: I think it may be the ability to virtually experience the thrill of the unknown.



Hydlide II (PC-8801)

JS: The PC-8801 version of Hydlide had static screens which flipped when players reached the edge. But the X1 version added scrolling. Did you want scrolling originally, but were limited by the power of the PC-88?

TN: No, it was because of my lack of programming skill. When I created Hydlide I had only been using the PC-8801 for three months. After using the PC-8801 for the first time, I created Cosmo Mutar within three months, and then began Hydlide after that. So it was because of my inexperience, combined with the limitations of the system. With the skill I have now, I could probably do Hydlide 3 with scrolling, at least on the PC-8801mkIISR model.

I didn't fully understand the Zilog assembly language until making Daiva. For Hydlide and Hydlide II, I used BASE-80, an assembler created by Carry Lab.⁵⁵ Whereas the native assembly language required code like "LD A, 0", BASE-80 allowed you to simply type "A=0". At the time, what little I knew of assembly language came from intro articles in computer magazines. Eventually I taught myself assembly language on my own, and even taught it to others in schools as a teacher. <laughs>

JS: Hydlide in 1984 and had regenerating health when players stood still. Today lots of games have regenerating HP, but I think Hydlide was the first.

TN: I'm pretty sure that the concept of regenerating health first appeared in The Black Onyx.

JS: The Black Onyx was the first with a health bar, but HP only regenerated when staying at an inn...?

TN: Yes, you're right. The HP meter appears in The Black Onyx, but Hydlide might be the first game where the character regenerates by standing still... *<pauses to reflect>* When you're in a cave, I imagined that you would feel tense and get tired, but when you're standing in an open field, I imagined that it would feel good and you would be able to rest a little. I didn't think of it as a truly novel idea, it just seemed like common sense, so I included it in the game. Hydlide 3 takes this kind of subjectivity further. Time passes, and eventually you get hungry and want to eat something, or become tired and want to sleep. Like real life.

JS: Falcom then copied the regeneration idea for Ys.

TN: *<chuckles>* Well, that's one way to put it. Personally, I don't consider it to be copying. I mean, if you push a lever this way, *<mimes joystick movement>* the character moves to the right. That's common to all games.

JS: Did you know at the time that Mr Kiya of Falcom considered you his biggest rival?

TN: *<English>* Biggest rival? *<laughs - Japanese>* I think I'm the loser in that rivalry. Kiya-san is a genius. I'm just an ordinary guy. Maybe a little super-ordinary, that's all. Back then, I just happened to come out on top among the ordinary people, and people liked me for that.

JS: Did you know that in Falcom's Xanadu, if you name your character "Hydlide" you start the game with the lowest parameters?

TN: Oh I knew. Kiya-san came and told me about it. *<laughs>* You also get a weak character if you enter in "Naito". When you talk to Yamamoto-san after this interview, he'll tell you about his game Laydock. In Laydock, if you enter in Yamamoto's nickname "Futaro", your character becomes practically invincible. His nickname is *Fu-chan*.

For me, it was less Kiya-san and more the game Ys itself that really made me sit up and take notice. Kiya-san... *<*inaudible; something about game mechanics*>* Ys was exactly the type of game I was striving to create.

<JS and interpreter leave to phone Mr Yamamoto, audio continues recording - some indecipherable chitchat>

JR: *<points to original computer Hydlide>* Is this a pristine version? Have you ever played this copy?

TN: *[Yes and no; answer is jumbled up as Mr Naito points to different games explaining whether pristine or used; impossible to tell from audio alone]*

JR: At the Game Preservation Society, our mission is to preserve all games in their original,

unaltered state, with no save data.

TN: Sure, I have a copy like that. For Hydlide at least, definitely.

<JR asks about source code, explains GPS' method of preserving copies with all sector information intact>

TN: *<holds PC-88 ver. of Hydlide 3>* I probably have my own save data on the User Disk for this, though...



Hydlide 3 (PC-8801)

JS: *<returns, sees box>* The PC-8801 version of Hydlide 3 is fascinating. If you have a 1MB memory card installed, you can play the entire game in RAM.

TN: That's true, we supported memory caching with a memory board manufactured by I-O Data. I wanted to support as many PC-8801 peripherals as we could. It's something I wanted to do personally. You're quite knowledgeable. The PC-8801MA model had 128KB of available memory, and we used some of that as a cache. We supported 128KB, 256KB, and 1MB memory configurations. With more memory, the floppy disk drive would be accessed less. We also supported PSG, FM synthesis, and ADPCM for sound. Hydlide 3 came on two disks, and the first disk is all sound data. If we had not decided to support ADPCM sound, the game would have fit on a single disk.

JS: Back to the original Hydlide - did you play all the conversions? If someone were to play Hydlide for the first time, which is the definitive version?

TN: Personally? I prefer the versions for the PC-6001mkII, PC-6601, and PC-6601SR computers.

JS: Because you added joystick support and a soundtrack?

TN: I'm sorry, I don't remember the details about the joystick support. <laughs>

JS: About one year later in 1985 you released Hydlide II. This had additions like a morality system: your morality went down if you attacked good monsters, and went up if you attacked bad monsters. It was called "FORTH" - was that short for the English word forthrightness?

TN: <laughs> I think it was supposed to be "Force". I was a big fan of *Star Wars*. I have them all on DVD now.

JS: Do you prefer the original trilogy or the new trilogy?

TN: That's a difficult question... They're both interesting. But that sequence in the original movie when they attack the Death Star... That's the greatest. And also when the wings open out on the X-Wing. That scene, when the wings unfurl, still gives me a thrill today.

JS: You added training to Hydlide II, which is needed to increase your strength. Is that also taken from *Star Wars*, like Luke's training as a Jedi?

TN: Maybe. You might be right! <laughs>

JS: In the first game HP stopped regenerating in caves, whereas now it goes down if you're in a graveyard or desert.

TN: I think your HP also went down in the first game...

JS: Oh! I only played it on Famicom, I'll have to check.

TN: Um... I think the HP also went down in the Famicom version, too. But the various versions of the game are slightly different. I let the programmers of the other versions make their own decisions, so there are many things that even I don't know about.

JS: In Hydlide II sometimes enemies drop black crystals which prevent health regeneration.

TN: Good question! The idea was that the hero would be consumed by it, like the dark side of the Force. That's why the crystal is black... Maybe. <laughs>

JS: *Star Wars!* <laughs> In dungeons treasure chests and stairs are invisible, so you have to feel around to find them.

TN: That idea might have come from *The Tower of Druaga*.

JS: *Hydlide 3* was released on the MSX range, Famicom, Mega Drive, and also computers such as the X68000 and the PC-9801. Which did you work on?

TN: I did the programming for the PC-8801, and I was the director for the Famicom version, which was primarily handled by a subcontractor studio in Tokyo.

JS: Can you remember the name of the subcontractor?

TN: Jorudan.⁵⁶ Nowadays they run a train route guide service in Japan. Ultimately it was Namco's product, so I'm not at liberty to discuss the subcontracting details.

JS: But you can talk about the PC-8801 version?

TN: Absolutely.

JS: You made more additions for the third game, including a weight system where equipment can weigh you down.

TN: You know how in role-playing games such as *Dragon Quest*, you end up carrying a lot of items? I thought it strange that you could walk around carrying 10 swords without any problems. If you're carrying a lot, it's heavy, and if it's heavy, you can't walk very fast. I think I also added weight to the gold coins. It seemed odd that your money was just a number that went up. So if you try to grind for a lot of money, there's a drawback. From that idea, I created the money exchange machine. Which is a little odd for a fantasy setting, but... <laughs>

JS: I think it's innovative! No other game at the time did anything like that. Also the day is broken into 24 hours, with the need to eat and sleep.

TN: Yes - your character has to eat first thing in the morning.

JS: My favourite aspect is the last boss requires a rather clever trick to defeat... (top, right)

TN: Yes, you have to enter his mouth! I thought that if the last boss could be defeated from a blow on the outside of his body, somebody else besides the hero would have already defeated him. So he's strong on the outside, but he is naturally vulnerable on the inside, like in his mouth. A simple idea, really.

JS: Were you concerned players wouldn't finish the game because it's counterintuitive?

TN: No, I wasn't concerned. Back then, games were supposed to be difficult. A game was a

challenge from us, the developers.



JS: The end was genius. Kaizack, a Cthulu-like multi-eyed monster who made the universe, decides to destroy everything. You're basically killing a god; destroying the creator of the universe to save the universe.⁵⁷

TN: I wonder where that came from... I think I was influenced by either the films of Hayao Miyazaki, or the film *The Neverending Story*.

JS: The first and third *Hydlide* games were released outside of Japan, but not the second. Were you aware of the international releases?

TN: Ah! I just remembered. There was going to be an IBM PC version of the original *Hydlide*. But my code was such messy spaghetti code, the American programmer in charge of the port gave up in disgust. Then another programmer stepped in, and he gave up too. So the IBM PC version was cancelled. <laughs> *Hydlide* and *Hydlide II* were both spaghetti code.

<points> But this one, *Hydlide 3*, was elegant code.

JS: Do you still have the code for *Hydlide* and *Hydlide II*?

TN: At home I have some 5 inch floppy disks that probably contain the source code, but I don't know if the disks are still readable. In fact, I'm not actually supposed to have those disks, so I can't give them to you.

JR: But the copyright should revert to you, isn't that right?

TN: The T&E Soft trademark is now in the hands of some real estate company in Niigata.

JR: But don't you own the source code?

TN: No. The source code I created at the company belongs to the company, not to me.

JS: <to Joseph> Maybe an "anonymous donation" could mysteriously appear at your doorstep... and Mr Naito could look in his attic and be like, "Where have my disks gone?!"

JR: The legislation regarding source code differs from country to country. For example, the source code of *Prince of Persia* has been recovered. It's like a piece of music, the copyright is partitioned. The real owner is the one who made it. So, I think the first step would be to preserve it, before it fades out. Then maybe in 50 years...



JS: It's important to preserve before the disk bio-degrades.

TN: It's a miracle if I have it, but it hasn't been stored in a good environment...

JR: Trust me, we can read it at the Preservation Society.

TN: That would be lucky, but the disks I have at home are most likely backup disks, and not the original masters.

[[image3x1]]

JS: Even more exciting - a work-in-progress version might have elements not in the final game!

JR: Like a diary of your creative process.

TN: <laughs> Hmm... I just don't think I can release it. If I hated Yokoyama-san, I'd give them to you. But since I like Yokoyama-san, I cannot do it. We still go golfing together from time to time. He's actually the founder of Digital Golf Inc.⁵⁸ <points> This is one of their products, for which I created the golf data. Unfortunately, this project was terminated.

JS: <jokingly> **There's clearly a connection, in Hydlide there are lots of open green fields.**

TN: No, that's just a coincidence! <everyone laughs> I *hated* golf when I was making Hydlide. But when I started this golf project, I thought that someone who hated golf would never do a good job, so I took lessons and learned to like golf.

JR: So you didn't join T&E Soft *because* you liked golf?⁵⁹

TN: No, I joined because T&E Soft was the only game company in Nagoya. I didn't know that they liked golf when I joined. Harukanaru Augusta, a golf game by T&E Soft, was created by Yokoyama-san, a big golf lover, and Eiji Kato, who *became* a golf lover.

JS: **What's your stroke handicap when playing golf?**

TN: I'm still not any good, so don't make me answer that! <laughs> This month, I achieved a new personal best of 96, so my handicap has a long way to go. But it's going to go down!

JS: **What was your involvement in Virtual Hydlide? Did you do the programming? (top row)**

TN: I was the director/executive producer on Virtual Hydlide for Sega Saturn.

JS: **Did you do any coding for the Saturn? I've heard it has a complex architecture.**

TN: No. Kentaro Nishiwaki was the programmer. And yes, the Saturn was tremendously difficult to program for.

JS: Virtual Hydlide was interesting. The landscape is randomly generated every time you start. Your idea?

TN: Yes.

JS: **Were you influenced by roguelikes, such as the Fushigi no Dungeon series?**

TN: Yes, they were an influence. Recently, I was the director on Fushigi no Dungeon: Fuurai no Shiren 4 Plus, for the PSP.



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JS: When working on Fushigi no Dungeon, did you draw on your experiences from developing Virtual Hydlide?

TN: Actually, it's more the reverse. I was asked to direct the new Fushigi no Dungeon game because of my prior experience with role-playing games such as Hydlide.

JS: So Hydlide has kept you in good stead, even today.

TN: I wouldn't say I'm successful. Hydlide has also caused me grief over the years. "Oh it's Naito, of course he can do it!" People expect me to be able to do anything, even when I can't. <laughs>

JS: Hydlide has a place in history as one of Japan's earliest Action-RPGs. Did you want to comment on its legacy?

TN: I think it was something that anybody could have created. I just happened to come up with it first.

JS: Let's discuss Daiva. There were seven different versions released at roughly the same time, all for different systems.⁶⁰ They were telling the same story but from different angles. Which version of Daiva did you work on?

TN: That's correct. I was the programmer for the battle scenes of the PC-8801 game. A person named Yasuo Yoshikawa was the executive producer.

JS: I'm interviewing him too! It's such an unusual and ingenious idea. Can you describe how the project started? At the time, no one could play every version, because you would have to own every computer.

TN: Game development at T&E Soft was organized with a different person or team responsible for each computer system. For Daiva, the entire development department worked simultaneously to create a version for each system. While we were making Daiva, no other games were being developed.

JS: What an ambitious undertaking! Why make seven totally different games, rather than just converting one?

TN: I don't know, honestly. It was Yoshikawa-san's project. I only worked on the PC-8801 game.

JS: Did you play the other games for the other systems?

TN: No. <laughs> I didn't have time.

JR: I have a question about Daiva's music composer, Mr Asakura.⁶¹ Today he's a very famous

musician, but he started his career at T&E Soft, and we have no information about his career at that time. How did you find him, and how did he join the company?

TN: I don't know the details, but maybe he came in through Toshiba EMI. I think he was originally working at Yamaha, before he became a musician. He debuted as a musician around the time he contributed to *Daiva*. I didn't know he was famous or going to be famous back then, so I sort of ignored him. <laughs>

He wasn't very knowledgeable about computers. The sound data he created was huge, so I had to cut it down. It was wasteful. The sound was pretty good, but... a musician will think in terms of simply taking existing sounds and combining them. But on a computer, you have to create the sounds yourself from the sound source. He wasn't used to creating sounds with a computer, so he had a hard time doing the project.

JS: Earlier you mentioned the IBM version of *Hydlide* was cancelled. Can you recall any other unreleased games?

TN: Sure. I had the beginnings of an active simulation RPG.⁶² But I lacked the skill to make the game fast enough. The gameplay was too slow, so it was cancelled.

JS: What year was this, and which hardware platform?

TN: For the PC-8801. It was after *Daiva*. I was really hoping to finish and release it, but I couldn't make the screen zoom in, so it didn't work out.

JS: What percentage was complete before cancellation?

TN: We only worked on it for 1-2 months. We were working on the difficult part first, and if that worked out, we would go ahead with the project. It didn't work out, so we moved on to *Rune Worth*.

JS: I noticed something unusual on your CV - you were in charge of localising *The Lost Vikings*?

TN: I didn't localise it myself, but I was the one who went to San Francisco to sign the contract. I created some of the Japanese text, and also did some playtesting.

JS: What did you think of it?

TN: It was interesting! I liked how you controlled the three different Vikings separately. It was a very novel way to establish gameplay.

JS: In the West there's a belief that Western games are perceived as not being good in Japan. I've heard the phrase *Yo-ge*, *Kuso-ge* (Western game, shit game). Would you say that *The Lost Vikings* is an example of a good Western game?

TN: To be honest, I haven't played many Western games even today. With regard to *The Lost*

Vikings, the company discovered it, not me, and then put me in charge of the localisation. I've also never played Ultima or Wizardry.

JS: Was Rise of the Robots handled while you were still with T&E Soft?

TN: Yes, that's correct.

JS: Can you describe your involvement?

TN: I did not have a very large role. I was the general manager, and just kept tabs on the progress of the project. It was developed by a studio in England. They seemed like they were really enjoying themselves. When I entered their offices, the programmer was playing the drums, and at the entrance of the office, they had a line of arcade cabinets.



JS: How well did Rise of the Robots sell in Japan?

TN: Sales were very low.

JS: It did so badly in England the majority of the dev team have been impossible to track down for interviews.⁶³

TN: Is that so? The graphics were nice, at least. But there was very little gameplay. T&E Soft looked at the screenshots and thought it looked great, but when I played the game, it wasn't good.

JS: While at T&E, did you see any Virtual Boy development?

TN: As a general manager, I did see some work going on for that system. People would spend hours doing debugging work with the Virtual Boy pressed against their face, and when they finally pulled away, there would be black marks on their face from the headset.

JS: T&E developed Red Alarm for Virtual Boy.

TN: I know of it, but Red Alarm was created by the Osaka office of T&E Soft.

JS: Xing Entertainment published Floating Runner, which was apparently developed by T&E Soft.

TN: I don't know anything about that title. I imagine it may have been developed in Osaka. Back in 1996 was the year I left T&E Soft, and as a result I had very little interest in our in-house games at that point.

JS: What can you tell me about Xing Entertainment?

TN: I established an independent game development company after leaving T&E Soft, and Xing Entertainment was a major source of work in those days. I feel very grateful to them.

JS: Right, in 1996 you formed E.O. Imagination.⁶⁴ Why did you leave T&E Soft?

TN: I wanted to make games again. My job had become just handling work by other people, such as with The Lost Vikings. Instead of creating things on my own, I was being told what to work on. At E.O. Imagination I created a Strategy-RPG, and also Dragon Money, a board game, both for the PlayStation. The object [of Dragon Money] is to try to make as many friends as possible. I'm a little embarrassed, because it's not a very good game.

JS: When you started E.O. Imagination, there were some interesting titles using the Develo Box, which was a device for homebrew development on PC Engine.⁶⁵

TN: The hardware was designed to be a data transfer tool for software development on the PC Engine, so the Develo Box itself did not have any special functions. It is my understanding that Tokuma Shoten manufactured it with cooperation from NEC. For this reason, feature articles and brochures about the Develo Box were only published by Tokuma Shoten. I think Bits Laboratory actually developed it, but I'm not sure.⁶⁶

JS: I'd like to introduce E.O. Dragon Adventure to readers. What can you tell me?

TN: Tokuma Shoten came to me with a request to provide some kind of sample program to

be published with a book about the Develo Box. I quickly put together a game in three days, and the result was *E.O. Dragon Adventure*. The game itself is really cheap-looking. The gameplay is similar to *Space Invaders*, which was a huge hit in Japan. But the point was not to make a complex and interesting game; it was a sample meant to demonstrate how ordinary users could use the Develo Box to create games easily.

JS: Your CV lists teaching work.⁶⁷ I'm intrigued!

TN: While I was working at my independent company, I gave a talk at a technical school about founding a game company. The person in charge then asked me to prepare a series of lectures for the students. In all, it was a 10-day course. The lectures I gave were about topics like the following:

- Refining a game idea
- Breakdown of game systems
- Approaches to scenario writing
- Getting the most results with the least work
- Visual expression
- Sound design
- Movie staging and effects
- Quality control/debugging
- Skills prized by the game industry

The lectures were a hit with the students, and on the last day I received a standing ovation. I heard that the head of curriculum at the school was amazed by the students' response. After that, my company closed down. When I visited the school one last time to thank them for their support, they asked me what I was planning to do next. When I told them I hadn't decided yet, they asked me, "Why don't you teach here?" The job benefits were very generous, and I also thought that I could contribute to the industry by training students, so I became a teacher.

JS: What subjects did you teach?

TN: - Basics of C language (day and night classes)

- C++ programming
- Microsoft Foundation Classes (MFC) programming
- Basic game programming
- DirectX programming (for 3rd-year and special-course students)
- Fundamental Information Technology Engineer Examination (a Japanese IT certification)
- Project management

In addition, I was also the Game Department leader, the trial enrolment supervisor, the machine maintenance supervisor, the 2-year game course advisor (120 students), the 3-year game course advisor (50 students), the 4-year game course TP,⁶⁸ and a national exam coach. I

also helped plan future curriculum, advise graduating students, and acted as a counsellor. It was an extremely busy job.



<**Tetsuya Yamamoto** arrives; the discussion reverts to back to T&E Soft as both gentlemen reminisce>

JS: Let's draw a sketch of the T&E Soft office as it looked when you first joined.

<TN draws sketch while conversing with TY>

JS: What is this *hamachi* room?

TN: That's where we hid all the prototype hardware we received from manufacturers for testing. When you entered the room, the door was locked from the outside. Sometimes we'd throw a programmer in there, lock the door, and say, "We'll let you out once you finish your code!" <laughs>

JS: Isn't *hamachi* a type of edible fish?

TN: It's the room where people went to work during crunch time, so it's "crunch" (*kaihatsu ni HAMAtta*) plus "people" (*hitotaCHI*), which is shortened to the "hamachi room", or crunch room. Another theory was that the people who got tired and were found rolling around in their sleep on the floor looked like freshly caught *hamachi*, a type of fish. <laughs>

JS: Where was your desk?

TN: Here. I wasn't a manager back then... <to TY> What was my title back then?

TY: I don't know, we always just called you Naito-sensei.

TN: Oh yeah, that's right! <laughs>

<TN signs book... overlapping small talk>

TN: <to TY> Hey Fu-chan, have you seen this, the T&E Soft recruitment brochure? Did you look at this and decide to apply?

<passes brochure around>

TY: I just saw a company advertisement in a magazine.

TN: That's how I joined, too.

<We switch to Tetsuya Yamamoto's interview>



Email follow-ups with Tokihiro Naito

Given the length of time from the interview to book publication, I sent some follow-up questions via email.

TN: Since last year, I have been working at a company called M2 in Chiba Prefecture. Currently I am busy working on a certain (secret) project. I thought I would have more time to write you sometime later, but things are going to get even busier starting in June, so I am writing to you now while I have the chance.

JS: On 1 October 2014 you Tweeted the following:

Those who want a new ARPG for the 3DS - if this tweet receives more than 3'000 RT in 1 week, I'll submit the proposal to the boss. #Marketresearch #Experiment

JS: What happened with this? Are you still planning to create an ARPG for 3DS?

TN: I received about 1'500 retweets. I also discovered that some people see this kind of experiment as simply "begging for retweets", and for them it only leaves a bad impression. Because of this, I don't think I will conduct any kind of experiment, survey, promotion, or announcement on Twitter ever again.

JS: Are you still planning to create an ARPG for 3DS?

TN: No comment... It sounds more hopeful when I say that. *<laughs>*

JS: What are your future plans?

TN: Currently, I am in a management role for game development at M2. I still want to create original games someday, and that's why I was experimentally gathering opinions on Twitter, but since M2 is a developer and not a publisher, things are difficult without some sort of breakthrough in that area. But the president, Mr Horii, is an unusual person in the good sense of the word, and he has a solid reputation for accomplishing things. I hope to be able to do something before I retire.

JS: I've seen photos of you with Hiromasa Iwasaki. Are you working on a project together?

TN: We just happened to be at a bar together. It's only because I talked about going out for a drink with Makabe-san of EYERESH,^{[69](#)} and Iwasaki-san showed up together with Yagi-san of Artdink.^{[70](#)} *<laughs>*



From left: Hiroshi Makabe (EYERESH), Hiromasa Iwasaki, Tokihiro Naito, and Masanori Yagi (Artdink)

JS: Would you like to add anything?

TN: I applied myself to a number of challenges over the year between turning 51 and turning 52.

- I mostly mastered Visual C# programming.
- I learned Perl/CGI/ShellScript.
- I started walking 25 km a month.
 - A year ago, I was crying out in leg pain after 8 km.
 - Currently aiming to participate in a half-marathon.
- Able to perform 45kg barbell press for 5 sets of 10 reps.
 - A year ago, I could only lift 20kg
 - I am working towards 60kg.
- In golf, achieved new record of 270yds on my long drive.
 - My average is 240yds, but I'm still improving.



YAMAMOTO, Tetsuya

DOB: 28 March 1967 / Birthplace: Aichi / Blood Type: B

~Selected Portfolio~

(sometimes credited Fuutarou Yamamoto)

T&E Soft

Laydock, MZ-2500 (several unconfirmed dates / also on MSX2 and FM-7)

Super Laydock: Mission Striker, MSX (1987, also Sharp X1, **right**)

Laydock 2: last Attack, MSX2 Turbo (1988)



/ *Aapaa MyaaDock*, MSX2 (1989)

Series of vertical shmups emphasising two player mechanics, allowing each player's ship to combine together into a stronger force (either vertically or horizontally). Though now sadly an obscure and overlooked series, it's found a following among the Western MSX fan-community. Said to be long and challenging tests of endurance, the series is worth investigating. *Aapaa MyaaDock* is a satirical spin-off from the originals, much like *Parodious* was for *Gradius* (only two stages long, it's more like

a demo).

/ *AshGuine*, MSX2 (1987): see accompanying page

(lit. Top Dog Quest) / *The Komainu Quest - 1989 - Celebrate the 36th Anniversary of the Foundation: My Town Computer Game*, MSX2 (1989)

Horizontal shmup designed solely as product placement for companies in Seto city. It's actually a lot of fun and amusing!

Undeadline, MSX2 (1989)

/ *Genjuuki* (aka: *Undeadline*), X68000 (1990)

Undeadline, Mega Drive (1991)

Less a trilogy, more a triumvirate of revised conversions. Tough vertical shmups with a hardcore following, they're not as difficult as many think (Damocles on Shmups Forum produced a detailed guide for improving one's skills). *Undeadline* is especially interesting because of its RPG trimmings. You select between a Fighter, Wizard or Ninja, each with different traits, and at first glance screenshots almost resemble a *Zelda* clone. Although the MD version looks nice, it's the weakest of the three, since it *removes* the Wizard and Ninja, and is also missing two extra stages from the X68000 version.

Sword World SFC, Super Famicom (Aug 1993) - see Tokihiro Naito chapter

Unreleased

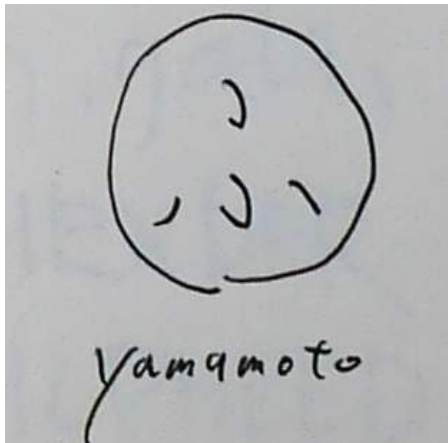
/ *Satelliteman*, Super Famicom

/ *Yuu-kun no Chokin* (lit. *Yu-kun's Savings*),

MSX2

After T&E Soft

Ascertaining everything Tetsuya Yamamoto worked on is difficult. He used a pseudonym for several titles, and there appears to be at least one other developer with the same name, credited at various different companies. Cryptically I was sent a list of games he worked on, where for post-T&E titles the names were omitted, simply stating there was one shooting and one racing game for the Sega Saturn, a simulation game for PS1, and a fighting game for PS2. The Saturn games are below, but results on the PS1 and PS2 games are inconclusive.

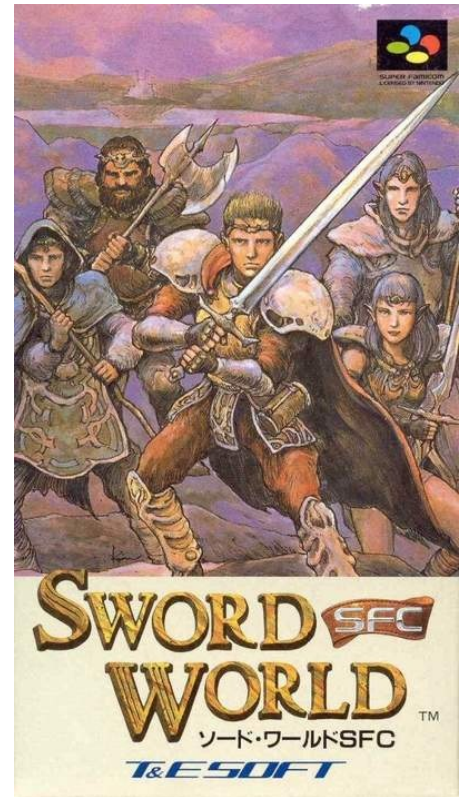


Musashi, Japanese DOS/V
(unknown, possibly **unreleased**)

Wing Arms, Sega Saturn (1995)

WWII shooters. The original focuses on attacking the *Musashi* battleship; the Saturn version apparently an update.

F-1 Live Information / F1 Challenge, Sega Saturn (1995)



Interview with Tetsuya YAMAMOTO

03 November 2013, Nagoya / Duration: 1h 52m

Looking through Tetsuya Yamamoto's credits list on English websites is misleading. Firstly, several titles he worked on are credited under the pseudonym Futaro Yamamoto; not because of company policy, but just because he liked it. Secondly, as is the case for several interviewees in this book, the majority of his games never left Japan despite being technically, thematically, or mechanically interesting and worthy of attention. Most of all though, his games just never got released. Not properly anyway. Two were entirely unreleased; they were completed but never commercialised, and their descriptions here are the first in the world. Another game was commissioned by the city of Seto to promote local businesses - it was released but is fairly obscure. There was another game still, which was released, but alongside two others with the same identical name, and is now a forgotten gem.

Mr Yamamoto's work never saw quite the same success as that of his colleague, Tokihiro Naito, but they are fascinating to read about and convey a wonderful sense of that time and place: Japanese development in the 1980s, on computers, unrestricted, unchecked, and undocumented. Bright pixel art, great chiptunes, just a few friends doing their own thing for their own reasons, before the outside world fully understood this burgeoning industry.

<introductions made, some general chat with Mr Naito, then we shift to interviewing his colleague, Mr Yamamoto>

JS: What is the first game you recall seeing?

TY: Table Tennis.^{[71](#)}

JS: And the first game system you owned?

TY: My first console was the Nintendo Family Computer, the Famicom. My first computer was the Sharp MZ-2000.

JS: When did you feel you wanted to make games?

TY: In my first year of high school.^{[72](#)} I used to type in the source code listings in computer magazines, to play games on the computer. My younger brother and I divided the work of typing all the code in, but he would get angry with me because I made too many mistakes. So I got frustrated and decided just to create my own games from scratch.

JS: *<laughs>* Were yours also printed in magazines?

TY: I think I submitted a game to a magazine at least once. Actually, I created a game for me and my friends to play, and one of my friends submitted this game without telling me, and it was published. Hmm... what was it? There was a rocket that shot up from the bottom of the screen... It was basically a clone of the Galaxy Wars arcade game. I don't remember the exact title.

JS: Whose name was it credited under?

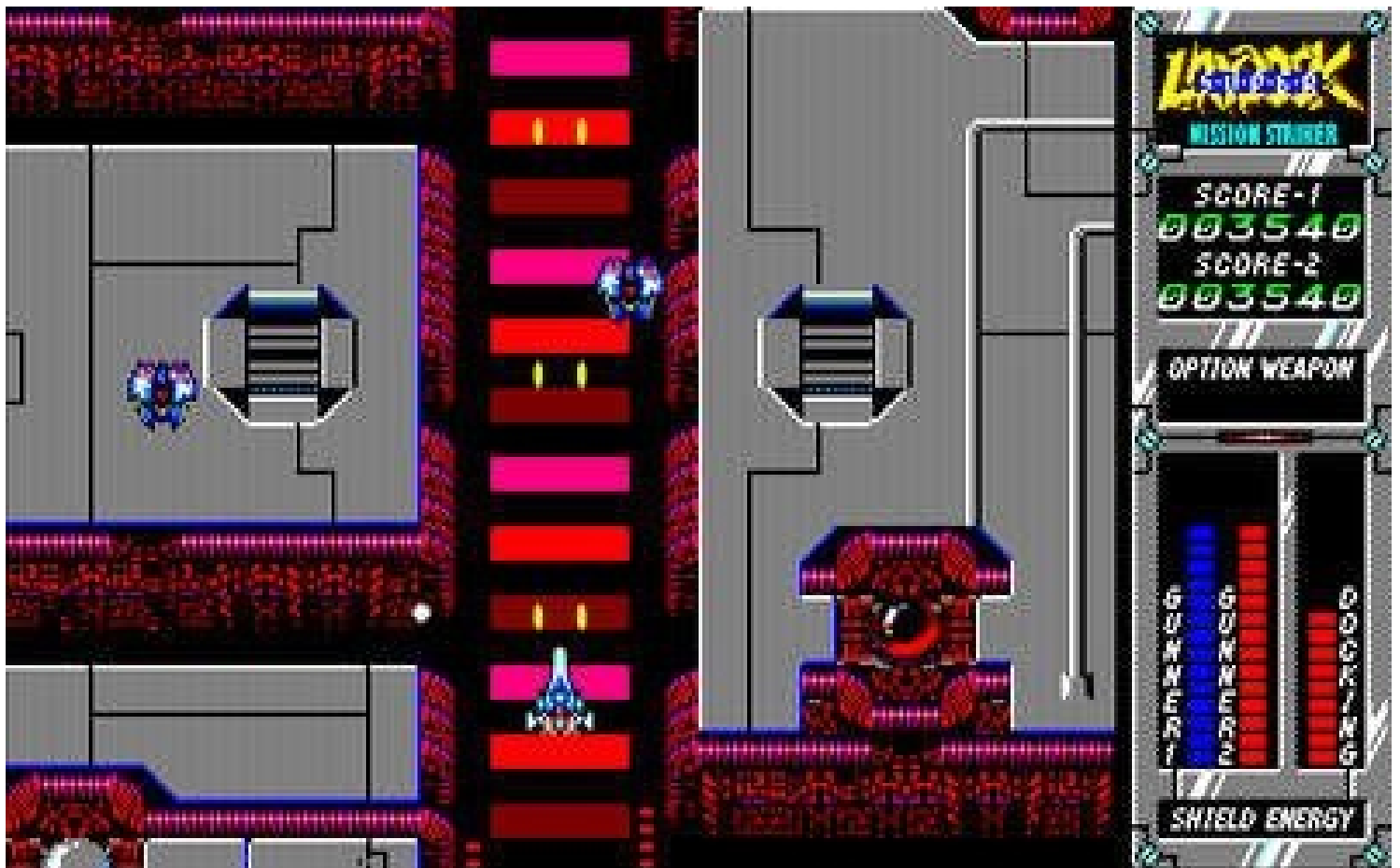
TY: It was under my name. <laughs>

JS: Was T&E Soft the first place you worked for?

TY: Yes. I was creating games as a hobby while I was still a student, but videogames seemed like a precarious and uncertain business, like being a bartender or something. So at first I joined a company that dealt in large-scale computers like mainframes. But I got bored of that job after six months, and realised I really wanted to make games.

JS: What was the name of the mainframe company?

TY: I think it was Nihon Business Consultant (NBC).⁷³ They provided things like online systems for banks, and train ticket kiosks. As a programmer for large-scale computers in that line of work, you don't really get the opportunity to see the computer do what you've programmed. I was bored, and I realised that I wanted to make games. At this time I came upon a magazine advertisement for T&E Soft, which was right here in Nagoya, so I went in for an interview. This was right at the time when T&E Soft's newest game *Laydock*⁷⁴ was being featured in the computer magazines. In the interview, I told the president and the vice-president that I could make something just like that, and they hired me.



Super Laydock: MS (X1) – showing the vertical 1P/2P ship configuration

JS: And then you converted it to the MZ-2500?

TY: Yes. Laydock was originally released for the MSX2, just before I joined the company. My first task was to convert it to the Sharp MZ-2500.

JS: Apparently the boss of Bullet Proof Software, Henk Rogers, did the voice for Laydock. Is that true?⁷⁵

Tokihiro Naito: Yes, it's true. Toshiro-san, the president of T&E Soft, was friends with Rogers and asked him to do it.

TY: Yes, Toshiro-san told me about that after the game was released.

JS: I love trivia like that. Can you share any more?

TN: One time, we ran out of time on an MSX game, so one of the developers, probably Yamamoto-kun, climbed into a truck and went all the way to the duplicator factory in Kanazawa and helped break up the finished circuit boards into the individual cartridges, working side-by-side with the middle-aged women who packaged up software as a part-time job. The T&E Soft managers had told him he could take a trip to Kanazawa and enjoy some gourmet crab, but he ended up doing a bunch of manual labour. The crab he got was pretty small, too.

<everyone laughs>

JS: Which MSX game was that?

TN: Super Laydock, I think.



JS: What year did you join T&E Soft?

TN: I think [Tetsuya Yamamoto] joined three years after I joined in 1984. <to TY> You weren't around [in 1985] when we made Hydlide II, were you?

TY: No, but I helped with the debugging for Hydlide 3, so I must have joined the same year that was released. So... In 1987.

TN: Just three years after me! I *thought* you had joined later. Oh yes, it was in the autumn of 1987, wasn't it?

TY: That's right, but I joined the company in the spring. I joined on the day before my 20th birthday.

JS: Your email listed Aapaa MyaaDock.⁷⁶ It's based on Laydock, right?

TY: Yes. It's a parody of Laydock that takes place in the city of Nagoya. That was a minigame included in the *T&E Magazine Disk Special* for MSX2, which was published through the Takeru software vending machines.⁷⁷

JS: You fly through Nagoya and shoot enemies?

TY: That's right. And the enemies are various things that Nagoya is famous for, like fried shrimp.



*The obscure, satirical Aapaa MyaaDock for MSX2 was a way of promoting Nagoya. Image via Project EGG
www.amusement-center.com*

JS: Was this influenced by Konami's Parodius?

TY: Hmm... I don't think so. It was just a part of the disk magazine, so it wasn't a large-scale game in the first place. It was also an opportunity to promote Nagoya.

JS: Can you tell me about the Takeru vending machines?

TY: I'm not deeply familiar with them.

JS: Did you choose to make a parody, or were you asked?

TY: I think a person in the sales department named Yoshikawa asked me to do it.⁷⁸ It was completed in a very short time. Less than two months. The game consists of only one vertically-scrolling stage and one horizontally-scrolling stage. At the end Nagoya Castle gets

blown up!

Another game of mine that's similar is *Komainu Quest* for the MSX2.⁷⁹ It's a shooting game similar to *Laydock*, and was commissioned by the city of Seto for use at a local event. The idea for the project came from someone in the Seto city hall, but they didn't have a budget for it, so they invited local businesses to sponsor the development of the game. If a business paid a little money, they would be included in the credits at the end, but if they paid a little more, a sign or billboard for that business would appear in-game. So that's how the game was funded, but what the businesses didn't realise was that they were paying to be blown up in the game!⁸⁰

<everyone laughs>

JS: A form of product placement?

TY: That's right. Signs for different businesses would be displayed on the tops of the buildings, but the enemies were also sitting up there, too. It was commissioned specifically for Seto city and wasn't sold commercially, so it's virtually unknown in the videogame world.⁸¹

JS: What kind of companies sponsored the game?

TY: All kinds of companies, completely unrelated to the games industry, as long as they were located in Seto. The premise of the game is to take back a golden *komainu* which has been stolen.⁸²

TN: I didn't know about any of this!

JS: Who was it distributed to?

TY: I don't know if it was distributed at all. I think the game was set up for visitors to play at some event, so the only people who actually possessed copies were higher-ranking officials or employees of the Seto city hall.

JS: Do you still have a copy yourself?

TY: I actually obtained an extra copy of the game from the Seto city hall before, but when I tried to play it, the disk was already unreadable. I'll check and see if I still have that disk. Maybe someone can restore it. I'm sure the residents of Seto would be particularly interested in it.

TN: Yamamoto's copy might be the very last one.

TY: I'm not sure I even have it anymore!

JS: Perhaps you should email Seto city hall and ask.

TY: <laughs> The person at the Seto city hall who was in charge of the project may not even be there anymore. It was 25 years ago!

JS: I hope someone archived it for history.⁸³

TY: Actually, I think some of the company sponsors may have also received a copy of the game.

JS: You must be careful with floppy disks, they can develop mold.

Joseph Redon: If you do find the disk, don't try to read it, because you may end up damaging it.

TY: My relative will be excited if we can restore the disk. My relative wanted to see the game, and was the person who made me contact the Seto city hall to request a copy before.

JS: Another shmup you're credited on is Undeadline.⁸⁴ Did you create the first version?

TY: For the first version on the MSX2, I was the programmer, and Naito-san was the designer/planner. That was the first time we worked together.



JS: It seems to be a combination of 2D shooter and RPG.

TY: I developed the *sekaikan* for this game.

TN: He was supposed to be just the programmer, but he inserted all these little "tricks" without telling me first. For example, for a section that takes place inside a cave, Yamamoto programmed rocks to fall from the ceiling. Then he'd call me over and say, "Here, play this for a bit." And since of course I didn't know about his tricks, I'd die and get a game over almost immediately, and he'd be sitting there, watching and laughing.

TY: We had plenty of freedom. Game development was extremely fun back then. We could do

what we wanted.

TN: The overall themes or ideas of a game were predetermined, but we were free to develop it however we wanted within those overall ideas. Yamamoto's game *Super Laydock* was the same way. They had to make a game within the existing *Laydock* universe, but Yamamoto and the designer, Kenji Nakashima, were free to create whatever game they wanted.

JS: *Genjuuki*⁸⁵ is actually *Undeadline* for the X68000 computer. Why the name change?

TY: Our boss, Eiji-san, insisted on changing the title to *Genjuuki*. He liked to come up with new titles. He also changed *The Lost Vikings* to "*Vikings in Big Trouble*" for the Japanese release.⁸⁶ Much of what we did at T&E Soft was based on our gut feelings, and not on sales numbers or anything. That was one of the strengths of the company.

- PLAYER SELECT -



CLASS: FIGHTER

ST=04: ■■■■

MP=01: ■

DX=02: ■■

AG=08: ■■■■■■



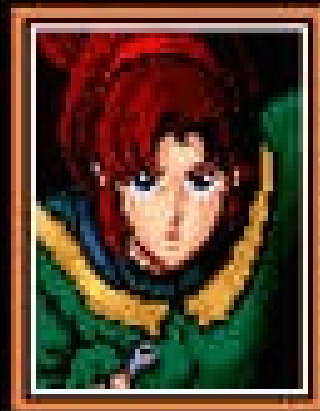
CLASS: WIZARD

ST=01: ■

MP=04: ■■■■

DX=02: ■■

AG=07: ■■■■■■



CLASS: NINJA

ST=02: ■■

MP=01: ■

DX=04: ■■■■

AG=10: ■■■■■■

JS: Any stories from the development of *Undealdline*?

TY: The original game basically proceeded according to Naito-san's original game design document. However, when we remade the game for the Mega Drive, we strived to make it more intense and exciting, and as development continued, the game gradually became more and more difficult. The selectable difficulty modes were "Easy", "Normal", and "Crazy". *<laughs>* And I would make Naito play it, and watch him crash and burn because of how difficult it was.

There was another thing we did as a way of training the debugging staff. We would cut a hole in a piece of paper, and then tape the paper over the monitor, so you're only able to see a

limited area of the screen. By forcing the playtesters to practice with a handicap in this way, their gaming skills improved. Because of this, the resulting game was extremely difficult, and normal gamers were unable to beat it unless they practiced in the same ways that our playtesters did.^{[87](#)}

TN: You put me through hell, you know that? <laughs>

TY: We actually had a name for the training regimen that included that technique of covering up the monitor. It was called the "Committee for Pursuing the Limits of Human Potential".^{[88](#)} I gave it an important-sounding name, but it was just an informal group I organized within the company.



JS: Can you tell me about AshGuine?^{[89](#)}

TY: The character of AshGuine was originally created to be the mascot for a new MSX computer manufactured by Panasonic.^{[90](#)} I think an AshGuine manga was also released. Panasonic then simultaneously requested both T&E Soft and Microcabin to create games featuring the character.

JR: It's unusual, because there are in fact two *AshGuine* games with different subtitles; one made by Microcabin, and one by T&E Soft, both for MSX2.

JS: Two different companies' interpretations of what the character should be?



TY: Yes. The full title of the T&E Soft game is *AshGuine: Kokuu no Gajou*,^{[91](#)} while the full title of the Microcabin game is *AshGuine: Fukushuu no Honoo*.^{[92](#)}

JS: That is unusual!^{[93](#)} Who came up with it?

TY: It was Panasonic's idea. The games themselves were separate, but they were also linked in some way. I think if you input a password obtained from the other game, or inserted the other game into the second cartridge slot, you would gain a special item or something.

JR: The T&E version is excellent; the Microcabin version is... not so good.



JS: Did you communicate much with Microcabin?

TY: I did meet with Microcabin's programmer and saw their work in progress. To be honest, I was a little worried for them. <laughs> I think they got stuck during development and had to redo the game from scratch. I think their original project was too ambitious, so they started over. The new version seemed awfully similar to T&E's project, which I had shown them.

Kenji Nakashima also worked on the T&E Soft game as a planner. He designed the stage layouts and mechanics, and also drew the artwork.

TN: Kenji Nakashima also did the graphics for the PC-6601 version of *Hydlide*, as well as

Laydock. He was the chief graphic designer at T&E Soft.

JS: What year was this?

TY: It was in the winter of 1987. I remember when the game was released, I had to go around to different computer stores for some launch event, and it was freezing cold! But I can't complain, Panasonic were really good to us. *Really* good, in ways I can't even disclose...

JS: What can't you disclose?

TY: I can't talk about it. Suffice it to say, the higher-ups at Panasonic liked us, and they treated us well. We had a good relationship. For example, I gave the source code for Undeadline to the people at Panasonic. I had written some silly comments into the code, including a pun on "Oh no!" and *ono*, the Japanese word for axe. So one day, Naito-san got a telephone call from a mid-level manager at Panasonic, a man named Shibata. He said, "Thanks for the source code. What's 'Oh no!' all about?" <laughs>

TN: I gave Panasonic the source code without knowing what Yamamoto had written! He was always trying to make trouble for me. <laughs>

JS: Let's discuss Satellite Man, an unreleased game for SFC.⁹⁴ There's no info anywhere; tell me everything.

TY: I was basically the co-director with Aoyama-san.⁹⁵ We created it jointly. It was an action game. It's all gone. I don't think there's any data available from that project. It was completely finished, however. After we finished it, I kept wondering why it wasn't released.

TN: The reason is because Eiji Yokoyama didn't think it was funny enough. The game director, Aoyama-san, took it to Eiji-san and promised that the game would make him laugh at least once every 30 seconds. But Eiji played and finished the game, and didn't laugh even once.

JS: There must have been a test cartridge.

TY: I'm sure there was, but we cleared and reused the EEPROMs for the next project.

<TY and TN have a brief discussion, mentioning Street Fighter and throwing meteors; TY starts sketching>

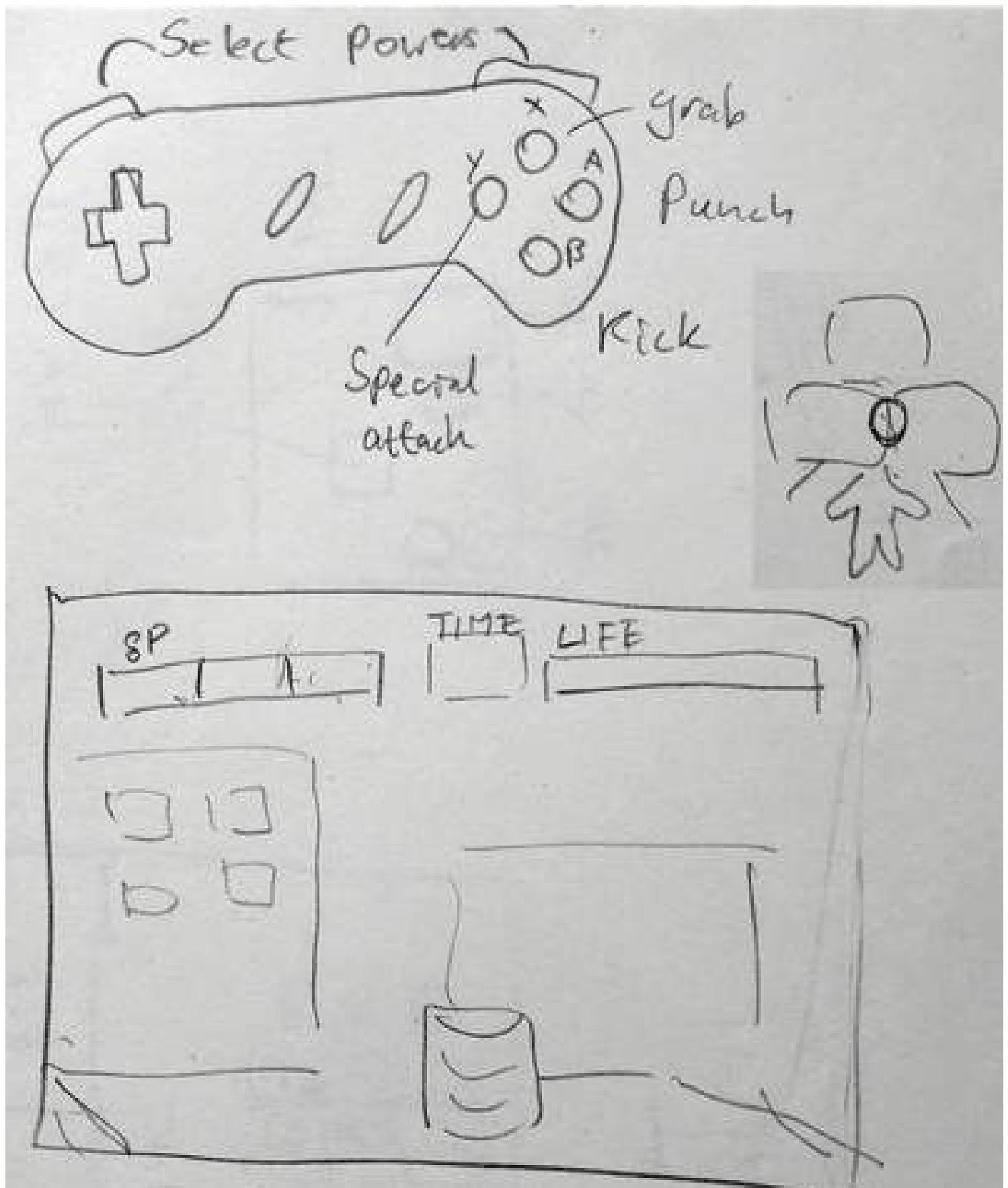
TY: It was a side-scrolling game, and you would walk around town beating up enemies.

JS: Similar to Final Fight?

TY: Yes, that's right.

JS: What did the main character look like?

TY: Hmm... I don't remember it very well. There a button for punch, kick, grab, and a special attack. The main character is Satellite Man, so he's a hero who uses the power of a satellite to fight. He has three special powers. With the first one, you press a button and a beam of light shines down from the satellite. With another one, you create two shadows of yourself who fight with you. We wanted to make the character like a superhero from an American comic book, so when you hit an enemy, a text bubble like "BOOM!" would appear, and the enemy would fly across the screen.



JS: How was HP represented: a number, an energy bar...?

TY: There was a time indicator in the middle, and a life gauge here, and a satellite energy gauge here. When the energy gauge fills up, you can use the special abilities from the satellite.

If the gauge is maxed, you can use the abilities three times in a row. It automatically recharged over time.

JS: Was the game one player only?

TY: Yes.

JS: Can you remember the first stage's background?

TY: It was in a city, like a back alley, with tall buildings and metal drum barrels.

There were about six stages, I think. Around the fourth stage, you travel into space. The ultimate goal of the game is to defeat the evil mastermind who has planted his flag on the moon and claimed it. So you need to go to the moon to pull out the flag. But Satellite Man doesn't have any money, so after the fourth stage ends, he grabs onto a NASA rocket and flies to the moon that way.

Each stage had a boss to fight. I've forgotten the exact order, but I think the boss of the first stage was "Baron Engine".⁹⁶ His body was a V8 engine, and he gets into a kiddie car, the kind of toy car with no floor that you push forward with your legs, and he tries to ram into you. Since his body has the power of an engine, he can propel the car forward very quickly.

JS: Tell us more - your words are the only record!

TY: Honestly, I don't remember it too well. I think we got carried away making it. *<laughs>* For the boss of the 5th stage, we scanned in a photo of someone in the sales department, and coloured it green so people wouldn't realize who it was.

JS: What about the 2nd or 3rd bosses?

TY: One of them was "Dynamite Bee", a bee-man who carried explosives. The 5th stage boss was "Captain Go", who was a spaceship shaped like the Apollo Lunar Module, with a body underneath the spaceship, and the face of the guy in the sales department. *<laughs>*

JS: Did the sales guy know he was in the game?

TY: I didn't tell him until the game was finished. If I had asked him first, he would have been against it. The last boss was named "Doctor Stealth".

JS: It was a comedy brawler, but management felt there weren't enough jokes, and so cancelled it?

TY: That's basically it.

JS: All that work going to waste.

TY: Yes, I suppose so. I thought the controls were pretty good in the way you could perform combo attacks and make the enemies go flying.

TN: I just remembered that this was after *Rise of the Robots* flopped in the marketplace. Since *Satellite Man* was similarly a fighting game for the Super Famicom, the management thought that the company would be in a precarious position if *Satellite Man* was also received poorly. So they decided to cancel it.

JS: Blood hell, *Rise of the Robots* killed your project!

TY: That's possible. If *Rise of the Robots* didn't exist, *Satellite Man* would have been the only fighting action game produced by T&E Soft. The company spirit at T&E Soft was to create games in as many genres as possible.

TN: They were probably worried that the distributors wouldn't be interested in another fighting action game from T&E Soft after the failure of *Rise of the Robots*. I wasn't involved with the project personally, but at the time I belonged to the same Amusement Team division of the company, so I observed the development process.

JS: It's a shame to think it was all thrown away.

TY: Yes, it's a shame, although there were only two people who actually worked on this project. It was myself as the programmer, and Aoyama-san as the designer/artist.

JS: Do you have anything related to the project? An office photograph, promo material?

TY: No, I don't think there are any materials left. In the first place, anything developed at the company must remain at the company, so I didn't take any materials home with me. If the game had been published, the company might have saved some materials, but since it wasn't released, there's probably nothing remaining.

JS: How long was development?

TY: About half a year.

JS: What year did development begin?

TY: It was after *Undeadline* for the Mega Drive, but before the Super Famicom version of *Sword World*.^{[97](#)}

TN (to TY): Ah yes, you helped out on *Sword World SFC*, didn't you? We couldn't fit all the party members on the screen, but there was another character who needed to be on-screen, and that's when you said, "Well, let's just break his legs!"

TY: That's right!

TN: We were only able to animate up to four [supporting] characters walking on-screen at the same time, but there are five [supporting] characters together at one point in the scenario, and we didn't know what to do about the fifth character. It was too late to go back and rewrite the

scenario, so Yamamoto had the idea of the character's leg being broken so he couldn't walk.⁹⁸

Yamamoto went to the Osaka office for three months to assist in the development of Sword World SFC. They needed another programmer.

TY: I had fun at Osaka. It was interesting, working with Nakashima-kun.⁹⁹ I was staying at a hotel, and there was a bar on the first floor. I love to drink, so after work I would relax in the bar before going to bed. The next morning, the office would call me to wake me up, and I'd say, "I'll be there right away!" I was working hard, but I enjoyed it.

JS: When working in Osaka, did you see development for the Virtual Boy?

TY: Virtual Boy? I think Nakashima-kun worked on that. I was not involved.

JS: Your full name is Tetsuya Yamamoto; where did the nickname Futaro come from?

TY: When I first joined T&E Soft, another developer said that I looked like the main character of a certain manga series whose name was Futaro Yamamoto. So everyone started calling me Futaro.

JS: I ask because there's a Saturn game, Wing Arms,¹⁰⁰ credited to Futaro Yamamoto.

TY: Yes, that was me. I switched back and forth between the names over my career. I went by Futaro Yamamoto during my entire time at T&E Soft.

JS: You stayed with T&E Soft through to the Saturn era?

TY: I stayed until just before the Sega Saturn. The last project I worked on for T&E Soft was Sword World SFC for the Super Famicom.

JS: For Wing Arms, which company were you working for?

TY: I was at Bell Corporation. A number of former T&E Soft employees went to Bell. While there, I also worked on F1 Live Information.¹⁰¹ That game still contains a lot of secrets that nobody knows about.

JS: Can you share one of these secrets?

TY: If you enter the Konami code (Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A) during the winning lap after finishing a race, a little logo made up of the Japanese character *fu* (ふ) inside a circle appears in the bottom-right corner. I snuck it in right just before the game's release so no one else would know about it.

JS: You personally programmed for the Saturn?

TY: Yes, I was a programmer, as well as a designer and planner to a certain extent.

JS: What was the Saturn like? I've heard it was difficult.

TY: The difficulty of programming was less of a problem than the tendency for the dev units to break. We would lie and say that one of the working dev kits was already broken, to procure an extra unit just in case.

As for the programming itself, it didn't seem too difficult. People who weren't familiar with the system would have trouble because of the dual-CPU design. The dual CPUs weren't necessarily difficult to work with, but they were a nuisance. Another issue is that we were programming fully in assembly language, without using C. And if you didn't use the libraries provided by Sega, you had to do all the 3D calculations yourself, in assembly.

JS: What year did you leave T&E Soft, and why?

TY: First of all was a desire to go back to my hometown. My grandmother passed away shortly before I quit. I have lots of relatives, so it wasn't really necessary for me to go home and handle the family matters myself, but Bell Corporation had also been courting me for some time, inviting me to come join them. So I thought it was a good time to leave.

TN: About a month after Yamamoto quit, I was surprised to hear that he was working at Bell. I thought, "What is he doing over there?!"

TY: At Bell, I first started working on a PC game called Musashi, which became the basis for Wing Arms. The game was about attacking Musashi, a famous Japanese battleship. I think the game was released for Japanese DOS/V computers,^{[102](#)} but it didn't sell very well. After that, we started working on an F1 racing game for the PC, and during mid-development, the Sega Saturn was announced. In response, the company decided to develop games for the Saturn, and so we remade Musashi into Wing Arms, and converted our partially complete computer racing game into F1 Live Information.



JS: Wing Arms is like a remake of Musashi.

TY: You could say that. We added additional stages for Wing Arms. The original Musashi is completely focused on sinking the battleship. At first you shoot down the fighter planes that take off from the battleship, then you climb into a bomber and go on a bombing run, and finally you get into a submarine and launch torpedoes at the battleship. When you sink the Musashi, the game ends. On the other hand, for Wing Arms, we added many more stages.

JS: We're almost out of time. Do you have a final message?

TY: Games these days are too focused on having the same game systems and gameplay mechanics for the sake of sales. I would like to see a much larger variety of games getting released.

JS: I couldn't agree more.

TY: Actually, there's another game I haven't told you about! It was an MSX2 game commissioned by the Japanese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. The title was something like Yuu-kun no Chokin,¹⁰³ something like that... It's a sidescrolling game similar

to Mario. You pick up mail and put it in mailboxes. The game was developed for Japan Post, but I don't know what they did with it. I don't think there's a copy of it anywhere.

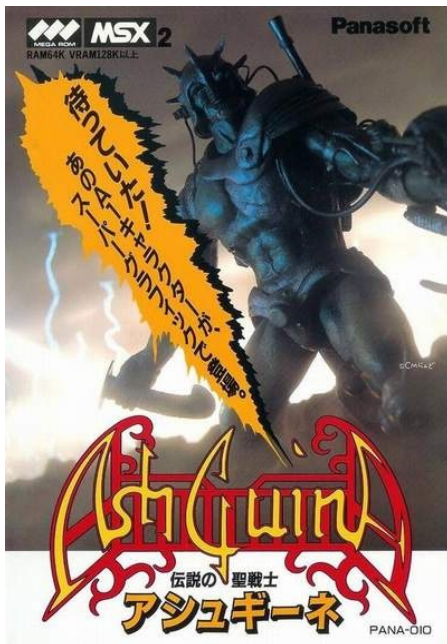
I received an illustration of the character from the post office.¹⁰⁴ They didn't know anything about games, and they wanted the character to have fingers, but there weren't enough pixels to show more than a round blob for the entire hand.

JS: You've had a lot of bad luck. Satellite Man, Komainu Quest, this game... None had a wide commercial release. That's why this book exists - your story will be heard!

<parting words - JR joins TN and TY for a nightcap, while author and photographer return to Tokyo>

AshGuine

This bizarre trilogy deserves more than a footnote. While Joseph Redon claimed there were two simultaneously-released titles, by T&E Soft and Microcabin, online records show three games - the third by forgotten developer Bit2. It's difficult to know precise release dates, but all three are Copyright 1987; presumably the subtitles of *Story II* and *Story III* on the boxart denote release order, however there are no such subtitles on the title screens. All three were released for the MSX2, all published by Panasoft. Assuming that all three started developed at roughly the same time, under the instructions of Panasonic, this makes for a fascinating historical item. Three unrelated companies asked to develop a game each, based on the proposed mascot for a new range of MSX hardware - the story echoes that of the Amstrad CPC and its series of *Roland* games (a series of "mascot" titles specifically for the new computer).



AshGuine: Densetsu no Seisenshi

lit. "Holy Warrior of Legend"

Bit2

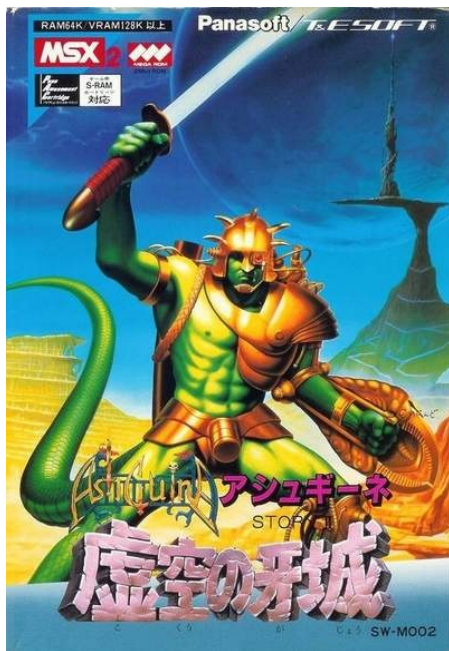
Playing like a cheap side-scrolling Famicom game, this is the weakest of the three. Your character moves as if in treacle, seemingly cannot duck to attack small enemies, and the scrolling is choppy. On the plus side it has some of the creepiest boxart imaginable, otherwise it's just plain awful. Developed by super obscure company Bit2, which seemingly didn't produce much else of interest.



AshGuine Story II: Kokuu no Gajou

lit. "Citadel in the Void"

T&E Soft



The game by Tetsuya Yamamoto. The best of the three, and legitimately awesome. Scrolling is smooth and fast, while the action and controls are satisfying, as you hack oncoming enemies. Collect keys to unlock side-doors into secret areas. The music, as expected from T&E Soft, is fantastic, while there's also plenty of nice little bonus touches - cut an enemy and your sword is temporarily smeared with blood. Predating *Undeadline* by a couple of years, there's the definite sensation this was a direct influence, since your character always faces upwards to attack, whichever direction he walks in.



AshGuine Story III: Fukushuu no Honoo

lit. "Fires of Revenge"
Microcabin

Resembling a *Zelda* clone, you wander the overworld fighting enemies and collecting items. The battle scenes switch to a different screen when touching the enemy heads which float around - it's still real-time action, but kind of disorienting. It's not terrible, but not great either; the kind of game which is more interesting to read about than actually play. **(below)**



Manga

Although a rare item, Shonen Sunday Comics published a manga based on *AshGuine*, by Masamo Kanzaki. The website Manga-News.com gives a release date of December 1987, which ties in nicely with the release of the games.



YOSHIKAWA, Yasuo

DOB: 9 August 1963 / Birthplace: Eihime / Blood Type: O

~Selected Portfolio~

Battle Ship Clapton II, MSX1 (1984)

Daiva series, multiple (see [overleaf!](#))

Super Hydlide, multiple (1987)

Undeadline, multiple (1989)

Bushi Seiryuuden: Futari no Yuusha, Super Famicom (1997)

Blaze & Blade: Eternal Quest, PlayStation/Win (1998)

True Golf Classics: Waialae Country Club, N64 (1998)

Swing Away Golf, PS2 (2000)

True Swing Golf, NDS (2005)

Powerful Golf, NDS (2011)



STORY7

/

Light of Kari Yuga

PC-9801VM/UV (Dec 1987)

Interview with Yasuo YOSHIKAWA

9 November, 2013, Tokyo / Duration: 2h 15m

Although my first contact with T&E Soft was Mr Yoshikawa, the interview itself was one the last on my schedule. We first spoke through social media, whereupon he later introduced me to his colleagues Misters Naito and Yamamoto. I was tremendously excited to conduct this interview, since Mr Yoshikawa was the mastermind behind Daiva, a legendary title exclusive to Japan and one of unrivalled ambition. We also chatted about *pachinko*, which was unexpected and fun.

JS: Did you travel far today?

Yasuo Yoshikawa: About two subway stops from here, but I'm originally from Nagoya. I came to Tokyo to work for Konami. It was about four years ago.

JS: What do you think of Tokyo?

YY: Well, I used to come to Tokyo all the time for work. Even when I was in Nagoya, I would travel to Tokyo up to three times a week. So Tokyo doesn't feel particularly different or special to me. The reason I picked this place for the interview is because there's never any space in a regular coffee shop. This place is spacious, and I thought it would be easier to talk here.

JS: Indeed! Can you recall the first game you ever saw?

YY: Block Kuzushi... No, actually it was Table Tennis.

JS: And the first computer you owned?

YY: That I owned? It was the TK-80, manufactured by NEC. I was maybe 17 or 18.

JS: Did you teach yourself programming on it?

YY: That's right.

JS: When did you feel you wanted to work in games?

YY: Just after I turned 20.

JS: So you made some on your own, just for fun?

YY: Yes. Many people, myself included, really wanted to play the arcade games at home. So we would try to recreate arcade games on the computer. Another thing I was particularly interested in was strategy/simulation board games. Normally, these games require you to perform calculations or roll some dice to produce a result, but that was tedious, so I started using the computer as a tool to automatically perform these calculations, and make the board

games proceed more smoothly.

JS: Ahh, a fan of simulation board games!

YY: Yes, I loved them. I really liked World War II board games. By playing you could... How do I put it? You don't experience war itself, but you get to learn about how taxing and difficult war is, while also having fun. At first, I entered the hobby through the war simulation games, but later I became interested in fantasy-themed simulation games as well.

JS: Was T&E Soft was your first job?

YY: Yes, that was my first job in the entertainment industry. Before that, I created accounting software for a *pachinko* parlour.

JS: Right, office software. Are you a fan of *pachinko*?

YY: Although I have played *pachinko* before, I have always known that you can never win and come out ahead, so I don't play at all. <laughs>

JS: Perhaps you can answer a *pachinko* question. From my understanding, the old style of *pachinko* was that it shot little metal balls upwards, and you controlled the speed via a dial. Then at some point there was a shift in the style of *pachinko*, and now it's more like slot machines?^{[105](#)}

YY: You're right. Going back earlier, originally there were manual *pachinko* machines where you pulled a lever attached to a spring, so you could control the speed of each ball when you shoot. I became old enough to play *pachinko* just as the machines changed over to automatic systems. The old manual machines had these gates that would flap open and shut, and if you timed it right, the balls would fall through the open gates and return to the player. It was a simple design.

JS: Sorry, that was unrelated to T&E Soft, but I've been curious about the evolution of *pachinko*.

YY: No problem. I don't remember this personally, but when I was about 2 or 3 years old, my father managed a *pachinko* parlour, and my mother was so busy helping him run the business that she didn't have time to look after me, and so I lived at a relative's house for about two years. That's what I've been told. <laughs> Our old house used to have lots of *pachinko* balls lying around.

JS: What motivated you to move from the stability of business software to videogames?

YY: First, I finished creating this accounting software for a *pachinko* parlour. It was well-received, and I received an offer to go work for that *pachinko* parlour's parent company in Fukuoka, on the island of Kyushu. They offered me a job working in their computer lab. This was just about 30 years ago. I was still only 19 years old, but they were offering me a salary

of 300'000 yen a month. Back then, it was normal for people around my age, 19 years old, to be paid about 100'000 to 150'000 yen a month for a typical job. So they were offering me more than double the salary of a typical job. But this had the opposite effect on me, and I became nervous. I worried that a job paying such an unusual amount of money would have a bad side, or possibly an unethical side. I wasn't specifically against doing *pachinko*-related work, but... I think I was irresponsible back then, in a certain sense.

People were encouraging me to take this *pachinko* job in Kyushu, but honestly I didn't want to go. So I decided to find another job instead. <laughs> I saw an advertisement in a computer magazine, and noticed there was this company named T&E Soft nearby. I had never even heard of T&E Soft. But I called them about a job on Saturday, and they told me to come in [and start] on Monday. At first I thought, "This is a very irresponsible company!" They hired me without even interviewing me. <everyone laughs>

JS: When programming the accounting software, what language was it?



YY: I used BASIC back then. They were using a computer called the Pasopia, from Toshiba.

JS: When T&E Soft hired you, could you program in assembly language?

YY: I had already learned assembly language while I was in high school, so I didn't have trouble understanding things when I started working for them. The first computer I used couldn't even run BASIC, so assembly language was the only option.

JS: The NEC TK-80?

YY: Yes. It was a one-board computer, so it was basically just a circuit board with 16 keys and 8 LED indicators. That's it.

JS: What was your first project at T&E?

YY: Actually I have an interesting story to tell you first. I was supposed to start work on Monday, and first I went to the main office, which is where the sales division worked. When I showed up, I was told someone would take me to the development office. They took me to an apartment. There were no lights on, so it was very dark. And they told me to wait there. So I sat there in the dark for hours. Finally, at around 5 o'clock in the evening, I suddenly heard this strange creaking sound. And when I looked, I finally realized that someone had been sleeping on the floor next to the desk the entire time. They woke up and just started working, completely ignoring the fact that there was this stranger sitting in the apartment with them. Since it was my first day, I was very nervous and didn't know what to do, so I didn't say anything.

Finally, the president came in around 7 o'clock, saw me, and said, "Yoshikawa-kun, you're still here? You can go home if you want." I took the train to work, but my home was actually a long way away, and if I didn't catch a train by 6:30, I wouldn't be able to get home. So I told him it was too late for me to go home, and he said, "Well, why don't you get some work done?"

Even though I was hired as a programmer, they needed another person to do graphics work, so they asked me to do graphics at first. So on my first day on the job, I ended up drawing graphics all night long. Everyone else was working, so I couldn't just go to sleep. I didn't even have a place to sleep. I worked until the next morning, and then when everyone started going back to sleep, I didn't know what to do, so I went back to the main office. The people at the main office said that since I had worked all night, I could just go home that day. No one told me anything about the salary or other issues.

JS: Who was this staff sleeping at the computer?

YY: Oh yes. His name was Katsuo Hosokawa.¹⁰⁶ That first game I worked on was a shooting game for the MSX. I drew the characters. That was my first project. I don't remember its name. It's probably easier to just look it up. Unfortunately, as I mentioned by email, it's been 30 years, so my memory is incomplete, and making an accurate list of everything I've worked on is difficult without double-checking. <pauses> Wait, the title of the MSX game was Battle

JS: What was the first big title you worked on at T&E Soft? Was it *Daiva*?

YY: Yes, in terms of the games I proposed and designed, *Daiva* was the first. I was the planner, director, scenario writer, and the main programmer.

JS: Excellent! The way I understand *Daiva*, it was seven different chapters or stories, developed side-by-side, and released at the same time for seven different hardware platforms. But the games were not chronological, they covered the same story from different angles. In effect, seven different games covering one giant space saga.

YY: That's right. Originally, the project was proposed for five hardware platforms, or five different machines. But along the way, the upper management told us to add the Famicom and the 16-bit NEC PC-9801 computer. Originally, the project was composed of five stories, so I had to add two new characters with their own stories, and the project became a simultaneous release on seven different systems. In terms of the individual games, the five hardware platforms from the original proposal have the same general style, but since the Famicom had different hardware limitations, the Famicom chapter is more of an action game. For the 16-bit PC-9801 chapter, since development started partway through the overall project, it wasn't possible to release it at exactly the same time as the other chapters, so we decided to take advantage of the 16-bit capabilities and create a more high-grade experience. Because of that, the game mechanics are slightly different in the PC-9801 chapter.

So that's the overall breakdown. Originally, the project was for five different systems, but a 6th and a 7th system were added later.



The star system map for the five main versions is the same, though with different system names and layout for each; note that individual planets are not visible

JS: It your idea to have five different games on five machines?

YY: Yes.



The PC-98 version overhauled everything, right down to individual planetary orbits

JS: Incredible. I've never seen anything else like it in the history of videogames. Usually a developer makes one version, then just converts it. This was seven games, each unique, all made simultaneously. Talk me through it...

YY: Back then, things were similar to the videogame industry around the world today. Some people own a PlayStation and so they think it's the best system, while other people own an Xbox and so they think the Xbox is the best system. Back then, people were the same way, and everyone thought the system they owned was the best. And as you mentioned, if we made a game for one system originally and then ported it to other systems, some players were guaranteed to complain that the port doesn't take full advantage of their system's capabilities.

Conversely, if the ported system is inferior to the original system, the colours might look strange or something. So the players wouldn't be very satisfied. They feel that their own system is the best, but they have to play something that is less than the best. The idea behind Daiva was to create the best experience on the system that each player thinks is the best, and at the same time encourage players on different systems to communicate with each other. Daiva is a war simulation game, and your fleet steadily grows stronger over the course of the game. Using a password, you can give one ship among your fleet to other players. A player at the beginning of the game with a fleet that's still weak can receive a password unlocking a powerful ship from the fleet of a player further along in the game. So whereas normally gamers argue about whose computer or console system is the best, with Daiva they can help each other out and become friends.

That is what I wanted to accomplish, so initially I designed five games for five different

hardware platforms, each with its own main character and story.



On the Famicom you move around as if in a car

JS: So someone with the FM77AV version could give a password to someone with the PC-8801 version, and the passwords worked between the different hardware?

YY: Yes, exactly.

JS: Astounding. When I first discovered *Daiva*, I was captivated by this ingenious idea. Was there resistance from senior management? Did they argue it would be more cost-effective just to make one game and convert it? It seems very cost-intensive and also labour intensive to make five at the same time. Like putting all your eggs in one basket...

YY: On the contrary, T&E Soft was an adventurous company that was always striving to do

something new. Instead of worrying about the risks first, we were attracted to fresh challenges and the idea of creating something new and original. That was our primary focus. No one ever told me that creating five games on five different systems was out of the question. It was an interesting idea, so the management were excited to try it.



The turn-based ship battles on the first six versions are simple. You basically position every ship where you want it, hit activate, and then let the two blow each other to pieces; the FC version has slightly simpler visuals

JS: And later your bosses suggested you also make a PC-9801 and Famicom version.

YY: Yes, although to be honest, many people on the development team had been wanting to make a Famicom game ever since the Famicom system was released, but the management refused.

T&E Soft was still a small company at the time, and to make a Famicom game, you had to pay the cartridge manufacturing costs up front. The company wasn't able to secure enough money for the upfront payment, so we weren't able to create Famicom games.

The Famicom version of Daiva was released by a different company, and what happened was that this other company paid the upfront costs, while we created the game itself and received a license fee.¹⁰⁸ That was how we finally broke into the Famicom market. It was a difficult business-related problem.



The PC-98 version is very different, with ships flying of their own accord around the combat zone

JS: Can you draw an office layout for *Daiva*? Mr Naito drew the layout for *Hydride*. He also told me about the Hamachi room, where programmers were locked inside until they'd finished their work.

YY: <intense laughter> It didn't really happen quite like that... It's just that nobody ever went home. This was basically a bedroom where people would stay the night. It was great fun.

JS: What year did you start the *Daiva* project?

YY: I probably started it in 1986. As for the office? The layout that Naito-kun drew was only one of two floors, the development floor. There was also an office floor. Which one did you want?

JS: The *Daiva* one. I'm trying to imagine how five or six different teams would work on this game at the same time.

YY: Actually, it was basically one person per hardware platform, rather than different teams. *Daiva* is largely composed of two game systems. The first one is the tactical part used to engage in warfare. And then there's the action part that starts when you descend to a planet's surface in order to conquer it.

The persons in charge of each hardware platform created the action part for each game, whereas I programmed the tactical part. The persons in charge of each hardware platform

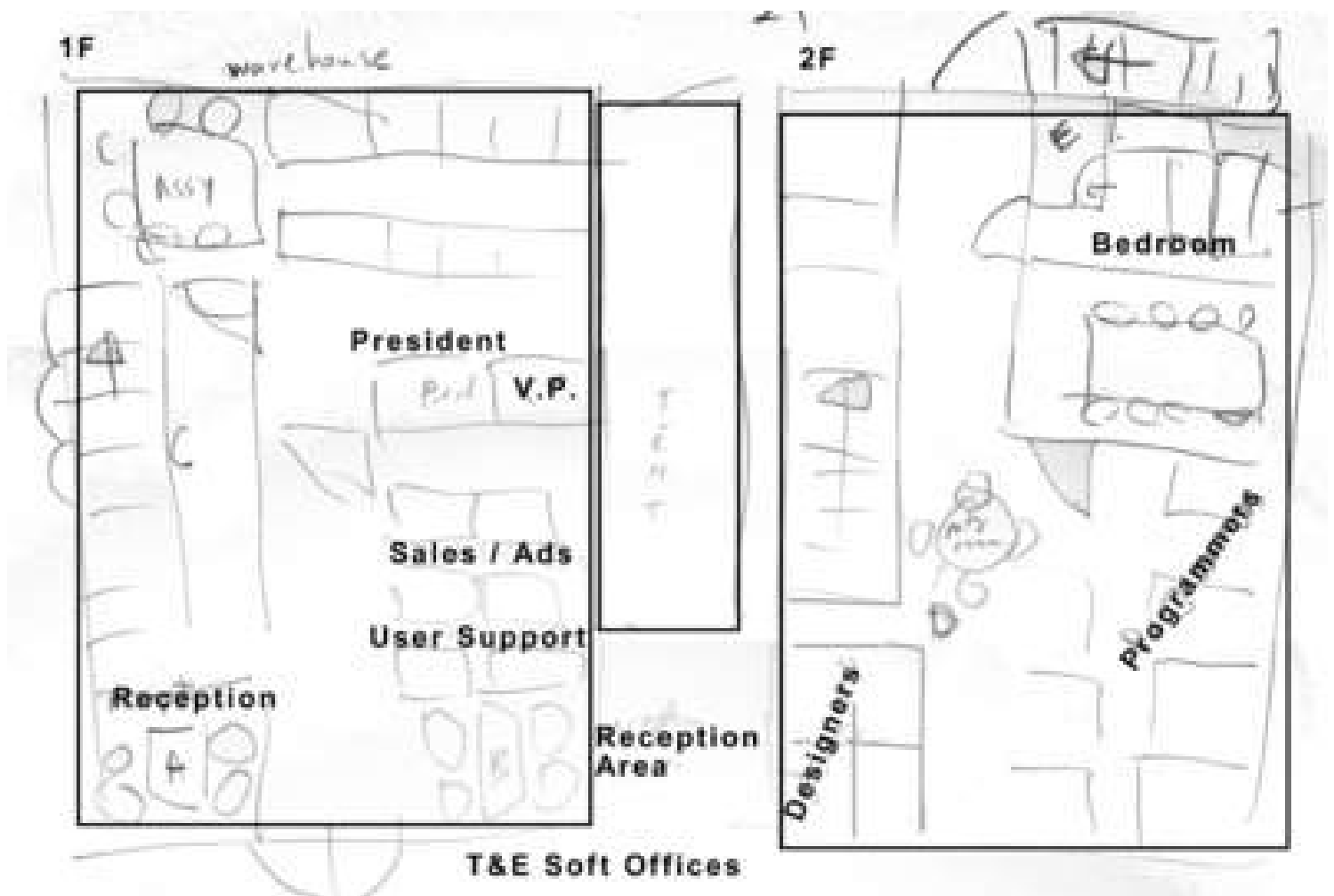
created the action part differently to bring out the best in each system. So the game mechanics in the action part are different, according to the differences between each of the hardware platforms.

JS: You handled the strategy aspect for all versions?

YY: Yes, but as I said before, the PC-9801 version and the Famicom version have different game mechanics, and I was not directly responsible for those. For the other platforms, I programmed the strategy part. *Daiva* is a particularly memorable project for me because directing it was an intense responsibility. The team members working hard on the separate platforms were very individualistic, and it was a challenge to keep everything in sync while also programming parts of the game myself. I basically never went home for about six months, working and sleeping in the Hamachi room like I mentioned earlier.

On one Sunday, I went home, took a bath, and went to sleep. When I next woke up, I was temporarily blind. I became very frightened, so I called someone at the company and asked them to take me to the hospital because I couldn't see anything. When I went to the hospital, the doctor told me that it wasn't a condition young people are supposed to experience, that it only happens when the body is very weak. The doctor ordered me to take a week's rest from work.

Luckily, my eyesight returned after two or three days, but like the doctor had said, I experienced some other symptoms that only occur when the body is very weak, such as spots on my face and joint pain. After that point, I decided to entrust the programming duties to someone else. I explained the algorithms and my thinking, and let them take over the programming. So it was a bitter experience for me.



JS: That's the danger of pushing yourself too hard; on that note, let's take a five minute break.

<orders more coffees>

YY: What Naito-kun drew was the development area on the second floor. On the first floor, the president and the vice-president sat here. The sales and marketing people worked over here. And the user support people sat here. Next to the president and vice-president's area, there was a hallway which led to some stairs up to the second floor, and there was a warehouse where we would assemble retail games to be shipped out. Various equipment and materials were laid out here, and a tent containing more equipment was set up here. Game packages were assembled here, and then shipped out.

Another thing I forgot to mention was a reception room where visitors were taken, and another open area here for receiving visitors. Also, in the hallway by the stairs, we had a kitchenette area for making tea, and also toilets for men and women.

JS: <jotting down notes> Section (A) is the reception room with enclosure, (B) is the reception area without enclosure. (C) is the kitchenette, and restrooms...

YY: Also, when you go up to the second floor, there was a small meeting room, which you can see a picture of here. <points to Comptiq magazine photo>

JS: That's (D). <marks it down>

YY: And this room was a bedroom. And one thing that was not in Naito-kun's drawing is a small area with an entrance here, and it was an enclosed space, like another Hamachi room, where you could go and work all by yourself. I did a lot of work here. I was the type of person who couldn't get work done in the middle of the day while it was bright outside. I worked better when it was dark, so I created this little room where I could work.

JS: Daiva would have been developed in this area?

YY: Yes. While we were making Daiva, almost everyone was working on the Daiva project. I'm not absolutely sure, but programmers were over here, designers were here.

JS: How much source code did each version of Daiva share? Or were they all coded from scratch?

YY: I wrote the strategy part in C, but back then it was still a little too premature to write games in C. Most platforms were built around either a Zilog Z80 or a Motorola 6809 CPU, and roughly speaking I had to write two separate code branches for these CPUs. Similarly, there were two versions of the C language: one for Z80 code, and one for 6809 code.

JS: There was a version of Daiva for the FM77AV, but not a lot of people had this particular model.¹⁰⁹ Tell me about the decision to work on it - the graphics were excellent.

YY: To explain it from a business point of view, at that time, whenever a Japanese computer manufacturer released a new machine, they would give away some of them for free to leading software companies, and encourage the companies to make software for it. This was also true of the FM77AV. They wanted new, exclusive titles for their new computer. And as I explained earlier, we wanted to take full advantage of the unique capabilities of each platform.

In the case of the FM77AV, there was a feature that enabled 4096 different colours to be displayed at the same time. On the other hand, other computers such as the PC-8801 could only display 8 colours at one time. So if we created an original game for the PC-8801 first and then ported it, the FM77AV conversion would only use 8 colours. That would be disappointing to the computer manufacturer, especially since we were telling them that we would show off what the hardware could do. For example, when it comes to sound capability, the PC-8801 [original model] couldn't produce great sound, whereas the FM77AV had FM synthesis which could produce nice sound. The machines back then were all different.

For the MSX2, we weren't developing on a retail machine. It was just a bare circuit board with a few metal supports. Back then, we acquired it directly from a company called Microsoft/ASCII. The MSX had its own unique sprite function, and they wanted us to take advantage of it. We did our best to make use of the special capabilities that each machine offered.

JS: Right! I played Daiva on the FM77AV, and the graphics for the action part resembled

a Super Famicom game.

YY: So the first reason for the decision was from a business perspective as I explained, and another reason was because T&E Soft as a company, as well as the individual staff, wanted to try new things. Many of the team members wanted to amaze other people with their skill. The person in charge of the FM77AV version didn't want to just add more colours compared to someone else's work for another system. He wanted to impress everyone by making it scroll better, or show more enemies on-screen. Meanwhile, the person in charge of the PC-8801 version didn't want to lose against the FM77AV version, so he worked hard to show different types of visuals and movement. Everyone was trying to squeeze the best performance out of their particular system.

Daiva was released on both the MSX and the MSX2. The MSX person really worked hard, and the action scenes in the MSX version are remembered as being highly polished. The MSX didn't have as many colours as the MSX2, but it had excellent gameplay and animation.^{[110](#)} Everyone on the team competed with each other so that Daiva on their machine would be the best version.

JS: Today the entire collection is sold via EGG, as a complete set,^{[111](#)} but back then I don't think anybody would have been able to play all of them. You'd need to have access to all the machines. What kind of feedback did you have from players?

YY: As I mentioned earlier, the Famicom version wasn't published directly by T&E Soft, so I don't know what the Famicom players' reactions were. For the other systems, the game package contained a user registration card, so players could write comments and send them to us. The rule at the company was that everyone on the development team for a game would read this feedback from players. We would read the comments every day to understand the players' reaction. Since we weren't able to do online updates like today, we would read the feedback and apply it to the next game.

For Daiva, some people said they really enjoyed it. For example, there were two brothers who owned different machines, and they really enjoyed sharing passwords with each other. Since there were slight differences among the different games, players would be curious about the other chapters, and friends at school would tell each other what happened in their games, and also exchange passwords. Today of course it's easy to discuss games over the internet, but back then, players had to meet in person to talk and exchange passwords. So Daiva encouraged players to communicate with each other, which was fairly innovative. Before Daiva, players did not have any interest in the games that weren't released on their own platform. Players would be prideful about their own machine, but also get curious about what Daiva was like on the other machines. So I think we really grabbed the interest of the players.

ACTIVE SIMULATION WAR

DIVA

クロニクル
CHRONICLE

すべては惑星アルジェナ、謎の消失から始まった

Project EGG
No.0003

BOTHTEC

JS: How long did development last? Was it six months?

YY: No, I think it was about a year. The Famicom version was released first. On the other hand, the PC-9801 version was released about a year later. So the Famicom version was released first, then the versions for the five systems that were originally planned, and finally the PC-9801 version, over the course of a year.

JS: Would you say Daiva is your proudest achievement? Or is there another game which means more to you?

YY: I always tend to consider my latest work as my best work, so I thought Daiva was my best work when I finished it, and then I thought Rune Worth was my best work when I finished that. My opinion of what is best changes as I grow as a developer. For better or worse, Daiva is very dear to me, because I experienced both success and failure during the project.

JS: Could you also sign my two signature books?

YY: Okay, I'll use the signature I used back then. I used to change the characters in my name slightly, like a pen name. In the old days, T&E Soft sent a free magazine or newsletter to its users.

My pen name in the magazine was "Yapio Yopipapa", so I always used to sign my name like this.



Area map from *Rune Worth* on MSX2

JS: After *Daiva*, you made *Rune Worth*. I've heard *Rune Worth* was supposedly like a *Hydlide 4*?

YY: Actually, it's the opposite. There was a false rumour that *Rune Worth* was related to *Hydlide*. Maybe Naito-kun already talked about this, but he created *Hydlide* as a trilogy that ends with the third game. However, the company was thinking in business terms, and asked him to make *Hydlide 4*. Naito-kun was against it. Obviously, if you're thinking of profits, *Hydlide 4* would have been a reliable, low-risk move. But that went against the company culture, and the staff wanted to challenge themselves with something new. Also, Naito-kun couldn't come up with another *Hydlide*, and I think when they asked him to create another sequel, he was suffering under a lot of stress. He had a proposal for another game, the title was "Magic" or "Magic & ...", something like that, but it was too similar to *Hydlide*, so he gave up on it. At that point, the staff decided to work on a brand new role-playing game of some kind, and that's when I proposed *Rune Worth*.

JS: Rune Worth was never released outside of Japan, but did you know fans in Europe produced a fan-translation of the MSX version?[112](#)

YY: That's the first time I've heard that!

JS: You work at Konami at the moment. Can you mention what you do?

YY: That's correct. Sure, although I can't go into too much detail. Now I'm actually a planner.

JS: You design the structure and layout of a game.

YY: Sometimes I do that, but the last project I worked on wasn't a game, actually. It was a golf simulator, which projects onto a huge screen. It's really more of a golf training tool than an entertainment product.

JS: What was the last proper game, or entertainment product you worked on?

YY: The last one I did was *Powerful Golf* at Konami.[113](#)

JS: What was your role on Bushi Seiryuuden: Futari no Yuusha for Super Famicom?[114](#)
(top)

YY: I was the producer. But *Bushi Seiryuuden* was originally created by Game Freak, the same studio that made *Pokémon*, and it was supposed to be published by Enix, which is now Square-Enix. For some reason, Enix was unable to release the game themselves, and they probably looked around for another company to finish it for them. The president of Enix at the time, Mr Fukushima, was friends with the president of T&E Soft, Mr Yokoyama, and so they decided that T&E Soft would publish the game. When we received the game, it was approximately 80% complete, so we completed it and released it. The foundation of the game was already in place, so our job was mostly debugging and making the final adjustments and balancing.

JS: Is there anything you would like to add?

YY: Since we discussed *Daiva* at length, I'd like to talk about *Rune Worth* a little bit more. As I mentioned, the game began as a sort of replacement for *Hydlide* because the company had commanded us, or rather requested us, to work on a new RPG title. The proposal had a clear goal, and was designed with a media tie-up in mind. There is a computer magazine called *Comptiq*, and we arranged to have a *mangaka* from the magazine help us create a free manga magazine published by T&E Soft, which allowed players to experience part of the story before the game's release. The story in the game picked up where the manga left off. The manga magazine was released in two volumes. Originally we planned to produce only one volume, but we had too much content to fit into a single volume, and we didn't want to change the game's release date, so we produced another manga volume.

Hydlide and *Rune Worth* are unrelated, but part of the concept of *Rune Worth* was to do the

things we didn't get a chance to do in Hydlide. For example, Hydlide doesn't really have a well-developed background story. Since it's an Action-RPG, the game is more important than the story, and it's the type of game that you can play without paying attention to the text. However, Rune Worth was created to have more interesting text, and we also did away with experience points. Rather than grinding for experience, the player becomes immersed in the world and wants to follow the story. Rune Worth was designed as the complete opposite of Hydlide in a sense. We had a thick file of background information and lore for Rune Worth that fleshed out the game world. I believe I still have it at home.



Bushi Seiryuden (SFC)

JS: Please don't throw it away, that's a precious item! Fans of Rune Worth would love to see this material.

YY: I actually don't keep materials from the previous games I've worked on, but my wife also

worked at the same company, and she keeps everything. So it's actually not mine, it's hers.
<laughs>

JS: On Twitter you've got an unusual nickname.¹¹⁵ What is its origin? It's four or six kanji, but it's quite unusual.

YY: I change it from time to time, so I don't remember... Oh, you mean this one? It's *tenjou tenge*, which is the first part of the phrase *tenjou tenge yuiga dokuson* (). When Buddha was born, supposedly he pointed one finger to heaven, one finger to earth, and said this phrase. *Uousaou* () means going back and forth from right to left, and basically means being utterly confused. I combined these two together as a joke to make the Konami code: Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left Right, B, A. Since I work at Konami now, I wanted to reference something related to Konami. It's just a play on words.

JS: I like it - very clever! Thank you. This interview has been most excellent.

YY: Same here, thank you very much.

<we break to take photos outside in the Tokyo twilight>



TM

Has Marked the point of the boundary between lightness and darkness.
Everything has been done there and then, finished and set there.

黒衣の貴公子

MSX 2

MSX 2+

ROM/CD-ROM 2.0
SYSTEM/ROM 1.0

3.5" 2DD・3枚 [MSX MUSIC (FM音源) 対応]

黒衣の貴公子

Daiva

Imagine if the 1993 classic *Master of Orion* had been released not only for DOS, but six other major formats, and its selectable races were locked to specific hardware. The NES version would be the only one with Bulrathi, and be more of a platformer; the SNES release would have the best visuals, the Mega Drive the most races, the TG-16 the highest number of unique events, while the Apple Mac would ditch any action and have a weird interface. You're now basically imagining *Daiva*, an epic sci-fi space opera combining intergalactic strategic movement, planetary and ship resource management, tactical turn-based ship battles, and side-scrolling action stages. The *Daiva* series is unique, and ambitious on an unprecedented scale. Seven games for seven platforms, developed in parallel and released at roughly the same time. All share similarities, but each is distinct based on its host hardware; they are not conversions and they are not sequels, but rather each forms a part of a unified whole, each with a specially tailored story and characters, and all of the games featuring a cross-compatible password system. Nothing like this has been attempted since and, to be honest, nothing like this could even be achieved today, given how fragmented and unrelated the various hardware markets are.

All share the same intergalactic map screen, apart from the Famicom and PC-98 versions. This allows you to build ships, micro-manage solar systems, and send fleets to attack enemies or conquer other planets. The Famicom ditches it for a more arcade style of control, just cruising around; the PC-98 makes it more complex, with players even able to select individual ship orbits around planets. The most noticeable version differences are in the side-scrolling action stages, when you invade a planet. The PC-88 feels like the default; the FM77AV looks and scrolls like a SFC game; the X1 has better visuals than the PC-88, though provides a less tactical HUD; the MSX1 version has possibly the most detailed backgrounds, and very smooth scrolling; the MSX2 has more colours, but its choppy and lacks detail; the Famicom auto-scrolls like a regular shmup; the PC-98 version does not seem to have any action stages at all, but does offer mouse support for the rest. All present different tactical options and map styles when invading a planet.



STORY1

/ **Flames of Vlitra**, PC-8801 (Feb 1987)



STORY2

/ **Memory in Durga**, FM77AV (Mar 1987)



STORY3 · / **Trial of Nirvana**, X1 (Feb 1987)



STORY4 / **Asura's Bloodfeud**, MSX cart (Apr 1987)



STORY5 / **The Cup of Soma**, MSX2 (Mar 1987)



STORY6 / **Imperial of Nirsartia**, FC (Dec 1986)



X
NAGASHIMA, Mitsuto

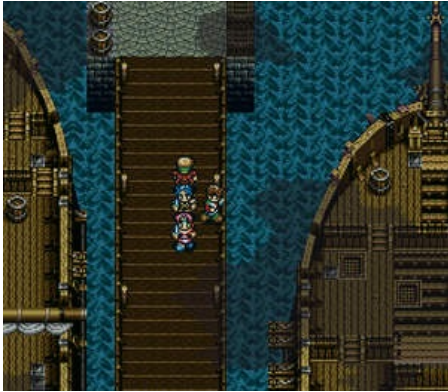
DOB: 04 December 1969 / Birthplace: Kure, Hiroshima pref. / Blood Type: AB

~Selected Portfolio~

Hobbyist

L-Type PC-8801

XOX (pic. upper right) PC-8801



Sword World (SFC)

faceofthemoon.blogspot.com

T&E Soft

ZAS / *Chikyuu Kaihou Gun* ZAS GB, 1992

1 & 2 / *Sword World 1 & 2* SFC, 1993/4

/ *Red Alarm* VB, 1995

× / *3-D Tetris* VB, 1996

/ *Cu-On-Pa* SFC, 1996

Other

/ *Dino Breeder* GB, 1997

/ *Shake Kids* PS1, 1998

/ *Chi to Ase to Namida no koukou*

yakyuu - GBC, 2000

/ *Konchuu Fighters* GBC, 2002

/ *Aozoura to*

Yukaina Nakamatachi Yume no Bouken - GBA, 2002

/ *Boku no Kabuto Kuwagata* - GBA,

2003

/ *Oncha Inu Kururin* - GBA, 2004

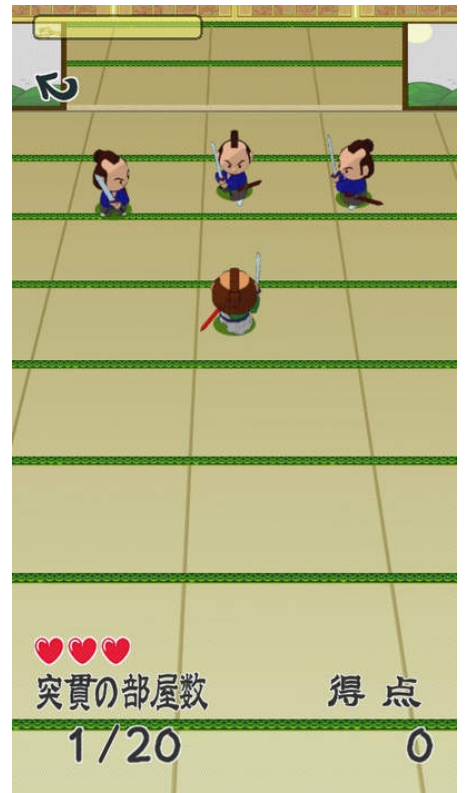
7

/ *Miracle! Panzou:*

7-tsu no Hoshi no Uchuu Kaizoku - GBA, 2005

/ *Chamber Rush* (Sannin Soft) Mobile, 2014

(right)



Interview with Mitsuto NAGASHIMA

Via email (emojicons left as is)

This interview signifies how unpredictable journalism can be. I was sitting in the Agatsuma office interviewing Yasuo Nakajima, and the conversation moved to the Virtual Boy and Red Alarm, two topics which had always fascinated me. Suddenly he mentions he has the business card for the lead programmer on it - Mitsuto Nagashima - leaves the room, and returns with a photocopy. Although I didn't have time to visit and interview Mr Nagashima in person, I did ask several rounds of questions via email. Given his work at T&E Soft, it was the perfect addition for this section. My translation wingman for this chapter was Casey Loe, who I hired, and who was interviewed in Volume 1 for his work on Suikoden II.

What I didn't realise at the time of emailing, was that Mr Nagashima was also lead programmer on ZAS for Game Boy: a legendary vertical shmup, exclusive to Japan, with Buy-it-Now prices rising nearly as high as £1'500 on eBay. Not only is it scarce, it's also one of the most technically impressive titles on the system, featuring parallax scrolling and transparencies. It exploits the original hardware so finely, that later models of GB and emulators can never quite replicate the effect seen on the original's liquid crystal display. Fascinatingly, it turns out ZAS was actually based on a home computer prototype Mr Nagashima made...

Given the difficulty of taking appealing-looking VB screens for monochrome printing (it's projected red light on a black backdrop), all VB screens have been colour inverted to show dark on white.

MN: I did my best to write this from my memories of the era. If there's ever a part that makes you think, "I wish he could discuss this in a little more detail," I'll try to find some time to write an addendum. I wish I had some photographs of the places where I worked, but all of my mementos from those days are long gone. I'm truly sorry.

Personally, I am so grateful to you for doing this, John. It means a lot to me that you're doing what even Japanese [journalists] will not. If you ever embark on a project like this again, please do not hesitate to contact me again, even if it's merely to ask questions like, "Do you know the person who made this?" I will help you in any way that I can. I hope we have the opportunity to meet one day. Please contact me again. I'll be waiting!



JS: Please tell me about your early days. What was the first game you saw?

MN: I was 12 years old and visiting a friend's house when I first saw it: a personal computer. At the time, I didn't even really understand what a computer was, and I didn't have any particular interest in finding out. My friend inserted a cassette tape and the computer started making an unpleasant sound. About five minutes later, a game screen appeared on the monitor. I was shocked. Some of the computer games from that era were so full of balance issues that I could barely get anywhere in them, but nevertheless, I played them obsessively.

JS: How did you get into programming?

MN: My friend watched me failing to progress as I played one game, sighed, and started typing away on the keyboard. "How's this?" he said. I looked at the screen and gasped. Suddenly I had 10 lives remaining instead of 3! I was shocked - it was like seeing a magic spell get cast in real life. I still couldn't get anywhere in that game (it was some rip-off of *Donkey Kong*), but I remember that at the moment I learned about the existence of computer

programs, my interest in programming was born. Perhaps the desire to bend videogames to my will was the entire reason I learned programming?

After that, I started studying programming in my spare time, and went to a computer-focused technical school. But the schools of that era didn't offer the level of curriculum I was looking for, so I quit almost immediately. But a friend I met there would go on to be a major inspiration in my life.



JS: Please describe entering the industry.

MN: Since I wanted to work for a game development studio, I decided the quickest way would be to make something that I could bring with me to job interviews. At the time I was quite enthralled with Irem's *R-Type* and *Image Fight* ¹¹⁶ - they were among my favourite games. The first step is imitating the things you love.

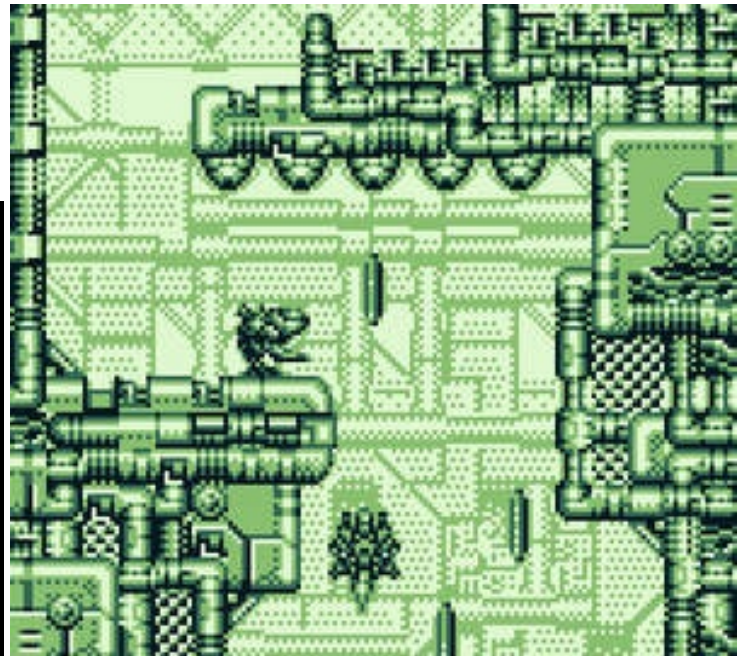
I learned assembly language copying *R-Type*, and as soon as I'd built up some confidence, I created an original game titled *XOX* (pronounced "zocks") in the style of *Image Fight*. I could have sent my game anywhere, but at that time, for some reason, the venerable Japanese

developer Xtalsoft was the only developer that really excited me. So I sent it off to them.

JS: How did you come to join T&E Soft?

MN: Despite my empty resume, Xtalsoft seemed to recognize my talent (I guess...?). I was promptly hired and entrusted with some important programming assignments. It was like a dream come true for me. Shortly after I was hired, the then-president, Morita-san, dropped a bombshell on us: "Xtalsoft is merging with T&E Soft."¹¹⁷ To put it in contemporary terms, imagine if Apple and Google announced that they were merging - well, the T&E/Xtalsoft merger would be... Nowhere even remotely close to as as shocking. ^^; *But to young computer punks like us, it was a huge deal!*

T&E Soft was considered to be one of the elite software developers of its day. Their technology was seemingly designed with careful consideration of every possible solution to a problem, and they combined that masterfully with brash, attention-grabbing entertainment ideas that no one had ever attempted before. You see, that's what T&E stands for: Technology & Entertainment.¹¹⁸



Notice the similarity in level design for XOX (left) and its remake ZAS (right)

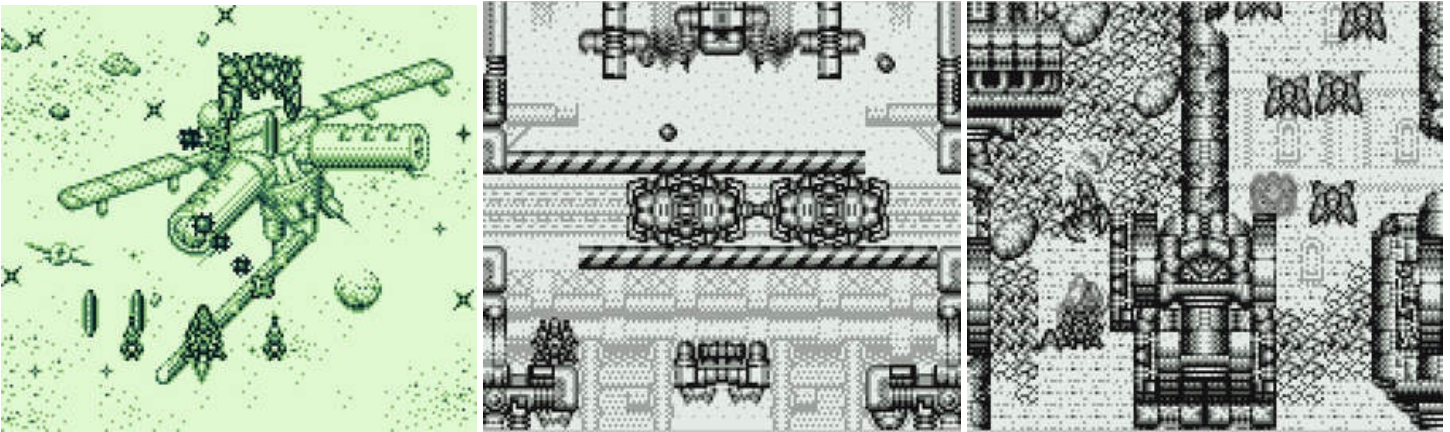
JS: Must have been a big shake-up.

MN: I worried that I wouldn't even be capable of working at the same level as their staff. But it was right around the time that the company started discussing the possibility of making a space shooter for the Game Boy - as I was something of a shooting specialist at the time, it would be the perfect project for me. But why would we make a shooting game when the industry was going through a major RPG boom? Looking back on it now, I wonder if the company decided to pursue a project in my genre of expertise specifically as a confidence-builder for me? The game was Chikyuu Kaihou Gun ZAS.¹¹⁹

JS: Oh wow - you made ZAS on Game Boy?!

MN: So even living overseas, you've actually heard of ZAS? <laughs> It's quite rare even in Japan, so I figured no one would know about it. But I guess it's possible to find, now that you can play it on Game Boy emulators, even if it never had an international release.

When I made L-TYPE I had only just learned assembly, and I only knew how to display small characters. But through persistence, I managed to recreate (to some extent) all the levels of R-Type. But the techniques I used to make XOX were much more advanced, though it only had a single level. There's no mistaking that it was the prototype version of ZAS.



JS: But emulators can't match the real thing, because of how the backgrounds work!

MN: I put in every trick I could come up with, using the Game Boy's hardware in clever ways, like making parallax backgrounds that utilized the ghosting effect of the liquid crystal screen. I consider the game to be my masterpiece. (I know I'm singing my own praises here.)

I'm sure you'll agree after seeing the videos that the game had unusually impressive graphics by Game Boy standards. Those were drawn by the close friend I met at technical school, [120](#) and it was thanks to him that I was able to realise my ideas in so stunning a fashion.

JS: How did T&E become involved with the VB?

MN: One day, I heard a particularly intriguing tidbit: "Nintendo is developing hardware that can display in three dimensions. Maybe we should get in on that?" Three dimensions? It was something I wouldn't be able to fully believe until I could see it for myself.

JS: So games companies were enthusiastic about Nintendo's new "virtual reality" experiment?

MN: At that time, there already seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm for developing three-dimensional shooting games within the company. T&E vice president Eiji Yokoyama went to Nintendo to see the technology, and came back saying, "We could probably do a wireframe 3D shooter." When president Toshiro Yokoyama heard that, he apparently gave it a green light on the spot. That sort of decisiveness was one of the things I admired most about T&E Soft.

JS: You were assigned as programmer?

MN: I resolved not to waste the opportunity, and to make it a game that would be worthy of the name "Toshiro & Eiji Software"...

Er... I mean "Technology & Entertainment Software." T&E stands for "Technology & Entertainment." It is not true that it originally stood for "Toshiro & Eiji." ^^;

JS: What was the VB prototype like?

MN: The next day, my boss Nakatsuji-san^{[121](#)} and I had a chance to go to Nintendo and see a prototype version of the hardware. The first Virtual Boy I ever saw was what looked like a handmade black box with two square eyeholes cut into it. When I looked through the holes, everything was red. I remember seeing a demo of a polygonal bird flying around. When I asked the developer why it appeared to be in three dimensions, he explained that there was a different screen for each eye so that they could project a different image to each. I remember thinking that if that was all there was to it, we should be able to pull this off.

Afterwards, we talked with the lead developer who made a passionate case for the Virtual Boy, saying things like, "A game doesn't need colour to be interesting," and "3D will open up all sorts of new possibilities!" At the time, the PlayStation had just released and we were seeing polygonal games that offered impressive graphics, but little in the way of new experiences. Having grown tired of seeing the same sorts of games over and over again, his words really resonated with me.

JS: The head developer? You mean...

MN: After learning all there was to know about the Virtual Boy, Nakatsuji-san and I got into a taxi and headed back to the office. As we rode, I heard Nakatsuji-san mutter, "So that's Gunpei Yokoi..."

Me: "What?"

My Boss: "He's the man who invented the Game & Watch!"

Me: "Whaaaaaaaaat?!"



JS: The legend himself!

MN: This was the pre-internet age, so there wasn't really any way to find out who had made the things that I had loved so much as a kid. So it was only then that I realised what an incredible person I'd be working with on this project. When I got back to the office, I immersed myself into trying to imagine what sort of red shooting-game screen wouldn't disappoint Yokoi-san.

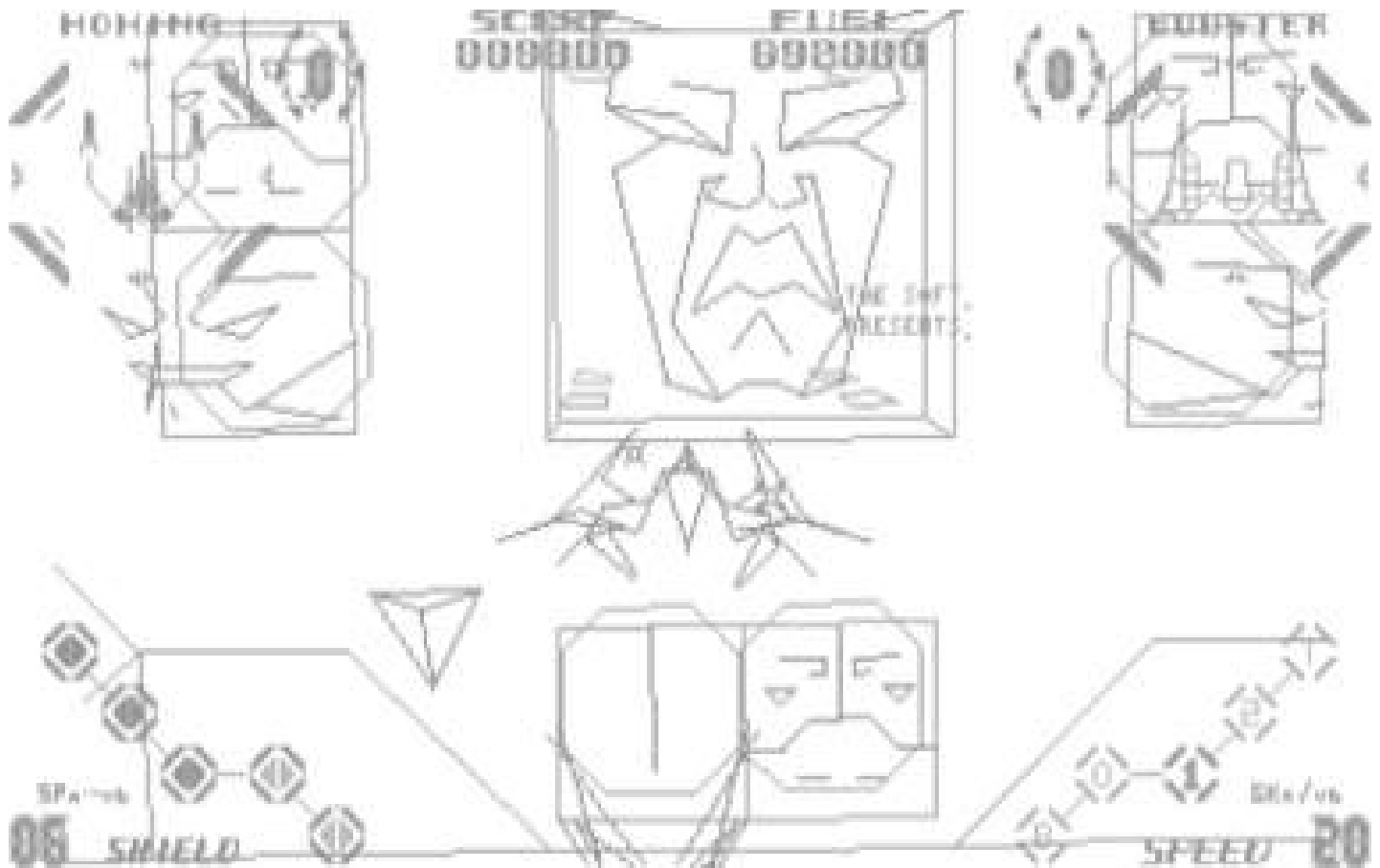
JS: So you were coder and planner?

MN: At the time, it wasn't unusual for a programmer to adopt the role that we would call "game designer" today, and determine what sort of content would go into a game. In my case, I was in charge of the game's content, balance, enemy positions, and even parts of the story.

JS: I assume Nintendo provided T&E with tools?

MN: Shortly after our meeting a development kit arrived at our office. It was almost identical

to the one we saw at Nintendo. I don't remember exactly what it looked like, but I believe the unit was the size of a small desktop computer, with that black box connected to it by a wire. It came with a number of demos, and I remember how excited I was to be playing them at my desk. In the latter half of development, the black box was replaced with the now famous red visor unit.



Owner of the Area51 bar (Tokyo) plays Red Alarm

JS: Can you describe how the VB worked?

MN: I went straight to work investigating the parallax displacement between how the image of an object appears to the left eye, versus the right eye. In theory, the closer the sight lines are to parallel, the more distant the object should appear, and the closer the sight lines cross, the closer the object should appear. **(right)**¹²²

So I placed a character against a black screen, and applied the parallax displacement to make it seem closer. "Huh...?" Then I tried to make it seem farther away. "What the...?" That's strange. Nothing happened. Maybe I need to try to make it seem even farther away...? "Huh...? What is going on here?"

JS: It wasn't working?

MN: Assuming I had done something wrong, I placed two objects this time, but only applied the parallax displacement to one of them. This time it worked perfectly, and I was able to make the object move forward or backwards in just the manner I had originally predicted.

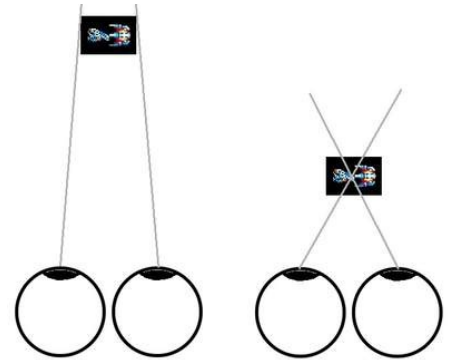
Can our eyes not perceive 3D without other objects for comparison? Can we not perceive

distance on a single object alone in the darkness? It would explain why I couldn't perceive the object as being distant in the earlier test, and perhaps when I tried to make it seem closer or further away, I just ended up causing my eyes to cross or become whatever the opposite of crossed is. Wow, could I cause people to cross or reverse-cross their eyes at will? That's kinda scary!

JS: I know some users were worried about damaging their eyes with VB...

MN: My eyes reverted to normal as soon as I removed my face from the Virtual Boy, so I was never able to confirm this theory. It remains a mystery to me still.

JS: How did development of *Red Alarm* go?



MN: Now that I had the 3D effect working, I wanted to do something that could only be done in 3D. I wanted to be able to fly freely in 3D space, going forwards, backwards, up, down, left and right... But the company's leadership wanted a game that was more like Namco's *Starblade*, where the game scrolls automatically, and the player aligns a reticule over foes to shoot them.

Designing controls for flying freely in space is complicated, and I don't think they believed we could pull it off. It's certainly true that there weren't many games of that era that allowed for free flight, and even a small misstep could leave you with a game that felt like a flight simulator. And then you end up with a control scheme where reorienting your ship to dodge an enemy bullet fired from close range becomes nearly impossible.

JS: Was *Star Fox* ¹²³ also an influence?

MN: I refused to give up on my dreams of free flight. The existence of games like *Star Fox* gave me confidence that we could make a free flight game that was fun. *Red Alarm* is often compared to *Star Fox*, but I did not use it as a model during development. We were certainly aware of it, but I always thought of *Red Alarm* as being something quite different. People think of them as being similar because they're both 3D games, but by the same logic, shouldn't all 2D shooting games be considered similar as well? That said, I sometimes wonder if the game would have sold better if Nintendo had stuck the *Star Fox* name on it and released it themselves.

JS: Did you have any technical difficulties?

MN: Creating the graphics data was quite a challenge. We'd intended to use middleware modelling tools, but none of them were capable of morphing characters by moving points. Or maybe they could, but not to our satisfaction. Since we were determined to have morphing characters, we decided to create our own proprietary tools. As a result, we were able to implement morphing and a variety of other ideas we had.

The level design was even more of a challenge. The CPU we were working with had

trouble calculating all the 3D coordinates at a fast enough speed. So in order to cut down on the amount it had to process, we made all the levels out of blocks, and implemented a way to arrange those blocks in a three-dimensional fashion.

JS: Levels were built around the CPU's limitations?

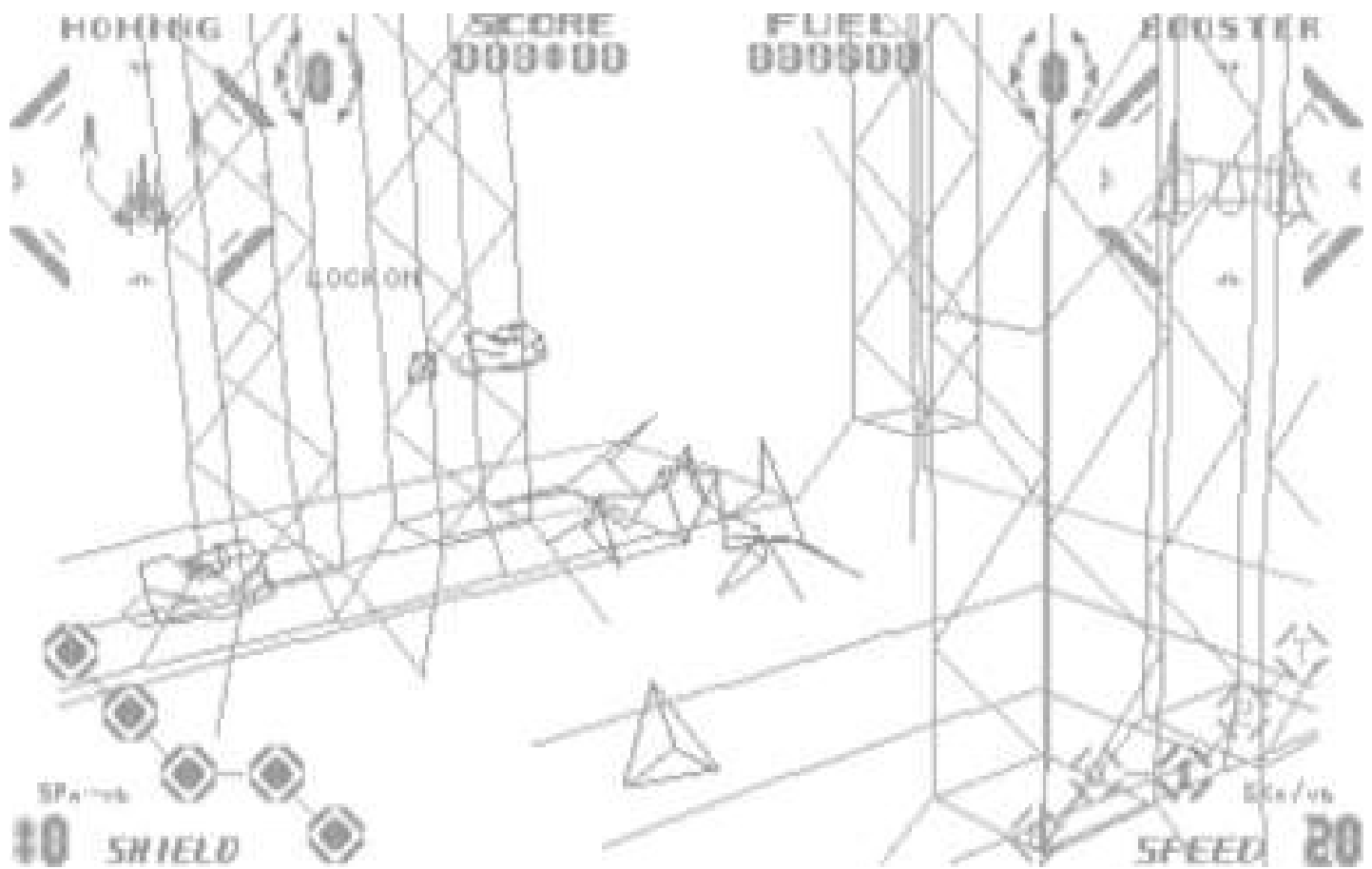
MN: 2D game levels are made by arranging 8x8 pixel tiles, right? This was kind of like the 3D version of the same technique. By using blocks we were able to reduce the amount of calculations needed for distant objects, and we were able to apply collision [detection] to each block individually, eliminating a lot of unneeded calculations.

But even making levels that way in 2D is quite time-consuming, so I know this created a lot of trouble for our level designers. I'm really impressed with the work they were able to do. I would give basic ideas to the level designers, and then fly through the completed environments giving feedback for corrections like, "I want to have a sub-boss blocking the passage here, so make the tunnel tighter," and "there are too many lines here, so let's cut some."

JS: The hardware was troublesome, I take it?

MN: Problem #1: Smoothly Dodging Enemy Bullets

While we were developing the game, Nintendo was still internally debating what form the controller would take. I had heard the Yokoi-san wanted a second D-pad on the right side of the controller, and I was convinced that since he wanted this, it would happen. Fortunately, it did. My idea was that the right D-pad could control the ship's horizontal movement, so that the player would still be able to easily evade extremely close enemies and bullets. Kind of like the way a boxer can evade a punch by swaying. Of course, technology doesn't allow contemporary aircraft to move like that, but it could be possible in the future... Probably.



Problem #2: We Could Only Use One Button for Attacks

So why did we only have one button for attacks...? Because with such an abundance of movement options, we'd used all the buttons for things like D-pad evasion, accelerating, and decelerating! ^^;

First, what attacks did we want to implement? I mean, there has to be the usual rapid-fire Vulcan cannon¹²⁴ and the high-powered missiles, right? But we only have one button left...

Developer A: "Maybe since everyone just holds down the fire button anyway, the Vulcan cannon could always be firing even without any button presses?"

Developer B: "For some reason, it just isn't fun that way."

Me: "I think you're right about that..."

JS: So you avoided auto-firing?

MN: Yep, because we thought it would make the game less fun; we didn't want to have automatic shooting. I mean, would you get any satisfaction from destroying an enemy if you hadn't pressed a button to do it? No, that wouldn't do at all. People have to be able to press the button!

Our next idea came from the game *Afterburner*. In that game, if you release and re-press the button after locking onto a foe, you fire a homing missile instead. Actually, now that I think about it, didn't the Mega Drive version of *Afterburner* have automatic Vulcan-cannon firing?¹²⁵ But when we tried to implement *Afterburner*-style homing missiles, there was a bug in the program that left lines behind stretching from some of the missiles to your ship. So there were all these long lines stretching out from it... And that looked kind of cool, so we

left it in. Sometimes bugs come in pretty handy. ^^

JS: Right, it's not a bug, it's a feature!

MN: One day, I heard Nakatsuji-san muttering to himself again... "I wish we had engine noises..." So even though the sound chip was pretty restrictive, we decided to devote one of its channels to engine noises. Since the game's BGM was already well under way, having to take back one of the sound channels was a big deal. As I recall, it left the music with a very sparse and lonely feel. But I really do think that you need those engine sounds to get the feeling of speed.

JS: What were Nintendo's reactions as development progressed?

MN: Just as we were battling with all these issues, people started talking about E3. Nintendo was planning to show the Virtual Boy at E3, and apparently wanted a demo of *Red Alarm* to show along with it. Naturally, we were grateful for the opportunity, and began developing an E3 demo alongside the actual game. Our goal was to make a 1-2 minute demo where you fly through a corridor blowing away enemies before battling a big boss at the end.

We periodically brought new versions of the demo to Nintendo, and after playing one, Yokoi-san remarked positively, "When playing, you completely forget it's all just lines." I was deeply flattered. One member of Nintendo's development team said that whenever we brought a new demo, around 50 people would come to play it.

Assuming it was lip service, I said, "Oh, come on," but he said "it's true" with a straight face. It seemed the game had drawn a lot of attention within Nintendo.

JS: Did anything have to be cut from the game?

MN: The one thing they didn't like about it was the robot hangar-esque area in Stage 1, where all the workers are running away. We programmed it so that the workers get knocked down if you fly too close to them, but Nintendo said "no way" to that. I explained that they get right up again and continue running away, but Nintendo said it still wouldn't fly, so we had to take that out. ^^;

JS: So how was the reaction at E3?

MN: When the demo was in a solid state, I finally thought, "This is something we can show at E3. All that's left is polishing." But then Nintendo told us that, "Yamauchi will make the final decision about what to show." I had been under the impression that the demo being shown was a sure thing, and a terrified shiver ran down my spine. There was nothing I could do but wait and see...

A few days later, when I brought the final demo to Nintendo, I finally had a chance to ask what President Yamauchi had decided. They said his only comment after seeing *Red Alarm* was, "I don't know. You guys can decide on this one." Thanks to a push from the rest of the staff, it was decided that the game would be shown after all.

JS: So you went to America?

MN: I was brought along to the E3 in Los Angeles, and I really enjoyed the vibe of the show. It was an experience I still treasure. The interpreter at the Red Alarm booth would say things like, "That person just now was saying that your game is incredible." I received all sorts of feedback, including, "Hey, it's just like Star Fox." At times like that, all I could think was, "Even if it was only for that, I'm glad it made an impression."

JS: It was regarded as one of the Virtual Boy's very best games - a system seller even.

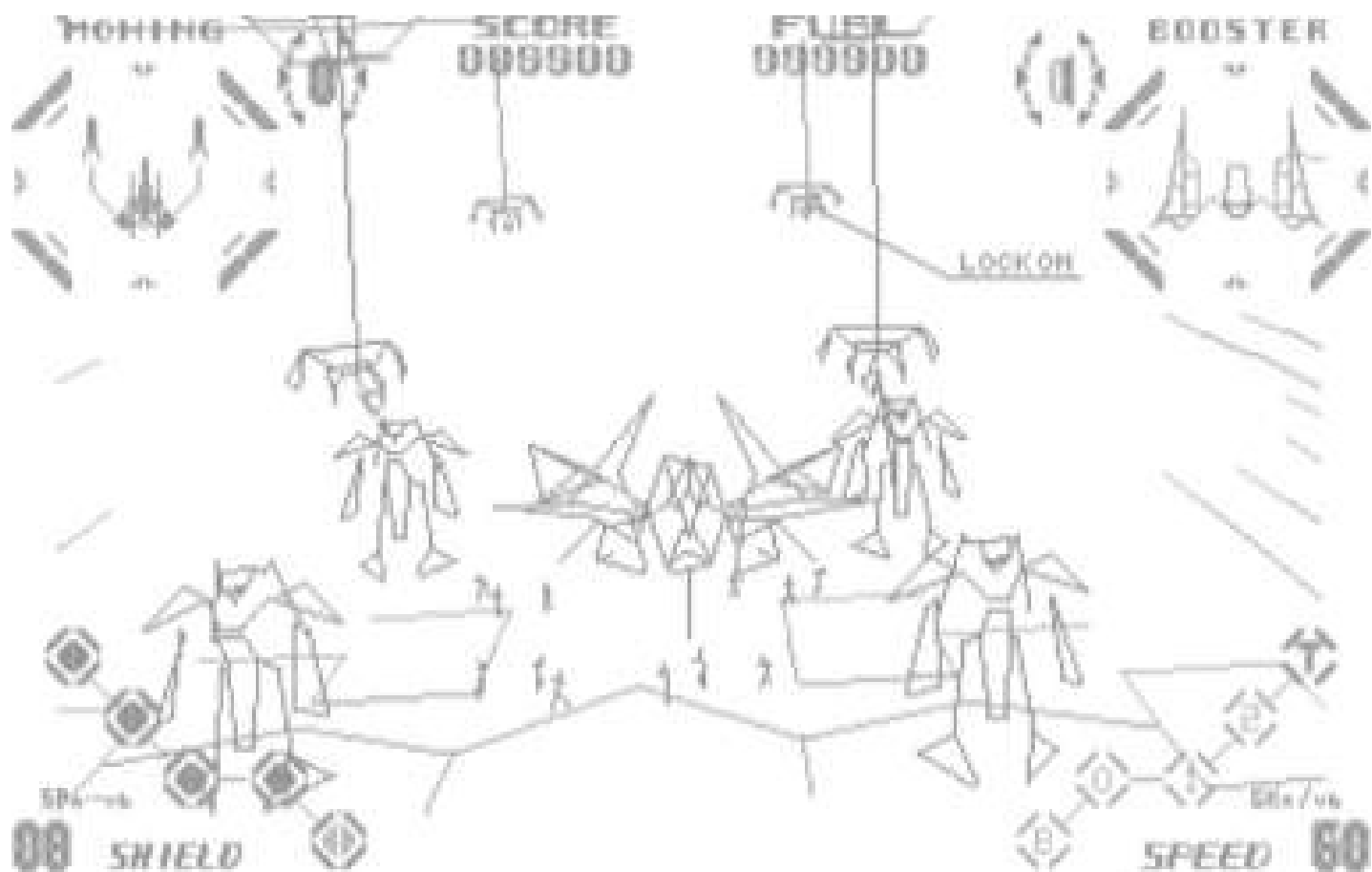
MN: Development continued, and I was optimising the game's performance until the end of the project. I was coming up with tricks like having the system calculate the 3D at 24 bits when precision was required, and reducing the processing load by having it calculate at 8 bits when speed was the priority.

Also, the game was originally processing geometry^{[126](#)} for the left and right cameras separately, but in the end I came up with a system where it processed the geometry only once, and added in the parallax displacement when it displayed the image to each eye.

I also tweaked other things here and there, but I still wish I'd had more time to make Red Alarm play more smoothly and have a better frame rate.

JS: Your system processed geometry only once?

MN: To explain that in a little more detail, the gap between the images was small for distant objects and large for nearby ones. So I had it calculate the difference in Z coordinates, and add that difference in when it drew the lines that compose the image.



See the tiny stickmen running around the robot hangar? You could knock them over originally

JS: Some people get headaches using VB for long periods. How did you feel?

MN: Every day, when I would peer into the Virtual Boy, I would become more used to its 3D display, and that initial impact faded away. Sometimes I'd wonder, "Am I even seeing this in 3D right now?" In order to experience the initial impact of the 3D again, I added the ability to tweak the parallax effect in the game's options menu. It was just like the 3D slider on the 3DS.

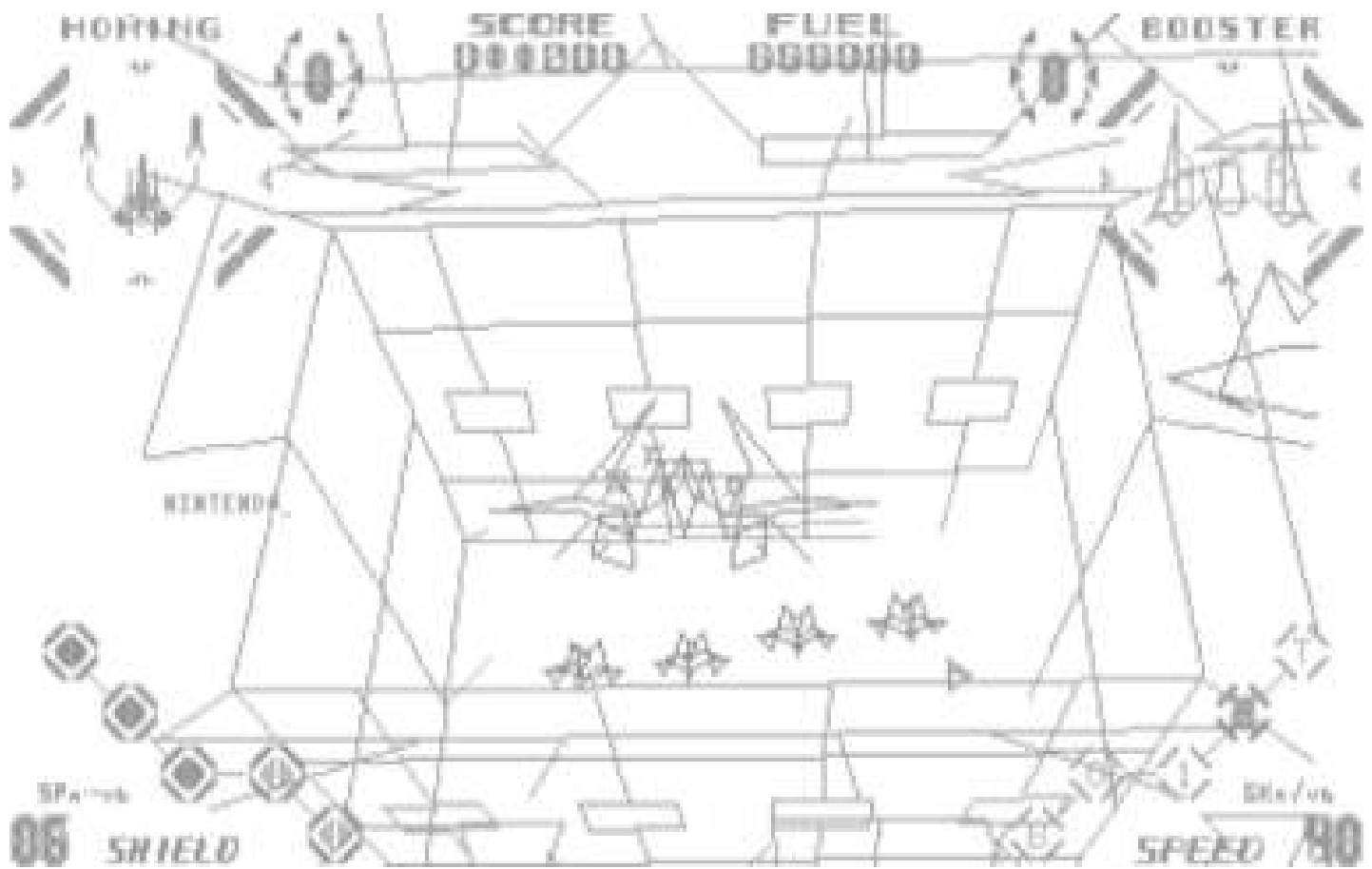
At depth level 0, I couldn't play the game at all. Not only couldn't I play it, but I couldn't even tell what was happening in the introductory movie! The impact of the 3D was far greater than I'd ever imagined. I took that as proof that I'd succeeded in making Red Alarm a game that could never have been made if it weren't for the Virtual Boy.

JS: For 3-D Tetris ¹²⁷ did you have source code from Bullet Proof Software, or was it done from scratch?

MN: After completing Red Alarm we moved straight into development of 3-D Tetris. Making the game in 3D required starting from scratch on the Virtual Boy. The game was designed by Kono-san. He'd tell us he had a good idea, we'd implement it and see how it worked, and then he'd tell us he had another good idea, and we'd implement that. It was a continuous process of trial and error. Even within the development staff, there was a lot of trial and error in trying to make the polygons easier to see in 3D and to improve the game's refresh rate.

I was in charge of the polygon display and the completion animations in puzzle mode. I was able to use the same basic wireframe techniques that I used in Red Alarm to make the polygons. As for the animations, the puzzles transformed into various shapes, like an F1

Racer, a dog, or a statue when the puzzles were finished. I had to painstakingly program in each of those sequences one by one. The puzzles were intended to serve as little breathers between stages, so there were originally only going to be five of them.



JS: It was *awesome* - a cool twist on the formula!^{[128](#)}

MN: But since they were blocks, there was a limit to the amount they could animate, and I had to come up with a lot of tricks. Early on, I tried to do unique things like having the F-1 Racer's tires spin around. When Yokoi-san saw that, he burst out laughing, saying, "Look at those square tires spin!" Maybe because those sorts of things were well received, the puzzles became their own mode and the number of stages increased to 20. It was hard thinking of 20 stages worth of character animations, and when I look at what I came up with, a lot of them barely make any sense to me now.^{[129](#)}

JS: It was released in America but not Japan - why?

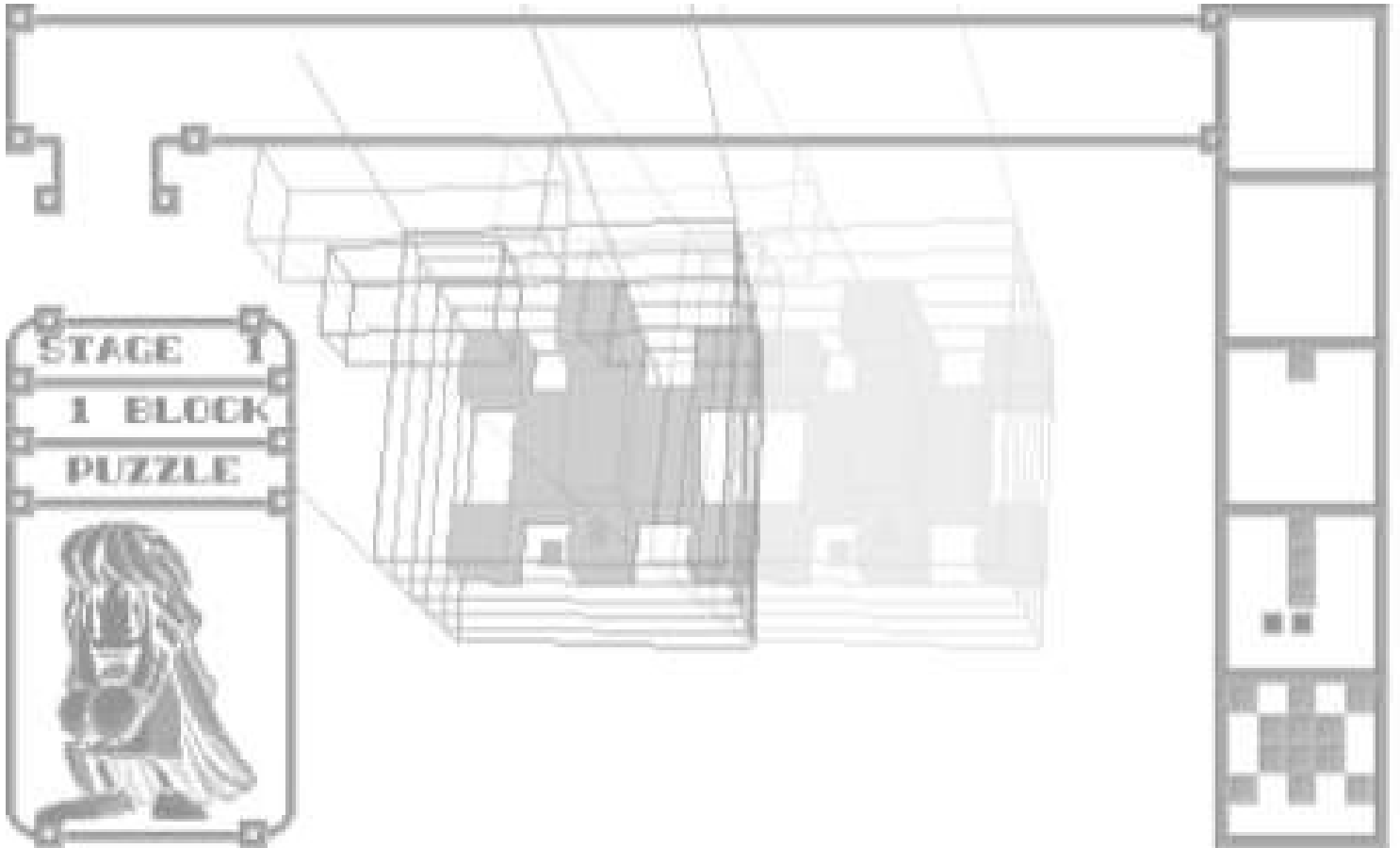
MN: Around that time, apparently our president Yokoyama was contacted by the president of BPS, who said, "For some reason Nintendo won't give us permission to release Tetris on the Virtual Boy." And apparently instead of Yokoyama-san saying, "That's because we're working with Nintendo on a 3D Tetris game," he just said "hmmm," and changed the subject. I don't know why 3-D Tetris was never released in Japan, although I may have known back then and just forgotten. It was probably some boring business reason, like the Virtual Boy's declining sales, or a rights issue.^{[130](#)}

JS: Were you involved in T&E Virtual Golf at all?

MN: The developers of Virtual Golf and I exchanged information about the Virtual Boy, but I wasn't directly involved with its development.

JS: Can you tell me about any unreleased games?

MN: After completing Red Alarm we ceased further development due to the Virtual Boy's sluggish sales. Personally, I had wanted to make a racing game next.



JS: Did you code any secrets into your games?

MN: For Red Alarm there's a secret menu that offers Full Power, Stage Select, and BGM Mode options. To access it, at the title screen, when "PUSH START" is displayed, press SELECT 100 times. If you do this successfully, you'll hear a sound effect. Then, during the game, press L, R, A, B and SELECT at the same time to open the secret menu. Now that I think about it, you may not need to press B. Sorry, I haven't tested that!^{[131](#)}

This menu allows you to listen to the game's music. I really liked the music from the E3 version, which didn't appear in the game, so I put it in the BGM Mode! Or... at least, I intended to. But then when I actually made the menu, it completely slipped my mind. I regret that to this day.

JS: Can you describe why you left T&E Soft?

MN: Back in those days, a lot of people quit programming when they reached their 30s, so I hadn't expected that I'd be able to make a long-term career out of programming games. Every time I worked on a project, I thought to myself, "I'll make this the last one." I think because of that, I made each one with an attitude of "since this is my final game, I should make sure it's something I'm proud of," which was probably a good thing. And ultimately, I did quit T&E Soft because I wanted to take a break from game programming. I guess I wanted to pursue something new and exciting? I'm not even sure myself.



JS: What are you currently doing? Any future plans?

MN: I was independent for a while, and threw myself into making whatever programs struck my fancy. Now I'm working for a company again, but I can work on my own terms, so it reminds me of the old days. Here's the web page for the things I made [when I was independent]: www.sanninsoft.com

I think I'll continue working on smart phones for a while. Not just making games, but whatever I feel like making.

JS: Any other messages?

MN: People who harshly criticise our work are valuable and necessary. Sometimes I think their opinions are off the mark, and then much later something happens that makes me realise, "Ah, this must be what they were talking about!" It's important to select the useful pieces from feedback you receive, and let them influence your work.

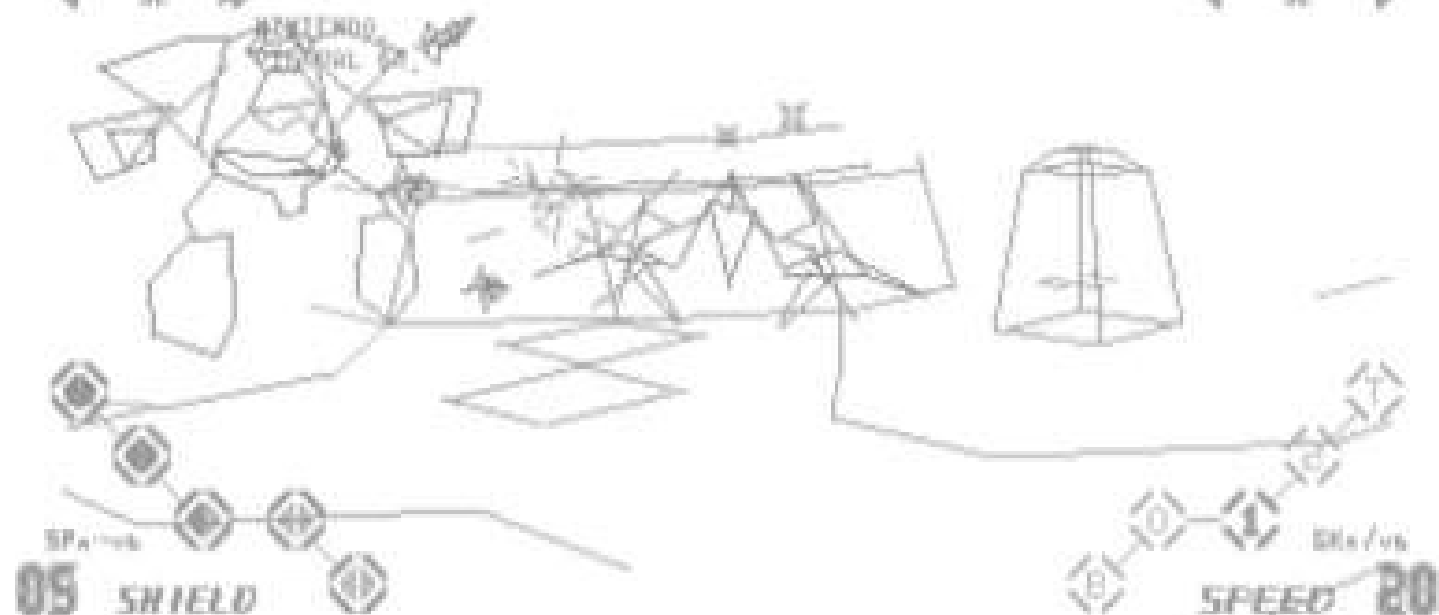
That said, it's just as dangerous to rely too much on the feedback of others, and lose sight of what you had wanted to achieve. You need to be able to merge their opinions with your own goals in a balanced way. That's a lesson I've learned the hard way, by losing sight of what I wanted and paying the price for it.

HOMING

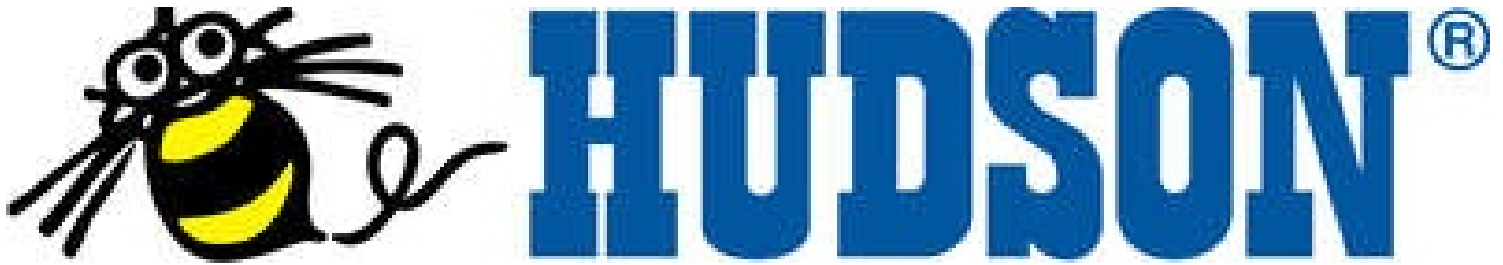
SCORE
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HUDSON



Without question Hudson was one of the most significant videogame companies in the history of Japan. One of the older games companies, it explored both computer and console development. In the 1980s it was one of the first Japanese companies to make inroads on British computers, converting several titles to the ZX Spectrum (including *Bomberman*, under the name *Eric and the Floaters*). It was one of the first third-parties to develop for Nintendo's Famicom, even creating Nintendo's *Family BASIC* software. Hudson's vending machine for buying games predates both Takeru's vending machines, and Nintendo's FDS vending machines, though sadly was cancelled. Later Hudson in conjunction with NEC was one of the few to challenge Nintendo's hardware empire and succeed, with the PC Engine (remember, Sega mostly failed in its native Japan with the Master System and Mega Drive, instead finding success in Brazil, America and Europe). Hudson was also one of the first companies to release a CD-based home console, as an attachment for the PC Engine. Later still, the company was the first to develop a game using high definition visuals, *Hi-Ten Bomberman*. It was so advanced it could only run on specialised bespoke hardware.

But this wasn't just a company on the cutting edge of technology, it was a madcap adventure from start to finish. The company founders, two brothers, had a miniaturised steam train running through the office (they were train nuts). Hudson was one of a kind, a maverick and pioneer we're unlikely ever to see again, not because no one wants to, but because that special kind of magic was strongest in the transition between the 1970s and 80s.

So it's strange to think that so much is still unknown regarding Hudson. According to Japan's Game Preservation Society, the majority of Hudson's earliest games, coming exclusively on cassette tape, are unaccounted for. I had considered putting a software listing here, but there's honestly too many gaps to warrant it. The myriad of licensing deals it engaged in are mostly undocumented, including significant deals with Nintendo, Red Company, Atlus, and others.

A sad epilogue to its vast and important history, is that Hudson is actually in danger of being forgotten. Having been bought out by Konami, it was absorbed and disappeared in 2012. It's been over 40 years since the legacy of the bee was born and now the name is a whispered memory. The old alumni still gather annually for Hudson Night in Tokyo, regaling ageing fans with frontline stories, but there will come a time when only the written word preserves their accounts.

I'm proud to present interviews with Takashi Takebe, the 7th employee Hudson ever hired; Hiromasa Iwasaki, who helped refine Hudson's early CD-ROM technology; and an examination of a Hudson School student-made game, featuring mini-interviews with various staff.

GOSUB



HUDSON

札幌に本格マイコンショップ

COSMOS SAPPORO OPEN!!



Hiromasa Iwasaki says:

"I think this was Hudson's first shop in Hiragishi, Sapporo. In this booklet, 'Gosub Hudson', it says this shop was on the 2nd floor of the CQ Hudson building (the first/oldest). Also inside it, Hiroshi Kudo, the elder brother and CEO, wrote 'This is the first shop.' This picture was taken perhaps in the spring/summer of 1978. Also in this publication, Mr Takebe wrote an article about TK-80BS STAR WARS - while in the 3rd year of Sapporo University!"



TAKEBE, Takashi

DOB: 27 September 1957 / Birthplace: Sapporo / Blood Type: O

~Selected portfolio with commentary~

HUDSON

- / **Dezeni Land**, various computers (1983)
- / **Dezeni World**, various computers (1986)
- / **Super Mario Bros.**

Special, PC-8801/Sharp X1 (1986)

/ **Milon's Secret Castle**, FC/NES (1986)

× / **Jaseiken Necromancer**, PC Engine (1988)

/ **Tengai Makyou: Fuun Kabukiden**,

PCE-CD (1993)

"This was after the PC Engine Super CD-ROM2 peripheral was released."

ZERO / **Tengai Makyou Zero**, Super Famicom (1995)

/ **Gulliver Boy**, PC Engine (1995)

/ **Vertical Force**, Virtual Boy (1995)

/ **Tengai Makyou: Daiyon no Mokushiroku - The Apocalypse IV**, Saturn (1997)



ROCKET STUDIO (not necessarily by Takashi TAKEBE himself)



N.U.D.E.@: Natural Ultimate Digital Experiment, Xbox (2003)

"This was a game for the first Xbox. It was an ambitious experiment incorporating voice recognition, voice synthesis, and artificial intelligence, that may have been a little too ambitious for its time. We had a very hard time with it, as the speech recognition ended up being spotty, and the speech synthesis wasn't very smooth. If we could do it again with modern technology, I think we could do a lot of interesting things with it."

Culdcept Saga, X360 (2008)

"This was a port of a game that had previously been available on different hardware. It's a very famous game in Japan, and has been made for a wide variety of platforms."

Dragon Quest Monster Road, Arcade (2007)

"This was our first experience with arcade development. It was a very popular game that had a

large user base. For 100 yen you would get one card and one play at the game. The card came imprinted with a special code that the machine would read to put your monster onto the screen. We developed the original game and its sequel. After that, we developed a title called Gyrozetter, in which you do battle as a car that can transform into a robot. That would be our last foray into arcade development."

Dragon Quest: Monster Battle Road II Arcade (2009)

Dragon Quest: Monster Battle Road Victory Nintendo Wii (2010)

Kemonomix NDS (2010)

Kemonomix Plus 3DS (2014)

Lumines: Electronic Symphony PS Vita (2012)

Destiny of Spirits PS Vita (2014)



Interview with Takashi TAKEBE

08 October 2013, Rocket Studio Inc., Sapporo, Hokkaido / Duration: 1h 55m

This was an exciting interview, and exemplifies how unpredictable the trip could be. The previous night myself, Matt Fitsko, Joseph Redon and Nico Datiche were drinking *sake* with the guys formerly from dB-Soft; Takaki Kobayashi suggested he put us in touch with a former Hudson colleague, Takashi Takebe. A surprise interview! Given how late in the day it was there was no time to book an interpreter and little time to prepare - however, Matt said he would fill in for interpretation, and later could transcribe it more precisely. We'd have two hours with Mr Takebe to ask as many questions as possible. My interest was in the Mario games Hudson developed and Family BASIC for Famicom; Matt wanted to discuss hardware variations and the operating system for the X1; Joseph wanted dates and colleague names for further research. Joseph and Nico had business for the whole of the next day, but would aim to arrive at the end of our interview for photos. Mr Kobayashi would also join us for the start. The mission was on!

Sometime around midnight myself and Matt found our way to the Sapporo capsule hotel. The next morning we loaded up on coffee and MOS Burger; Joseph texted a set of questions while I used my smartphone to browse MobyGames, looking through Mr Takebe's listed credits. As one of Hudson's earliest employees he could reveal secrets about the company's seldom-documented past. To save time it was agreed that Matt should ask many of the questions directly in Japanese, rather than interpret my spoken English. Our window of opportunity was short, and it was imperative we discover as much as possible. Around midday we headed for Rocket Studio, the company behind the unique Natural Ultimate Digital Experiment on the original Xbox and several Dragon Quest spin-offs, **to meet the president!**

JS: Please describe your early days before Hudson.

Takashi Takebe: I was a high school freshman when I first touched a computer. This was back in 1973. The world's first microcomputer was the Intel 4004, announced in 1971, so this was before we could even conceive of things like "personal computers" and "videogames". But my high school had a minicomputer, so I was able to learn the basics of programming with that. It was an OKITAC 4300C - it was manufactured by Oki Electric Industry.¹³² I bet you could find a picture of it on Google.¹³³ The programming language it used was FORTRAN. So in my high school days I experienced programming simple things.

After graduating from high school, I went to university. But I was in the law department, so I didn't have any opportunities to use a computer for a while. But when I was a second-year student, I went out and bought NEC's recently released TK-80, a single-board microcomputer with an Intel 8080 processor. I imagine you could find a picture of that on Google too. *<laughs>* On the TK-80 you had to input machine code in hexadecimal, so you couldn't use any high-level programming languages.

The first generation of personal computers soon followed, and I used one to learn BASIC. So my journey as a programmer began with FORTRAN, and proceeded in order to machine code, BASIC, assembler, C, C++, and finally C#. I've also dipped my toes in PASCAL, Prolog, LIPS, and other languages, but I don't remember much about them now.

JS: Did you play games?

TT: The game I played the most before I joined Hudson had to have been the very first version of Star Trek, on an Apple II.

JS: How did you join Hudson? It was founded in 1973.^{[134](#)}

TT: It's a very long story! <laughs> I joined around 1979, I think? I joined Hudson just as they started working with computers and remained with them for a long time. To explain everything from the very beginning would take all night! <laughs>

I joined Hudson immediately after graduation from University, in 1980. Originally, Hudson began as a computer shop, and I had been working there as a part-time job. As my final year in university was coming to an end, I was worried about what I'd do next. Since I loved computers, I decided to just take a full-time job there.

JS: Before 1979 their business was not related to games?

TT: Yes, that's correct. At first, Hudson was just an electronics shop selling transceivers for amateur or "ham" radio, which continued for some time. Then, around 1977 I believe, Intel started selling the SDK-80.^{[135](#)} After that, the Japanese company NEC created a one-board microcomputer called the TK-80.^{[136](#)}

MF: The TK-80 was a build-it-yourself microcomputer kit?

TT: That's right. So Hudson started selling the TK-80. About a year after that, Hudson also began selling other computers such as the Commodore PET 2001 and the Radio Shack TRS-80, as well as Japanese computers like the Sharp MZ-80K. Originally Hudson was only selling the hardware, because at that time, nobody was selling software at all. The concept of selling software didn't exist.

Hudson was a retail shop, so customers would come into the shop and want to try out the different computers. But these first computers only included a BASIC interpreter. So we would make sample programs, and give them away for free. The games we made were tiny, but we would include 5-10 of them as a bonus with the purchase of a new computer.

The customers appreciated these games and started talking about them, so Hudson started taking out magazine advertisements and selling games nationwide by mail-order. We received a large number of orders, and realised that software could be a business. A number of other computers also appeared, like the Apple II, and different machines emerged from Japanese companies other than NEC and Sharp, such as Hitachi and Toshiba. Everyone started making computers, and there was a huge increase in the demand for software as a result. In response, Hudson started hiring more staff to create software, and the first development teams were organised within the company.

Hudson and Sharp developed a very close relationship during this period. One reason for this is because Hudson created the BASIC interpreter for the MZ-80K. Originally Sharp had provided their own interpreter, Sharp BASIC, but then NEC released their PC-8001 computer which included a built-in BASIC interpreter written by Microsoft. Compared to the Microsoft

BASIC interpreter on the PC-8001, Sharp's interpreter was somewhat slow, so Hudson designed a new BASIC interpreter for Sharp computers. It was very well-received.

Sharp applied some of Hudson's ideas in their later lines of computers, such as the X1 and the X68000.

MF: So Hudson and Sharp maintained a friendly relationship for many years?

TT: Yes. During this time, while contributing to things such as the assembly language for Sharp's computers, Hudson also created a variety of games for computers. They were very small, but we created and released a large number.

MF: And you were selling these games by this point?

TT: Yes. Back then we were still using audio cassette tapes for data storage, so we couldn't make games that were very big. Long games were out of the question. Later on, things changed when floppy disks became available.

Next, in 1983 I think, Nintendo released the Family Computer, or NES. Sharp introduced Hudson to Nintendo, and helped us establish a relationship with them.

JS: Hudson made Nintendo games for computers, such as Super Mario Bros. Special on NEC PC-8801 and Sharp X1. But first, could you list the games you were involved in? You're credited on Super Mario Bros. Special, Salad no Kuni no Tomato-hime (Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom), Family BASIC, Lode Runner for Famicom, and Ys IV for PC Engine. I'd like a list of other games, in case I don't know about them.

<Takashi Takebe expresses growing embarrassment as the list of games is recited>

*<Meanwhile, **Takaki Kobayashi**, who arranged the interview, is taking great delight in watching his friend squirm under the microscope>*

TK, to TT: *<gently joking>* This interview's about to get humiliating for you. *<laughs>*

TT: As far as I can remember, when it comes to computer games, I did Tomato-hime.¹³⁷ Another person did the programming, but I handled the scenario and shaped the overall game. By this time Hudson was already making games in teams of 3 or 4 people. Sometimes there would be a graphic designer. Things were still very small in scale, but we would divide the work among two or three people.

To be honest, I haven't programmed too many games myself. From my experience working on Hudson's BASIC interpreter, I went on to do things like a 16-bit BASIC interpreter while the rest of the staff were making games. As I mentioned earlier, Sharp facilitated the relationship between Hudson and Nintendo, and the direct catalyst for that was when Nintendo was looking for someone to create a BASIC interpreter for the Family Computer.¹³⁸ Sharp knew we had the experience, so they told Nintendo to go talk to us at Hudson.



JS: <shows HG101 article on smartphone screen>¹³⁹ I'm sorry we're so rushed today, I would have printed this off; let me show you this article a friend wrote on Tomato-hime, both the Famicom and PC-8801 versions. He played through both and took screens for a comparison gallery.

TT: Wow! I didn't know about this website. We wouldn't be able to create a game like this today, with all the regulations and restrictions. Back in the old days, we could make whatever we wanted. There weren't any regulations.

JS: On this site, I also wrote an article about the Hudson Mario games developed for computers.

TT: For the Super Mario computer game, someone else did the programming, but I was responsible for the planning.

JS: Do you know anything about Punch Ball Mario Bros.?¹⁴⁰

TT: I was not involved in Punch Ball Mario Bros. at all. By that time the number of staff at Hudson had grown considerably, and everyone was working on something different. Thanks to the introduction from Sharp, Hudson did business with Nintendo, and I created Family BASIC. At the same time, Hudson told Nintendo that they wanted to make games for the Family Computer.

The first titles we made were Lode Runner¹⁴¹ and Nuts & Milk.¹⁴² Lode Runner was

originally an Apple II game released by Broderbund, so we purchased the license. The Apple II CPU was a 6502, identical to the processor core in the Famicom, so we purchased the source code from Broderbund, and ported it to the Famicom while also introducing our own changes. Another person did the programming, but I did the graphics. Although we were porting from the Apple II version, we decided to update the graphics a little. So I was in charge of the graphic design.



Load Runner (FC)

TK: Whoa! Did you draw the pixel art yourself?

TT: Dot by dot. I also did the title and the character animations. I was the graphic designer.

TK: <laughing> I never knew that!

JS: At the end of Bomberman on Famicom the little guy actually turns into the Lode

Runner. Was that your idea?[143](#)

TT: No. That was someone else's idea. Who came up with that? Before the Famicom, one of the many games we created for computers eventually became the prototype for the Bomberman character.

MF: Bakudan Otoko, I presume?[144](#)

<explosive laughter all around>

TT: *<in a pained voice>* You know about that?!

So we took that character and modified him a little for the Famicom to create Bomberman. At the same time, someone suggested putting him into Lode Runner as well. I don't remember who had the idea though.

MF: Did you work on the Famicom version of Bomberman?

TT: No, I wasn't really involved with that Bomberman.

JS: What about the scary first-person 3-D Bomberman?[145](#)

TT: I didn't have anything to do with 3-D Bomberman; it was developed by an entirely different team. At the time, I believe I was stationed in the Tokyo office, and the game was being developed back in Sapporo. I remember that there had been lingering doubts about whether the series' core 2D gameplay of evading explosive blasts would still be fun in the game's pseudo-3D perspective, where it would be hard to judge distance. But at the time there weren't many 3D games like that, so we figured there would be value in making it as an experiment.



3-D Bomberman (PC-88)

JS: Describe your role on *Super Mario Bros. Special*.

TT: I designed the game screens, for example. I was not responsible for the graphic design, but I designed the level layouts, and worked with other staff to guide the overall composition and direction of the game. My role was similar to a game director.

JS: Several icons, such as the Hudson Bee, appear in it. There were lots of Easter Eggs. Did you add them?

TT: I guess I must have! It was a long time ago, so I don't remember it very well.

JS: <loads images on phone> It featured the *Donkey Kong* hammer, Hudson logo, *Mario* crabs, and so on.

TT: Oh, this is the first I've seen of these - I didn't know we added this! I suspect this might have been developed back in Sapporo while I was in the Tokyo office. Considering the timing

of when Nintendo might have been licensing Super Mario, it had to have been after 1985. That was when PC games were still selling well.



JS: <confused> Hudson's computer games included Mario Bros. Special from around 1984, and Super Mario Bros. Special from around 1985. You're listed as producer in the credits for 1985's Super Mario Bros. Special - but if you've not seen these images, did you perhaps actually do planning for 1984's Mario Bros. Special instead?¹⁴⁶

TT: This may be a little vague, but I'll answer with as much detail as I can remember. <laughs>

The relationship between Hudson and Nintendo began with the development of Family BASIC. I believe that was right before the Famicom boom began, before all the third parties started signing up. As I recall, Hudson was the first company besides Nintendo to develop a game [for the Famicom]. The Famicom would go on to become a smash hit in Japan, but at the time, personal computer games were still dominant.

Due to the relationship the companies forged in the early days of the Famicom, Hudson was able to acquire the licenses to the Golf, Excitebike, and Ice Climber games that Nintendo had released on the Famicom, and port them to computers. I believe Mario was part of this deal as well. I don't know the specifics, but I suspect the license only covered the titles and characters, and didn't allow them to port the games themselves. That's why they added "Special" to the title.

I was not involved with 1984's Mario Bros. Special; I believe that was developed by a different team. For 1985's Super Mario Bros. Special, I was involved with the project planning and progress management. Those are tasks that are generally performed by a director, not a producer. And yet... I guess I was credited as a producer in the staff roll! <laughs>

In those days, when games were made by small teams in short development schedules, developers often had to perform a variety of additional duties. I believe that's how I ended up getting credit as a *Producer* on Super Mario Bros. Special. At that time, I remember it being that kind of situation.

JS: Were you involved with Ys IV on the PC Engine?¹⁴⁷

TT: No, I was not directly involved with that one.

<TK receives a phone call and excuses himself>

TT: For the PC Engine, I created Necromancer.¹⁴⁸ I did the programming directly.

JS: Please tell about any games you worked on. It doesn't have to be the PC Engine.

TT: Let's see... *<starts listing them, pauses to reflect>*

JS: And Dezeni Land?¹⁴⁹

TT: Oh yeah! I made that too.

JS: Many regard Dezeni Land as the first big success for Hudson. Do you agree? Can you confirm whether the original edition was the Sharp X1D 3-inch floppy version?

TT: Hmm... I don't think the floppy version came first. I think it was originally an audio cassette tape version for the original X1 model. Typically we developed games for the X1 first, and then ported to other systems such as the NEC PC-8801. But we created the X1 versions first.

We attached a hard disk to the X1. For the OS, this was still before MS-DOS, so we used CP/M and a macro assembler to carry out game development work. We created our own hard disk interface by hand. This is why the X1 versions of our games are the originals. I even wrote *Family BASIC* on the X1. The CPU is different between the X1 and the Famicom, so I used a cross assembler. After that, MS-DOS was released, and eventually we stopped using CP/M.

MF: Excluding the little games to demo computers, was Dezeni Land the first full-fledged game Hudson created?

TT: Not necessarily. Back then we created a huge number of titles, and we were selling them by mail-order through the magazines. Meanwhile, other companies besides Hudson started developing and selling Japanese computer games, and American developers were circulating their games within Japan as well. The Apple II was a notable presence, and many shops in Akihabara were importing Apple II machines from the US and selling them.

These small, early games were mostly action games. But we made too many of them. It wasn't as bad as the Atari shock,¹⁵⁰ but sales were going down. About two or three years before Dezeni Land, the first adventure games for the Apple II appeared from the US. These were very popular, and I myself obtained several of them from overseas and played them. Since action games weren't selling as well, we decided to change our approach and make a different type of game. Just as I was wondering about what kind of game to make, Tokyo Disneyland opened. I went there on holiday and had a great time.

MF: You came up with the premise for Dezeni Land?¹⁵¹

TT: Yes. I thought Disneyland was fun. Nowadays a game like that seems ridiculous, not just because of trademark issues, but because the very idea of making a parody of Disneyland is absurd. But back then, personal computers were still an extremely minor presence, and a highly limited number of people were playing these games. It wasn't a market that Disney would have noticed. Of course, that market gradually grew up over time.

In the beginning, a single programmer working alone could create a new mini action-game every two weeks or so. As long as you had a gameplay idea, some graphics, and an illustration for the packaging, you had a complete game. But over time these types of games stopped selling, and so we decided to invest more time and resources into each game. This is what led to the new style of game development that started with Dezeni Land.



From left: Dezeni Land (PC-8801) was followed Dezeni World (PC-8801, middle & right), which also mocked several films

JS: Can you recall an early Hudson game called Cannon Ball for the PC-6001?¹⁵²

TT: That was another person, not me, but that's an example of the games we would create in two weeks. We would base the entire game around one idea. <laughs> We reached a limit on what we could accomplish with that style of development, and the number of copies sold per title was decreasing. Hudson decided to change tactics, and take the time to make a single game that would sell many, many copies.

JS: Apparently Mitchell bought the rights to Cannon Ball and made the Pang series, also known as Pomping World. Can you recall the deal between Hudson and Mitchell?¹⁵³

TT: I didn't know about that! Pomping World? I've heard of it. But the deal would have been handled by the business side of Hudson.

JS: It's 100% identical to Cannon Ball.

TT: Really? I didn't know! <laughs>

JS: You were speaking about producing lots of little games. I've been told that Hudson released over 800 games in total throughout its history.¹⁵⁴ Was quantity a priority? Do you feel it was a good business model?

TT: I'm speculating now, but one of the major questions was how many copies of each title we could ship. There were many other companies making games besides Hudson, so I think the strategy was to have many games in parallel, in case the sales for a single game did not pan out. Our bosses would keep telling us to work. "WORK!" <laughs> They would ask, "How many can you make this month?" It was like a mass production factory.

The result was that we would ship out many copies through distributors, but the retail stores would be left with many unsold copies, and they didn't know what to do with these leftover copies. Sometimes they would demand that Hudson buy them back. So publishing many products in parallel also created inventory problems. Ideally, everything would sell out,

but there was always leftover stock, and the more we published, the more the leftover stock grew. I would wonder to myself, "Isn't this going to be a problem?" <laughs>

On the developer side of the company, the constant pressure to create new titles every month was very stressful. Meanwhile, the business side had to deal with these inventory issues. We discussed these problems, and realised that the company might not be able to continue unless we changed course and focused on creating a smaller number of games that would sell more copies. That's what led to the change of direction.

So Hudson changed direction, and that led to some of the games we discussed earlier, such as Tomato-hime. Meanwhile, while we were making these games, we established a relationship with Nintendo thanks to the BASIC interpreter, and released Lode Runner and Nuts & Milk on the Famicom. This was risky, unknown territory for the company, because manufacturing these cartridge games required significant amounts of money. We wondered how much we would be able to distribute and sell. Meanwhile, from Nintendo's perspective, we were the very first third party to negotiate a license to develop Famicom games. So Nintendo didn't really know what to do, either. <laughs> We told Nintendo that we would create and sell Famicom games, and Nintendo imposed the condition that we had to manufacture the cartridges at their factory.



The Vanamo Online Game Museum

MF: The Nintendo games that Hudson ported to personal computers are highly unusual, and demonstrate how successful Hudson was in negotiating with Nintendo. Hudson convinced Nintendo to let them make a Mario game for the Sharp X1 and other computers. But a short time later, the Famicom exploded in popularity, and Nintendo no longer allowed its franchises such as Mario to appear on anything other than Nintendo hardware. Was Nintendo easy to negotiate with?

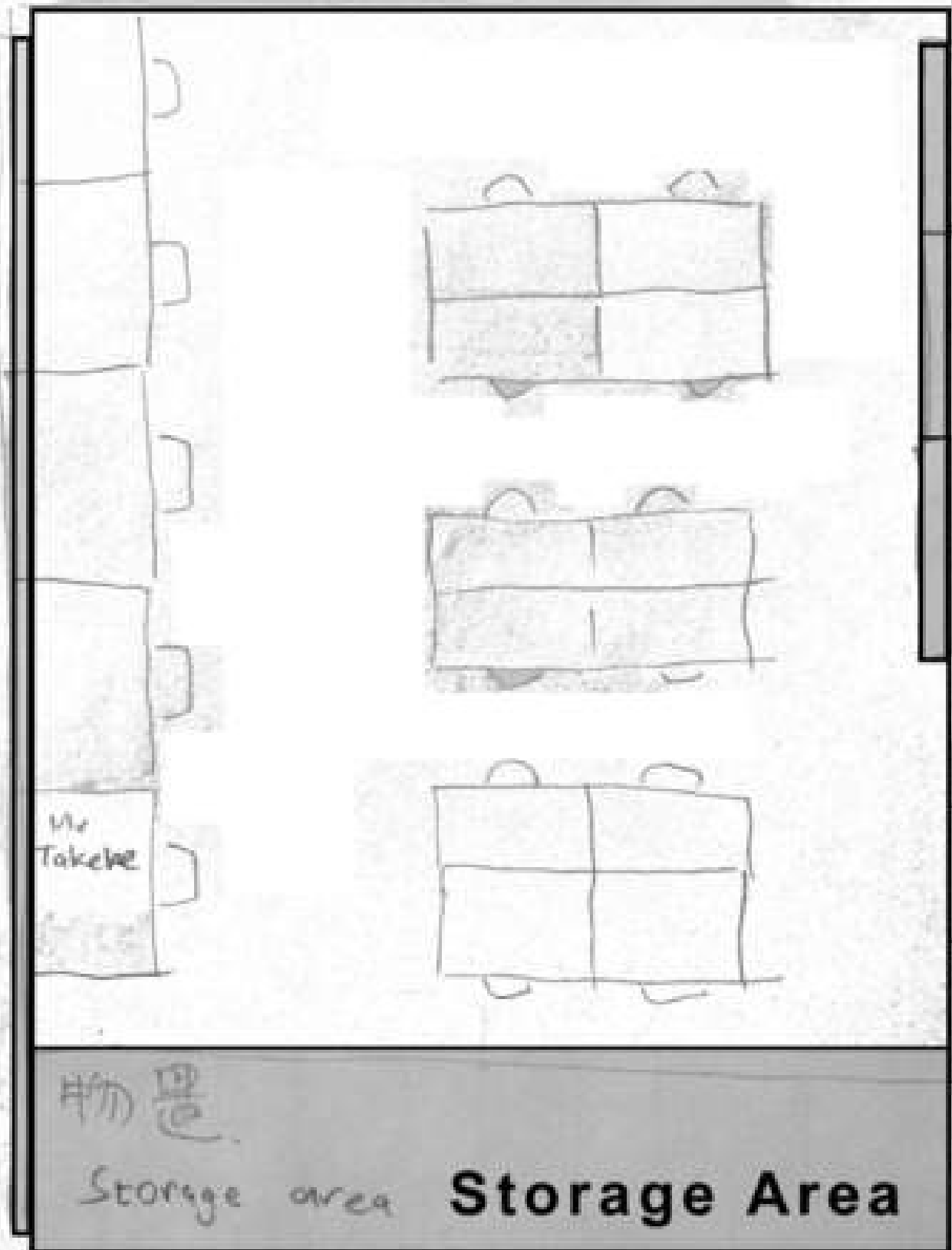
TT: Our first opportunity was with Family BASIC. Almost immediately after that, we proposed Lode Runner and Nuts & Milk, and told Nintendo that we wanted to make these

games for the Famicom. At that time, Nintendo had only released four or five cartridge games, such as Donkey Kong and Popeye. The world of home gaming still belonged to computers.¹⁵⁵ At Hudson our thinking was that the Famicom was an interesting machine, and if we created some games for it, they would definitely sell. So we made our first two titles, and they completely sold out. We thought, we should have produced more copies!

Meanwhile, the Family Computer started selling very well, and Nintendo handled the business in a smart way. This was very profitable for Hudson, too, so we decided to make more games. Not many other third party developers for the Famicom existed yet, so Nintendo and Hudson were responsible for most of the early Famicom games. A short time later, Nintendo released the original Super Mario Bros., and thanks to that, Famicom sales exploded. Hudson was still making computer games at this point, and we wondered whether we could obtain a license to port the game. I don't remember the exact details, but I think Nintendo agreed to license Super Mario Bros., as long as we didn't port an exact copy of their version. So we proceeded to create an original game of our own using the Mario character. That was how it started, and after that we also made conversions of Excitebike, Ice Climber, and Nintendo Golf.¹⁵⁶ Actually, come to think of it, I was the one who converted Nintendo Golf. I just remembered. <laughs> That was for the Sharp X1.

So the licensing consisted of a license for the right to use the Mario character, as well as specific licences for another three games, some of Nintendo's earliest home games. Nintendo granted us the license to create home computer versions. But then Nintendo went on to create their gigantic empire, <laughs> so they became more protective of their assets, and stopped licensing them out.

1981~1983



Hudson (Sapporo)

JS: Fascinating. Could you draw the layout of Hudson?

TT: Well, the layout changed over the years. There was the 1980s office, the 1990s office, and so on.

<short break, TT draws layout and signs book. While TT is drawing the old layout, MF takes the opportunity to look over a Dragon Quest: Monster Battle Road II arcade cabinet sitting in a corner of the conference room>[157](#)

TT: That's Dragon Quest: Monster Battle Road. We created the entire software here at our studio, Rocket Studio. You know the cards that you win from the game, which come out of the slot there? We've printed about 120 million of them.

MF: Wow! I love the idea of using the sword as part of the controls.

TT: People come up and think, it's Loto's Sword, what do we do?[158](#) *<laughs>*

MF: Seeing the sword, it really brings out the kid in you.

TT: Yes, we really wanted to show players the sword. Taito makes the hardware, and the bottom is made of clear acrylic so you can see the entire sword. Taito was very worried about it breaking and kids getting hurt. They were adamantly against making the bottom transparent, but we negotiated on the price and used reinforced acrylic. It won't break even if you kick it.

<TT finishes sketching>

TT: The office layout looked like this, I think. My desk was over here. We had Intel development machines here, or maybe here. I think it was like this. **(adjacent page, left)**





JS: Do you know anything about the abandoned Hudson factory on the outskirts of Sapporo? We visited yesterday. It was built 1992 or 1993 I believe. (top)

TT: Oh! You went there? When was that built... Oh yes, it was right when I was transferred from Tokyo back to Sapporo, so 1993?

MF: It's quite an impressive building.

TT: Isn't it, though? We thought the upper management had lost their minds. <laughs>

MF: What was developed there? Chronologically, it was built around the time of the PC-FX console.

TT: Originally the name of the building was the "Hudson Central Research Institute". It wasn't built for game development, but for things like development tools, and also hardware development. They also conducted research into things like image compression algorithms and GPS navigation software. Hudson is an interesting company, because we weren't just developing games, but also creating development tools, GPS navigation systems, and also hardware such as the graphics chips used in the PC Engine. We were making games of course, but Hudson also dabbled in other areas, such as assembly line systems for factories, portable computing terminals for the East Japan Railway Company, LCD watches, and gamepads. Hudson was not specialised in solely making games. It was more like a department store, bringing together many different, unrelated divisions.

I believe Hudson may have been the first company to use integrated circuit cards for a game console, with the HuCards for the PC Engine.

JS: How did Hudson build its national retail network, and how was this connected to SoftBank?¹⁵⁹

TT: Well, Hudson was originally based in Sapporo, but it already had a branch in Tokyo by 1980 or so. I was also in Sapporo at first, but was transferred to Tokyo and worked there for a long time. We created another game development division in Tokyo and hired more people. Obviously, there are many companies concentrated in Tokyo, so Hudson arranged sales with them. At that time, we were already selling quite a bit of computer software. This was before Famicom, back when we were being told to make two games a month. *<laughs>* If we said it was impossible, our bosses would say, "OK, one a month then."

Around this time, the company president at the time had the idea of opening another office in Berkley, California. He would say, "California *is* Berkley!" And our reaction was, "Huh?!" In Berkley, the Hudson staff were doing things like managing arcades, and many of the staff were either of Chinese descent or Japanese-Americans. They formed relationships with other companies in Berkley, which helped Hudson's business from time to time. It was through this that Hudson came into contact with Masayoshi Son, the founder of SoftBank.

Later, Son-san returned to Japan and founded SoftBank, originally a distributor for computer software. Hudson was a game maker, SoftBank was a distributor, so it was a natural fit, and SoftBank began distributing Hudson's games. SoftBank wasn't immediately successful and endured a number of ups and downs in its early days. This is what I've heard, but I think Hudson helped SoftBank in various ways when they were in danger, or rather when they were going through difficult times.

<talk about profile photo and other arrangements>

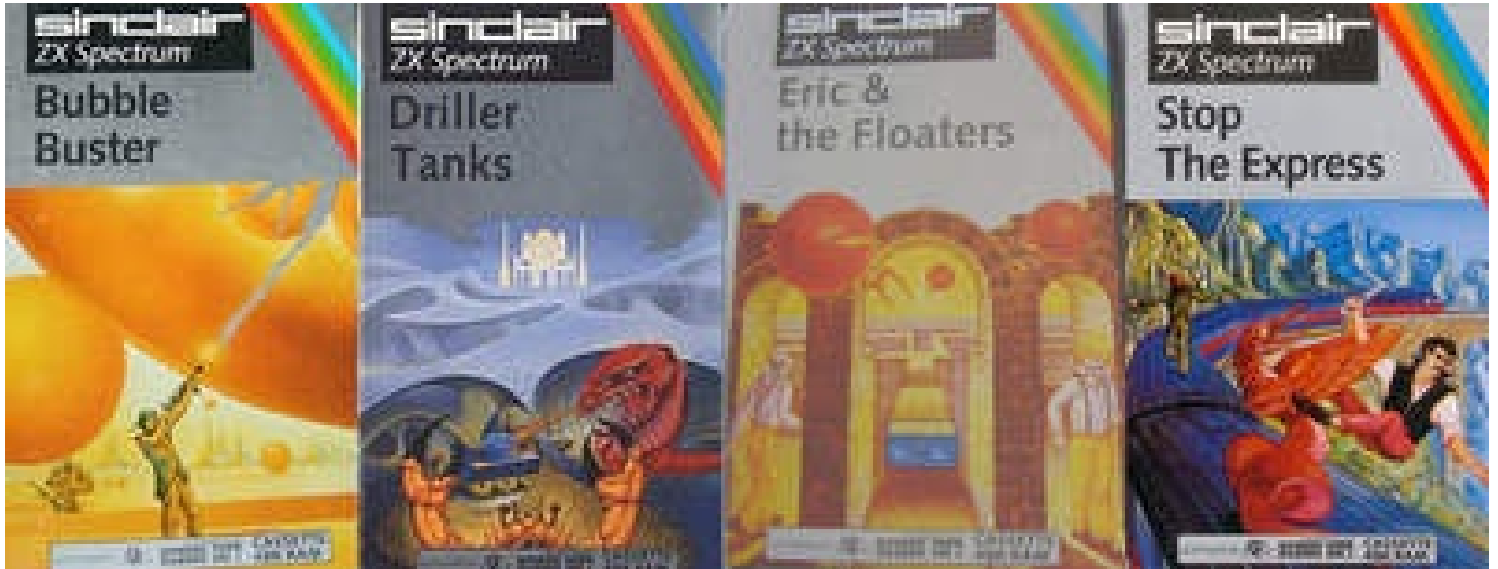
TT: My Hudson employee number was #7, which means I was the seventh person that Hudson ever hired. I'm in the single digits! *<laughs>* Hudson ultimately closed two years ago, but I think the last employee number was around #1'500.

JS: Do you know anything about the British ZX Spectrum? That computer received several games by Hudson.¹⁶⁰

TT: I remember the Spectrum, but I think other people did the actual programming. The first time I went to London, it was for a computer convention called PC World, I believe. My boss told me to go. So I went to London to help out at the Hudson booth. *<laughs>* My memories of those days are a little fuzzy... This was probably around 1982 I think? We took out a booth for the convention, and tried to find businesses willing to port our games to the computers popular in the UK.

Sorry I can't be more specific. I remember that including the show prep, we were there for seven days. On the last day, we were told that we could do some sightseeing, so we went to the British Museum. Personally, I loved London, with all of its historical buildings. Westminster was incredible. My one regret was that I never got to go to a pub... I had really wanted to drink a beer at a British pub, the Sherlock Holmes Public House & Restaurant, in particular. *<laughs>* Because Japan based its traffic system off of England's, walking around in the city felt quite comfortable. I'd like to visit London again one day.

Unfortunately, I don't have any pictures from that era. I'm sorry about that. Those sorts of business deals were made on the development side, so I don't know much about them. All I remember is the company's then-president bringing in a ZX Spectrum and ordering us to make games for it. It had a Z80 CPU, so we started by porting over our "package", and then the games themselves. Because of the packages, we were able to easily produce large amounts of ports.^{[161](#)}



JS: *Kaeru Shooter* used a "transport package", for easier conversion to other hardware. Can you describe this?

TT: At the time, different personal computer platforms were being released by lots of different electronics manufacturers. Dedicated game consoles didn't exist yet. The hardware of each platform had lots of subtle little differences, but taken as a whole they were quite similar, and a lot of them used the same Z80 processor. In order to make games easier to develop, we separated out the hardware-dependent components and logical components into a package similar to modern SDKs. Then, when a new computer was released, we'd customise those components for the new hardware so that we could develop our games for the new platform quickly. Some of the machines had different CPUs, so this package ended up being ported to the 6800 and 6809, among others.

<Nico Datiche and Joseph Redon arrive>

JS: Sorry we never had much time. I'll ask more via email.

TT: It would be my pleasure. We didn't have much time today. Like I was saying earlier, among game development companies, Hudson had many faces, so there are many stories to tell about its different facets. It was quite unique among Japanese companies.

MF: Absolutely. The way they worked on both the hardware side and the software side is impressive.

TT: It was a good company. <laughs> But I have a lot of stories I can't tell publicly.

MF: I'd really like to hear some of those!

TT: Hmm... I'm afraid I can't talk about those unless we go to Susukino.¹⁶² <laughs> Then we can talk about the dark side of Hudson. <laughs> Hudson is like Latin now, it's not going to change. <laughs> I still cherish many fond memories of it. There are things I can say now because Hudson no longer exists.

JS: Let's document it before no one is left to tell the story.

JR: Takahashi Meijin has spoken quite harshly about Hudson before.

TT: Yes, I've known Takahashi since he joined Hudson.

MF: Saito-san over at dB-Soft told us that Takahashi Meijin wasn't really all that good at videogames! <laughs>

JR: Takahashi admitted as much himself!

TT: He does his best. <laughs> He did the public relations. The boss said, "We need PR! Takahashi, you do it!" Takahashi said, "Who, me?"

JR: His job was to be the *Meijin*.¹⁶³

TT: That's right. His official position was the "*Meijin*". I thought it was strange. <laughs>

MF: Yes, but at the same time, the work Hudson did with events like the Famicom Caravan¹⁶⁴ was extremely valuable in terms of creating a videogame culture.

TT: I think the children needed a hero, someone to look up to. I still don't understand why they turned some middle-aged man into an idol, but it did help draw children into the world of games. That was part of the genius of Kudo-san, Hudson's original founder. He didn't plan things, he just followed his instincts. This was one of those things that became unexpectedly successful. We didn't understand the things he made us do, and we didn't like it, but afterwards we would realise that he was right. He was a very innovative person. Hudson's weak point was that we couldn't keep it going. We were ahead of the curve, and the rest of the world didn't catch up in time.¹⁶⁵

JS: Hudson was also ahead with high-definition. You guys had *Hi-Ten Bomberman* at the 1993 Super Caravan!

TT: We developed *Hi-Ten Bomberman* because we thought it might be fun to have a 10 player version for competitive events. With 10 players, using custom hardware¹⁶⁶ and an expanded screen, the game looked quite impressive. With 10 characters moving at once, it looked like a

lot of fun to the spectators, but for the actual players it was nearly impossible to process everything that was going on, so it was surprisingly easy to get hit. Increasing the number of players made for a very lively experience, with lots of secret alliances and betrayals and such.

<overlapping chatter, TT starts talking to JR>

JR: At the GPS we concentrate on preserving games from the 1980s. We collected many Hudson games from 1979 to 1985, but it's difficult. We have around half of them. Hudson was publishing on every available platform.

TT: That's right. They told us to just keep making games!

JR: Dezeni Land is quite a major title.

TT: Looking back I think, "Why the hell did I make something like that?" I was lucky Disney didn't get angry. *<laughs>* There's no way you could make that today.

<talk about taking photo, TT leaves the room, JS-MF-JR converse about Hudson vending machine, TT returns>

JS: Before we go, can you comment on Hudson's mysterious vending machine?

TT: Hmm... I can't quite remember.

JS: The Preservation Society has a flyer. According to the flyer, it was available in a shop of some kind in Hokkaido.

TT: I think we made it, but it wasn't actually available at retail. We had a plan, made a prototype, but... It may have been used as a demo for a computer show or something. Back then they were called "*maicom* shows".

JR: This would have been before the Takeru software vending machines, so it would have been the first of its kind in the world! It's a shame it didn't work out.^{[167](#)}

TT: Ultimately, it didn't attract customers. I don't mean the end users, but the retail shops. The store owners didn't want to install it. It was too early for its time.

JR: Before this, a company called Brother made the Takeru vending machines. Hudson had the same project, but they did it even before Brother. It was a kind of vending machine, not tapes, but EPROMs.

TT: It was around the time of the PC Engine.

JR: Actually, I think it was before that. This was around 1984, according to the catalogue. So I think it was for the Bee Card system on the MSX.^{[168](#)}

TT: You're quite knowledgeable! <laughs>

JR, to JS: I have a rare catalogue distributed at this *maicom* show, so we have a picture of the machine and games that were going to be released. It's interesting because it's not ROM, but instead a rewritable HuCard. At this time they weren't called HuCards yet. They were called Bee Cards, after the Hudson bee mascot. But now we know that it was never used anywhere in any shops.



Bee Pack along with the Bee Card game Takahashi no Boukenjima; photo by Julio Gracia of [MSX.org](https://www.msx.org)

JS: When was the Hudson Bee mascot created?

TT: It was always there, since the beginning of the company. In amateur radio, you use a callsign. The radio area for Hokkaido is designated JA8. The number 8 is pronounced *hachi* in Japanese, which is also the word for bee.¹⁶⁹ So it was a very simple idea, conceived by the

company founder.

Email follow-ups

Given the brevity of our encounter, I sent follow up questions via email. Several were shots in the dark based on MobyGames listings. It was certainly worth it, since I was able to email scans of the unreleased Bonk RPG featured in magazines. The truth may surprise you...

JS: You're Executive Producer on Vertical Force. Thoughts?

TT: That was the Virtual Boy game, right? We had multiple teams creating numerous titles simultaneously, and since I was assigned to a different project, I didn't know anything about this title. Despite being only red, the Virtual Boy had LEDs that allowed it to display very clear images. We may have liquid crystal displays now, but I still think the Virtual Boy was probably just too ahead of its time.

JS: I've attached some images of the unreleased PC Genjin (PC) RPG, also known as RPC Genjin (RPC). Please tell me everything. Super hi-res images here:

chrismcovell.com/secret/PCE_1990Q3.html#rpcgenjin

TT: PC Genjin was a pun based off of the name of NEC and Hudson's joint game console, the PC Engine. PC Engine led to PC Genjin,¹⁷⁰ meaning a primitive man, which was the basis of the caveman motif. All of the characters had a caveman style to them. The characters were actually designed by Red Company, who handled the planning and design of the titles. The PC Genjin games were action titles.

Back in those days, there was a magazine called *PC Engine Monthly*, which ran a column by Red Company. They ran mocked-up pictures of a role-playing game titled RPC Genjin as a joke, but it got a big enough response that they decided to put it into production. But since it had just been an idea off the top of someone's head, it didn't really develop into anything, and the truth is that the project collapsed without any real development occurring.¹⁷¹

JS: Red Entertainment - the company had a strong connection to Hudson, and also your Rocket Studio.

TT: Our relationship stretches back to the Red Company era - they were the predecessor of Red Entertainment. Shortly after the PC Engine was released, NEC began developing CD-ROM as a high-capacity device. To take advantage of it, they wanted to include the things that wouldn't fit on their solid-state ROM cartridges: epic stories, anime-esque cut scenes, voice overs from actors... Things like that. Those sorts of game design challenges can't be solved at an engineering level, so they turned to Red Company, which was operating as a team of content creators. Red Company began developing Tengai Makyō, and went on to do a lot of different projects with us. My last collaboration with Red at Hudson was Kita e.¹⁷² When I was at Rocket Studio, we collaborated with Red on N.U.D.E.@ Natural Ultimate Digital Experiment for Xbox.

JS: Can you comment on the Hudson school in Hokkaido?

TT: In 1991, Hudson started a game school in order to foster new talent for the game industry. Many of its graduates joined Hudson, and others ended up being hired at game companies throughout the country. To this day, I still occasionally meet alumni of the Hudson school, and discuss happy memories of that time.

There were other game companies that established schools, but even still, I think it's a very unusual thing to do in Japan. However, the school didn't last long. While it did achieve its goal of fostering new talent, when Japan's economic bubble burst, it had a severe impact on the school's business prospects, and the school closed its doors after barely five years in business.

JS: When and why did you leave Hudson?

TT: I left in 1999. Hudson had become a large company, and had around 500 employees at the time. I didn't have anything against the company per se, but working there was becoming a hassle in a bunch of different ways. I left because I wanted to make games in a small team again.





JS: How did you feel when Konami bought Hudson?

TT: Quite a lot of time had passed between my leaving Hudson and its absorption into Konami, so it didn't affect me personally, but I saw it as another sign of changing times in the industry. I had hoped that one day the company might regain its independence from Konami, but I guess they never managed to pull that off.

In 2014, when Konami Sapporo was completely dissolved, I remember thinking, "Well, I guess Hudson is finally lost and gone." I had a feeling that would happen sooner or later, so I was hardly surprised when the announcement came. But Hudson had been an interesting company - in more ways than one - and I was still hit with a sad twinge of nostalgia.

JS: Can you recall any unreleased games?

TT: These things were a long time ago, so I'm afraid I don't remember much. My primary

interests were in things like development environments, development tools, and information sharing systems, so I always made a variety of tools for my projects. I was creating integrated web servers for my projects, tools that converted game scenarios into flow charts for easier editing, and other such organisational tools before those sorts of things were the norm. Since they would be made for one specific project, they would be deleted at the project's end. Looking back on it now, it seems like such a waste. If I had focused on designing them as general-use tools instead, that might have been a real boon to our development process.

Projects got cancelled for a wide variety of reasons. Sometimes the prototypes we made weren't received well, or a project spent too much time in development and would no longer be relevant in the marketplace, or by the time the game was nearing completion the console it was developed for had been abandoned by the platform holder.

To the company, each game was a business venture. As soon as they decided a project was unlikely to be profitable, it was usually brought to a quick and definitive end. But sometimes games did manage to teeter along at the brink of cancellation, and ultimately found their way off of the chopping block and onto store shelves. At one point *Milon's Secret Castle*¹⁷³ was just barely being kept alive by two engineers, without an end in sight. The company was considering cancelling it altogether, but asked me to salvage it instead. The game's assets seemed like they had potential, so I took the game apart and reconstructed it from the ground up, and somehow managed to get it ready for release in just three months!

JS: Can you share any secrets no one knows about?

TT: In the pre-internet era, it wasn't easy to get the sort of technical information developers needed. Everything had to be made from scratch, and the ethos of "if you need something, make it yourself" even extended to hardware at times. I remember there was one year when we had a lot of new employees, and we had them each build their own computers as a research project.

Each employee was given a schematic for an 8-bit computer, a list of components, and some money, and sent to Akihabara to buy everything they needed. When they came back, they had to follow the schematics and solder it together. I had prepared a BASIC interpreter in advance, so that they would be able to run BASIC on their computers as soon as they were correctly assembled. Somehow, we managed to get every last one of their computers working. The goal was for them to experience how computers work. It was a really interesting exercise.¹⁷⁴

JS: How did your company, Rocket Studio, start?

TT: Rocket Studio was established in 1999 by 12 former Hudson employees, including myself. Our last title with Hudson was *Kita e*, mentioned previously; half of that development team became founding members.

It was in the summer of 1998 when we first started thinking about forming our own studio, but we didn't get serious until February 1999. That's when we began the process of establishing the company in earnest. We were going through the process of registering with the government and securing office space as we were in the final stages of developing *Kita e*. We submitted the master of the game on 15 March 1999, and resigned on the same day. Rocket

Studio was officially established three days later, on 18 March. It was a very busy week!

We're something of a tech collective, as nearly our entire staff - myself included - are programmers. Our mission statement is... Well, we don't have anything cool like that. But if we did, it would probably be something like: "We program for computers." We don't restrict ourselves to games. Every type of computer needs programs, and as a team of programmers, that's how we want to make a name for ourselves.

Unfortunately, since Rocket Studio does contracted development, there are many titles that we are not allowed to disclose our involvement with. These are what our typical titles look like. (see p72)

JS: What are your future plans?

TT: I've been in the game industry for nearly 35 years - from its birth to the present day. I may be something of a historical artifact already. <laughs> I believe the game industry is healthiest when it's in the hands of young engineers who are excited to explore interesting new ideas. From a business perspective, I know it isn't quite that simple, but I look forward to seeing what the new generation comes up with.

As for me, I think it would be nice to give something back to the game industry, and help develop this new talent. That said, I don't yet have any concrete plans to do anything of the sort...

JS: Any other messages?

TT: As computers have grown into a worldwide industry, games have followed, becoming a major industry as well. Perhaps the way the industry developed has been for the best, but for me personally, I'd prefer to see more unique games be released. In particular, I'd love to see more games that can make players laugh. In Japan, computers have long attracted a certain type of "enthusiast", and because of that, I think the game industry has been moving in something of an idiosyncratic direction.

In the past, there was an experimental cycle of trial and error that often produced unique results. We'd develop any idea we could think of, making up the procedures as we went along, throwing in some of this and some of that. Create, destroy, rebuild... This sort of experimentation was occurring throughout the country, not just at Hudson. It produced some smash hits and there were also many games which were branded as *kusoge*. Those misses certainly were not masterpieces, and they may have been a little weird, but a lot of them were games that I happily played, again and again. There were many one-off prototypes or ideas for old games; I see the scattershot inspirations of the games from that era as hitting the true essence of what games can be. It's that aspect of the games of the past that I think developers of today could benefit from exploring a little bit more.

Of course, the games of that era are rapidly fading from our memories, and that's what makes what you're doing so incredibly valuable, John. Thank you for loving the games of Japan.



IWASAKI, Hiromasa

DOB: 27 July 1963 / Birthplace: Kyoto* / Blood Type: B

~Selected Biography~

Street Fighter, PCE-CD (1988 - special thanks)

No·Ri·Ko, PCE-CD (1988 - special thanks)

/ **Susa no Oudensetsu** - PCE (April, 1989)

Based on the manga by Go Nagai. An ambitious modern-day RPG with a lot of cool ideas, like a day/night cycle affecting enemies and NPCs, visible enemies on the world map, and recruitable partners. Also features Cannon Ball as an unlockable minigame! Never released in English, one can only hope a fan-translation is attempted.



Ys: Book I & II, PCE-CD (1989)

Bomber Boy / *Dynablaster* / *Atomic Punk*, GB (1990)



II MARU / **Tengai Makyō II: Manjimaru**, PCE-CD (1992)

Flagship title for the updated PC-Engine CD-ROM, this was one of (if not *the*) most expensive game of its day; think of it as Hudson's analogue to Shenmue. Selling incredibly well, multiple sequels and spin-offs would follow across various formats, making this a rival to classic franchises like Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest and Megami Tensei (it also followed their gameplay templates). Pretty much none of the series reached the West, so check out the detailed feature on Hardcore Gaming 101.

Metamor Jupiter, PCE-CD (1993)

Emerald Dragon, PCE-CD (1994)

Linda3, PCE-CD (1995)

My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, mobile (2012, Design director)

NAtURAL DOcTrINE, multi (2014)



Interview with Hiromasa IWASAKI

15 October 2013, Tokyo / Duration: 2h 12m

I first came in contact with Hiromasa Iwasaki in 2011, interviewing him via email for an article in *GamesTM* magazine (issue 111, p152-159). The article was "*Falcom: Legacy of Ys*" and covered the entire history of the *Ys* series of Action-RPGs. Other interviewees included Toshihiro Kondo, the then president of Falcom, arranged through XSeed, and former Hudson US president John Greiner, who back in the day helped Mr Iwasaki with the localisation of the US-bound Turbo CD update. This *GamesTM* article was a lot of fun, documenting a beloved series, and the interviews within were part of the inspiration to create an entire book of interviews.

Although my *GamesTM* questions focused exclusively on his many roles for *Ys: Book I&II*, Mr Iwasaki has in fact been involved in a diverse range of fascinating ventures, including Sony's initial involvement with the CDi medium, and Hudson's flagship Super CD-ROM release, *Tengai Makyou II*. He was also a games journalist, writing for popular Japanese magazines, and in later life produced a blog and *doujinshi* (indie) magazines, in an effort to document the truth about games. So I was keen to interview him again, face to face, and dig deeper into his life story.

When I started my Kickstarter project which led to these books, Mr Iwasaki tweeted every single day to his followers in an effort to generate publicity. He also invited me to the annual Hudson night (5 October), where he and other former Hudson staff gathered to share their memories and secrets with a captivated audience in an underground (literally) Tokyo club. Most generously, Mr Iwasaki also promised to introduce me to eight further interviewees, all with significant portfolios, once I arrived in Japan. Unfortunately given my tight schedule I was unable to meet these contacts, but I did finally meet the man who helped make these books a reality. Due to the brevity of our meeting, some follow-up questions were done via email.

JS: It's good to meet! I wasn't able to catch you at Hudson Night because you were on stage.¹⁷⁵ How have you been?

Hiromasa Iwasaki: I'm fine, but now it's really crazy busy. <laughs> Because now I'm working for two companies and I have to check the KPI for a game,¹⁷⁶ so I've been really, really crazy busy! <laughs>

JS: Wow, two companies. Let's start with something easy then. What's the first game you saw?

HI: Ever? Ahh, perhaps my first videogame was... <reflects> In 1975 or '76? It was while on Hawaii island.

JS: Hawaii, America?

HI: Oh yeah. My father took the family to Hawaii, and that's how I found TV games, or videogames. Not here in Japan. It was at the hotel. Perhaps that was, maybe, Atari's *Pong*? It was Atari's *Pong* and I saw it on... I don't know how to describe it. <gestures> It was the

cocktail-type tabletop.

JS: You were on holiday?

HI: Yes, that's right. The summer holiday for my elementary school.

JS: At what point did you feel you wanted to make games?

HI: Ahh - it was in 1979! Back then, in Japan, the movie *Star Wars* opened. That was amazing! And also, a lot of books were published - including lots of *Star Wars* fanbooks. In one of these books I read about videogames - a personal computer game named Star Trek. It was Star Trek for the Apple II.¹⁷⁷ I really wanted to play it! <laughs> So I checked a lot of things, and found that if I could program - if I could write these computer programs - then I could play a lot, *every game!* <laughs>

JS: Because you could make them yourself.

HI: Yes. So I wanted to make that game, by myself. So as to play Star Trek.

JS: Did you study programming formally? At university?

HI: No. <shakes head> No, no, no. Just studying programming by myself, in high school.

JS: Self-taught. Did you start with BASIC?

HI: Yes. First I learned BASIC, but BASIC is too slow. Second, I learned some assembler and some other, very small languages. Like, perhaps you don't know these, but VTL¹⁷⁸ or GAME. Actually, GAME was one of the famous Japanese personal computer programming languages. GAME language, G-A-M-E. <spells it> It means *General Algorithmic Micro Expressions*.¹⁷⁹

JS: So although your first *full* game for Hudson was Susa no Oudensetsu, you'd actually made games before.

HI: Yes. Before, I made lots of amateur games. For myself.

JS: Do you still have these games?

HI: Ahh... <exhales> Basically, no! <laughs> Or perhaps I can find an audio cassette tape in my hometown, in my parents' house. But perhaps I can't read it anymore.

JS: Old media biodegrades, and you'd need an old PC.

HI: Yes, that's right. So perhaps we cannot see it.

JS: What was your first company? Your Wikipedia page says you were involved with the

Philips CDi format?

HI: Yes, that's right. My first company, first professional work, was making some authoring tools for the Philips CDi, for a little Japanese venture company.

JS: CDi was the "Green Book" CD format, right? Audio was "Red Book". I've interviewed some CDi game developers, so I find this interesting.^{[180](#)}

HI: Basically that's correct. CD had three formats, called *<writes it down>* "RED BOOK", "YELLOW BOOK" and "GREEN BOOK". Red is for CD Digital Audio, Yellow is for CD-ROM, and Green is for the CDi. This CDi format contains an OS and some new [modified] CD-ROM format. The OS was named CDRDOS, coming from OS/9-68000 and made by Microware in Iowa, USA. And also CDi has CD-XA, or eXtended Audio. This was a really good format for streaming audio in 1987.

JS: You authored CDi tools? I know about the American side, but nothing about CDi in Japan. How did this start?

HI: In Japan our company was consulted by one of Osaka University's professors. And Osaka University, during the early 1980s, joined with various companies and made a lot of things. One of the largest companies which it joined with was Sony - and Sony wanted to use the CDi format. So this professor from Osaka University brought some people together to make a company for producing CDi content. Some people informed me, and they asked, "Do you want to make some digital entertainment?" *<laughs>* And I really wanted to do that! So I joined!

JS: You were a student at the time?

HI: Yes, that's right. I was a student from a dental university. *<laughs>*

JS: Dentistry?!

HI: Yeah! *<laughs>* Not computers. But I knew some of Osaka University's professors. So something that they asked me was, "Do you want to join this venture company?" And I really wanted to do that, so I quit the dental university and joined the venture business.

JS: Almost a dentist... How many years did you complete?

HI: Three years, three grades. It takes six years to become a dentist. My mother and father told me that I should stop this crazy thing and I should keep studying to be a dentist. They said keep computers as your hobby. *<laughs>* But I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be a creator of games, or digital entertainment, or computer graphics, or something like that.

JS: One phone call changed your life.

HI: Yes!

JS: The computer programming knowledge that you had, that was purely from self study?

HI: Yes, basically it was all from self studying.

JS: You said Sony wanted to be involved with the CDi?

HI: Yes, that's right. Basically, first Sony and Philips made the format for audio CDs, calling it Red Book. It's the standardisation for audio CDs. Secondly, they made the Yellow Book, which is for the physical structure of CD-ROM. How to define a CD-ROM. And they also wanted to make a software and hardware standardisation - that's the Green Book. It's for CDi. Sony and Philips thought that a multimedia machine could sell a lot around the world.

JS: Have you heard of Steve Yellick?¹⁸¹ He was a member of the Red Book team.

HI: I don't know - I've not heard of him.

JS: What's interesting with the CDi is, Nintendo and Sony joined together to make a CD add-on for the Super Famicom. This fell through and later Nintendo made a deal with Philips.

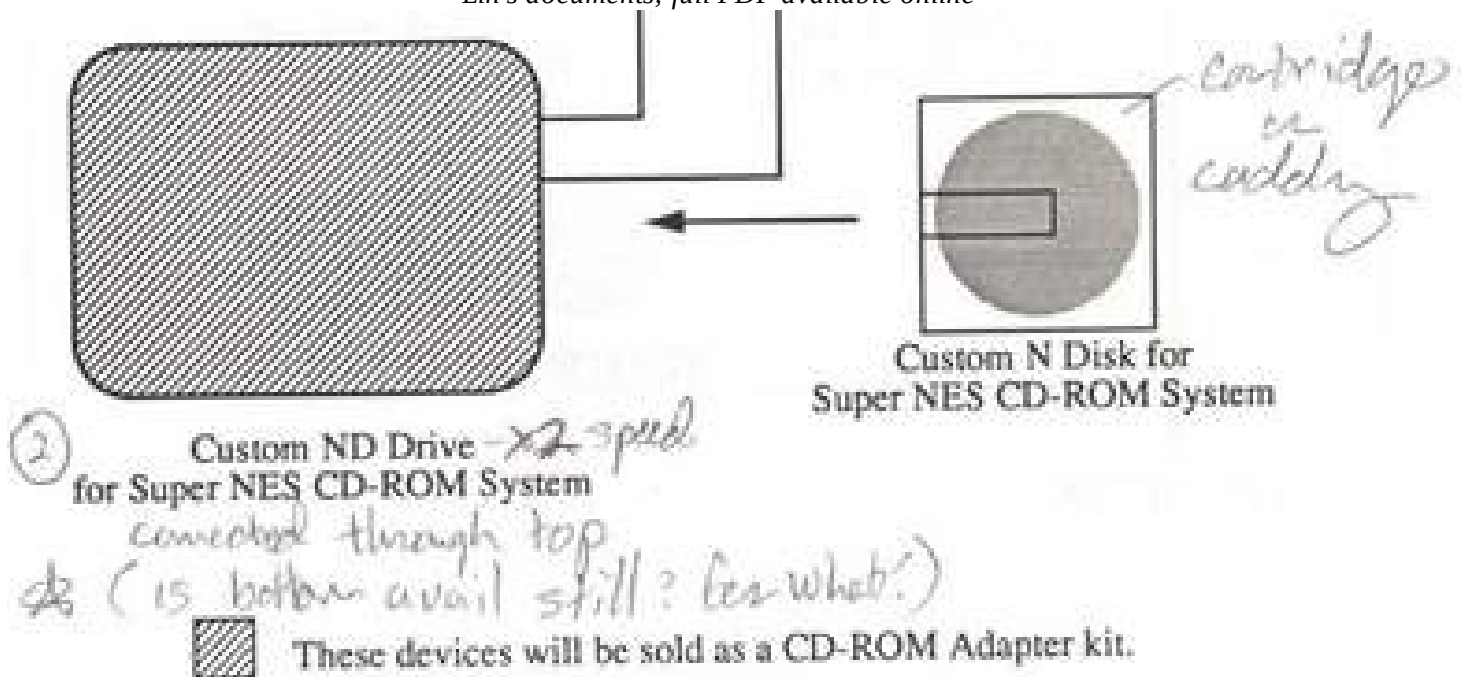
HI: I know about some of that! <laughs> Because a while after I made *Ys: Book I&II*, I was visiting Nintendo and heard about the Super Famicom and Philip's CD-ROM. Basically they made a prototype, which I saw. They had a caddy case, and in the case they had battery back-up, and lots of... They also had a CPU inside, and it was almost like a Super Famicom, but it was just an adapter.

JS: Amazing! Tell me more...

HI: It was early 1993.¹⁸² I went to attend a technology conference concerning the Super Famicom CD-ROM adaptor that, at the time, Nintendo was planning to release in collaboration with Philips. The Nintendo CD-ROM used disc cases, so you couldn't touch the disc, and the cases had contact terminals and built-in SRAM to serve as a battery back-up.¹⁸³ [The system] used an upgraded version of the Super-FX as the CPU.¹⁸⁴



Above: Vector upscaled image of a tiny concept drawing printed in magazines of the time. **Below:** Partial scan of Steve Lin's documents; full PDF available online



JS: Whoa! I've seen prototype photos. Apparently development kits ended up in some collectors' hands.

HI: <laughs>

JS: You were a programmer for PC Engine and its CD-ROM, and in one article¹⁸⁵ spoke

about how easy it was to program for. What did you think of the CDi hardware?

HI: *<sharp inhale>* The CDi hardware is not good. The CDi hardware was not good for making games. So when I attended meetings, with Sony and Philips in the US,¹⁸⁶ I told them, "This hardware does not have a lot of sprites. This hardware's graphics mode is not suitable for creating action games, or some kind of arcade style game." I told them this, and they said to me, *<assumes a different posture>* "This is not videogame hardware. This is multimedia hardware. Not videogame hardware. And we think videogame and multimedia hardware are not competitors. Also, multimedia hardware will win!" *<laughs>* They told me this!¹⁸⁷

JS: Yes! An American CDi developer, Dale DeSharone, said Philips was funding multimedia projects, like a Smithsonian CD, for millions of dollars. And while they did give funding for games, it was only around \$600k, much less! Funny thing is, when the CDi came out, few bought the multimedia products - mainly the games sold. Also, the way the hardware worked, you could only scroll around 2.5 screens in one direction, horizontally or vertically.

HI: Yep. And also the CDi doesn't have, uhm... Well, it only has one sprite! Perhaps Philips thought that this would be for use with a mouse, or something like a pointing cursor. Not for creating *Mario*, or something like that. *<laughs>* Also when I was working for CDi, I played a lot of videogames on the Famicom, and I knew that I could not make that style of game on CDi. I couldn't make an action game or something similar. Perhaps I could only make an adventure game, titles like that. So I did not want to spend much more time on CDi. I wanted to quit the company and find some other place, and then at last Hudson found me.

JS: Which years? The PCE CD-ROM came out 4 December 1988, and the CDi came out 3 December 1991. I heard they wanted to release the CDi many years before, but there was a problem with the hardware, so it was delayed.

HI: Yes, that's right. Basically the problem with the hardware was the video chip. Some CDi graphics modes, like Delta YUV and CLUT Mode, were really powerful. *<spells it> Colour Look Up Table.* And Delta YUV is a little difficult to explain.¹⁸⁸ Before JPEG, it was really good for compression and showed natural colours in pictures.

JS: Your first full game at Hudson was...

HI: ...*Susa no Oudensetsu*, yes!



Susa no Oudensetsu (PCE)

JS: You said Hudson found you. Did they approach you?

HI: It's really tough to explain. <laughs> I was also a journalist for game magazines, and I was working on some books. An editor for one of these books started to market a Famicom magazine, perhaps in 1986 or early 1987? This editor's name was Someya-san. <spells it out> So Someya-san knew me well, and he joined KMO, or Kadokawa Media Office. And Kadokawa is the publisher behind *Comptiq* magazine.¹⁸⁹ As a result, Kadokawa knew really well about Hudson. Anyway, Hudson was starting the PC Engine project and they really needed a lot of programmers, and lots of game designers. Hudson told KMO, they first told KMO, "Are there any game designers, or are there any programmers who really want to make games?" Since Someya-san knew about me, he asked me, "Do you want to make videogames?" <laughs> I really wanted to make videogames, so I first designed my game,

Susa no Oudensetsu, and had a presentation at Hudson. And they told me, "Ah, it's OK."
<laughs>



Susa no Oudensetsu (PCE)

JS: You designed it on paper first?

HI: Yes, paper first. It was not released outside Japan.

JS: How would you feel if it was fan-translated into English?

HI: <genuine surprise> What?! <laughs> I'd accept it, and I'd be happy, but... <laughs> Susa no Oudensetsu is my first commercial game, and my first role on game design. For consumers. And ehh... It's too crazy. Basically, I put in too many ideas. Susa no Oudensetsu is still, even after 20 years, it's still a unique game. <laughs> It still has unique conversations,

and a unique engagement system, and lots of other unique things. Even now.

JS: That's why I want to play it in English. If someone started a fan-translation, you'd be happy to see that?

HI: Yeah. *<laughs>* I think it's up to them.

JS: Since it's an RPG it's difficult to enjoy without fluency.

HI: Language problems. *<nods>*

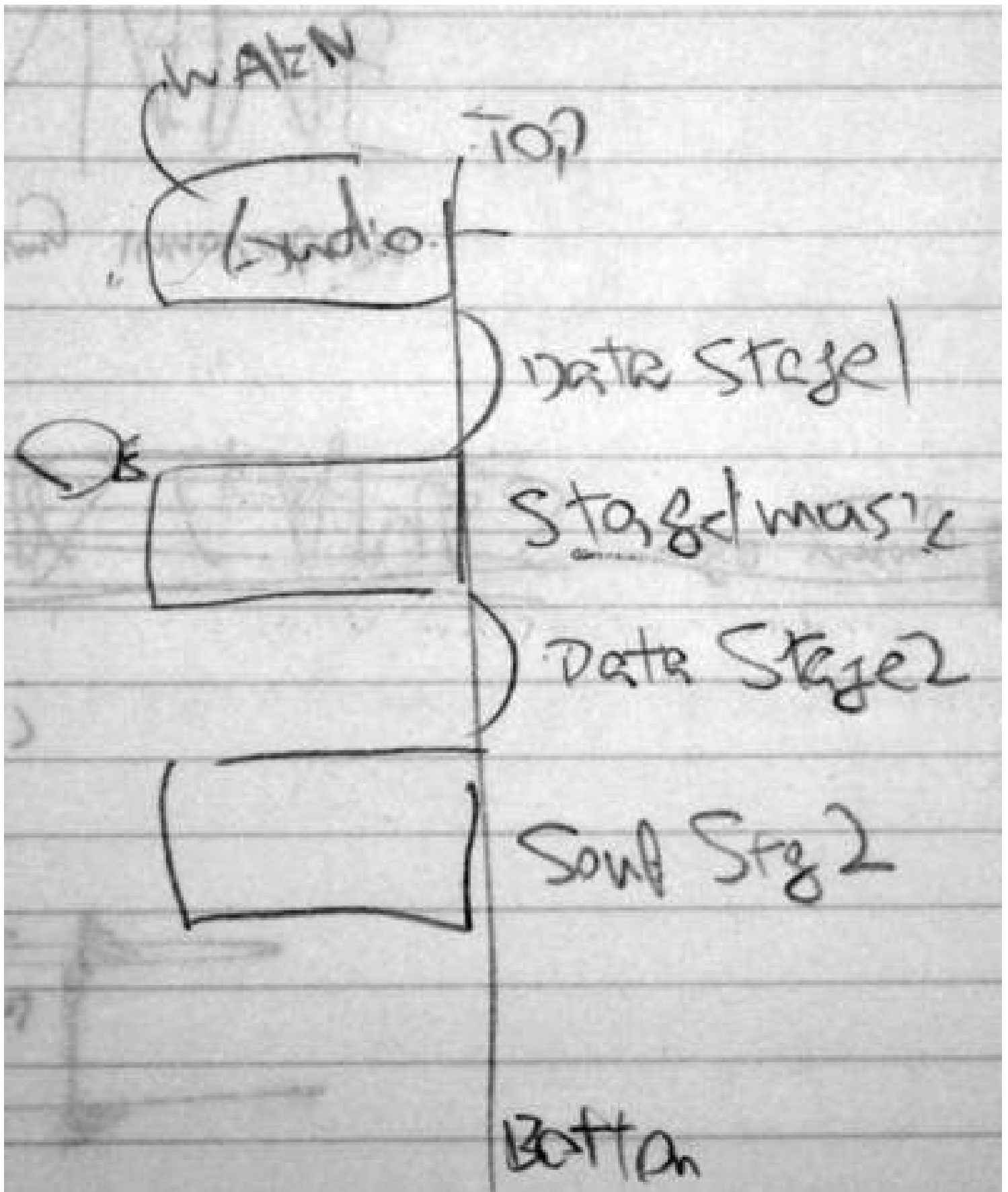
<Nico gestures that he wants to take some photos>

JS: Allow me to hand you over to my professional photographer. I'm free all day. How are you?

HI: Perhaps I have to leave here at 1 o'clock? If you need more, perhaps I could make 30 minutes another day?

JS: Yes, perhaps we could meet for a second interview.

HI: OK, no problem. *<pause>* So that was my first game, and when I joined... Perhaps I know why Hudson took me on. It might be because when I had the presentation at Hudson, their people... Perhaps you know the name, Hudson's Nakamoto?^{[190](#)} He was not impressed with my game design.



JS: Wait, it did *not* impress him?

HI: It did *not* impress him, right. But he *was* impressed with my knowledge on CD-ROMs.

Hudson in 1987 wanted to make CD-ROM games. I had the presentation and then afterwards Nakamoto-san asked me. *<changes stance>*

"Ahh, hello Iwasaki. What other jobs did you have?"

And I said to him, "Do you know about CD-ROM? *<smiles, leaning forward>* Do you know CD-ROM? I have been working on making a CD-ROM authoring system, and now that I know CDi is not suitable for games I want to change jobs."

Suddenly Nakamoto-san says to me *<intense voice change>*, "**DO YOU KNOW?!** *<laughs>* DO YOU KNOW CD-ROM?!"

<reverts to normal voice> Yes, I do.

<back to intense Nakamoto voice> "**I WANT TO MAKE CD-ROM GAMES FOR PC ENGINE!** You have to join Hudson!"

<everyone laughs>

JS: Hudson's CD-ROM structure is very unusual. It's not like standard data CDs.[191](#)

HI: Yes, that's right.

JS: When you joined Hudson, and were working on the PC Engine CD-ROM, was the hardware format complete, or did you assist in defining how it would function?

HI: First, when I joined Hudson, almost all the BIOS and almost all of the format was defined. I could not touch them. But I asked about some things, some points regarding Hudson's CD-ROM system. For example, Hudson CD-ROMs do not have any... What I call "High Sierra" format. Hudson's CD-ROM doesn't have that. The High Sierra format was later followed by ISO-9660, which became the international standard for CD-ROMs.[192](#)

I asked Nakamoto-san, "Why don't you use a High Sierra format system?"

And Nakamoto told me, "A High Sierra format uses too much memory. We can't keep so much memory."

JS: Right, that explains why when you put a PCE CD in a computer, the audio and data is all mixed up.

HI: Yes, that's right.

JS: That's one of the reasons it took so long for PCE-CD emulation, and you need an accurate TOC for each game.[193](#)

HI: Basically, the reason why is because of really, really slow seeking.

JS: The speed of finding and reading data.

HI: Before *Ys: Book I&II*, perhaps everyone thought that CD-ROM is *really* slow. But after *Ys I&II*, perhaps only a bad developer would make a really, really slow game. *<laughs>* They need to increase the loading speed, and increase the seeking speed. So for example, it's better

and suitable for access... *<starts drawing>* For example if this is the CD-ROM data, from the top to the bottom. This is the first audio data, that warning audio that plays: "This is a PC Engine CD-ROM disc, do not play this..." and so on, OK. This is audio track one. After this is a data track, for example "Data Stage 1", OK? *<sketches next layer>* Then this is Stage 1's music. If you make a new data track here, for Stage 2, and then after it you can put the soundtrack for Stage 2.

JS: It's quicker to load data in small chunks like this, than for the laser to travel back to a single large data track?

HI: Yes. So here and here on the disc, *<referencing stage data and accompanying audio track>* they are really near each other. So if you load and play, and load and play stuff, it's really fast. So for example, some action games use that structure. Because the seeking is too slow. From NEC's hardware spec, its spec sheets for this, the maximum seeking time from the top to the bottom is three seconds. It's written on the specification sheets. But, in fact, in a real games machine we have to read a lot of things [data], and are seeking lots of things. If a foolish programmer makes a foolish program, it will take over one minute! *<laughs>* So this is all about trying to make the PC Engine load faster. So lots of crazy data structures.

JS: In Susa no you hid a version of Cannon Ball?¹⁹⁴

HI: Yes, I know, I know! *<laughs>*

JS: Do you know who made the original?

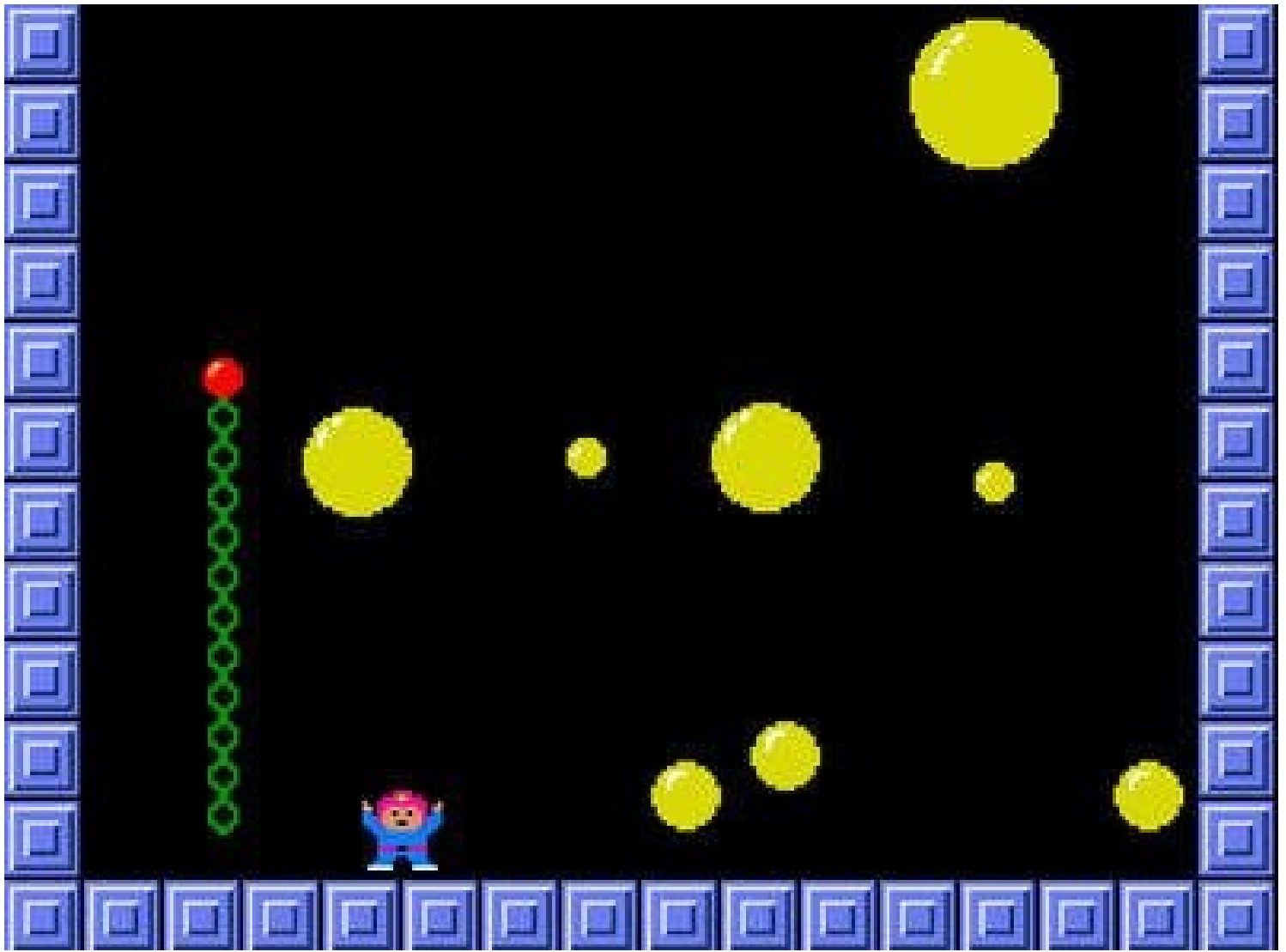
HI: Perhaps the original Cannon Ball was made by Nakamoto - who was Hudson vice president and Bomberman's creator - on an old computer named X1¹⁹⁵ which was sold in Japan from 1982. I could ask some people about that. I heard the following story... Cannon Ball and this other game, my friend told me the name of it, Kaeru Shooter.¹⁹⁶ Anyway, Kaeru Shooter was the first game to use a "transport package" for multiple machines. What's in the transport package is... Well, in 1983 or '84 or '85, lots of personal computers were released by lots of different companies. And they all have a different video structure, a different architecture, and lots of different things. So it's really hard to transport from one to the other. Hudson thought that if they made some form of "standard transport package", it would be easy to implement a game to multiple machines and then sell a lot of copies.

JS: Kaeru Shooter was released on MSX and the ZX Spectrum, what else was it on?

HI: As I recall, it was released on the Pasopia 7, PC-8001 Mk2, and the Sharp X1.

JS: Cannon Ball was also something everyone at Hudson had to study, programming a version when they joined?

HI: Yes, that's right! *<laughs>* Cannon Ball was "study software" for the PC Engine.



Cannon Ball found in Susa no Oudensetsu (PCE)

JS: <notices Nico fidgeting> Oh, right, photos. When you get back we can continue. Because I spoke to Roy Ozaki of Mitchell Corp, and he was very secretive about how they acquired the license for Cannon Ball. Mitchell made Pang, aka Buster Bros., aka Pomping World, for arcades.

HI: Yeah, I know, I know. I heard that Pomping World had a direct connection to Cannon Ball. Hudson sold its rights to Capcom or Mitchell.

Nico: <intensely> Let's go do the pictures!

<Hiromasa Iwasaki and Nico leave and then return>

JS: So you joined Hudson, and the first thing you did was recreate Cannon Ball?

HI: Yes, I made that when I joined Hudson. Actually, first I had to study about the PC Engine. Then, before making Susa no Oudensetsu, I had to make two games... No, three games! Three original games. One game was... I'm not sure how to describe it - it was just a "graphics game". I wanted to make a full graphics package for the PC Engine, for creating and drawing

pictures.

JS: Right, a graphics utility.

HI: Yes, a graphics utility. Well, not simply a graphics utility, but rather a graphics utility package. I just made a really small game for using this graphics utility package. Then a test for multi-tap. Do you know the multi-tap?¹⁹⁷

JS: Of course.

HI: Then I made a small game just for testing the multi-tap. Then at last I made an action game, or rather a test program for an action game. This was a standard "studying game" within Hudson - and *that* was Cannon Ball. I made Cannon Ball and I changed a lot of things. I rewrote Cannon Ball's game mechanics, and almost right after making Susa no Oudensetsu, I found a little bit of space. There was a little bit of space which was empty in the game's ROM, and we couldn't use this memory space for the other data. I found that I could put, <laughs> I found that I could put Cannon Ball in this small place! In that tiny space. So I put Cannon Ball in and connected it to the main game.

When the player stays at a hotel, for recovering his HP, and the hotel's master asks the player, "Do you want to play a game?" If the player says yes, then you can just play it.¹⁹⁸
<laughs>

JS: When I get home I'll find it.

HI: Only one thing, really for me, is that Cannon Ball's music was made by my friend Hoshi.¹⁹⁹ He is one of Hudson's famous music composers. This was music from Hoshi!
<laughs>

JS: When remaking Cannon Ball, did you look at the source code of the original?

HI: Yes, the source code. The source code of the original was transported to the PC Engine. Yes, that's right. I saw the source code. This source code was used for studying the PC Engine.

JS: Do you know anything more about how Mitchell Corporation came to remake Cannon Ball as Pang or Pomping World for arcades?

HI: I know the game... <pause> I had heard about Pomping World from Hudson's people, and they told me that, perhaps Hudson sold the rights to recreate Cannon Ball as Pomping World, either to Mitchell or Capcom.

JS: Mr Ozaki mentioned officially licensing the rights, but he didn't want to elaborate. I asked if it was a secret deal, and apparently it was official, but there's too many people connected to reveal details. Eventually he said, "You're really hung up about this deal!" I'm curious - it seems like Mitchell's success with Pomping World comes from Mr Nakamoto and his original Cannon Ball.

<idle chat about where to send the book, and the limited edition cover>

JS: You mentioned work as a journalist. Tell me how you got involved.

HI: <laughs> How I became involved as a journalist?

JS: I'm building a mental picture. You were at dentistry school, then worked on CDi while a student, leaving dentistry to pursue games. But while working on CDi you were also doing journalism?

HI: <confirms each statement as made> It's tough to explain... <laughs> Because CDi's venture company had an artist, a manga artist named Satomi Mikuriya...²⁰⁰ He was also a manga artist, and so he had his own manga production. His manga production was working for Japan's first videogame magazine, named *Beep*.²⁰¹ I had been working with him, so he asked me, "Do you want to write articles in *Beep*?" Also at that time I wanted to write lots of articles and essays, and stuff like that, so I wanted to write! So he told me, "Oh, OK, so you can try it." Lots of people read my article and perhaps lots of people liked my article, so I continued as a game journalist.

Nico: <gets ready to leave> Thank you. See you on the 18th? Bye, bye.

JS: Yes, the 18th. [...] So what was this first article?

HI: The first article in *Beep* was... "Making BASIC games".

JS: Excellent. Did you keep all the issues you were published in?

HI: <whispers it> No. <laughs> No, I don't have them. Perhaps some of my friends do. But I don't have any.

JS: A shame. So this was a guide for others to create BASIC games?

HI: Yes. First I wrote a BASIC game and put the listing in the article. Then I wrote explanations for the functions, how the program worked, how to play it. For example: this program from this point to this point is the function for this, and this, and so on. That kind of style. That was my first article. Almost one year afterwards, I wanted to write some videogame reviews. I asked my editor, can I write a review for my article? He told me sure, OK, yes. So I just wrote a review for my article, and a lot of readers wrote back! The editor told me, "Your videogame review was really good, so please write more videogame reviews!" So my articles were changing from BASIC game explanations to a videogame review corner style of essay. <laughs>

JS: Can you remember the year you left CDi? What year did you join Hudson?

HI: Two years? From 1985 to 1987 was the venture company. And from 1988 to 1990, I was working at Hudson. From 1990 to 1992, I was working for Kadokawa Media Office - KMO.

JS: And in 1988 you were playing Ys II on the computer, really enjoying it and...[202](#)

HI: <laughs> Yes! That's right! In the winter of 1988 I was really enjoying Ys II for PC, and while I was playing, Nakamoto came to my place and said, "Do you want to convert it to PC Engine?"

I replied, "Mr Nakamoto, I want to do it only if you can accept my condition. Ys is one story made from two parts - Ys I and Ys II. I want to transplant two games onto one CD. If we do that, we can promote how the higher capacity of CDs compares to ROM cartridges."

JS: Right, and Nakamoto said to you, "OK, we will do it! We'll visit Falcom in Tokyo and arrange a deal."

HI: Almost exactly, that's right. Though he told me, "It's OK, we have to go to Tokyo to get the rights," perhaps two weeks after that first meeting.

JS: Hudson didn't have the rights, they just thought it would be a good idea?

HI: Yes.

JS: If you went to Tokyo, where were you based?

HI: When I visited Tokyo, or rather came back to Tokyo, this was in 1989, perhaps March? At the start of March?

JS: Your original office at Hudson was...

HI: Ah, in Hokkaido! Do you know the Sankei building? <gestures with hands> It was on this side of the street, across from Hudson's CQ building. In the Sankei Building the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floor was rented by Hudson. I was working on the 4th floor.

JS: When I went to Hokkaido, I visited the old Hudson laboratory. I also met Mr Takebe...

HI: Ah! I know Mr Takebe. But I never met him, basically.

JS: I interviewed him. Hudson is a very important company - one of the few to produce hardware that challenged Nintendo. I have a Sapporo map drawn by Mr Takebe.

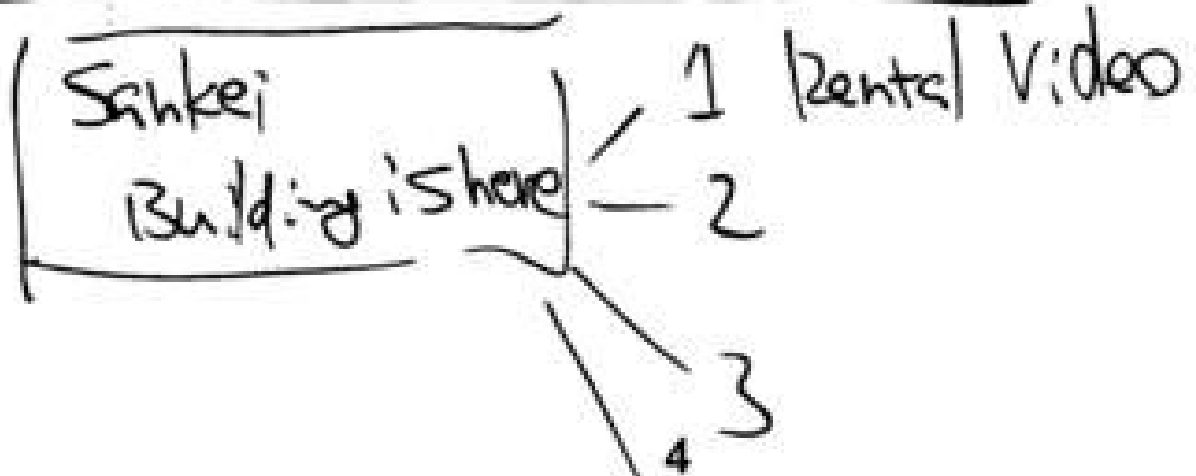
HI: Oh wow! <laughs> This is a really, really old place! This is Hudson's CQ building. I could draw a map for Hudson's Sankei building.

JS: Yes please.

HI: <sketches> OK, first there was Hudson's CQ building. Then a street. Then the Sankei Building, and two, three and four was for Hudson. While floor one [ground floor] was for rental videos. <laughs>

CQ
HUDSON

STREET



JS: When bored did you go downstairs and rent videos?

HI: <smiles - sharp inhale> I rented *LOTS* of videos from here! Because when I was making Ys, we had to choose voice actors, so we rented lots of anime videos from here, and listened to all the voices, <laughs> and we'd say, "He is suitable for Dark Fact, and she is suitable for Feena!" Or something like that. <laughs>

JS: It's cool to discover your selection method for voice actors. Was it easy to contact them or their agents?

HI: Yes, that's right, that's right.

JS: Could you also draw the inside of the office when developing Ys?

HI: OK, for the 4th floor. <begins drawing> I can show you, perhaps, the Sankei building. It's still here, still perhaps standing.

JS: This is also where you met John Greiner?

HI: How is he? Is he good?

JS: Yes. His company MonkeyPaw Games are doing well. They're bringing cool games to PlayStation Network.

HI: <noting map> Here is the entrance, and here is the elevator, and the coffee maker. Quite a

bad coffee maker! <laughs>

JS: Those are all the desks?

HI: Yes, desks, and the Ys team is here. <references middle top group> And here is the Ys team, and here. This is... I forgot the foreign name for Makaimura. <alongside Ys team, middle top> It was Capcom's SuperGrafx game.^{[203](#)}

JS: Daimakaimura? You mean Ghouls'n Ghosts?

HI: Yes, yes, that's right. The Daimakaimura team is here. And here is the Battle Ace team.^{[204](#)} Near them was the Tengai I team.^{[205](#)}

While here, <referencing lower right> this was the place for game designers and project management.

JS: You mention the Tengai team...

HI: Tengai one.

JS: I thought that the series was outsourced to a company call Red Company?^{[206](#)}

HI: Ah, it was just the scenario and animation [cutscenes], and maybe something else. It was not the programming, that was not outsourced. The program was created in here. And over here, this was Momotetsu.^{[207](#)} The Momotaro team. And here was the Power Golf team.^{[208](#)} While here was Toshio Kawaguchi's adventure team.^{[209](#)}

JS: Was PC Genjin here?^{[210](#)}

HI: No. PC Genjin development was outsourced to Atlus.^{[211](#)}

JS: Atlus? I thought it was outsourced to Red Company.

HI: Ah, for the first game, the first PC Genjin game, it was outsourced to Red Company. Meanwhile Red Company and Atlus and Hudson... Well, Hudson thought it was better to join Red Company and Atlus together. So Hudson introduced Atlus to Red Company, and they joined forces and made PC Genjin.

JS: Do you know anything about the PC Genjin RPG which was developed but never released?^{[212](#)}

HI: <inhales> Ahh, I've never known about that. But if I ask some old Hudson friends, perhaps some of them might know about it.^{[213](#)} A lot of people have asked me about this, but unfortunately, I don't know much about it.

JS: Magazines showed screenshots. It was meant to be an RPG, where you'd wander a

map, have random battles. But it was never released.

HI: Ah, OK. Perhaps I could ask some scenario writers, or programmers, who had been working for Hudson.

JS: Yes please.

HI: <referencing map, upper left> And back here, in the corner, were "young people". Newbies go here. This is a map for the 4th floor. Hudson, from 1988 to 1989. Sankei Building, 4th floor.



JS: I'm collecting office maps. <shows them>

HI: <laughs - recognises a map> Falcom?!

JS: Yes, up the stairs is the shop, and then behind it is the office, and the president sits here.

HI: Ahh! I know, I know, I know - this was the meeting place! <points to rightside> I met with Mr Kato right here.

JS: Let me mark this on the map. (see Volume 1)

HI: Nakamoto-san took me here.

JS: Did they still have the shop at the time?

HI: Perhaps... Perhaps they still had a shop.

JS: You worked with a Mr Hasegawa²¹⁴ on Ys I&II. But he was from AlfaSystem?²¹⁵

HI: Yes, that's right. He was, basically, a sub-programmer for Susa no Oudensetsu. He was a *really* good programmer. So first Mr Nakamoto asked me, after receiving the rights from Falcom, he asked, "What team do you want to form?" My first choice was Mr Hasegawa from Alfa, because he's a really, really good programmer, and I wanted to work with him again.



JS: Before Ys: Book I&II and Tengai Makyou II, you were the programmer on Fighting Street?²¹⁶

HI: Ah, Street Fighter I (one)? It was not in the same place as Tengai Makyou II, it was here. <points to Hokkaido office layout> In 1988. Before Ys I&II.

JS: After Susa no Oudensetsu?

HI: While making Susa no Oudensetsu, I saw the development of Street Fighter I - or rather Fighting Street. I joined that project and looked through the code, and did debugging, and spoke about how to improve seeking on CD-ROM, and stuff like that.

JS: This was in Hudson's office?

HI: Yes, Hudson's office.

JS: How did Hudson get the license from Capcom?

HI: I don't know how they got it. Basically, Fighting Street was made by AlfaSystem. I was a friend of AlfaSystem, so I checked Fighting Street.

JS: So then Fighting Street was not in the Hudson office?

HI: No, no, no. Fighting Street *was* developed *in* the Hudson office, *by* AlfaSystem. Because AlfaSystem's people, the company's staff, came to Hokkaido and were working in the Hudson office.

JS: Where was AlfaSystem's office?

HI: Based in Kyushuu. Kumamoto prefecture, Kyushuu.

JS: So they're based in Kumamoto and they send their staff to Hokkaido to work alongside Hudson?

HI: Yes, that's right. <laughs> It's pretty difficult to explain that story. AlfaSystem's staff were working in Carry Lab.²¹⁷ This was once one of the famous software houses for personal computers. <spells it: C-A-R-R-Y> It was a really famous software house in the early era of personal computer history in Japan. AlfaSystem's staff were Carry's main programmers. They made lots of personal computer games, and also they made some Famicom games, like *Hao-kun no Fushigi na Tabi*.²¹⁸ Afterwards the staff complained about, <laughs> their salary, and lots of other things. So they left Carry Lab and started AlfaSystem. Hudson was the first sponsor for AlfaSystem - Hudson paid a lot of money and brought over staff from AlfaSystem. But they said, "Please come to Hokkaido and work with us, for one or two years. And please contribute money." <laughs>

JS: What was the deal between Hudson and AlfaSystem?

HI: Perhaps Hudson... I don't know the matters about the deal, but at that time Hudson needed really good programmers to create really good games for CD-ROM. So perhaps Hudson paid a lot to AlfaSystem?

JS: You were freelancing for Hudson, but you'd go into the Hudson office?

HI: Yes. Both myself and AlfaSystem were "outsource entities" of Hudson. Reflecting on it, Hudson was a very strange company, because with *Ys: Book I&II*, they gave me one of their outsourced AlfaSystem staff to be my sub-programmer. So we - myself and members of AlfaSystem - were working with Hudson and cooperating while inside the Hudson building, but we were in fact outsourced by Hudson.

JS: What are the benefits of being a freelancer rather than an official employee?

HI: <laughs - long pause> Perhaps there is no advantage. There is almost no benefit to it. But I didn't want to join Hudson while I was working, because basically, I didn't want to wake up at 09:00am. <laughs>

JS: Were there long crunch times as a freelancer? Working late into the night?

HI: Yes! Yes, yes, yes - I was crazy! <laughs> I slept at the office. Many times! <laughs> But in the winter, Hokkaido is *really* cold, and the office building switched off the heating at night. So we had to leave the office.

JS: Did you meet Falcom's Hashimoto and Miyazaki?

HI: No, no, I never met them. Never. I know Hudson had a sneak preview for them at the Tokyo office, after I made *Ys I&II*. But I never met them, because when Hudson got the rights for porting *Ys*, after March 1989, perhaps two or three months after this, Hashimoto and

Miyazaki quit Falcom.²¹⁹ So I never met them. I don't know where they went, but there's one story I can tell you. When Hashimoto and Miyazaki were invited to Hudson, Tokyo, for a sneak preview of Ys before it went on sale, I've been told that they exclaimed, "This is what we want to create!"²²⁰

JS: Both Hashimoto and Miyazaki disappeared. I've heard wild rumours... You also worked on the American release of Ys I&II, with John Greiner, do you have any fun stories?

HI: Don't forget John Greiner, he was the main translator from Japanese to English for Ys: Book I&II. It was over 20 years ago, where I would read all the dialogue, one line at a time to John, and would translate them into English. At the end of the year, in 1990, we received the "Game of the Year" award in *Omni* magazine,²²¹ and got a lot of prizes.

JS: For Europeans, their first Ys was on the Master System, but in America it was yours on TG-16.

HI: <laughs> First, I said to the American side, "I don't want to change the title graphics, or anything." Because this is just a symbol, and you can read the title and hear it: Ancient Ys Vanished. I didn't want to change the katakana to English. But I changed all of the game's balance and all the text. You need to understand that in Japan, Ys I and Ys II are really, really, really famous games. Everyone loves them. But I felt the text in the originals was not good for explaining the background to the games. I couldn't change it for Japan though, because they're really famous, and if I changed something for Ys: Book I&II, if I changed some text, perhaps a lot of players would complain about that: "Ehh! Iwasaki changed the text and he's crazy, because Ys is already perfect!" <laughs>

But I knew that Americans did not know this game, and I wanted to explain it. About the background, characters, and everything. So I changed a lot of text. For example, this was the style - first translate the text from Japanese directly. Do that first. Then John Greiner would ask me, "Hey Iwasaki. Oh, what's this?" And then I explained about that piece of text, saying it goes here, or there. Or another piece of text explaining this, and this, and this. <gestures with hands> This one explains the background and so on. I thought it was better to change the text in that manner. So John wrote the new text.



John Greiner (far left) after *Ys*: "Hudson would rent out a 747 for a week and send 400 plus employees on an all-expenses paid holiday to places like Guam and Australia. Pretty fun company!"

JS: And expanded the game!^{[222](#)}

HI: Yes, that's right! So I think that *Ys: Book I&II* for the USA is really the best version - for me anyway. <laughs>

JS: So you were like a producer?

HI: I was not a producer on *Ys: Book I&II*. I wrote the program with Mr Hasegawa, one of greatest programmers I've ever met - he still works in AlfaSystem - and I rewrote all the dialogue with Yutaka Nagayama.^{[223](#)} I created game balance, created the animated cutscenes alongside artists... Back then those animated cutscenes were all programmed, they were not streaming movies like today. I controlled all the game's elements. Nowadays, I think this job would be described as "Creative Director".

JS: What did you think of *Ys III*?

HI: Perhaps *Ys III* was... I heard this story from Tomo Yamane^{[224](#)} - he is one of the authors of *Ys I* and *II* - and he was a part of Falcom. But his name was titled as "Hideyuki Amagi".^{[225](#)} After making *Star Trader*,^{[226](#)} he quit Falcom and moved to Hudson.

First he made *Xanadu: Scenario 2*,²²⁷ he was an artist and made that game's graphics. Then he made *Romancia*'s graphics.²²⁸ Then he made the map and almost all the graphics for *Ys I*. Then he made the opening animation for *Ys II* on personal computers. Afterwards he joined the *Star Trader* project, and later quit and then worked with us at Hudson.



JS: Tomo Yamane is Hideyuki Amagi?!

HI: That's correct. In fact, I was the one who named him Hideyuki Amagi. In Japan it's really frowned upon when someone leaves a company and then goes on to make a game for another

company - in this case, Hudson's remake of Falcom's Ys. So it would have been an issue if Tomo Yamane's name had appeared in the game's credits. That's why we decided to go with a pen name instead.

Yamane used this pen name in a number of games that followed, but then in 1994, he decided to go back to Tomo Yamane. Or at least, that's how he was credited in the PC Engine version of *Emerald Dragon*.

JS: I spoke to Kouji Yokota, who worked on Ys III, and he said Ys III did not start as an Ys game, and they only put Ys III on it to sell more.

HI: Yes, that's right! I heard the exact same thing from Mr Yamane. He told me that Ys III is **not** Ys III. Yamane also told me, perhaps Miyazaki and Hashimoto think that Ys III is not Ys III, it's just perhaps Wanderers from Ys. It's outside the story...

JS: You mean a *gaiden*, or side-story?

HI: Yes, that's right! He thinks perhaps that scenario was for a *gaiden*, but maybe Falcom's president, Mr Kato, forced them to change the title from a *gaiden* to Ys III.

JS: You mentioned lots of people left Falcom because the president was not doing such a good job. Can I print this?

HI: Yes, that's right. Kato. <laughs> No problem. I think Kato was a good president. But Kato is a good president for the company; however, I think Kato is **not** a good president for staff. I heard about this because Kato kept their salaries too low. Apparently. The staff made **really** big hits, however Kato did not provide any kickback from these hits towards their salaries. So lots of staff complained.

JS: Right, Masayuki Kato. (centre, circa 1980s)

HI: I think Kato was a good president for the company, but not a good president for staff. And Kato was not a good president for maintaining staff motivation, to create games at Falcom. So almost all the old staff left Falcom. Almost all of Falcom's first, really good creators left.

JS: Hudson made Ys I&II for PC Engine, then in 1993 developed Ys IV: Dawn of Ys. (above) There was an unrelated version for SFC by Tonkinhouse.²²⁹ How did Hudson receive permission to develop Ys IV independently?

HI: You need to understand that Falcom's Ys series was one of the biggest games in Japan, while Hudson's version of Ys for PC Engine was regarded as one of best conversions. So obviously Hudson wanted to make a new Ys, and.. <laughs> So Hudson



kind of ordered Falcom, "Make another Ys title!" But Falcom didn't have the needed resources for development. As I said, almost all the programmers and artists had quit, because the company's president was not good. As a result they could not develop a proper story or all the concept art, and other required elements. So instead they supplied Hudson with some of the material.

JS: Have you played Ys IV for PC Engine?

HI: Yes, I know it. <laughs> I enjoyed Ys IV for PC Engine. I was really surprised by the PC Engine's version of Ys IV. Because the main scenario writer, Yutaka Nagayama, was [originally] the assistant to me.²³⁰ <laughs> In Ys: Book I&II there was a lot of work for the game balance, making the visual scenes, also I had to do debugging, and checking the sound. I also had to write the scenario. I had too many jobs, and... <laughs> This is a funny story. When I was working like crazy at Hudson, I saw Nagayama, and he didn't have any specific work. He didn't have his own project on Hudson's 4th floor. Every time I saw him, he had opened an Edo era book. Do you know the Edo era?

JS: Yes, the classical historical period.

HI: Yes. So every time he just opened the Edo book, and he doesn't have any projects, and he doesn't join any projects. Every time he reads the Edo book he'd write something on the computer.

I asked him, "Hi Nagayama. What are you working on?"

And Nakayama told me, "Hudson's president Kudo²³¹ wants to make an Edo period game. A historical Edo game is what the president wants." And Nagayama had studied the historical Edo era in university, so he became a part of Hudson. So he joined the president's project, and he was reading Edo books, and making notes.

So I asked him, "Do you have time?"

And Nagayama said, "Oh, I have time. Because this is just a research period, so I have enough time."

So I asked, "Do you want to work with me?"

<laughs> He told me immediately, "Yes!"

I asked Oyama,²³² he was in charge of the 4th floor, the section chief. I asked, "Can I use Nagayama?"

<laughs> And he told me, "Yes! You can."

So I worked with Nagayama to write the scenario. When I saw Ys IV, Nagayama was the main scenario writer. <laughs> **Heyee! Nagayama is the main scenario writer!** <laughs> And also Ys IV's main programmers, Ebina and Haga,²³³ were my assistants for Ys: Book I&II.

JS: Falcom says the SFC version is the official timeline. But fans feel that Ys IV on PCE should be canon, especially given the continuation of staff.

HI: Yes, so they knew all about Ys I&II. So they could make a good game. But almost 10

years after this, Falcom changed the world set-up. In that new world set-up, the suitable version became Tonkin's bad Ys IV.²³⁴ <laughs>

JS: I enjoyed both, though the PCE version is my favourite.

HI: So Falcom used the Super Famicom version as the "official" version. But I know, and perhaps everyone knows this, the *fun* version is the PC Engine version.

JS: You left Hudson in 1990?

HI: No, Hudson Hokkaido. I joined Kadokawa Media Office, and joined the Tengai Makyou II project.

JS: What's the connection with Hudson and Kadokawa?

HI: It gets a little complicated. At the time, Hudson and Kadokawa Media Office were geographically quite close to each other, and KMO's Head Editor Tatsuo Sato, a role that made him effectively the company's president, was good friends with [Shinichi] Nakamoto and [Yukio] Osato at Hudson. In 1987 Hudson asked Kadokawa, "Do you know anyone who can make games?" and that's how I ended up getting a contract to work with Hudson. As I mentioned earlier. After that, I was contracted to work on Ys I & II, and once we made the international version, that project ended, in May of 1990. But it was right around that time, I think, that Head Editor Sato asked me to join Kadokawa Media Office. And since I was now a KMO employee, Hudson contracted with Kadokawa for us to make Tengai II.

JS: Let's discuss Tengai Makyou II: Manjimaru. I've heard much, but not actually played it.

HI: Tengai Makyou II was a really big project. Firstly, I have to say that Tengai Makyou II was a *really* big project and perhaps also the first triple-A title on CD. I believe so, anyway. Because at that time, for Tengai Makyou II, we used almost... <takes pen>

<HI writes the following text: 500'000'000 yen>

JS: Five hundred million yen?

HI: Yes, in yen. <laughs> But remember, this is from around 1990 to 1992! We used this budget. Perhaps if we made this in recent years, it might take... Maybe five or six times the budget? <laughs>

JS: I'll look up inflation rates; it's a lot of money!

HI: Yes, 20 years ago. It was a crazy amount. Also we used over 20 programmers.

JS: Where did the budget go? Salaries? Voice actor costs?

HI: Yes, that's right. But we used this budget only for hiring artists, or something like that. Perhaps this does not include Hudson's regular staff salaries. Maybe. We used over 20 programmers within Hudson, and also over 30 artists. So perhaps we used almost all of them over just one year.

JS: 50 people.

HI: Yes, 50 people per year. And perhaps the salaries of these people are not contained within this [original] 500 million figure.



JS: So it's even more expensive!

HI: Yes, I think so. But it sold well. *Tengai Makyō II* was a really strategic product for Hudson and NEC. It was an important project because it was planned... Let me explain that. First, in 1990, Hudson and everyone else knew that Hudson's first PCE CD-ROM system did not have enough memory - RAM - for programming. Only 64 kilobytes.

JS: That's why you had the System Card upgrades.^{[235](#)}

HI: Yes, yes. So Hudson and NEC planned the Super CD-ROM, which used four times more RAM than the first CD-ROM.^{[236](#)} If we had that much memory basically we could make... I mean, compared to the capacity of the original, and the capacity of ROM cartridges, the Super CD-ROM had a really strong advantage. So Hudson and NEC were planning the Super CD-ROM from early 1990. *Tengai Makyō II* was designed for the Super CD-ROM's functionality - so it was given a really big budget.



JS: In the original *Tengai*, the battle scenes had detailed backgrounds, but in *Tengai II* they were plain. How come?

HI: *Tengai I* read data off of the CD-ROM for battles, so it was able to load in backgrounds. But I was determined not to access the CD during random encounters in *Tengai II*, which meant no backgrounds. That was actually my call, so I'm certain about this. Not having backgrounds at all gave the battles a lonely feel though, so we added a parallax gradation instead.

JS: For *Tengai II* Winds was involved for event graphics. What was the relationship between Winds and Hudson?

HI: Winds was a company created by the team that originally did the graphics for Masaya/NCS games, so they were people who had worked on *Gynoug* for the Mega Drive and *Cho Aniki*. When they started their company, they were able to receive work from Hudson due to their history working on the PC Engine. Incidentally, Winds didn't just do the event graphics, they also did field and character assets. I remember that it was Winds artists who drew things like the dungeon version of Manjimaru, the main character in *Tengai II*.²³⁷

JS: So your role on *Tengai Makyou II* was...

HI: It's difficult to explain. Basically my role... <furrows brow> Hmm! Second lead game designer, perhaps? First lead game designer and lead scenario writer was Shouji Masuda.²³⁸ I was the second game designer, basically.



Inset: It's easy to miss, but the overworld sprite (left) is different to the dungeon sprite (right)

JS: Was Hudson sure it would sell? Were they nervous?

HI: Basically, they *were* nervous! <laughs> But Hudson knew that they had to do it, because the first CD-ROM unit had too little RAM. So they *had* to expand it, and they had to sell this

expanded system a lot. So they knew they had to make something like *Tengai Makyou II* - "We need a superb flagship piece of software!"

JS: Yes, that's the inside story! There's very little in English.

HI: <laughs> Yes, and you have to know that in Japan... There are too many lies, *too many lies!* There are far too many on Japanese websites, and lots of people believe these legends or myths, things not based on facts.

JS: Can you give some examples?

HI: Yes, I could. *I could give you lots of examples*, <laughs> from Wikipedia! <laughs> Wikipedia in Japan, the games section, you must never believe this section!

JS: Sometimes Wikipedia cites my article as a source, but misconstrues what I said to "prove" something unrelated.

HI: <intense laughter - claps hands> I understand what you mean! On Japanese Wikipedia it's the same. This is the reason why I made my blog.²³⁹ At some point - I forget when - I was browsing the web for some data, and I found the history for *Ys* on Japanese Wikipedia. I read it and said, "Hey! This is not fact!" <laughs> These are just lies!

For example, and this was corrected, but for example: in the history of *Ys*, it said Hashimoto and Miyazaki made *Ys I* and *Ys II* as two parts, two separate projects. This is not true. The original plan for *Ys* included the contents of both *Ys I* and *II*. However, that would be too much content for the floppy disk capacity of the era, so they decided just to make the first half. Then, after *Ys* was a hit, the sequel was greenlit.

Incidentally, I had a chance to talk to some staff from that era recently, and as a little addendum to that, they mentioned there wasn't a perception within Falcom that the game's computer version had been some big hit. It was more like, "Well, the game did well enough, right?"

JS: We were lucky the series continued...

HI: I know that when Hashimoto and Miyazaki made *Ys I*, they didn't know if they could make the second part of the story. If *Ys I* had not sold enough, then perhaps they could not have made *Ys II*. But *Ys I* had big sales, and they were able to finish it. This is true, but lots of people still believe Hashimoto and Miyazaki planned them as separate games.

I heard the truth from Tomo Yamane, and also I know because of the comments in the source code for the games. For example in *Ys I*, the final boss is Dark Fact, and his messages were cut. They were removed or "commented out". Originally in Dark Fact's messages, he says Feena is one of the goddesses of *Ys*, and after defeating the player he will hire her as a maid. But this is commented out. Because if Miyazaki and Hashimoto had used that, then *Ys I* would not be seen as finished. Because no player would understand that - "Why?! Why is Feena a goddess? And why does Dark Fact say that?"²⁴⁰ So Miyazaki and Hashimoto cut that message, and Dark Fact only says something like, "Welcome, but you die here."

JS: First hand accounts are the only way to find the truth.

HI: I had lots of interviews with old Hudson people who I know. They told me the truths, and I wrote articles.

JS: Do you know anything about Hudson's Mario games?

HI: Yes, I know them. I know who the programmer was. Super Mario's PC-88 level designer was Kitanu.^{[241](#)} He was also the programmer of the PC-88's Mario games.



In this final battle with Dark Fact (Ys I, PC-8801), he originally revealed the truth about Feena

JS: Kitanu? But the programmer on SMB Special is credited as Yukio Takeoka.^{[242](#)} Are they the same person?

HI: I was thinking it must have been Sakurada-san,^{[243](#)} but he was more of a level designer than a programmer. However, he does do some programming.

JS: The design of those games is fascinating.

HI: The first time, they made it a full scrolling game.^{[244](#)} And for the first test it was working fine. But then they put the enemies in, and it was **too slow!** <makes a motion to show the slowness - ow! ow! ow! - laughs>

JS: That's why they changed it to flip screens?

HI: Yes, that's right. This is a true story, which I heard from Kitanu, from the programmer.

JS: And the turtle shells bounce back off the screen's edge!

HI: <laughs> Yes, that's right! The reason is because the machine was too slow. Side-

scrolling was not working.^{[245](#)}

<pauses> Hey, you know, I can introduce some old game developers to you. Let me write down a list:

- **Roppyaku Tsurumi**, (Sega/arcades): *Spider Man*, *Michael Jackson's Moon Walker*

Kenji Kaido,^{[246](#)} (Taito): *Night Striker*, *Cameltry*, *Sonic Blast Man*, *Warrior Blade*,^{[247](#)} *Metal Black*;

(SCE): *Ape Escape*, *Ico*, *Shadow of the Colossus*

Kazu Ayabe, (ADK): *Esper Boukentai*,^{[248](#)} also creator of *Boku no Natsuyasumi*^{[249](#)}

Katsuhiro Nozawa, (Hudson): *Star Soldier* (FC), *Challenger* (FC), *J.J. & Jeff* (PCE/TG-16)

Akira Sakuma (Hudson): *Momotaro Dentetsu* and *Momotaro Densetsu* series

Shouji Masuda, *Tengai Makyou I&II*, *Metal Max series*, *Linda Cube*, *Ore no Shikabane o Koete Yuke*^{[250](#)}

- **Jun Ii**,^{[251](#)} *Emerald Dragon* (computers / PCE), *Seiya Monogatari: Anearth Fantasy Stories*

Ichirou Mihara, Arika vice president - he knows a lot about the early *Mega Man* series and *Street Fighter* series

JS: That's very kind! Hopefully I can meet them. Later in life you went to New Zealand. How come?^{[252](#)}

HI: Ah, yes! For one year. <laughs> It's also a little tough to explain. First I left [my previous company] on the 27th, and joined a Korean game company, Genius Games.^{[253](#)} I was working as a creative director. This was In 2008.

Anyway, so I worked for three years to make an action network game. <laughs> And basically the producer was... Not good. I concluded I could not finish the project while that producer was there. So I decided to tell the investors, "Please choose between either this producer or me." <laughs> "If you choose this producer, I will quit this company." Unfortunately the investors were not smart, and they chose the producer.

JS: You gave an ultimatum! I've had to that myself in life!

HI: So they chose the producer, and the producer told me, "We can make this game even if you were never here." <laughs> And after three years it is still not out!^{[254](#)}

<laughs> So I decided to quit, and I wrote on Facebook: I am quitting!^{[255](#)} My colleague and friend was sending messages to me, and told me that I should have a drink with him. OK, I'll have a drink. I had quit already!

I asked, "Why do you want to drink with me?"

And he said, "Do you want to work with me?"

I said, "What company do you work at?"

"Oh, Gameloft in Korea."^{[256](#)}

"OK," I said. "I could join you."

He told me, "Please just pass the test."

"OK, OK," I said. I brought together my portfolio, and work experience sheets, everything. I sent them to Gameloft, and the company's producer came to me and did an interview. We chatted, and after two or three weeks they called me, "Oh, hey Iwasaki! You are

hired."

"Thanks," I said. "When am I moving to Korea?"

They replied, "The New Zealand studio wants someone who knows micro-payments and Free to Play, a game designer. Can you join them in New Zealand?"

<strong laughter all round>

HI: "OK, OK, OK, I will join them in New Zealand!" I said to him. "Because I have never visited New Zealand, perhaps it will be really enjoyable."

JS: What did you think of it?

HI: New Zealand is a really, really nice place for living. *<laughs>* I think New Zealand is one of the nearest places to heaven. *<laughs>* Not too cold, not too hot, and the views are really beautiful. And really good food - the fish is excellent. *<laughs>* Everything is great in New Zealand! Also, Gameloft is a really nice place to work. But after almost one year, I felt that Gameloft's direction and my direction was a little bit too different. This is an important thing for game designers nowadays - we have to think about F2P, Free to Play. A company's main objective is to earn money, right? And with F2P we have to monetise everything. I thought about the ultimate Free to Play game. I was really thinking hard about the perfect, ultimate F2P game. First, I thought about the player's ultimate reward or incentive - which I thought would be earning money, right? Secondly, I thought that the perfect F2P would just be tap and pay, right?

JS: Tap the screen and pay real money?

HI: Tap and pay. I concluded this ultimate and perfect F2P game for the company is: **just gambling**. A slot machine! *<laughs>* Because a slot machine is a really fast money earner. It's also a really powerful incentive for players. So the ultimate F2P game, honestly, is just a slot machine. But I don't want to make slot machines.

JS: Do you miss the PC Engine days and traditional games?

HI: Yes. I love traditional games, and I love challenging, and thinking, and making strategies - or making up playing patterns, and those sort of things. This is what I love.

I thought to myself... Gameloft is a really good company, but if I stay, perhaps finally I will have to make online gambling titles, not games. This is not my chosen direction. So I decided to quit and make games in Japan.

JS: You're working for two different companies now?

HI: Three different companies now! *<laughs>* And perhaps I'll add one more, so four different companies. One company is for the PlayStation 4. It's top secret - I cannot say. Another company is for smartphone games. The third company is smartphone games as well.

So I'm directing three projects for smartphone games, and one project for PlayStation 4.

JS: Does the company have plans for Xbox One?

HI: What you really mean is, "Why PlayStation 4?" <laughs> Basically, because this company was working first for the Japanese market, and in the Japanese market Xbox One is still not scheduled for release. <laughs> So they can only choose PlayStation 4 currently.

JS: I don't like the look of Xbox One. Microsoft said you can't lend games, everyone complained, and then they changed their minds. You can't trust the company.

HI: Xbox One's first concept is actually really suitable for today's downloading world. But they failed to explain their concept. Whereas PlayStation 4, SCE, succeeded by explaining their concept to gamers. So Microsoft changed their idea too much, again and again and again!^{[257](#)}

JS: We're up to time... Let's have a second interview.

HI: Sure, OK. I have to attend something regarding the PlayStation 4, today. Please email me!

Game Inflation at a Glance

According to fxtop.com the historical exchange rate in 1992 would be around: £2'250'000 / \$4'000'000. According to the same site, calculating for inflation gives you roughly £4'000'000 and \$7'000'000. Given fluctuations of the yen over the last 23 years, fxtop shows negligible change. Here are some fun comparison figures taken from a 2014 Kotaku article, using public information: Ultima VII: The Black Gate, another critically acclaimed RPG and released the same year as Tengai Makyou II, cost only \$1 million, roughly a quarter of the price.

PaRappa the Rapper (1997) cost 90 million yen, a mere 18% of the Tengai Makyou II budget (not calculating inflation); Shenmue on Dreamcast, which for a long time held the record for development costs, was \$47 million (excluding marketing) in 1999 - a mere seven years after Tengai Makyou II. Today Destiny cost \$140 million to develop. Shenmue was a grossly over-budgeted monstrosity for 1999 (and nearly crippled Sega), but even so, the figures show just how aggressive increases in development costs for triple-A titles were with each successive hardware generation, and explains why many of our favourite developers closed over the years.





~In memory of~

NARUSAWA, Daisuke

29 September 1965 ~ 6 March 2015

I wanted to let you know about another death in the community - a fellow games writer who

contributed to the industry. In early March of this year, Daisuke Narusawa passed away. He was only 49. He was not a developer, but rather a writer and critic. He started out in the late 1980s as a reviewer for *Famicom Hisshoubon*, a magazine similar to *Famitsu*. A huge fan of *Megami Tensei*, he also wrote and edited several highly-regarded strategy guides. It seems like he devoted much of his career to the *Megaten* series, and it's safe to say the popularity of the series is partially thanks to his work.

I have a copy of his guide for *Kyuuyaku Megami Tensei*, and it's amazing. The first section is written from the perspective of the post-apocalyptic world of *Megami Tensei 2*, with fake screenshots of a Devil Analyzer program (running on Windows 2036) for categorising demons. Let me explain. The first *Megami Tensei* (the original, not *Shin Megami Tensei*) takes place in the present, inside a giant extra-dimensional labyrinth. However, *Megami Tensei 2* takes place in a post-apocalyptic Tokyo of 2036, with the main character living underground in a sealed vault, *Fallout*style. Here's the cool part: at the beginning of *Megami Tensei 2*, you play a super-condensed version of *Megami Tensei 1* as a game-within-a-game called "*Devil Busters*". In other words, the entirety of *Megami Tensei 1* is recontextualised as a videogame being played by the hero in the post-apocalyptic world of *Megami Tensei 2*.

The strategy guide written by Daisuke Narusawa maintains this fiction, and the first 50 pages or so of the book are written as a strategy guide for the game-within-a-game, *Devil Busters*. The guide is supposedly published in 2036, in the world of *Megami Tensei 2*, and the screenshots are of a fictional Devil Analyzer program which acts as a companion to the *Devil Busters* game. So when you, the player in the real world, reads the real strategy guide by Narusawa, you are actually pretending to be the hero of the second game reading a strategy guide for the first game, which is being played by the hero of the second game as a videogame within the world of the second game which you are about to play.

Also a horse racing aficionado, he wrote guides for most of the *Derby Stallion* games. He also wrote a neat-looking retrospective on Namco in 1991, simply titled *The Namco Book*. Seemed like a cool guy. *Requiescat in pace*.

Matthew Fitsko, Japanese games expert

I knew Narusawa; he knew me. We were really the first generation of games journalists. Regrettably, we never met face to face. We spoke via instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and other ways, but we never had the chance to hang out.

Hiromasa Iwasaki

One of the few friends my age that I made after 40, has passed away. Writer Narusawa Daisuke, evangelist of *Derby Stallion* and *Megami Tensei*. I want as many people as possible to remember his name and the work he has done.

Kaz Ayabe, creator of the *Boku no Natsuyasumi* series

Narusawa Daisuke-san, famous for the *Derby Stallion* strategy guide, has passed away. He covered my early work '*Little Lovers*' in '*Narusawa Daisuke's Game Software Kono Ippon*' (No.11 1997.5.28), and I was very encouraged. It's thanks to that article that I've been able to continue as a game designer. May he rest in peace.

Jiro Ishii, key person behind recent adventures like *428* and *9 Hours 9 Persons 9 Doors*



• • •

Heisei 3rd Year (1991) Hudson Computer Designers School Graduation Album

= Graduation Manual / = Not For Sale / = celebrate / =
completion

Discussion with head of Japan's Game Preservation Society, Joseph Redon

16 October 2013, at an undisclosed location in Tokyo

This interview is an extract from the Game Preservation Society chapter in Vol. 1. Given its focus on the mysterious Hudson school game disc which Joseph had procured, I decided to keep it aside for the Hudson chapter in Volume 2.

We started our interview looking at an unreleased PC Engine game developed at the Hudson Computer Designers School in Hokkaido. It was made by students as part of their studies. Almost the entire game is shown as a slideshow of screenshots on the supplementary DVD.

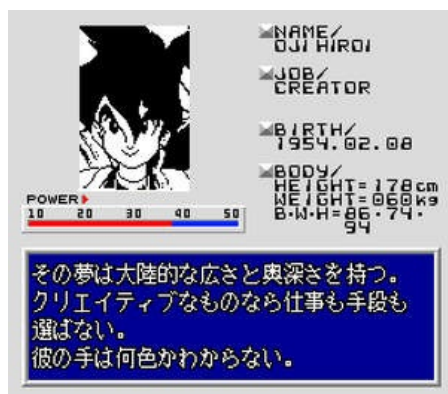
Joseph later provided 96 images taken from the game. This is a valuable resource in terms of Hudson staff names and roles, plus their photos (which I hope will be used on sites like MobyGames and Wikipedia). For a fun game, type the names you see on these pages into MobyGames, some of them have worked on prominent Hudson and Konami series!

For the full selection in raw PNG format, visit:
www.hardcoregaming101.net/hudsonschool/hudson.htm



JR: So you can fully move into the building and when you interact with a place you have this dialogue screen. Students and programmers, teachers, almost everybody who was in the building at this time is in this adventure game. You walk and speak and search, just like an old adventure game. There is no particular thing to do, you just have to speak to everyone to complete the game. So it's not really a game. It's called "School PR" on the CD, so it's just to promote the school.

But I don't think it was used for PR - it's just a student project for the CD. Maybe when we complete it we have names. But I think all of them were involved. I am sure they enjoyed making this, <laughs> meeting everyone in the company including some famous programmers. If I remember, Oji Hiroi appears in the game. He's the head of Red



JS: How did you find this CD? Did you know this game was on it?

JR: No, no, no. It was a complete surprise, because I think that three of them are available. I mean every year they released a CD and...

JS: Like a graduation CD?

JR: Yes, so three versions exist and two of them were already...

One of them was released on the internet and one of them we just had pictures of what's inside. It's work done by students so I won't say it's bad, but it's just students' work - so nothing really good or fancy. So this particular CD appeared in Akihabara in a shop called Retro Friends²⁵⁹ and they kept it like three or four months in the shop because they were selling it at a high price. It was like 250'000 yen.²⁶⁰ Which of course is too expensive. So no one would buy it, even if it's a unique item, very rare, and so on. It was just too expensive for this kind of stuff.

Another explanation is that looking at the CD like this in the shop, you would think that it's a copy. Honestly, I thought it was a copy. And then one day I talked with a French collector - there are many PC Engine collectors in France - and I told him they had this game in Akihabara for quite a while.

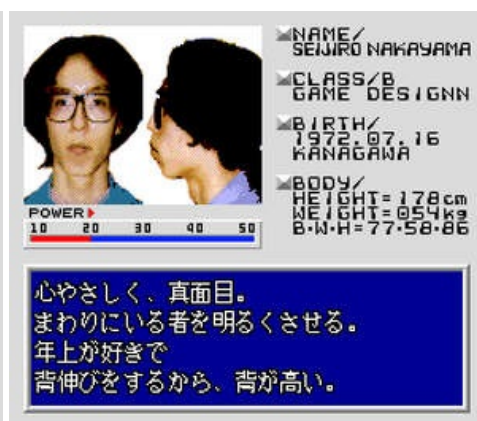
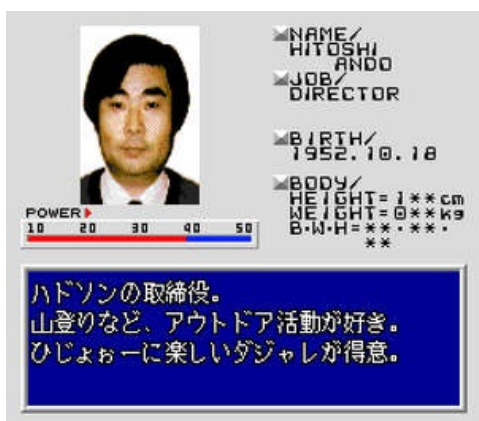
He told me, "We have to buy it whatever the price is!"

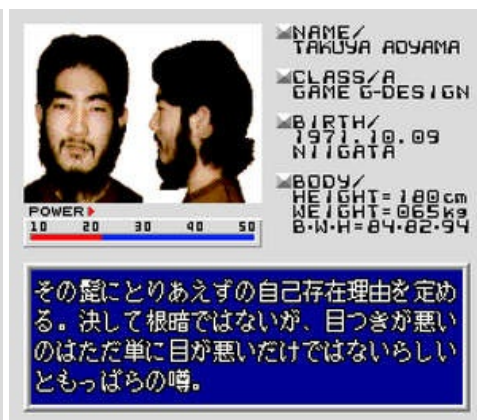
I said "No way - but if you are okay to pay for it, fine, I'll check first if it's a copy or not."

So I went to the shop, I asked to open it and I found that it was a pressed CD from this era so impossible to make a copy. So I bought it and I told my friend, "Okay, when you have money just pay me back, then I'll send you the game."

I've had it for maybe one year. Because it's a rare item I made a backup, then played it, only to discover that everything is just *awful*!

<everyone laughs>





JS: Did you try the "Hudson PR" option last?

JR: Yes, yes, and I was very surprised by the quality of the graphics, by the content, so I played it until the end. I think I spent one or two hours on it, reading everything, and it's really, really interesting because it contains some very small interviews with everyone in the building, or just stories, rants about Hudson and programmers. So it's quite enjoyable.

JS: Like a time capsule of people's thoughts from that place and time.

JR: Yes, I think this has real historical value. I don't mean the game or the item itself, but rather its contents are historical. It's a very important artefact, containing stories that maybe we wouldn't normally hear from people at Hudson.

JS: If somebody asked you to give them a text dump to do a translation, would you do that?

JR: Well this has to be discussed, because first: physically this is not my copy even if I have not been paid for it. It's still my friend's copy so... There are two problems here. I need to ask permission from my friend first. And as head of the Game Preservation Society, we have policy rules, and so on. It's difficult for us, in our position, to release any materials.



JS: It would have to be done by your friend.

JR: Yes, when I give it back, definitely it would be a very good idea to spread it, or make it available. Well, if he agrees. *<laughs>* But in Japan, by the Game Preservation Society, unfortunately this is not something we can freely do. If we wanted permission, then we will have to ask permission from so many people involved with the game, including the students themselves. It would be very, very hard to do that. Or we have to wait 50 years. *<laughs>* *Maybe more.*

JS: But we don't need permission to write about it?

JR: No, but I think one good solution would be to take video footage of it. Everyone is doing

that today, a sample from games to introduce them, and then finally we can add English subtitles to share the information. That would be a good idea.

JS: How much text is in the entire thing?

JR: Wow, quite a lot. I don't remember how many people there are in this game, but I would say easily more than 50 or 60. We also have their faces from this time. Also their birth date, and some rather private information. <laughs>



JS: What kind of private information?

JR: Um, birth date, and... like their...

JS: Marital status?

JR: No, no. Like height... Weight, and their measurements.

JS: Measurements?

JR: Yes. <laughs> Not very interesting, but yes.

JS: They've all got a power rating like in an RPG.

JR: Yes, I would say this is just a conversation.

JS: Like a private in-joke?

JR: Yes, yes, from the students. Power in the company at this time. So we have to look for the one who has 50.

JS: I wonder if Mr Takebe is in here?

JR: *<looking at unrelated profile>* This one is interesting, because they say that he is tall, but he is just 178 centimetres, so in Japan that will be quite tall.

JS: We're looking at Seijiro Nakayama?^{[261](#)}

JR: Yes, a game designer.

JS: The students must have gone to all staff, photographed them, digitised all the photos...

JR: Yes.

JS: A phenomenal undertaking!

JR: Yes. The previous screen you saw was the fifth floor and there are several floors to visit, and in the end if you speak to everyone you can enter the President's room... And this is the end.

JS: Is this documented online?

JR: Maybe. Yes it's mentioned, it was definitely mentioned on old Japanese home pages. I'm not sure if these pages even exist now. Because it was like a very old reference.

JS: The Hudson school was based in Sapporo and taught students programming, art, and design?

JR: Yes, the school is just a small part of the headquarters of Hudson, so I'm not sure how many students they had this year. Maybe if we have a look at the leaflet inside the CD case we'll know. *<flicks through leaflet>* Oh, quite a lot actually.

JS: And the leaflet has photographs of all the students as well.

JR: Yes. *<continues to flip through>*

JS: Graphics, quiz design, it says here project leader. Is the "Hudson PR" project listed and who worked on it?

JR: I think everyone was involved with it. Yes, so 19 students maybe, no more. We have the full list of students for this year, so quite a few. *<counts>* Yes, 19 people.



JS: And they'd be guaranteed a job at Hudson after they graduated?

JR: No idea. We'd have to contact them. They left phone numbers, addresses, quite a lot in this booklet. *<laughs>* So maybe if we send a postcard to where families are still living, at the same place... I mean it's Hokkaido, so they were almost all from Sapporo. *<browses list of student addresses>* Just one is from Otaru; we went to Otaru when we visited Hokkaido.

JS: Lovely town.

JR: Yes. So maybe there are still families living there... *<notices something>* Oh no, no. Wait, wait. This is their address in Sapporo at this time, but they were originally coming from all over Japan.

JS: What was the furthest?

JR: The furthest I have here is... *<goes through>* From Hiroshima.



JS: A fun idea might be contacting all of them. I wonder where they ended up over the years?

JR: Indeed!

JS: Maybe we could have them meet up again, play the game, then give commentary on it and where their lives went.

JR: That would be difficult because this is their phone number and address while they were living in Sapporo, so most of them just moved out. Only a few of them are from Sapporo... Not a few, half, maybe half of them come from Hokkaido, so maybe we can get in contact.

JS: Let's go to a different floor. Does it say who those two are?

JR: Yes, she's like a... We say in Japanese "office lady". <notes profile's power rating> Yes, she's quite powerful for...

JS: Midori Tanno, admin staff. She's 50 years old in 2014. I wonder if she remembers this? ... *That's Shinichi Nakamoto!*²⁶²

JR: He's director at this time.

JS: Mr Iwasaki said Mr Nakamoto interviewed him at Hudson.

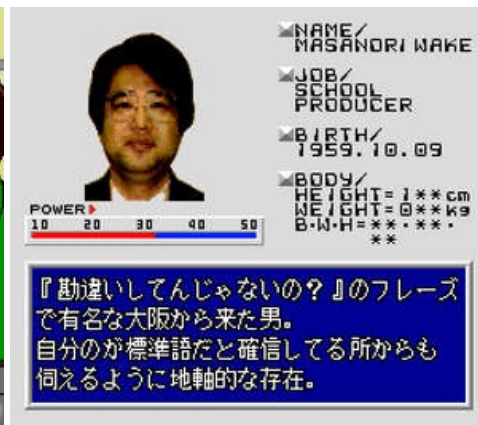
JR: We still have to find Mr Takebe, right? <laughs> Yes, so you just talk and search, you have to do both, and then afterwards you can move from this place. So lets go to another floor.



JS: You've had this CD for over a year now?

JR: Yes... Oh! <laughs> And this is the ladies' restroom. (below)



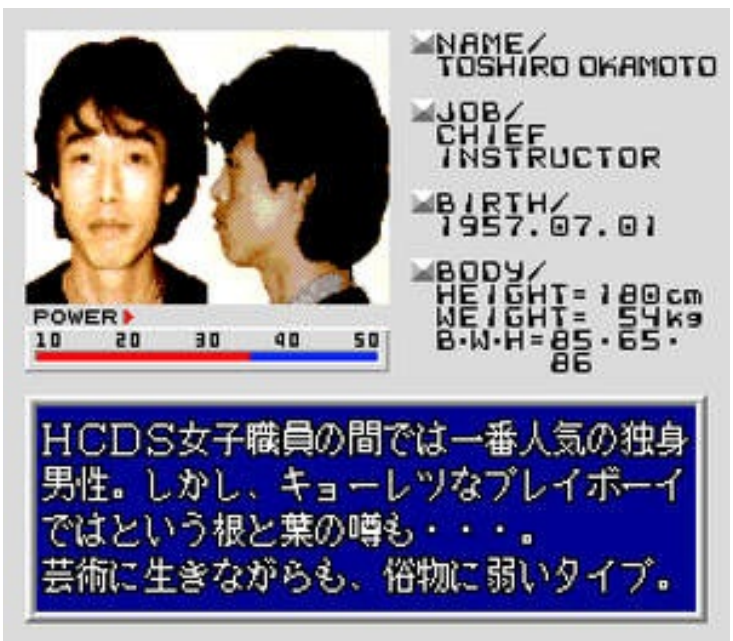


JS: You should not have gone in there!

JR: I hope that's not...!

<everyone laughs>

JR: <laughs> Strange guy. This is the graphics artist chief. Let's search for more about him.



JS: Mr Toshihiro Okamoto. [263](#)

JR: Chief Instructor, okay. He is shown like this because the students say he is a playboy.

JS: How did the store in Akihabara end up with this?

JR: If we have time maybe we can go to Akihabara, to the places I often go, including the shop where I found this game. We can ask them.

JS: This is incredible. It's priceless.

JR: Yes, it is really the kind of material I like finding, in this job of preservation. To tell the

truth, if there was not this adventure game on the CD, I would have told my friend, "Please send me the money as soon as possible, and I will ship you the game." But I'm happy to hang on to it for a while! <laughs>





NAME/
MASAYO FURUYA

JOB/
COMPUTER
INSTRUCTOR

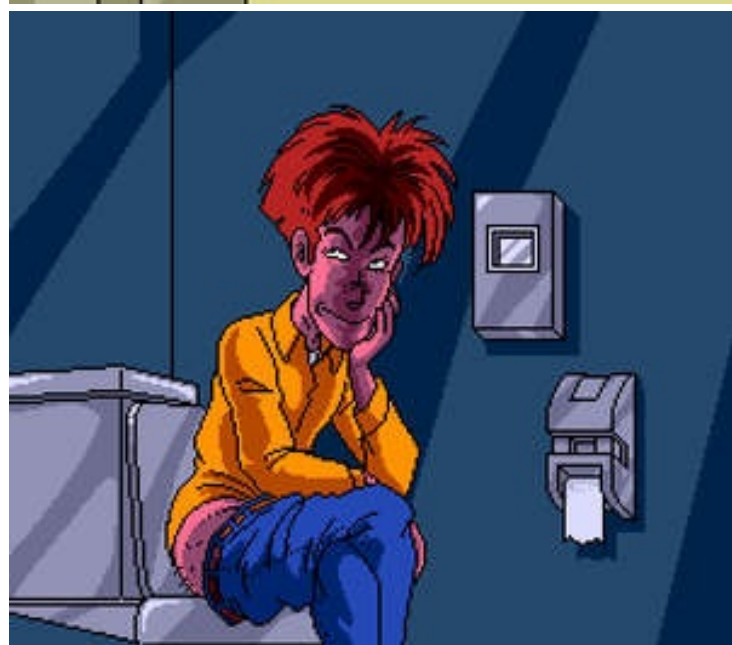
BIRTH/
1951.09.26

BODY/
HEIGHT= 153cm
WEIGHT= 40kg
B.W.H=65・65・

POWER ▶
10 20 30 40 50

北海道が誇る、コンピュータ界の女王。
家に帰ると、良き母、良き妻であること
に間違いはないが、やはり、しっかり
プログラム管理しているのだろうか。





▲NAME/
MASAKAZU ETIGO
 ▲CLASS/A
GAME G-DESIGN
 ▲BIRTH/
1973.01.04
HOKKAIDO
 ▲BODY/
HEIGHT=182cm
WEIGHT=66kg
B.W.H=70・62・68



寝る子は育つが、寝ていてばかりだと
 背は伸びるが、年をとらない良い見本。
 無邪気だが駄々子という噂も。



▲NAME/
SHOJI MIZUNO
 ▲JOB/
ANIMATION
INSTRUCTOR
 ▲BIRTH/
1960.06.03
 ▲BODY/
HEIGHT=172cm
WEIGHT=78kg
B.W.H=100・84・
100



妖しい雰囲気を出すアニメーション
 の講師。一見その筋のお方に思われがち
 なのは、あまり不本意には思っていない。
 あのトシちゃんと同年齢。

ZAINSOFT



Without doubt the most mysterious company featured in this book trilogy; not just for a Western audience but in Japan also. First though, let's clarify the name. From sometime around 1984 until sometime in 1990, this Osaka based company underwent two name changes. During its lifetime it was known by three different names: **Sein Soft** (1984-1986/87), **Xain Soft** (1987/88-1989), and finally **Zainsoft** (1989 onwards). There is no consensus on the specific dates of the name changes (in fact, the *Dios* PC-8801 packaging from 1989 says Zain, while the sticker keeping the lid closed says Xain). All the names are pronounced similarly, and spelt the same in Japanese (). There was also a revised Zain logo, and a fourth name/subsidiary (Lee Way Corporation), but that's covered later in the interview. When discussing a chronologically important event I have tried to use the spelling of that time (for example when joining the company), whereas for more general discussion I revert to Zainsoft. Yes, it's confusing, but that's Sein / Xain / Zain for you!

From the moment you encounter Zainsoft you're enveloped by myth, anomalies, and wild rumours. Speak to a Japanese retro enthusiast or even an older game developer, and their voice becomes hushed as they recount stories of alleged yakuza connections, violent staff beatings, and workers kept locked away. Staff who managed to escape - quite literally *escape* - would have to run away to Tokyo to evade the grasp of the company president. Kouji Yokota detailed some of this in his Volume 1 interview, given that his friend at Telenet, Jun Mukai, had done just that when aged 16. When I mentioned Zainsoft to Beep Shop's Takayuki Komabayashi, he exclaimed: "**MAJIDE** - you're interviewing **ZAINSOFT?! How did you find someone from Zainsoft?!**" He gifted me his copy of *Comptiq* magazine because it had a small piece on the company. Apparently candid interviews with Zainsoft were extremely rare, and the truth behind the rumours has never been fully documented.

Equally as intriguing is the company's reputation among Western enthusiasts, such as Michel Pavouris, who I asked to write the accompanying introduction. As Western fans will attest, many of Zainsoft's best games were released after and copied popular titles by companies such as Falcom and Telenet, hence the abundance of Action-RPGs. During a roughly six year period the company produced over 85 known games, if you count conversions, though not all were released (which itself is important, because there's one title which could be the only true PC-8801MC CD-ROM game in existence). Meanwhile the official English spellings on the title screens and boxes don't always match the Japanese *katakana* alongside (ie: is literally "grandmaster", but it's anglicised as Ground Master). None of the games received console ports, though there were regular mentions of upcoming Famicom and PC Engine conversions which never materialised. In fact, none of the games officially left Japan in any form. Meaning the only way to experience them is by importing a copy for archaic computer systems, or emulation. Even then, most

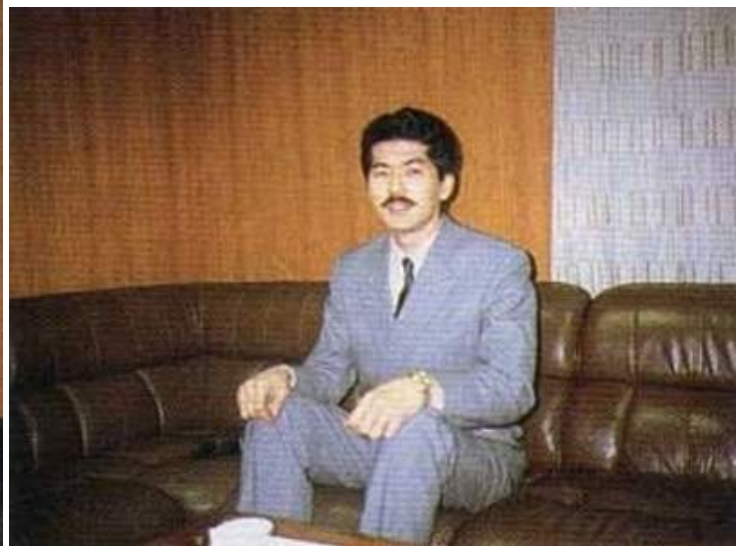
titles are so infamously buggy players might wonder if it's an emulation issue. In Japan it's speculated the high difficulty of some Zainsoft games was to mask the fact that bugs left them incomplete. As we also reveal, the games are full of oddities - if you followed the advertising campaign for something like Valusa on the X68000, it would appear as if the game underwent several major overhauls, with important content either being cut or replaced entirely. Everywhere you look with Zainsoft: the name changes, company reputation, rumours of staff violence and yakuza involvement, cut content of games, buggy conversions, disconnected adverts, ***something strange is always going on.***

The interview was arranged by Joseph Redon, and given all that I'd heard, I was extremely keen to get the inside story. Joseph had made contact quite by accident. A female friend of his had been hired by someone to do website work, and while they were chatting the client mentioned having once worked in videogames. The friend suggested the client chat with Joseph, who liked discussing game history. To Joseph's astonishment, this mysterious stranger was Kensuke Takahashi, one of the key programming staff at Zainsoft. They met a few times and discussed the company's history, and it was agreed that my book would be the perfect vehicle to document this rare part of Japanese computer history. Mr Takahashi had long been out of the industry, and was nervous about revealing his name or face, but after several hours of discussion, and a few post-interview emails, he felt comfortable letting the world know everything about Zainsoft. Truly, a world exclusive. So let's break open the quantum threshold and step through, though our new reality may surprise you...

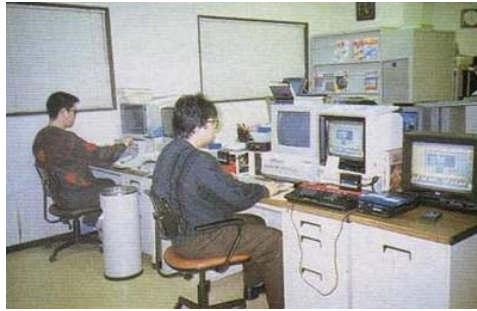
(Michel's intro was intentionally written ***before*** reading the interview, to maintain the perceptions of someone looking in from the outside.)



our interviewee, Mr Takahashi



the company president, Mr Miyamoto, described by MSX Magazine as a "dandy"



*random office photos; **centre:** Tritorn II development*

Company Portfolio

Games are **not** in perfect chronological order. No one knows the precise month of release for most of these titles. Instead they're mostly in Japanese alphabetical order, grouped by year, except where altered. Post-1988 releases are especially messy, and have been segregated for easier parsing. Conversions were released on different months, obviously. English names do not always match the Japanese, but it's what was written on the boxes in *romaji* and is correct. **Note:** given that Zainsoft advertised games as being already released as much as two years *before* release (ie: Mirai), none of these dates are 100% reliable.

Title System Media Year

× / MAX-01 FM-7 TAPE & DISK 1984

× / MAX-01G PC-8801 TAPE 1984

× / MAX-01G PC-98 DISK **1985**

× / MAX-01G X1 TAPE & DISK 1985

/ Holy Grail FM-7 TAPE & DISK 1985

/ Holy Grail PC-8001mkIISR TAPE 1985

/ Holy Grail PC-8801 TAPE & DISK 1985

/ Holy Grail PC-98 DISK 1985

/ Holy Grail X1 TAPE & DISK 1985

/ Tritorn PC-6001mkII TAPE 1985

/ Tritorn PC-8801 DISK 1985

/ Tritorn X1 TAPE & DISK 1985

/ Tritorn (new packaging, rare) PC-8801/X1 DISK 1985

/ Aramo (aka: Alamo) MSX ROM **1986**

/ Tritorn FM-7 TAPE & DISK 1986

/ Tritorn MSX TAPE & ROM 1986

/ Tritorn PC-98 DISK 1986

/ Super Tritorn MSX2 ROM 1986

/ Mirai (aka: Future) PC-8801mkIISR / X1 DISK **1987**

/ Mirai (aka: Future) MSX DISK 1987

/ Mirai (aka: Future) MSX2 ROM 1987

/ Mirai (aka: Future) PC-9801M DISK 1987

/ Deep Forest FM77AV DISK 1987

/ Deep Forest MSX2 ROM 1987

/ Garyuuoh (aka: Dragon King) MSX2 ROM 1987

/ Majin Kyu X68000 DISK 1987

/ Ground Master PC-98 / X68000 DISK **1988**

¥ / Cluju PC-8801mkIISR / PC-98 DISK 1988

/ Majin Kyu MSX2 / PC-98 DISK 1988

/ Herlesh PC-8801mkIISR / X1 DISK 1988

/ Hideger PC-8801mkIISR / PC-98 / X1 DISK 1988

/ Bastard MSX2 DISK 1988

/ Bastard Special PC-8801mkIISR / X1 DISK 1988

/ Jotunn MSX2 / PC-88 / PC-98 / X1 DISK 1988

/ Tritorn II PC-8801mkIISR DISK 1988

1989

/ Tritorn II MSX2 / PC-9801F / X1 DISK 1989

/ Hideger MSX2 DISK 1989

× / Road of Darkness PC-98 DISK 1989

/ Tritorn Final X68000 DISK 1989

/ Alfaim PC-8801mkIISR / PC-98 / X68k DISK 1989

/ Galf Streem MSX2 / PC-88 / PC-98 / X1 DISK 1989

/ **Dios MSX2 / PC-8801mkIISR / PC-98 DISK 1989**

/ Kobe Ren-ai Monogatari PC-8801mkIISR / PC-98 (?) DISK 1989

(aka: The Love Story in Kobe)

1990

/ Kobe Ren-ai Monogatari X68000 DISK 1990

. / Bookmate Vol.1 PC-98 DISK 1990

/ Tug of War PC-8801mkIISR / PC-98 / X68k DISK 1990

/ **Dios PC-8801MC CD-ROM 1990**

/ **Dios X68000 DISK 1990**

/ Valusa no Fukushuu X68000 DISK 1990

/ Reinforcer X68000 DISK 1990

UNRELEASED (not a full list)

/ Last Survivor PC-6001mkII TAPE 1985 - **unreleased**

/ Scion PC-8801 DISK 1985 - **unreleased**

/ Tritorn Bloody Famicom ROM 1986 - **not started?**

/ Cham Christmas MSX2 ROM 1987 - **unreleased**

/ Golf Contraction X68000 DISK 1989 - **unreleased**

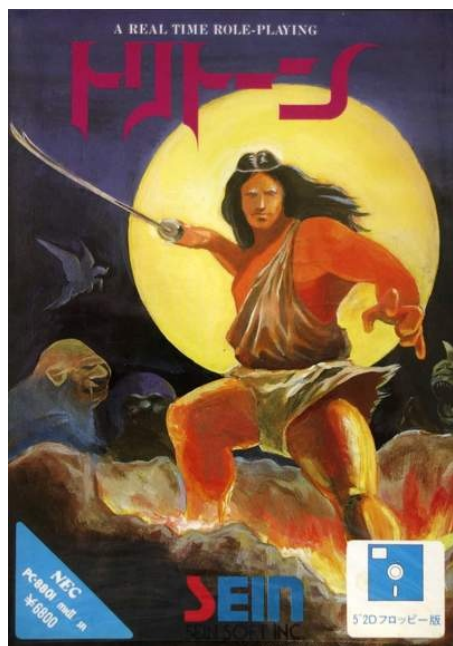
¥ / Yuki no Kuni Cluju X68000 DISK 1989 - **unknown**

/ Dios PC Engine ROM 1990 - **not started?**

/ Valusa no Fukushuu FM Towns DISK 1990 - **not started?**

/ Reinforcer FM Towns DISK 1990 - **not started?**

Introduction and mini-reviews by Michel Pavouris



This is one of my favourite game companies from the 1980s and early 90s - the one I'm most fanatical about. The company's identity is confusing due to its multiple name changes, but Sein / Xain / Zainsoft must stand as one of the most bizarre and interesting developers ever. It's really shrouded in mystery, considering all the crazy business decisions and lack of staff credits. It created a huge number of A-RPGs and was one of Falcom's closest competitors. I remember when first discovering and researching old Japanese PC games, Zainsoft's titles immediately stood out.

It's difficult to articulate all of the company's oddities, because there's so much. The most interesting topics would be the development of *Tritorn 2*, the bizarre Xain period, and the 16-bit switch, but there's plenty of other... weird things. There's also lots of unreleased titles if you browse old magazines. I love

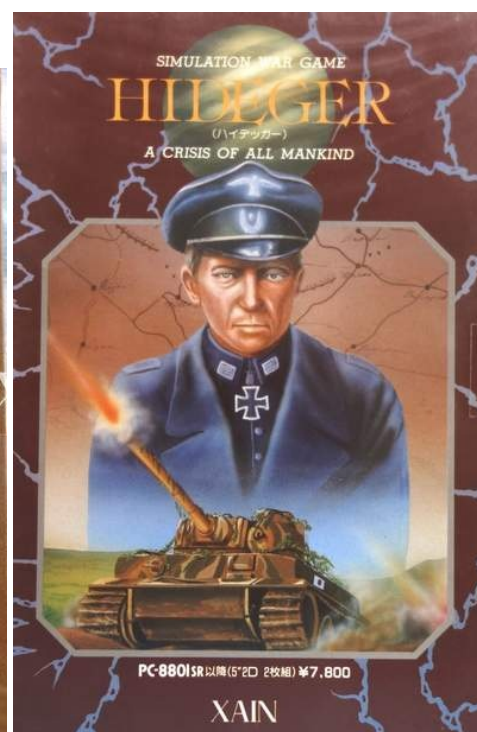
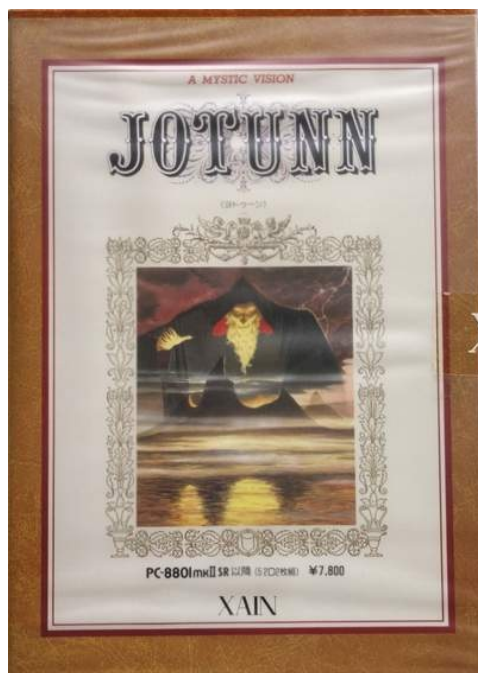
the company because its games are amongst the most fascinating ever made, and the fact it usually focused on A-RPGs similar to those by Falcom. The majority of the company's titles were action based, and the themes explored are often extremely cool. For many of the games it's the cover art which is immediately striking, but after playing for a while, the amount of awesome ideas, unexpected imagery, and other aspects give the games a strong charisma. *Dios* is the big one for me: a side-scrolling action game where the player investigates a planet overrun by monsters. The amount of incredible moments in that game, with its eerie storyline and insane atmosphere and non-stop bosses is **crazy**.

Sein Soft started in roughly 1984 with *Max-01*, which was a simple *Lode Runner* style game, followed months later with a similar game called *Holy Grail*. It wasn't until the release of *Tritorn* in late 1985 that the company had its first success. They hit it big with the release of *Tritorn*, which was essentially a 2D platformer/A-RPG heavily inspired by *Hydlide*. Essentially it took the core elements of the popular *Hydlide* released a year earlier, but instead of a top-down perspective it used a side-view.²⁶⁴ In 1986 there were conversions of the original *Tritorn*, an MSX2 exclusive sequel in *Super Tritorn*, plus a new release in *Aramo*, an action game with the usual Zainsoft twists: it's split between an isometric maze and top-down dungeon crawling, with light RPG overtones (items, EXP, stats). In 1987 it released two shooters: the MSX2 exclusive, vertically scrolling "walking" shmup *Garyuu Oh* (very similar to some of the Konami releases from that same year, *Knightmare* and *Hi No Tori*), and also *Mirai*. The release of *Tritorn* had made the company a bigger name in the Japanese PC market, a reputation further strengthened with the impressive *Mirai*.



This early line-up was arguably the most critically well received phase of the company. Afterwards it changed its name to Xain Soft, and started releasing games more chaotically, with less consistency in quality. Everything from this point went downhill. The president was a guy with a moustache who hired coders straight out of high school for low pay, and the company expanded to release heaps of titles ported to all the main computers. Most new games had bugs or were simply unfinished, and the rushed ports to other computers suffered even more. Most of this occurred during the Xain era.

Despite the rushed and often bug-filled releases of this time, the charismatic, bizarre and interesting aspects of the games actually became more prevalent. Releases included Ground Master, a standalone S-RPG subtitled "Act 1"; Bastard, a fantasy A-RPG; Hideger, a contemporary turn-based strategy war game, with side-view action battles when units attack on the map; Herlesh, a rushed and unfinished fantasy A-RPG that copied Falcom's Ys; Jotunn, a more traditional RPG; and Cluju, an adventure and RPG hybrid.



All of these games were initially released in 1988, showing just how many titles the company started pumping out at this point. Which also makes it obvious why so many were rushed and buggy, though they are still entertaining regardless. Shoddy ports are something that would define the reputation of the company's games from the Xain era onwards.

Another thing to mention of the Xain era is the troubled development of *Tritorn II*, the follow up to the company's most successful game, which they failed to capitalise on. Originally advertised for an intended 1987 release, it had multiple development problems leading to a change of programmer, and when released at the end of 1988 it was completely different to earlier screenshots, and nowhere near as much of a commercial success as the original.²⁶⁵ *Tritorn Final* was an awful X68000 remix/remake of *Tritorn II*. Nicer graphics, but very jerky scrolling and poor detection.

Sometime after this the company entered its third and final phase, renamed Zainsoft. Rather than the high volume of releases during the Xain era, it appeared to slow down slightly, and every game had the same consistent though unique art style previously established in *Tritorn II* and *Galf Streem*, giving the impression the company had a more permanent group of staff for each game's development.

An interesting move during the Zain phase is its late 1989 line-up contained two traditional Japanese adventure games,²⁶⁶ called *Alfaim* and *Kobe Renai Monogatari*. Of course during this period they also developed another side-scrolling A-RPG called *Dios*. (see overleaf)

Towards the end of the company's life in 1990, Zainsoft made the radical decision to focus on developing games for the 16-bit powerhouse computer, the X68000 (famous at the time for providing perfect arcade ports). The announced titles were the side-scrolling fantasy action game *Valusa no Fukushuu*, and the cyberpunk top-down action game, *Reinforcer*. First was *Valusa*, which was heavily advertised in magazines and showcased impressive graphics not unlike arcade titles of the time. When finally released in September 1990 it was apparent the game had been rushed, as many features shown in screenshots (such as a magic point gauge,

gold to buy new equipment, and even many of the areas and bosses), were not in the final game. Poor collision detection and a lack of hit stun were once again apparent, and the game didn't succeed at all.

Magazine ads for Zainsoft dropped off shortly after and the end seemed near. However, the company still managed to release the cyberpunk themed Reinforcer for X68000, before finally disappearing. Unlike Valusa though, Reinforcer was released in a much more polished state. In fact it was impressive compared to most of the company's games, with no immediately apparent bugs and seemingly no missing features. Despite this, Reinforcer received very few ads compared to Valusa and barely managed to get copies released.

It seems the sudden and exclusive change to X68000 development didn't suit the company very well. As Sein / Xain / Zeinsoft games rarely had staff credits, it's unknown who many of the developers were and therefore what they did once the company folded. The eclectic but distinct style of the company's games should not be underestimated, and to this day its games have retained a cult following in Japan amongst fans of old computer stuff.

Mirai - PC-8801mkIISR, X1, MSX, MSX2, PC-9801M



Despite first coming out in 1985 *Mirai* featured large detailed characters and two distinct play modes: *Section-Z* styled shooting sections, and on-foot side-scrolling areas akin to a traditional A-RPG, with the same kind of character advancement system and interface as Falcom's *Xanadu*. Players can wear many different "suits", which both looked different when equipped and had different weapons. Cool sci-fi setting and nice graphics throughout, it must have been particularly impressive during the year of its release.

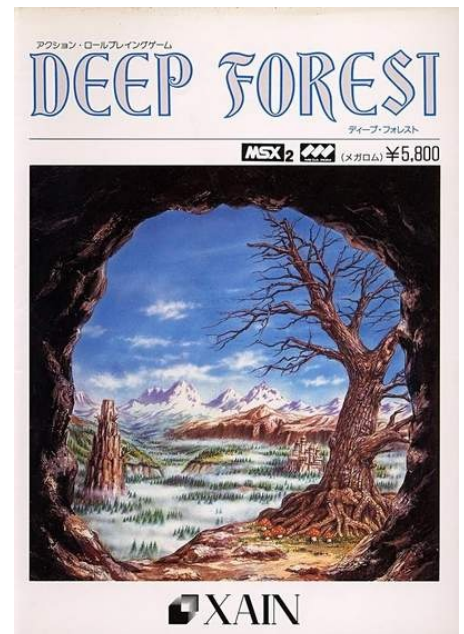
Herlesh - PC-88, X1

Standard *Ys* style A-RPG, but with a visual style extremely similar to that of *Hydlide 3*. Playing up to the first boss there's nothing that stands out as especially interesting, but certainly it's quite a solid adventure.



Deep Forest - FM77AV, MSX2

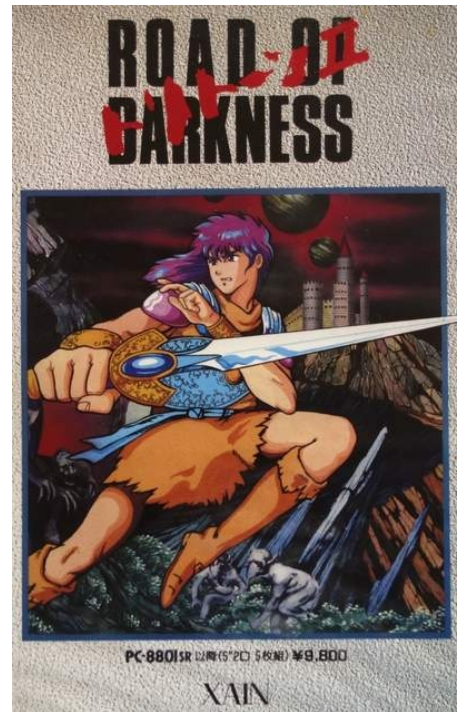
One of the more noteworthy titles in the Xain era was *Deep Forest*, released in 1987 for the new and powerful FM77AV. It was yet another side-scrolling A-RPG, though the action is the main focus since there are very few NPCs to talk with. The FM77AV hardware allowed for gigantic boss characters, great colours, with lots of action onscreen at once and little slowdown. The game took full advantage of the hardware, with incredible stages filled with multiple bosses and lots of variety. Despite the high quality of the FM77AV release, it was ported to the MSX2 in a drastically altered state and is generally considered one of the poorer games on the system, with stodgy controls and much of the content from the original removed. It was however fan-translated into English! There's an online video²⁶⁷ which shows the simple, but weird and super haunting ending to *Deep Forest*, noteworthy because the game actually has a proper staff roll unlike most others from the company.



Tritorn II - PC-88, MSX2, PC-9801F, X1

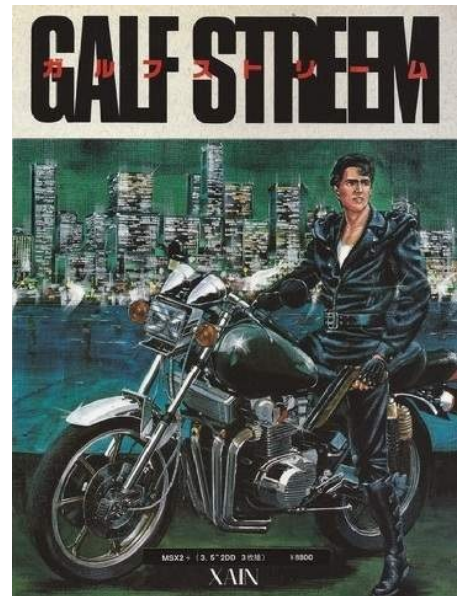
Also known as *Road of Darkness*. Despite a host of problems related to control and collision detection, *Tritorn II* is still entertaining and cool. Yet again, here was Xain Soft releasing a side-scrolling A-RPG with large characters, great art style, and an adventure where you're

constantly moving through varied locations and fighting lots of bosses. One of the company's best aspects is the quantity of bosses and unique enemies in many of its games. One particularly memorable part of *Tritorn II* has you swallowed by a huge monster, and the inside of his stomach is an entire area to traverse.



Galf Streem - PC-8801mkIISR, PC-98, X1, MSX2

The first game with fancier intro and music. The main draw here is its styling - it's not everyday you see an RPG with a modern 1980s setting, or cover art depicting a *Mad Max* look-alike atop a bike with sawn-off shotgun, standing against a metropolis! The **PC88GameWorld** site likens it to the 1984 movie *Streets of Fire*, which is apt; atmosphere-wise it's comparable to games like *Final Fight* and *Streets of Rage*. However, this is also one of the hardest to categorise into a mechanical genre. You walk around in a regular JRPG view, talking to people, advancing the story, sometimes bumping into thugs and having to defeat them in an action battle. These battle scenes are... unique. They control like a side-view beat-em-up and seem standard, but are also hilarious - a kick to the head, for example, results in one's head briefly inflating to comedic proportions, complete with a silly and exaggerated expression. You can punch/kick/duck etc., though you can't move around, akin to a side-on *Punch Out*. Amusingly, it also has a cameo by the *Blues Brothers*!

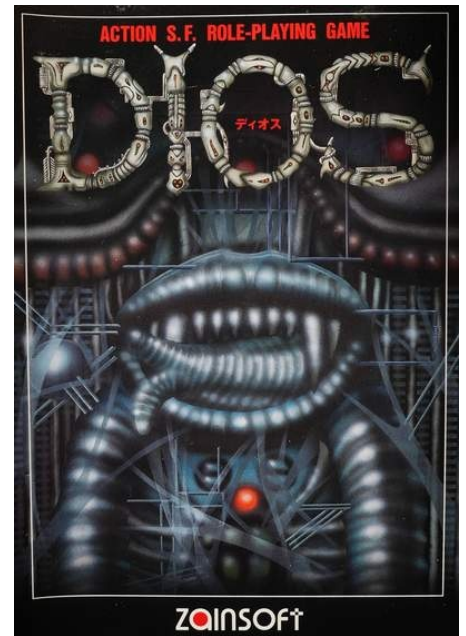


Dios - PC-8801mkIISR, MSX2, PC-98, PC-8801MC, X68000

My favourite Zain game. Don't be fooled by the "role playing" title on the box, this is a straight side-scrolling action game. It is perhaps the most striking and interesting of all the company's output, featuring an incredible cover art that's a copy of an H.R. Giger painting. For fans of dark sci-f it draws you in, making one incredibly curious to see what awaits within. The game itself doesn't disappoint, with a creepy atmosphere and complete disregard for standard game design conventions. The story follows a team of soldiers called to the planet *Dios* after reports of an outbreak of mutants massacring the people. The cinematic intro is incredibly cool, taking up two of the game's eight PC-88 disks, and shows the team of soldiers receiving their orders to complete various tasks independently, meet up with

resistance fighters already on the planet, and try to figure out the mystery of the mutant outbreak.

What this leads to is mostly an action side-scroller with seven playable characters but very few "RPG" elements. Each character has their own distinct, mostly linear mission. The characters all wield various guns, or "mental projectiles" in the case of one. In addition are items such as screen freezing weapons, energy "rations" and reviving modules, so the way it plays is perhaps more akin to something like *Metroid*. The main flaw is that like other games from Zainsoft there is no hit stun when taking damage, meaning most deaths result from your entire health bar draining because you touched an enemy too long. This also means that bosses can burst out suddenly and kill you in about a second. This can be hilarious, frustrating, and kinda cool all at the same time...



The merits of the game are numerous though, and it really epitomises all the unexpected elements the company was known for. Each of the character's missions are, much like *Tritorn II*, extremely varied, and filled with memorable bosses. The designer clearly went as far out as he could, throwing massive bosses at the player non-stop, most of which have incredibly twisted biological designs.

None of the missions are broken into specific "stages" or boss areas though; each mission is one long, seamless stage. Though in a few cases you have to complete a mission of one character before you can progress with another. To illustrate how well it all works: one of the best missions belongs to the main character Zach Hunt, who starts on the surface of the planet, which is infested by mutants and various abominations. He has to fight a gigantic mutated flying monster to gain access to the underground of the planet, where he then fights another huge boss, which leads to a series of suspenseful chambers and eventually a mysterious cyborg encounter. Zach engages in a surreal conversation before taking him down. This then leads into the core of the planet, which is entirely biological, and ends in a boss battle against an even bigger, crazier abomination that fills half the screen. The twist is, Zach is a biological military experiment like all the other monsters and - in fact - *is the son of this particular boss!* Afterwards Zach is paralysed, and another character's mission involves rescuing him.

The game throws new things at you constantly and never repeats the same enemies or scenery for longer than a few minutes. The dark sci-fi theme is memorable and makes it a must try for those who like the genre, or are fans of all the hard-boiled action sci-fi OVAs Japan was producing at the time.

The X68000 version of *Dios* looks *absolutely gorgeous* with its 16-bit graphics, but it fails due to being a horribly rushed and super buggy mess which runs too fast. Most importantly, a lot of content was cut from the original PC-88 version, including scenes and all the animation from the intro, and even a sub-plot, which is one of the most important and mysterious parts of the story (it's the scene where the commander who sends your team to *Dios* has a secret conversation with another officer, suggesting their involvement in the troubles). Some of the bosses no longer shoot projectiles and there are no character portraits during conversations. The MSX2 version is also bad, with slow and jerky scrolling. Zainsoft also later released a

CD version of Dios for the PC-8801MC. Supposedly there was voice acting added in the cutscenes, but who knows what else was added. Dios CD still hasn't been found - making it the final, undiscovered treasure of Zainsoft.

If you want to get a sense of how cool/weird the story is, read these conversations between Zack and two bosses. Stuff like this is probably why the company has such a cult following in Japan:

-- Gord (Area 3 boss) ---

Gord: So you've come, Zack. But you're too late. Your younger brothers put up quite a struggle.

Zack: What!? Who the hell are you?

Gord: My name is Gord. I was developed by the army at the same time as you. The monsters here were all created after you. You and I are of the same kind, but I can't let you pass.

-- Final Boss in Zach's Chapter ---

Boss: My son. So you've made it this far.

Zack: Son? I don't know anyone like you!

Boss: When I still had a body of flesh and blood, I was used as a guinea pig in the army's biological experiments and given this form. For the purpose of getting revenge on the army, I have sent my partition here and challenged them.

Zack: Getting revenge on the army is fine, but you've gone and involved innocent people. Even if you are my father, I will never forgive you!

Boss: You are my son. If I die, then you will die as well. Would you still fight me?

Zack: Someone like me, born from such a deformed creature, would be better off dead anyway.

-- Final Scene ---

Zack: M... My body won't move.

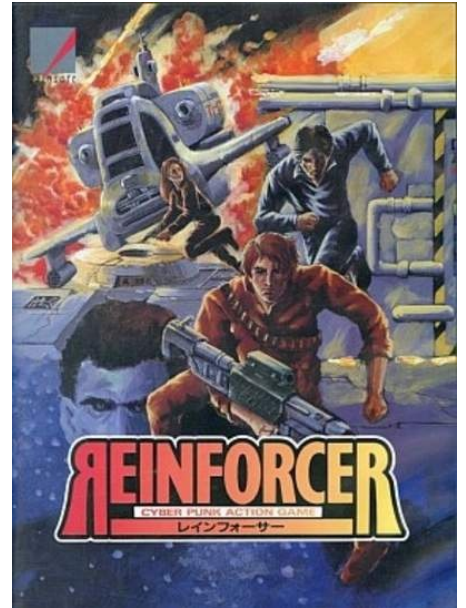
Tug of War - PC-8801mkIISR, PC-98, X68000

Late in the company's life Zain produced its most offbeat game, Tug of War. Probably the only game based around the sport. It really *is* a game about tug of war competitions, involving teams of five. You have a team of dudes and have to beat opposing teams by madly tapping keys and then hitting enter once you've built up energy to pull the rope. Apart from destroying your hand to win, there is some strategy in switching out team members with others that have been resting. Although the mechanics are button mashing with some strategic decisions, leave it to Zainsoft to produce a concept like this and make it memorable. Instead of a realistic sports theme it has a story involving a "Dark Lord" as the main villain, there are lots of mini-games between the tug of war competitions to help raise your team's stats, and best of all... Boss battles involving your entire team going up against singular large demons on the other side of the rope! These boss battles are as cool and hilarious as they sound. Also, Rod Soul from Dios makes a cameo in a poster in one of the story scenes.



Reinforcer - X68000

The last Zainsoft game and an X68k exclusive. It can be described as thematically/aesthetically inspired by the Sega arcade game *Crack Down*, though the way it plays is perhaps closer to *Gauntlet* (minus enemy generators, plus more emphasis on tactically taking out enemies). Players run through large areas, which at first appear to be mazes but are thankfully quite linear, utilising numerous weapons. As you complete stages you control different characters that are part of your team, advancing the plot. In true Zainsoft style there are many boss battles to break up the standard running and gunning - sometimes three or more in a single stage! Similarly to *Dios* there is a dark sci-fi theme, but whereas *Dios* was in the vein of *Metroid* or the film *Aliens*, *Reinforcer* is like *Blade Runner* mixed with *Die Hard*. The cool art, atmosphere, and constant boss battles make it quite a thrilling (and difficult) experience right until the end. (Also, the intro has multiple references to heavy metal bands!)



Valusa no Fukushuu - X68000

An X68000 exclusive and technically the last in the *Tritorn* saga. The main enemy in the first *Tritorn* was the evil demon lord Pay Valusa - the name here is literally "Valusa's Revenge". It may initially look like a side-scrolling A-RPG, but really it's a straight action game. After years of playing I'm still discovering new things hidden within, some of which even lead to detailed cinematic cut-scenes. Like *Dios*, it's a game that warrants a lengthy article, especially when factoring in the intense ad campaign. For five months straight it had big two-page ads in *Comptiq* and other magazines, starting from before it was released. Oddly, the screens in the first ad show a *Wonder Boy in Monster Land* style system, with the character wearing different armours and wielding different weapons. Subsequent ads reverted to a single sprite for the main character, similar to the retail version - except with the guy wearing purple armour.



There is also a super cool screen-filling boss in one screen, but which is *nowhere* in the final game! There's also a currency counter which was ultimately removed. It's annoying to think how much better the game could have been if Zainsoft had kept the original design with changeable weapons and armour, and the unused enemies and bosses. The situation must have been really bad at the end if they had to strip the game down and release it the way they did.

It has the same "enemies drain your health in seconds" problem as in *Dios*. Most people never get past the second stage, since it's the most absurdly balanced in the whole game. There's only one way to complete this part: sparingly use the wave-flame shots to get through enemies and reach one that drops the knife, at which point the game balance becomes a lot more "normal" and plays a bit like *Makaimura*.

Valusa's strongest point is the bosses, which are massive. It's also extremely funny - at the end of Stage 2, instead of just giving you the key to proceed, two characters run around throwing it to each other and you have to catch it out of the air. The game feels quite mysterious, with strange items, hidden weapons and other stuff which can be missed if you don't search. The game is so deeply idiosyncratic that it's worth experiencing, despite the balance problems.

~Selected Gallery~



Max-01 (FM-7)



Holy Grail (FM-7)



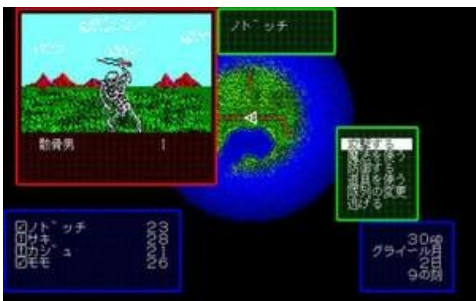
Mirai (PC-88)



Aramo (MSX)



Haryuuoh (MSX2)



Ground Master (PC-88)



Cluju (PC-98)



Herlesh (PC-88)



Bastard (MSX2)



Galf Stream (PC-88)



Galf Stream (PC-88)



Deep Forest (FM77AV)



Majin Kyu (MSX2)



Tug of War (PC-88)

~The Tritorn Saga~

Tritorn was Sein's first hit. *Super Tritorn* was an MSX2 only sequel, updating the visuals and redesigning the whole map. *Tritorn II* was in development for a long time, ending up very different to magazine previews. *Tritorn Final* is an X68k exclusive sequel, though with beautifully redrawn art from *Tritorn II*. But it doesn't even come close to its predecessor, bordering on unplayable (scrolling is so jerky you can't perform jumps unless you've scrolled it first). *Valusa no Fukushuu* is the end of the saga, its name paying homage to the boss of the first game. Much more polished and a great send off, despite extremely severe difficulty spikes.



Tritorn (PC-88)



Tritorn II (PC-88)



Super Tritorn (MSX2)



Tritorn Final (X68k)



Valusa no Fukushuu (X68k)



Dios (PC-88)



Dios (PC-88)



(Reinforcer (X68000))

NEW 制作快調 / 今秋発売予定
Cyber Punk-Action Game
REINFORCER レインフォーサー

トップビューサイバーパンクアクション。「Neut」を殲滅せよ！
2006年、平和な日本は、一人の将軍の死を契機に勃発したクーデターによって、恐怖の日々を送ることになった。2週間後そのクーデターは鎮圧されたが、それが後に続くパニックのほんのプロローグに過ぎなかったことを、まもなく知ることとなる。集団テロ組織「Neut」とは、特殊精鋭部隊「REDRUM」とは、そして「REINFORCER」とは……。

プレイヤー・ウェポンが最大5種類装備可能！
3人のプレイヤーをシナリオに沿って巧みに操作し集団テロ組織「Neut」をぶっつぶせ！
迫力あるアクションシーンの合間に見せるビジュアルシーンで複雑な話が解き明かされていきます。
個性ある敵とその地形を考え、特色ある武器を使い分ける事によって全てをクリアする事ができます。
オープニング画面はフルアニメーションによりこれから起こる出来事を明確に表現しています。
8方向スクロールのトップビュータイプ
キャラクターシューティングゲーム

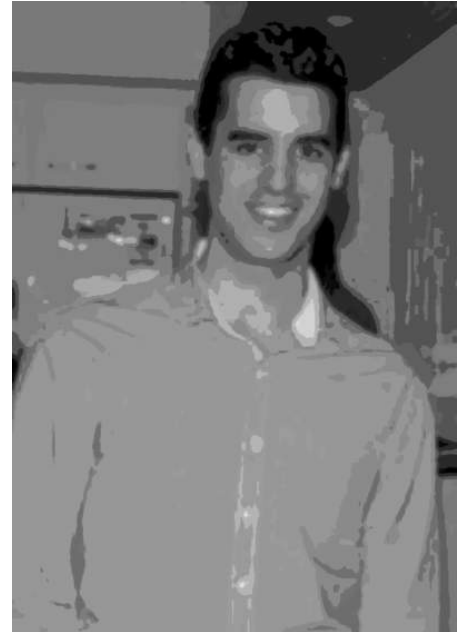
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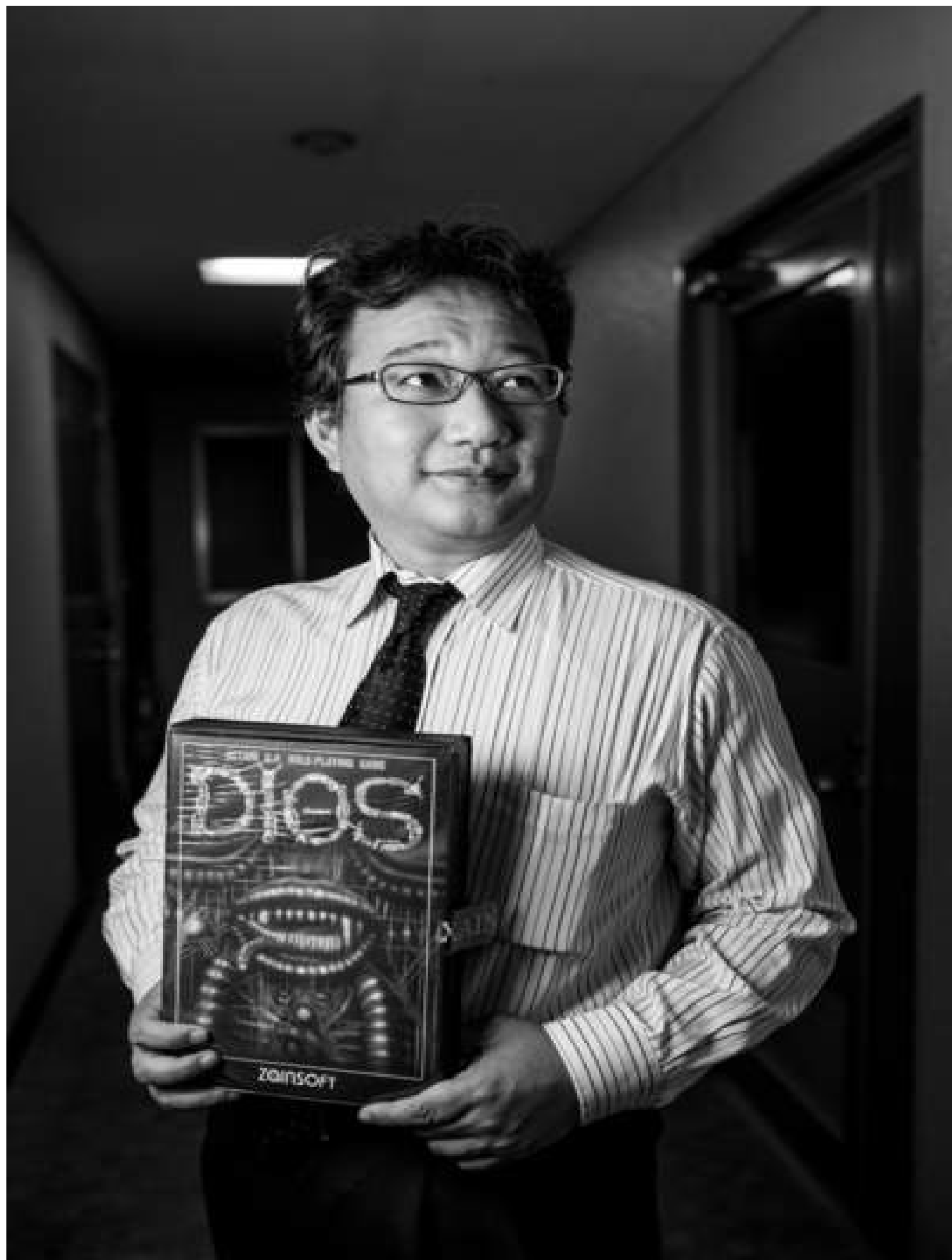
■対応機種 ●X68000 ●FM TOWNS
■価格 ￥8,800

In some instances an MSX conversion was shown since they're easier to find. Even so,

acquiring screenshots for some games was super difficult, so the book's author thanks the following: www.generation-msx.nl - fm-7.com - www5f.biglobe.ne.jp/~apaslothy/ - www.geocities.jp/rip_gamer/future/future.html - mercenaryforce.web.fc2.com -

Michel Pavouris is the world's leading English-speaking expert on Zainsoft, with a collection of over 300 Japanese computer magazines. Based in Australia, he preserves videogame history by streaming videos of games not yet documented. While emulation is sometimes inevitable, he prefers owning original copies of games, and provided scans of the cover images used throughout this chapter!





TAKAHASHI, Kensuke

DOB: *secret* / Birthplace: Kobe City / Blood Type: A

Interview with Kensuke TAKAHASHI

11 October, 2013, Osaka / Duration: 4h 14m

<JR spoke with KT some time before, and had shown various materials - sudden audio start>

Kensuke Takahashi: ...with the help of your materials. I didn't even remember some of the titles, because my memories are fading. You know, what do you remember from 26 years ago? You know, you might have worked on something 26 years ago, so you have that much condensed time in a way. And there are titles that other people worked on, without me. So take a look at that. I don't think this was released. <points to one of the "unreleased" games in the portfolio list>

JR: At first glance, this doesn't seem like it was released.

KT: Sometimes we would list a release date for an upcoming game in an advertisement, but we would be unable to meet the deadline. That's unthinkable today.



Mirai (PC-88)

JS: Last night I spoke for about three hours with a Zainsoft collector in Australia.²⁶⁸ He emailed photos I've printed out.

KT: Thank you for that. <looks over them> I'm impressed. He's from Australia?

JS: Yes. I know him from the Tokugawa forums. We had a long conversation.

KT: I can send you data about our releases via email. <shows Excel print-out> The ones with "Takahashi" written next to them are the ones I created. And the ones with "assistance" next to them are titles that I was involved with.²⁶⁹ I looked for things after you [Joseph] came here last time. You can take these home if you want. I can ship these to you.

JS: By any chance... You don't happen to have Dios on CD-ROM, do you?

KT: I didn't find anything. That was the one title I really wanted to keep, but I couldn't find it.

JS: Very rare, the CD-ROM version.

KT: Yes it is. I think only 500 were ever produced. So there are really only a few copies out there. And many of them may have been disposed of at the retailers, without ever being sold.

JS: That's a shame. There's probably not even 500 in circulation now.

KT: Probably not. Unlike today, CDs were expensive at that time, so it wasn't easy to get even a sample.

JS: Regarding the interview, do you want me to omit all personal information?

KT: No, that's fine.

JS: When did you join?

KT: I joined the company in 1987, and the first title I ever worked on was Mirai. I worked as an assistant. Mirai is listed as being released in 1985, but the truth is we hadn't released the game yet, even though we kept printing advertisements saying the game was released. The game wasn't actually released until 1987. After that, I worked as an assistant on Deep Forest. I worked on that for three or four months, and then the first title I programmed myself was Garyuuoh for the MSX2.

JS: Which version of Mirai did you work on?

KT: PC-8801.

JS: How old you were when you joined?

KT: I joined at the age of 20. I graduated from a technical school, and normally the graduates of that school would go on to join large corporations such as Fujitsu. But I personally felt that games were the future, and called several game companies to ask for an interview. I ultimately received offers from a few companies, and Sein Soft was the closest.

JS: What was your impression after the first few weeks?

KT: I regretted it. I felt I never should have joined. It was terrible. Recently in Japan, people have started talking about "black corporations", which refers to evil sweatshops that unfairly exploit their employees. But Zainsoft was on a whole other level. I was punched and kicked regularly. One time, someone took a 14-inch CRT monitor and threw it at me.

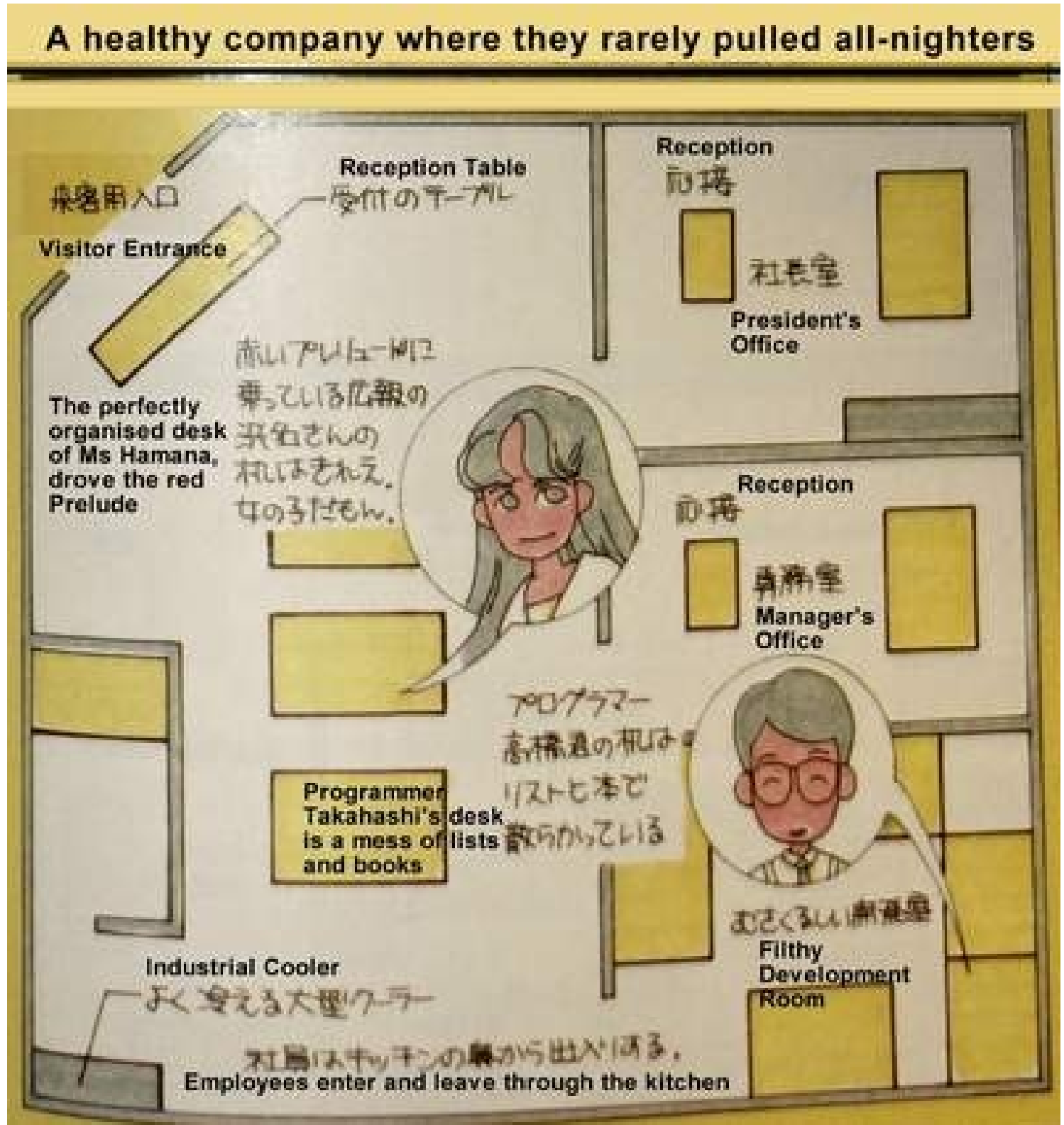
JS: Bloody hell, was this Takahiro Miyamoto (), the owner?



KT: Yes, Miyamoto-san. <looks at group photos of staff> How did you find these? It's been a long while since I've seen these people, even in photos.

JS: Miyamoto looks a bit sinister in this photo, doesn't he? (left)

KT: Yes, I think so. At this time he was 25 or 26 years old, I think.



JS: This kid is Jun Mukai, he was only 16. I interviewed a friend of his from Telenet, who

said Mr Mukai had to escape from Zain by moving to Tokyo. Apparently he was locked in an office and not allowed to leave until he'd finished the work.

KT: In my case, I went for as long as six or seven months without ever going home.

JS: You lived in the office for seven months?!

KT: I worked an average of 20 hours a day, with about one day off per month. I could also only take a bath about once a week.

JS: Using facilities at the office? This magazine has a map of the office. (scanlated as found in a magazine)

KT: Yes, it looked exactly like that.

JS: How many offices did Zainsoft have? Was this the only office, or did they have multiple offices?

KT: This was the only office we had while we were in Takasago. After moving to Kobe, we had a more spacious office in the Trade Centre Building.

JS: This was the first office?

KT: Yes. Shortly before I joined the company, the office building was refurbished, or I should say rebuilt, and so this was called the new office.

JS: Would Miyamoto lock the door and force you to stay?

KT: No, there wasn't anything physically restraining us. But there were work deadlines we had to meet. I was still young, and I wanted to accomplish something. But the deadlines were impossible in the first place. We were expected to create new titles in just two months, and port titles in just a week.

JS: One week?! So there was *no* simultaneous development for other machines - ports were done after the original shipped?

KT: That's correct.

JS: <making notes> What was the last game you worked on and when did you leave Zainsoft?

KT: My last title was Dios.

JS: Did you work on Dios CD-ROM as well?

KT: Yes. But I could be mistaken. I have a slight recollection of working on the X68000

version as well.

Basically, I had already decided that Dios would be my last game at the company, so I was winging it at the end. This is the only game that I actually planned and developed myself.

JS: Excellent, so Dios is fully *your* creation.

KT: That's right.

JS: Dios on PC-8801 is one of the best Zainsoft games. My friend in Australia says it's one of his all-time favourites. I've got a lot of questions about it.

KT: Please, go ahead.

JS: <checks notes> ... But you were also main programmer on Valusa no Fukushuu for Sharp's X68000?

KT: Yes... So that means Dios was not my last title.

JS: So you were there when Zainsoft changed its name twice. Mirai was under Sein Soft, and then it changed to Xain Soft.

KT: I joined just before it was changed to "X". I remember the president suddenly telling us that he had changed the spelling to "X" just after I joined. Basically, the names changed when there was a change of staff. Before I joined, there was a person named Hata-san who was the main developer. His work is labelled as "Sein Soft". Then he quit, and some other people including myself took his place, and so the name was changed to "Xain Soft". Later, although I was still there, another programmer joined, and the name was changed to "Zainsoft". I think this happened when Furutani-san joined.^{[270](#)}



Group photo circa 1986, before Mr Takahashi joined

JS: Were there other reasons for changing the name? I speculated that perhaps it was for financial reasons, because changing the name would make it a different corporate entity...

KT: Well actually, the official company name was always the same in Japanese, it's "sein" in katakana (). The English spelling is more of a logo.

JS: So it was purely to represent the change in staff?

KT: Yes, I think the president wanted to us to feel like we were making a fresh start.

JS: You describe some appalling conditions to work under, which in my mind would make it difficult to develop good games. But as I mentioned, there are Zainsoft fans. I was looking at magazine scans, and apparently there was a fan club called the "Egg Club"?

KT: I've never heard of that.

JR: Is this in Japan?

JS: Yes, Michel mentioned it. The name was in a magazine scan he had.

KT: I was not aware of it. While I was at Zainsoft, we would often receive letters and faxes, especially letters from children. But I was unaware of any organised fan club.



Circa 1988, Mr Takahashi back row, third from the left

JS: Could you describe the company structure? How many staff were there when you joined, and how many worked on each game?

KT: When I joined, there were six people excluding the management. Of those six people, three were programmers, and three were designers. The music was composed by Miyamoto-san's wife, who was also a senior executive of the company.

JR: I think Mr Miyamoto himself is a programmer.

KT: Yes, he also did programming, although he rarely got involved by the time I joined. I don't remember exactly, but I think Miyamoto-san worked on just one title after I joined. I'm not sure which game it was, maybe this one.²⁷¹

JR: Do you remember the length of the deadline for this title [*Road of Darkness*]? <laughs>

KT: He just worked when he felt like it, so it took a very long time. I think it took him over a year.



JS: Presumably he didn't throw anything at himself.

<everyone laughs>

KT: No, of course not. My salary was absurdly low. This was during the Japanese economic bubble. My take-home pay was only ¥70'000 a month. *<someone gasps in the background>* Back then, even the Yoshinoya fast food chain was offering ¥1'100 an hour, but they couldn't find anyone willing to work at those wages, so one of the stores had to close down. I couldn't even afford to spend ¥10'000 on groceries. Even the cheapest curry dinner at a casual restaurant cost over ¥1'000. If you went out to eat normally, you could easily spend ¥5'000 a day on food. So I was only making enough money for two days' worth of food each month.^{[272](#)} Every month, there was usually a week in which I had to get by without any food.

JS: Damn! Did they at least give you complimentary copies of the games you worked on?

KT: They might have. Meanwhile, in the parking lot behind the office, there was a BMW Z1, a Jaguar, a Toyota Crown, a Nissan Sylvia, cars like that.

JS: Like in this photo here? *<points; not pictured here>*

KT: No, this is probably different. What magazine was this? I think the magazine's editor had just purchased a new car, and drove from Tokyo to Osaka to visit us. Was this *Famitsu* maybe?

JS: I think it was *LOGiN*.

KT: Yes, that was it. *LOGiN*. It was the editor of *LOGiN*.

JS: You mentioned senior management. How many other people besides Mr Miyamoto were in a senior position?

KT: That was it. There was also his wife, but when I joined, his wife had just given birth, so she rarely ever visited the office after that.

JS: Did she continue to make music for the games?

KT: Yes, I think she composed music from home for about two years after that. But it wasn't very difficult work. We'd say we needed the music in the morning, and she'd have it done by that evening.

JR: Who was programming the music? I don't think that Mr Miyamoto's wife was a programmer. Was she using a synthesizer or a piano, something like that? And then it was transcribed or programmed into a PC?

JS: Good question. Who programmed the music?

KT: In most cases, we received the MML²⁷³ from Miyamoto-san's wife. It wasn't like the complex music we have today, because there were only three sound channels. The songs were very short, consisting of an intro, an A part, a B part, and a bridge.

JS: The Australian collector found a *doujin* music pack for the PC-8801, a collection of music by a *doujin* creator, and it had a track surprisingly similar to one in *Dios*. Did the *doujin* person copy *Dios*, or the other way around?

KT: Before *Dios*, and starting from *Galf Streem* I believe, an amateur started asking us to use his music in our games. I don't remember who it was exactly, but this person was still a student, possibly still in high school. He said that we could use his music free of charge, but in return he wanted a sample copy of the game to commemorate. So we received music from this person. Unfortunately, I don't know his name, and I never actually met him. We just received floppy disks containing MML data, which we would then convert and use.

This person sent us dozens of songs, and we listened to them and selected the ones that fit the mood of particular scenes in our games. So he didn't compose music individually for each game, but rather we chose which ones to use for each title.



president's office

JS: That leads to another point. In *Dios* there is a character called Rod Soul, who has his own music track, and that track seems to be reused in *Tritorn Final* and *Reinforcer*...

KT: They might not be exactly the same, strictly speaking. We had many songs which were somewhat similar. Also, when we converted the music data from the original composition, certain features such as the tempo would change slightly. So even if the melody is the same, the data is different.

JS: The availability of creative assets, for example donated music, interests me. As another example, the cover for *Dios* resembles an H.R. Giger painting.^{[274](#)}

KT: The advertising agency that originally designed the packaging used Giger-san's work. But then Mr Miyamoto said it was too expensive, and instructed someone else at another advertising agency to draw a similar cover illustration. When I first saw the package design, I was deeply disappointed, because I thought we were going to use one of Giger-san's actual designs.



Ms Hamana's desk

JS: You thought it would be an original Giger design?

KT: Yes, that's what I thought. We didn't really think about copyrights back then.

JS: You mentioned the musician being a student. I believe Zainsoft mainly employed young people. Was it part of the company culture to hire kids out of high school?

KT: No, I don't think so. Basically, we hired everyone who came to us looking for a job. As far as I can remember, there were about 60 people who joined the company and then quit.

JS: Wow, 60 people?! Incredible.

KT: The fastest person to quit came in one morning, and left by 11:00 a.m. When I came to take him out for lunch, he was already gone.

JS: Do you know why he quit?

KT: First, since the company hired everybody who asked, some of them had no talent. Some people were hired who just couldn't do the job in the first place. But there were some other people like Mukai-kun who had talent. We had several very smart people. There was one person named Miyamoto-kun.²⁷⁵ He had the same last name as the president, but they were unrelated. He was a high school student who lived in the neighbourhood. He had never done any programming, but he said he wanted to try to make a game, and so he would come in

after school, still in his school uniform. We let him use one of the computers, and he created something almost immediately. He was a genius.

JS: Surely with programming skill being so essential to do the job, there was some kind of screening process? Is this maybe why the games were quite buggy?

KT: Rather than that, the reason was because the company shipped out unfinished work. I don't remember all of them, but one game didn't even have an ending, and they took the master disks to the duplicator company for mass production and release.

JR: If so many games had problems, bugs, they couldn't be cleared. You could not play until the end. I want to know how you dealt with the bugs, because you had to provide user support. My guess is that in the end, you had short deadlines, but then you also had a lot of work after the game was sold...

JS: Yes, how did Zainsoft deal with fan complaints?

KT: We had surprisingly few complaints.

JS: Some developers say that to hide bugs, games were made impossibly difficult so players wouldn't reach them.^{[276](#)}

KT: We didn't have enough time to be that sneaky. *<laughs>* I have something in a box here... I found this, for example. *<shows user support letter from Zainsoft>* This was sent to us, and when we looked into it, we discovered that the disks were faulty, so we exchanged the disks.



Jotunn is a laborious and very traditional JRPG. Bizarrely, and you can just make it out above, the player's character is represented not by a traditional avatar, but a floating tile with an arrow on it...

JS: Wow - you've still got their address here.

KT: Yes. This is what I thought of when you asked your question. But I'm sure we had other

major bugs. We were impressed by how far some of the players could get in the games. Some bugs made it very difficult to reach certain later stages.

I will never forget *Jotunn*. It was the first game that ever brought me to tears. It's a role-playing game, and when we were playtesting it, there were many things that could only be tested by starting over from the beginning. I had to play it day and night without any sleep, and then I'd find another bug, fix it, and start over back at the beginning. And then I'd find another bug, fix it, and start over again. The development took a long time, about eight months, and I'd estimate about four months of that was just playtesting over and over and over.

We used a keyboard back then instead of a game control pad. I used to weigh down the keys so the game would advance automatically, and use that time to take a nap. One time, I woke up and I looked at the screen, and it said "Game Over". I had been working on that playthrough for the last two or three days straight. I just broke down and cried.

JR: It's interesting because we can imagine that because there were not many complaints, they kept on shrinking the deadlines. A feeling of: "Whatever, let's go. If there is a problem, we can always take care of it afterwards."

JS: I wonder if the lack of complaints might have been due to the fact that there weren't many sales to begin with...

JR: And there was no internet, no network, nothing. At this time, you're in front of your computer, you think you can complete the game, you don't think it's a dud, you think you just don't know how to complete it yet.

JS: Were there guides for computer games, like the Famicom books I saw?

JR: There were a lot, but only for adventure games, not action games.

KT: When I created *Dios*, it took two and a half months. But the unspoken rule at the company was that games had to be completed in two months. I had to plead with them to let me create the game as I saw fit. It was the first game I came up with myself, and also my last game with the company. So I made sure there was a proper ending, which is something of a rarity among Zainsoft games.

JS: That's the original PC-8801 version. The X68000 conversion is missing a fair bit of content and seems to run a bit too fast.

KT: That [Sharp X68000] version was not only incomplete, it was still at the prototype level. But they shipped it out anyway.



The jellyfish boss in the PC-88 version; beneath is the redrawn X68 version. Further below are more X68 screens

JS: Wow. The X68000 version was a prototype?

KT: Yes. We only worked on it for about three weeks.

JS: The 16-bit sprites look *AMAZING*, with more colours and a higher res, but the speed is too fast. Conversely, the MSX2 version is quite slow and has jerky scrolling.

KT: *<nods>* You're right.

<we all take a break, snacks are made available - the author, Nico, and Joseph are to one side discussing Osaka business, but an interesting conversation takes place...>

KT: ... and since we could not afford food, we would each buy two packages of *nori* containing six sheets each. We would wolf down the first bag, and then eat the second bag slowly one sheet at a time. That was our entire food for the day. No rice or anything. Just 12 sheets of *nori*. *<laughs>* I would do that for up to a week. It was tough!



Female voice:²⁷⁷ And you were in your 20s, which is when people eat the most.

KT: On payday, one of us would take a taxi to a convenience store, because there was no convenience store within walking distance. And that person would buy a bunch of food for everyone. I would eat a *bento* box, three or four sweet rolls, and a litre of coffee with milk all at once until I felt sick, and then go the next two or three days without any food. I gained a lot of weight.

Female voice: So you actually gained weight from doing that?²⁷⁸ Didn't you ever get ill?

KT: I wanted to get ill, but my body wouldn't let me! Besides, if I'd fallen ill, it would have seemed like an excuse.

Female voice: Not if you had to go to the hospital or something like that.

KT: Yeah, but I never had to do that. I was there for four years, and I never even caught a cold.

Female voice: Your body became more resilient.

KT: I became more resilient physically, and I also became tougher psychologically. I felt a sense of accomplishment. I had decided that I was going to create the highest-rated game in the magazines, so I was prepared to do anything until I reached that goal.

Female voice: After you quit Zainsoft, did you feel a sense of relief, or a wave of exhaustion crashing down on you?

KT: I did feel that. I took some time off, and left Osaka. Later, an acquaintance of mine said he was starting a company, so I decided to join. It wasn't a game company, the business was selling Macs.

<snack time over, we resume the interview and look over the materials KT has on the table>

KT: Feel free to help yourself to any of these items. You can take everything.

JS: Really? That's very kind of you!

JR: Not for you, for the Game Preservation Society, sorry.²⁷⁹ <laughs>

KT: I used this to study programming. I never studied while in school, but I spent a long time studying on my own with these two books, learning about the Zilog Z80 CPU. *Introduction to Assembler Programming: Microcomputer Z80*, and *Machine Language Game Programming*.



Circa 1987. A fresh-faced Mr Takahashi works on "Space Dog Fighter". Ultimately unreleased, a single blurry in-game screen shows it to have been a simple vertical shmup, for what appears to be the original MSX

JS: Having completed a vocational school, you would have been in a good position to

have your pick of various jobs. What drew you to games?

KT: Well, for one thing, the office was nearby as I mentioned earlier, and I was also impressed by Tritorn. I liked the game, so I had a good impression of Sein Soft.

JR: I think at that time, many young programmers were attracted to game companies such as Enix, for example, because they could become rich.²⁸⁰ So were you attracted by the possibility of becoming rich as a programmer?

KT: Yes, I think so. In my second year of high school (11th grade), Enix held their first game contest. At this time, Enix was still a subsidiary of Konica Minolta, basically just a brand name and not very famous. There was a person named Kouichi Nakamura-san, who was just a year older than me, who won the contest with his game Door Door. When I saw that, I realised that videogames were the future. Even after Nakamura-san entered the University of Electro-Communications, he was making more than ¥1'000'000 a month from the royalties. And while I was attending technical school, Nakamura-san founded his own company and made Dragon Quest.



Circa 1987

JS: Exactly. I spoke with programmer Toru Hidaka of Enix, who said a lot of young people were enticed by the success of Mr Nakamura. But he said Enix actually engineered

it this way, with the promise of royalties, to encourage more people to submit programs. However, nobody ever reached the same level as Mr Nakamura.

KT: That's right. Several years later, I met Nakamura-san on multiple occasions, such as at an NEC engineering conference, and other industry events held by Nintendo, for example. When I talked to him, he said that it wasn't easy, and he wasn't as successful as he appeared on the outside. He said that at the worst times he had faced enormous debts, to the tune of hundreds of millions of yen, enough to make him contemplate suicide.

JS: Really? Oh my God!

KT: So he had some severe ups and downs.

JS: I've not heard that before. There's definitely a dark side to videogames, which few discuss. I've heard rumours Zainsoft had *yakuza* connections. Can you comment?

KT: I don't think the *yakuza* were involved. The president, Miyamoto-san, sported a moustache even though he was a young man. I think he grew a moustache to make himself appear older so that people would take him more seriously. So I think maybe he just looked like a stereotypical *yakuza*, but he was not actually *yakuza*. He was a weak-willed person, and ultimately he was arrested for fraud.

Zainsoft was a 100% family-run business. His younger sister was the office manager, while his wife was the managing director. Their home was just behind the office. Miyamoto-san's parents were actually quite nice, and they took care of us.

JS: Oh! Are his sister or wife here, dressed in pink?

KT: Yes, this is his younger sister here, but his wife is not in this picture. By this time, his wife rarely ever came to the office. Wait a minute... Oh, no, she's not here either [the sister]. If there's a picture in a magazine or something from about six months to a year earlier than this one, she might be in it. Maybe she didn't like to be photographed.

JR: You said he threw a monitor at you, right? For me, it's like the manner of the *yakuza*.
<laughs>

KT: I suppose it's a matter of definition, but he was more like a gangster. The *yakuza* have to run a business.

JS: You describe his wife and sister, his parents who looked after you; it seems like a safe environment. Yet Mr Miyamoto seems like a completely unhinged sociopath?

KT: A lot of times, even the worst kids just have normal mothers, you know? His mother lectured him a lot. He was simply a bully. For example, on the outside, from the perspective of the bank and other companies he did business with, he must have seemed very funny and kind, like a person of integrity.

JS: So this was a hidden side which only staff saw.

KT: Yes, he was a psychopath like the kind you see in the movies. One minute he's laughing, and then he turns around and he's furious. To give you another anecdote, one time I kept working for nine days without any sleep. And then Miyamoto-san spotted me dozing off, and he came up from behind me and kicked me as hard as he could. The desk and myself went flying two or three meters, but I was so tired the pain didn't even register. I hit my head against the monitor hard enough to make the screen crack. But the only thing I cared about was whether the computer was working or not.

JS: What a hellish environment. It sounds almost like the staff were brainwashed, like Stockholm syndrome.²⁸¹ You were bullied, but ended up caring about your abuser.

KT: Exactly. When Japan had to deal with the Aum Shinrikyo cult, people wondered why the cult members followed Shoko Asahara and didn't run away.²⁸² But I understood how the members must have felt. Even as 60 people joined the company and then quit, I stayed on for four years. I stayed longer than any other employee. I could have quit at any time by simply not showing up for work, but I wanted to create the number-one game. I promised myself I would quit if I just did that. When I created *Dios*, I decided it would be my last game. So I asked to do everything myself. I handled the discussions with the advertising agency, and decided what kinds of advertisements to take out, and what kind of packaging to create. That's why I chose the H.R. Giger design.

JR: Do you remember what the ranking for *Dios* was at this time? Were you satisfied with it?

KT: I was not satisfied at all. Back then, the major distributors for games were SoftBank, which is now a major mobile phone provider, and another company whose name I can't quite remember.

JR: ASCII?

KT: Not ASCII. A distribution company. Kameo maybe? So there were two distributors. And the representative from the Kameo distributor gave us their internal evaluation of the game, which was used to determine how many copies of the game to distribute. For *Dios*, they gave it the highest possible game rank, a 5 out of 5. But Zainsoft's brand reputation was the lowest possible rank, a 1 out of 5. So they refused to carry it, and Kameo didn't ship out any copies at all.

JS: Did the low reputation of Zainsoft affect the ability to take out ads?

KT: More than advertising, the big problem was securing distribution. For example, these numbers might not be right, but for *Mirai*, we initially shipped 4'000 copies of the PC-8801 version. However, 3'000 of those just sat in a SoftBank warehouse. I remember the SoftBank representative coming to Miyamoto-san and begging on hands and knees for Miyamoto-san to take back the unsold copies. The representative said that he would be fired if Miyamoto-san

didn't take them back. But Miyamoto-san didn't care, and refused to take them back. After that, the size of the initial lot that SoftBank accepted for our new releases shrank drastically, from thousands of copies down to hundreds of copies. This was our biggest problem. Advertising was less of an issue, because you could always pay money to take out ads.

JS: I want to share something which hopefully makes you feel better. The collector I spoke with said Zainsoft is a company he's fanatical about, and its games are some of the most interesting. There are people, even foreigners, who enjoyed the games and discuss them *even today*.

KT: Thank you so much. I'm so happy to hear that. It's actually very difficult to take what you imagine and express it on the computer. With enough time, you can polish it, but it's very difficult to express the conceptual parts on the computer.

JS: Did you write the story and all the dialogue in Dios?

KT: About half of it, yes. There was one other designer, I don't remember his name though, and we thought up the dialogue together.

JS: There's a character called Zack Hunt, and at the end of his chapter there's a conversation between him and his final boss (bottom), and this boss reveals he's Zack's father, and the military performed strange experiments on them. After Zack defeats the boss, he ends up paralysed.

KT: I don't remember! *<strong laughter>*

JS: It was rather creepy! *<laughs>*

KT: I think we wanted a scary and creepy ending. I prefer it that way.

JR: I have one comment and one question regarding Zainsoft. The reason why Zainsoft has so many fans in Japan is because this company, most of the games, I would say 95%, are just a copy of something existing. And this is why there are so many fans. So I think for every game, you could just write what it follows after, except Dios of course...



JS: I thought Dios has a tiny bit of the flavour of Ys III...

JR: My question is, who decided which game to copy? I think it's Mr Miyamoto, but I'd like to ask you.

KT: To be honest, I generally didn't feel like I was making a copy of something else. The hardware limited what you could do. The more important question we were asking ourselves was, "What can we do on a two-month schedule?" So even if a game was 95% similar to something else, I tried to make that last 5% different and unique. For example, Mirai is a little different, I think. We made that one without a deadline, and it ultimately took around two years to complete. For everything after that, we were working under very tight deadlines. If our games are similar to others, it's because the deadlines were the only instructions we ever received. We did what we could.

JR: There were a lot of fans because everyone was waiting for the next Zainsoft game so they could say, "Oh, it's a copy of *this*, but with an original twist."

KT: I don't think I or the other people I worked with were intentionally copying other titles. As I said before, there were many amazing things which we wanted to do within the limits of the hardware, but which were impossible to accomplish given the deadlines. We were forced to choose either vertical or horizontal scrolling, and with only a short amount of time for character design, we couldn't create anything that was very large or elaborate. In terms of design, there are probably some elements which seem to be copied from another game. We did look at the computer magazines for reference and inspiration. But nearly everything we did was the result of thinking about what was doable within a limited timeframe. Also, I think

almost all of the originality you see comes from myself and the president, Miyamoto-san.

JS: The ending in Dios is somewhat ambiguous - it doesn't fully explain how the monsters overran the planet. Was that intentional or because of the deadline?

KT: There was actually a little more to Dios, a part of the game we weren't able to finish in time. So we had to cut it short. Another issue was that Dios was a big game and needed a large number of floppy disks. At one point, we were instructed not to increase the number of floppy disks any more.^{[283](#)}

JS: Is this maybe written down in a notebook somewhere?

KT: I don't remember where all my notes went. I'm not an organised person. Recently, at another company, I discovered a pile of notes and design materials from when I worked on Garou Densetsu Special for the Super Famicom,^{[284](#)} but someone from accounting threw it all away. <laughs>

JS: That's a terrible shame.

KT: Yes, but it's just garbage to people who aren't interested. <laughs>

JS: I disagree with that, actually. It's always worth saving these things.

KT: I tend to save everything, like these, but there are people like my wife, my mother, and the office managers at the company who keep telling me to clean up. So I have no choice but to throw it away. <laughs>



Garou Densetsu Special (SFC)

JS: Perhaps you could donate them to Joseph's Game Preservation Society.

KT: Yes, I'd like to donate all of these materials.

JS: Don't throw anything else away. I've heard so many stories about source code and materials just being binned and lost forever.

KT: You're right. I think I still have the source code for some of my games, but they don't make 5-inch floppy drives anymore. I haven't seen a 5-inch floppy drive in ages. Another thing is that most of our source code and other development work was done on a Sharp X1. Whereas computers like the PC-9801 run MS-DOS, the X1 has no OS, and we used a special text editor. Without that software, reading the data is next to impossible. You would have to read out and analyse the binary data. This was back when even the concept of a file didn't exist.

JR: So it's a challenge for us.

KT: I think so. The graphic data was also developed using custom tools, and wasn't stored as files on the floppy disks. We didn't have the concept of organising data into files back then. It was referenced by disk sector, and we would specify that this data is stored on this track and this sector. Everything was done manually.

JR: Do you remember about copy protection? Was it done internally or externally?

KT: We used a company called ED-Contrive for most of our copy protection, although sometimes we also used a company called Tokyo Denca. They would give us the copy protection source code and specially formatted floppy disks, and we would test them using a special program. We never developed copy protection entirely inside the company.

JS: Was game copying a big problem for you at this time?

KT: Yes it was, although the market was small. There were probably more people copying music off CDs onto cassette tapes. But while I was at Zainsoft, we received several phone calls from police departments around the country, telling us that our business was suffering damages, and asking us if we wanted to press charges or sue.

For example, sometimes we would hand over the masters to ED-Contrive or Tokyo Denca for duplication, and even though the game wasn't even released yet, a disk-cracking program for our game would already be available for sale. <laughs> I suppose there was someone on the inside.

JR: This is because it can be sold for a huge amount of money across Japan, to rental shops. So maybe someone in the company, who didn't get enough money from the company, sold it. So it's not only a leak, it's a business.

KT: I don't know about that. First of all, we never had any contact with people outside the company, because we were working 20 hours a day without any days off. That's why I was surprised when I saw *filers* for our unreleased games already being released.^{[285](#)}

JR: You're referring to *filers*? That was part of the culture back then.

KT: Yes it was. Back then, it didn't seem like the crime it's considered today. I copied games myself, to be honest.

JS: How do you feel about people emulating your games today? For example the Australian emailed photos of the originals in his collection, but he also emulates the games on a modern PC, and extracted all the Japanese text from *Dios*. How do you feel about a new generation of fans today discovering Zainsoft games through emulation?

KT: I can't imagine anyone being interested. I can't understand it. <laughs> Young people today did not experience that era. I mean, this was back when I was only 20 years old. About

26 years ago. How do I feel about it? I suppose I feel happy. Surprised, but happy. It's extremely rare for me to meet anyone who remembers and appreciates my old work.

JS: Hopefully when people read this interview, they'll check out some of your games.

KT: <laughs> I hope so.

<we take a short break>

JS: You mentioned that you personally saw 60 people quit from the company. Is this why so few games at Zainsoft have a credits listing at the end?

KT: We never had time to put credits in, because the masters were taken away from us before we were finished. We always felt that the games were unfinished. Game studios are not like ordinary companies, especially back then. The reason so many young people were still willing to join is because they were passionate and really wanted to create games. I think most of the 60 people that came and went experienced considerable stress from being denied the chance to finish their games.

JS: Deep Forest is one of the few games to have a proper staff roll at the end.

KT: That's right. I think Majin Kyu had credits too, but I was not deeply involved with that project, so I don't remember exactly.



JS: You had very short deadlines of about two months to complete the original, and a couple of weeks to make the port... Even before finishing, the master disks were taken away. Why was there so much rushing?

KT: It was probably related to the company's financial situation. Before I joined the company, they released Tritorn. Before that, Miyamoto-san had founded the company and created some games himself in his early 20s, but I heard that if Tritorn didn't sell, Miyamoto-san was planning to shut down the company. But Tritorn was a hit, and supposedly it earned ¥400 million all by itself. That's a huge amount of money for a small team, which was only about three people at the time. Suddenly, the president could afford to live a life of luxury, and he started buying cars and having love affairs with other women.

The next games after that, such as Mirai and Deep Forest, had longer development schedules, because there was extra money. But then some of the original staff members quit, and I joined around that time to take their place. Financially speaking, Miyamoto-san realised

that he needed to ship another title soon. At first, a development period of up to six months was acceptable, but he started to increase the pace of new releases. At the same time, the numbers of shipped copies were going down, so the deadlines started becoming tighter and tighter.

JR: A vicious cycle.

JS: *<calculates>* **Miyamoto was in his early 20s in 1984. How did such a young person become head of a company?**

KT: I think Miyamoto-san was an unusual person. I think the creation of the company was a casual decision at first. He just decided to get some friends together, make a game, and see if they could earn some money from it. I think Miyamoto-san was a smart guy. He was a programmer himself.

JS: **They did a few games before their big success with Tritorn. Presumably they were just a few guys putting together simple games like Max-01 G and other titles.**

KT: That's right. The key person during this period would have been Hata-san.

JS: **Please tell me more about Hata-san.**

KT: Originally, it was Miyamoto-san, the woman he later married, and Hata-san. The three of them essentially formed the company Sein Soft together. In the beginning, Hata-san was the leader of the development team, and he did almost everything.

JS: **How long was he with the company?**

KT: He must have started sometime in 1984, and stayed for about three years. He left about six months after I joined. His last game before he quit was Mirai. I think he had a number of reasons for leaving. I had a very friendly relationship with Hata-san. The primary reason was that he was exhausted. At the end, he sort of isolated himself and became suspicious of others. I clearly remember one time when he said he couldn't trust even me anymore. But he was an incredibly gentle, kind person.

JS: **It sounds like the company burned him out.**

KT: Yes, I think so.

JS: **Speaking of the woman he married, and female staff... What's up with the pink dresses for uniforms? Was that Mr Miyamoto's idea?**^{[286](#)}

KT: I believe so. Miyamoto-san's younger sister was an exception, but these other two women didn't stay long at Zainsoft. Miyamoto-san tended to do whatever came to mind, and he had things like staff jackets and T-shirts made for everyone.

JS: So on his good days he was creative, and on his bad days he was a violent monster.

KT: <laughs> Yes.

[[image]

One of Valusa's missing bosses



One of Valusa's missing bosses

JS: He sounds like a deeply tormented man.

KT: Yes, but you also have to consider the context of the times. I think he was seduced by the illusion of the Japanese economic bubble, and mistook it for his own skill. Back then, you could make money no matter which stocks you picked. He often referred to himself as a genius.

JR: I heard that it wasn't unusual in Osaka, this kind of behaviour. I heard the same stories regarding SNK and Capcom. Have you heard any of the stories about these other companies?

KT: It's roughly the same, but I think Zainsoft was still somewhat different. I made a lot of friends at various videogame companies and heard all kinds of stories, but I couldn't tell whether my situation was strange, or other people were lying.

JS: Can you recall which companies these friends worked for, and perhaps some of the stories?

KT: First of all, Mukai-san, the person who was only 16 years old, quit the company just before I joined, but the remaining staff such as Hata-san kept in contact with him, and heard that he joined Telenet Japan. They would often call each other in the middle of the night, after the president and everyone else had gone home, and ask each other about their work situations.

I also talked to Mukai-kun sometimes. He would ask me, "Takahashi-san, why don't you quit Zainsoft and come work over here? We have time to sleep over here, and enough food to eat." <laughs>

As for SNK and Capcom, I went to work for SNK later, but I heard stories from people at Capcom, Xtalsoft, T&E Soft, places like that. I also attended game developer seminars organised by various game companies, and talked with other developers there.

JS: A Japanese fansite talks about unusual dialogue in Zainsoft games - was it an intentional stylistic choice?²⁸⁷

KT: No, it wasn't intentional. I'm surprised to hear that actually, and I think the other staff members at the time would also be surprised. We were not aware that the Japanese we wrote was unusual. One possible explanation is the limit on the number of characters we could include in the dialogue. I remember struggling many times to fit everything into a limited number of characters.



JS: Did games have their content changed a lot? For example Valusa no Fukushuu - screens used in ads and the packaging contain elements not in the final game. <points to print-out> This boss here, I don't think he's in the final game at all. Was he removed during testing because of a bug, or was he never in the game? How come there's a difference between the screenshots and final game?

KT: In most cases, it was because we didn't have enough time to put it in. For most of the titles I was involved with, only about 60% to 70% of each game was completed. In many cases we had plenty of graphic data, but not enough time to use it all.

It was a dilemma. In order to sell our games, we had to get featured in the magazines. But because of the magazine release scheduling, we had to prepare the screenshots to use in the magazines very early, about a month in advance. Even if we had more time until the magazine deadline, say two months, we would have only just started development of the game, and we wouldn't have any definite screenshots yet. Sometimes, we didn't know whether we were creating assets for the game, or just creating assets that could be used for screenshots in the magazines. So the screenshots included elements that we planned to put into the game. But then the development deadline would come up three or four weeks later, leaving us without enough time to add in all the planned elements.

JS: There appears to have been a more complex inventory system, different types of armour, and the ability to collect gold. There's speculation that perhaps Valusa no Fukushuu had a system where you could change your armour.

KT: There was no system like that. I remember that for these specific Valusa no Fukushuu screenshots, we hadn't actually started development yet. The designer simply used a graphics editor on the X68000 to draw these images. These aren't actual game screens.

JS: So it's mockups, basically.

KT: Yes.

JS: Did you also use mockups on the back of the packaging?

KT: Miyamoto-san and I took most of the screenshots, while the office manager, Miyamoto-san's sister, took them to the advertising agency. But since she only managed the office and was not directly involved in game development, she didn't know anything about the screenshots or how they related to the game. She just handed everything over to the advertising agency in an envelope, without knowing anything about them. Later we would receive the final package design and think, "What the hell is this?!" <laughs>

On the other hand, I think the advertising agency that created the magazine adverts and the game packaging was amazing. They created everything with no information to go on, and without ever playing the game. And we let them print it without even checking the final proofs.

JS: The painted cover for Valusa no Fukushuu is quite lovely, actually.

KT: I don't think this artwork was created specifically for Valusa no Fukushuu. I think it was selected from the agency's collection of royalty-free images. That was one of their strengths.



JS: Wow, because Valusa no Fukushuu starts on a ship and features a hero with a sword. It's very appropriate.

KT: Yes it is. And this is despite the fact that the people from the agency never played any of the games from Zainsoft, not even once.

JS: <shows different Valusa advert, bottom> This is a bit unusual, using a plastic toy figurine for the ad. Can you remember how it came about?

KT: No, this is something the agency did. The programmers weren't really involved. We would see the finished result after the fact and be surprised. <laughs>



Scan of an advert mock-up showing alternate armour, a Magic Points bar, Gold counter, and a more complex inventory

JS: Perhaps you can tell us about the game's many hidden secrets. Playing through it repeatedly one discovers new secrets, some of which reveal a cinematic cutscene. For example, one of them is if you're fighting the forest boss (middle) and your health is reduced to a tiny fraction. If you then move to the far right of the screen a character jumps out and defeats the boss for you. These are really cool - but why are they so deeply hidden?

KT: Because I'm a mean person. <laughs> I like movies, and I took inspiration from various movies to create the scenes. I was at Zainsoft for four years, and particularly at first, I wasn't able to create anything interesting, and it took me a long time to create something. Once we were given two-month development schedules, it seemed impossible at first, but I gradually

got better at it. If they asked me how long it would take, I would still say two or three months, but I became able to whip something up quickly, and have some extra time left over. At that point, I wouldn't worry about the game as much, and focus more on enjoying the process and adding in little details.



graveyard assets ended up in the retail version, but it highlights how different the final game was to what players anticipated

JS: Can you describe any ideas that were removed from Valusa no Fukushuu due to the deadline?

KT: Yes, there were many. We only used about one third of the graphic data we had created for the game. Starting with Galf Streem, and continuing through Valusa no Fukushuu and Dios, you can observe a difference in the art style. This was because we gained a new designer who was extraordinarily talented. He was fast, skilled, and neat. We would hold an informal meeting about Valusa no Fukushuu, for example, and decide on a rough direction, but then he would take that and draw all kinds of stuff. I would take his work and incorporate it into the game, but I struggled to keep up with him.

JS: That was my next question! <laughs> Everything up until Galf Streem seemed to have a random art style, and then everything afterwards was more focused. Can you remember the artist's name?

KT: What was his name? I remember his address, but not his name. After I quit Zainsoft, I contacted him about working together again, and we worked together at another company in Osaka... What was his name? In the end, he became an alcoholic, lost his job, and ruined his life. I can't remember his name.



Valusa no Fukushuu (X68k)

JS: Do you think that was a result of working at Zainsoft? Also, which other company was this?

KT: I don't remember the name of the company. As for the artist, I think it was the result of coming to Osaka. He was originally from Akashi,^{[288](#)} and he didn't have any friends in Osaka. He had always been a strong drinker, but started staying at home and drinking by himself all the time, never going outside. I don't think Zainsoft had anything to do with his problems.

JS: It's a sad story.

KT: Yes it is.

JS: Can you recall who did the music for Valusa no Fukushuu? Was it Mr Miyamoto's wife or the student?

KT: No, Mrs Miyamoto only created the music in the early days. Around the time of Galf Streem, we started selecting music from the stock provided by the high school student I mentioned earlier. He also sent us new music periodically.

<English discussion about Nico taking photos and whether to make the interview anonymous>

KT: Are you going to publish the photos somewhere?

JS: Yes, in the book. Nico, my photographer, suggested some artistic ideas where your face is in shadow. I won't publish your name or face if you don't want to.

KT: Honestly, I doubt there will be any problems even my face is published. People who know the situation will probably be able to identify me from the text of the interview, even if my face is never revealed. But that's most likely limited to the people I actually worked with at Zainsoft. It's fine. There's no need to be paranoid. *<laughs>* I'm not worried about it. For example, I've already appeared in magazines like this probably 20 or 30 times. Recently, I also appeared on an MBS television program, and I was introduced as a computer software developer under my real name, Takahashi. Nobody's going to come after me. It's fine.

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JS: Then allow me to hand you to Nicholas Datiche. When you return, could you sign two signature books?

KT: I must apologise for my terrible handwriting. *<laughs>* To think I'd ever be giving my autograph for this. When I was with SNK, I worked a booth at the Consumer Electronics Show, CES, in Chicago. The kids came up and surrounded me. That was the last time someone ever asked for my autograph.

JS: This is perfect - thank you.

<break from interview; overlapping simultaneous conversations in English and Japanese; praise to my hired transcriber for untangling multiple conversations!>

JR: So John, you've played Dios until the end? Mr Takahashi was saying there is an epilogue at the end. This is the epilogue. *<shows booklet from inside box>*

JS: No, I didn't know that.

JR: I don't know if they created this epilogue booklet because they couldn't include the ending, or if the idea was there from the beginning. I think it's bizarre to put the ending right in the box.^{[289](#)}

JS: <laughs> Yes, you'd spoil it. See, cool omake like this is is why the real thing is better than emulation.

JR: Yes. But sometimes some games, some movies, some books, are starting from the end. Maybe that's the idea? *<laughs>* And don't forget to ask all you can ask, anything, any technical details, anything from development of Dios CD. We need to know about this.^{[290](#)}

JS: Right, what the differences are.

JR: He was unsure whether Dios on CD-ROM was released or not, because maybe it was released after. I don't know, we don't know about that.

JS: I'll also ask about the voice acting.

JR: Because they hired people to record the voices, I think it was a huge project. It's not possible he won't remember. If he doesn't, I think then it was done externally. And developing for CD-ROM at that time was quite difficult, because there were no development kits or anything, so they had to have quite a lot of knowledge of CD-ROM.

JS: Wasn't there only one other game for the PC-88 on CD-ROM, Mirrors?

JR: Yes... But no, it's not quite... Have you played Mirrors? The CD-ROM is not a CD-ROM. Technically it is a CD, but it contains data to make the floppy disks, and that's where you boot,

from the floppy disk, and you only access audio from the CD. You don't access any data directly from the CD itself. So it's a CD-ROM, but it's not. So Dios could be the only *true* CD-ROM software for the PC-8801.

JS: Assuming it boots from CD. It might be like Mirrors.

JR: I don't know. We have absolutely no information about this game. So any information is welcome.

<we settle down for questions - Joseph decides to stay>

JS: So... Dios CD. Did you physically hold a copy of it in your hands at any point?

KT: Of course. Before launch, the products come to the company. I should have a copy somewhere, but I haven't been able to find it yet.

JS: If you find Dios CD, you must let us know. What are the differences between Dios CD on the PC-8801 and the floppy version? Is it simply the addition of voice acting, or did you perhaps add any extra elements to the game?

KT: First of all, we used digitally sampled sound effects. In the normal version, the FM sound source and PSG [programmable sound generator] are used to synthesize sound effects, but the CD version has real recorded sounds for gunshots and explosions. In terms of differences, that's basically it. I think the load times are slightly faster, too, because floppy drives are inherently slower. But in terms of game content, the versions are the same.^{[291](#)}

JS: Were you present for the voice recording?

KT: No, I was not.

JS: What did you think of the voice recording when you heard it back at the office?

KT: It was better than expected. We used real actors and voice actors, and their voices were close to what I had originally imagined. There is an advertising agency called Planning Centre. They might have a copy.

JS: Really? Joseph - that's your mission now!

JR: Yes. Would you help us to contact this company so we can preserve it?

KT: Sure. I just hope Planning Centre still exists.^{[292](#)}

JS: What interests me is there weren't any *true* CD-ROM games for the PC-8801. Joseph says Dios might be the only one. Did anyone on the team have experience working with CD-ROM technology?

KT: First, the exact computer model was the PC-8801MC, which featured the same CD-ROM drive as the PC Engine game console. So people who had developed PC Engine games before must have had some experience, but nobody had ever developed a PC-8801 CD-ROM title before, certainly no one at Zainsoft. Was the PC Engine CD-ROM unit even available back then?

JR: It was.

KT: And this was also slightly before the FM Towns. So if you consider the PC-8801 version, it may have been the first of its kind, maybe the first in the world.[293](#)

JR: On the PC-8801, there was also the CD-ROM version of *Duel*, and *Mirrors*. But both of these games boot from a floppy disk, and only access the CD-ROM to play back music, so they're not actually CD-ROM games.

KT: Right. At one time, NEC requested game companies to develop CD-ROM software for the PC-8801MC, but few companies agreed to do it. In terms of sales, creating a game for a machine that had yet to move even 1'000 units was a bad decision. The machine was mostly just used for promotions, and didn't sell well.

JR: NEC made a mistake.

KT: Absolutely.

JS: **There were only 500 copies of *Dios CD* manufactured?**

KT: Yes, but NEC paid all the development costs. They basically wanted it to be a present for everyone who purchased a PC-8801MC. Actually, I think more copies went to NEC than were released into the market.

JS: **Did NEC organise the recording of the voice acting? It's a big job. Or were the logistics handled by Zainsoft?**

KT: The agency, Planning Center, was the one who actually organised the recording, in addition to marketing. I've just looked it up, and they still exist. They're actually quite a large company, and command one of the largest market shares in the magazine advertising business.

JR: There was also deal between NEC and Zainsoft for *Dios* to be the very first CD-ROM game for the PC Engine.

JS: **I was going to ask, I've read in magazines the mentioning of a PC Engine version of *Dios*?**

KT: First of all, in those days there were computer games on the one hand, and console games for systems such as the Famicom and the PC Engine on the other hand. They were

different types of games. For computer games, anybody could make them. There were no restrictions imposed by the hardware manufacturers. But if you wanted to make games for the PC Engine or the Famicom, you had to sign a contract with the hardware manufacturer. I don't think Zainsoft was able to develop console games. During the Famicom era, Miyamoto-san often told Nintendo that he wanted to develop games for that system, but Nintendo didn't allow it. The PC Engine was similarly difficult.

JS: It's interesting you mention the Famicom. I believe Tritorn Bloody was announced for the Famicom, but not released. Do you know anything about it?

KT: No, that was before I joined the company. Besides, Zainsoft didn't have a contract anyway.

JS: <shows list of unreleased games> A lot of these were ports, like Reinforcer and Valusa on the FM Towns. Did you see these unreleased games being developed?

KT: There was a master for Tug of War on the X68000. But by this time, Miyamoto-san had lost interest in games. He could have released this title, but he didn't. Also, he had no intention whatsoever of developing games for the FM Towns.

JS: So these FM Towns games which were mentioned in magazines, these never actually started development?

KT: Correct. Fujitsu was reluctant to lend us their machines. Most manufacturers would send us their new machines, but Fujitsu would only lend them to us for two weeks, for example. Meanwhile, whenever NEC released a new PC-8801 model, they'd send us about ten of them.²⁹⁴ As a result, we naturally gravitated to NEC, and we had more of their machines to work on. On the other hand, we didn't even have an FM Towns machine for development.

JR: I didn't know that, that is very important information!

JS: That could be why NEC was the dominant force - if NEC was giving out systems to encourage development.

KT: I think you're right. NEC's engineers were also very open to suggestions. They would listen to us and incorporate requested features into the newer models.

JS: Did the CD version of Dios use that packaging, or was it a new kind of design? Was it a jewel case?

KT: It was the same. The only thing different was the computer model listed on the spine. I think we just applied a sticker over the old model listing. In those days, we did a lot of the work in-house, without relying on the duplicator company. We removed the paper illustration from the packaging, applied the sticker, and then inserted it back into the plastic sleeve, one at a time.

JR: It's important, because now we know what we're looking for.

JS: **A box identical to the floppy release!**

JR: Yes. So maybe someone still has a CD version, but it's just written "MC CD" here. *<points to spine>*

KT: Yes, the only way is to look for "MC".

JS: Dios seems like a significant title for Zainsoft. They put a lot of resources into developing the CD version, and made ports to the MSX2 and X68000. I get the feeling you were given free rein. How did you persuade Mr Miyamoto?

KT: His thought process was easy to understand. When I told him Dios felt like it could be a big hit, he started treating me nicely and calling me "Takahashi-chan".²⁹⁵ *<laughs>* Adding, "And if it doesn't sell well, I'm going to kill you." *<laughs>*

JS: So did you pitch the idea and say, "This is gonna be great! Give me a chance to make it."

KT: No, rather than that, I worked on it for a little bit at first, and then showed it to him.

JS: Like a tech demo?

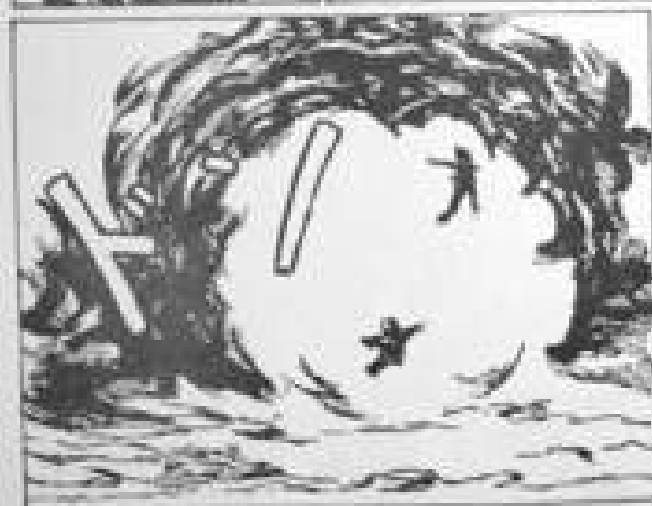
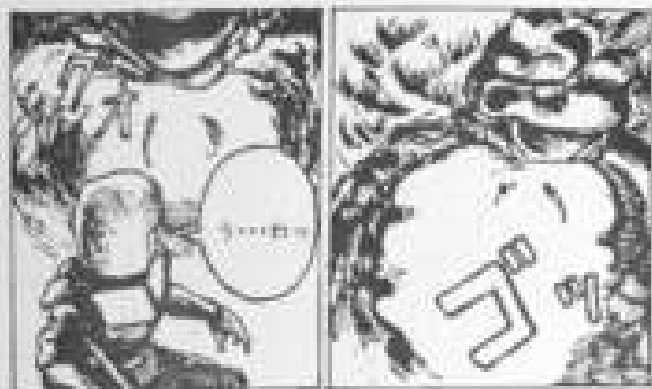
KT: That's right. Earlier you mentioned Ys III. Dios looks similar because it also uses three-layer scrolling, but I developed the technology for that independently. Dios was ultimately released later than Ys III because I spent a lot of time testing the technology. At first I reused some graphics data, not the Dios graphics, to make a demonstration of the type of game I was going to develop, and it was accepted.

JS: What I liked in Dios is the bosses would appear unexpectedly, you never knew what'd happen next!

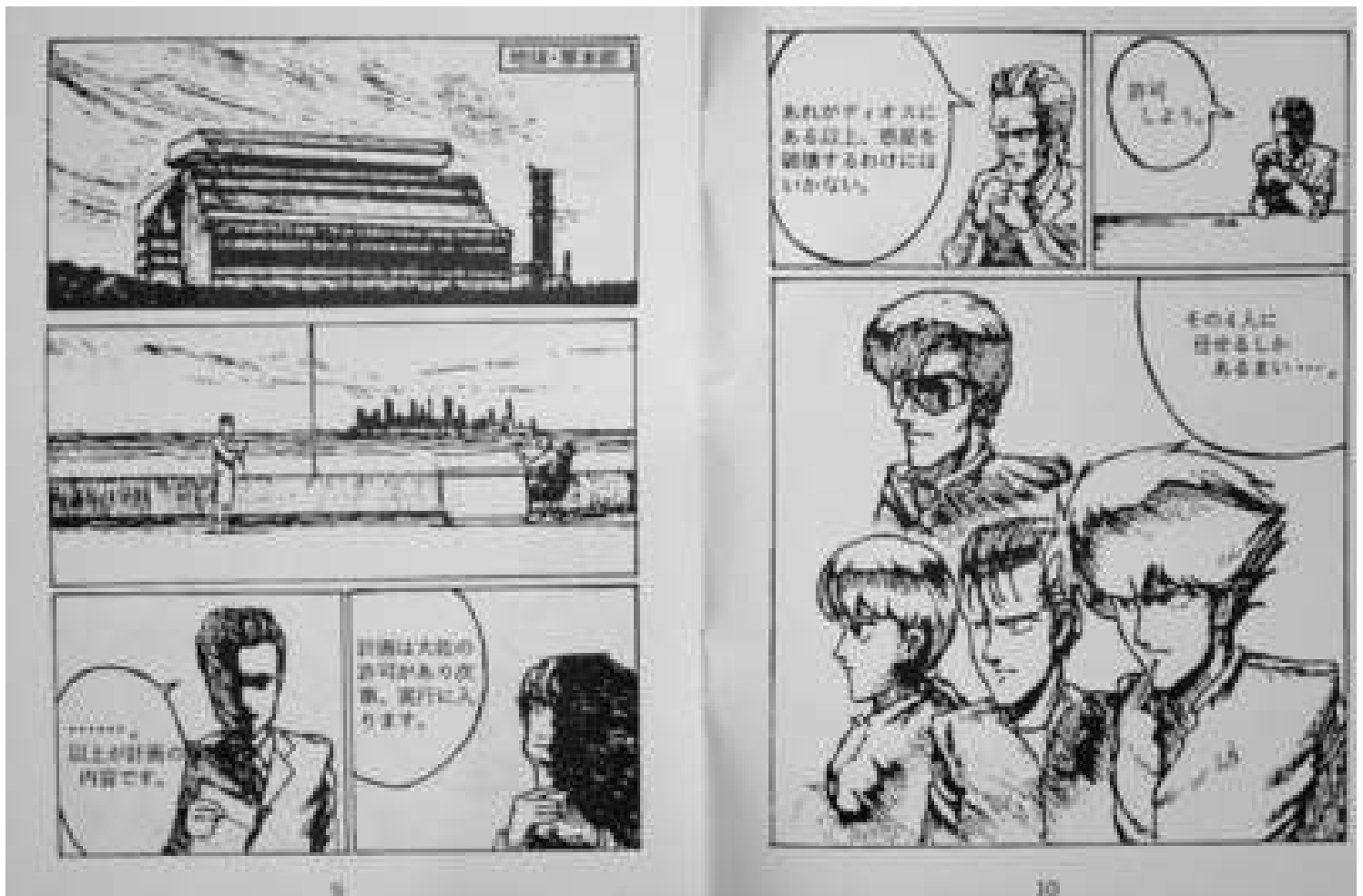
KT: Yes. I'm glad you noticed that! For example, at the beginning, I don't remember exactly, but there's an insectoid boss, like a fly. I spent a lot of time thinking about how to make that boss appear all of a sudden.

JR: You mentioned the story was not finished. Is this why this manga epilogue is in the box, because you couldn't put the real ending in the game?

KT: Hmm... I don't think it was originally planned, but I created many concepts and a large story for the game. Given the deadline and the hardware limitations, I was only able to develop a small fraction of that story. I don't remember much about this epilogue specifically. It was drawn by the same person who did the character design, but I didn't have a chance personally to work on it. It was at the end of the development period, when I was in a crunch to finish the master, working day and night.



戦況開始から3年、突然開かれた原始生物群による侵略によって、惑星の人口の50%が2週間で死滅し、惑星内との通信も完全に不可能となった。
その後、派遣された軍も瞬く間に全滅……。
残された道は惑星の破壊以外ないように見えた……。



JS: There seems to be a mysterious Lee Way Corporation credited on *Tritorn Final*, and also in relation to the unreleased X68000 version of *Cluju*.

KT: Lee Way Corporation was created by Miyamoto-san, and was originally intended to be a real estate company. However, things didn't pan out, and when Miyamoto-san heard that Zain had developed a bad brand reputation, he decided to release games under the name of this other company. If things went well, he was going to abandon the Zain brand and move everything under Lee Way. The programmer who created the titles for Lee Way was a new hire, but we all worked in the same office. There wasn't a separate office or anything.



JS: Real estate? Interesting! I believe Zainsoft also made software tools?^{[296](#)}

KT: Ah, that's right, we did. A person named Uehara-kun made them. At the time, the president had the idea of selling tools for the X68000. It was called "G Tool".<laughs> You know more about this than I do!

JS: There were two graphics utilities developed by Zainsoft: Objet for the Sharp X1 in 1987, and G Tool for the X68000. It seems unusual for a games company to make utilities. Were they successful?

KT: First of all, we developed all of our own graphic tools and utilities. We rarely ever used external tools. For G Tool, I think Miyamoto-san simply released it as an experiment to see if it would sell, because we didn't actually use that one internally.

JS: Oh, you just developed it to sell?

KT: Yes.

JS: There also seems to have been a shift to developing X68000 games almost exclusively, around 1990.

KT: I think it was because Sharp tried so hard. They came to visit us frequently. Before that, there was the Sharp X1 and X1 Turbo series of computers. They may seem similar, but from a development perspective, they were completely different. We wanted to make X1 Turbo games, but when considering the user base, we had to target the X1. This dilemma continued, and people gradually stopped developing for the X1. In response, Sharp later released the X68000. Their market share started going up, and we were able to just call them up and ask for five or ten machines - just by asking with a single phone call. Their technical reference

material was also excellent, much better than the other manufacturers.

JS: If Zainsoft had been developing an increasingly bad reputation, how come Sharp had such an interest in the company developing for X68000?

KT: I think it was because the computer manufacturers wanted to secure as many developers as possible, as part of the power struggle in the computer market. In the computer market, the software houses had more power than the hardware makers. On the other hand, with the console market, the software houses were completely dominated by the console manufacturers such as Nintendo.

JR: Unfortunately myself and Nico are leaving, but I wanted to ask if you ever got a bonus from the company for any of the games you made?

KT: Never! Not once! <laughs> I just wanted a fair salary! I wanted to eat!

JR: At the time of Dios, you had the same salary?

KT: Oh yes. Maybe it went down.

JS: Do you know what happened to Mr Miyamoto?

KT: Ah, I don't know. He was involved with fraud, but since he was probably a first-time offender, he may have avoided jail time. I wonder what happened to him? I don't know, and the other people I worked with back then don't know either. He probably faced some tough times after that, especially after the economic bubble burst.

He thought he was a genius, picking all the right stocks, but that was only because the entire economy was booming. <laughs> And then right as the bubble was ending, he was arrested for fraud. He was simply at the mercy of the bubble.

JS: Looks like karma came round to bite him.

KT: When I started the X68000 version of Dios, Miyamoto-san established another company called Alphabet Computer, specializing in selling Apple Mac computers. The business was originally located in Takasago, but later moved to downtown Kobe. It was a different line of work, but the company made good profits, and was doing ¥100 million a month in revenue just from selling Macs. With that kind of money, games didn't matter anymore.

But in the end, Miyamoto-san didn't pay back his suppliers, diverted his merchandise through the black market to dealers in Nipponbashi, and tried to go bankrupt intentionally, but he was caught and arrested for fraud. By that time I had already left the company, so I don't know the details.

JS: He diverted his merchandise?

KT: Essentially, the company would acquire, let's say, 100 machines from Apple. But the company then took the computers and sold them on the black market in Nipponbashi, Osaka's

electric district, without ever paying Apple back for the sales. Eventually, Miyamoto-san was caught and arrested.

JS: I wonder if he went to jail...

KT: Possibly, but I don't know for sure.

JR: So anyway, this was the very end of Zainsoft.

JS: Presumably Mr Miyamoto still owns all the rights to the games released by Zainsoft?

KT: I'm not sure. Company-owned copyrights are a complicated matter.

JR: As far as I know, many people are asking for *Tritorn* to be released by Project EGG. But Project EGG cannot find where the copyright is located. So I think that maybe Mr Miyamoto has the rights, but no one can find him. Maybe he's dead, we don't know.

<Joseph and Nico leave>

JS: Did you want to comment on any of the games companies you worked at after you left Zainsoft? You're no longer in game development...

KT: That's right. First, after I quit Zainsoft, I helped a friend establish a company in the business of selling Macintosh computers. But I got the urge to make games again, and so I left that company after about a year and joined SNK.

After I joined SNK, I took a position in an SNK group company.^{[297](#)}

JS: It's unfortunate we didn't have more time. I probably could have spent a few hours discussing SNK.

KT: I'm sure we could have. I made these games while I was at SNK. *<shows shelf, including Garou Densetsu>*

JS: Can I send supplemental questions via email?

KT: Sure, anytime.

JS: Is there any final message you want to say?

KT: Well, to me, Zainsoft shaped who I am today. For a while I hated Miyamoto-san, but now I feel a great sense of gratitude. I think you can understand if you imagine what it was like. I worked every day for 20 hours, at the age of 20, holding on to the conviction that I was going to create the very best game. It's not something that most people will ever experience. And thanks to that experience, I know I will never be afraid of getting hit, or running out of money. Mentally, I became so much stronger. More than anything, I honed my skills. For that, I am

grateful to Zainsoft. I wish I could meet Miyamoto-san today, talk to him, and laugh about the old times.

Actually, there are still many things I could still tell you, stories I hesitated to talk about...



From left to right: Nico Datiche, photographer; Joseph Redon, head of the Game Preservation Society; Mr Kensuke Takahashi, our interviewee; the author of this book; the friend of Joseph's who made the original introductions

JS: You can email them to me in Japanese.

KT: I might do that.

JS: Thank you very much for giving up your time. I had been looking forward to this for weeks!



~Bonus Material~

While sourcing magazines for this chapter, Michel Pavouris stumbled across images for the unreleased *Black Wing* by dB-Soft, discussed on p470 of V1. There was no imagery to be found at the time, so here it is, better late than never!



ブラック・ウイング

BLACK WING

「うってい・ぼこ」から「プロデュース」。さらに「パワフルまあじゃん」など、いつも他のソフトとはひと味違うゲームを出し続けているデービーソフトが、またまた変わったアクションゲームを発表した。人からケモノへ、ケモノから人へと変身して巨大な悪と戦う「ブラック・ウイング」がそれだ！

上のリードの文章の中で、「ブラック・ウイング」のことを「へんなソフト」のように書いてしまったが、そんなことはない。このゲームは、これまでのデービーソフトからは考えられないくらいマジメな(?)アクションゲームなのだ。それでは、ストーリーから紹介していこう。



■強力なケモノに変身して戦えば、そのパワーは最強！ 何れものなした。

現在、地球上には、3億分の1の確率で動物に変身できる人間が存在し、しかもそれらの人間たちは、常人の10倍もの能力を持っているといわれている。これに目をつけた悪の総指揮官デビル・アイの首領、スカワルト・リドルグは、これらの人間をその手に集め、世界征服を企んだのだ！

が、悪の企てたためしなし、この野望を打ち砕くべく、強力な変身能力を持つ7人の勇者が集まり、リドルグの前に立ち向かった。はたして、5人の、そして世界の運命は……。

……というわけで、キミは5人のキャラクターを持って、リドルグ

と戦うことになるが、そのためにはまず、各国にある支部の支部長(ボスキャラ)を倒さなければならない。

支部はアメリカ、中国、イギリス、ソビエト、ニュージーランドの5カ所、どの国に誰が行っ

てもいいし、またひとりですべての国をまわってもいいぞ。

ゲームの内容は横スクロールタイプのランニングアクションで、素早い動きを要求されるが、同時にそれが魅力にもなっている。もちろん、武器やアイテムもたくさん



アイテム

- デービーソフト
- PC-9801(16M、A)
- 価格¥5,000
- 発売日未定



■ケモノのデビル・アイは、勇気と力をもつて倒す。中国なら万里の長城、アメリカなら……。



用意されているが、このゲームではその一々ものを使うのはやめても。

このゲームでのアクションシーン(戦闘)の醍醐味は、素手でのパンチ、キック！そして、強力なケモノ(動物)への変身なのだ！

アイテムを取るとパワーアップするゲームはたくさんあるけど、動物に変身するってのは、ちょっとない。発売が1ヵ月も先のことなので、今はまだこれ以上のことは伝えられないけど、コイツは期待していいぞ！

タイガ・セイリョウ



■勇気と力をもつて倒す。中国なら万里の長城、アメリカなら……。

バルネット・ルガード



■パワーアップする能力をもつ。中国なら万里の長城、アメリカなら……。

メイア・ランレイ



■パワーアップする能力をもつ。中国なら万里の長城、アメリカなら……。

ゲイル・ランドリュ



■勇気と力をもつて倒す。中国なら万里の長城、アメリカなら……。

ホルグワ・ムーガ



■勇気と力をもつて倒す。中国なら万里の長城、アメリカなら……。



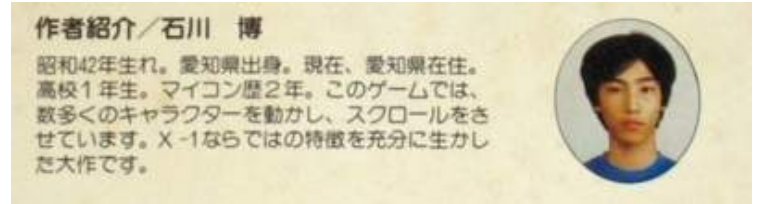
■アメリカはニューヨーク(デビル・アイ)なら最強の敵。中国なら万里の長城、アメリカなら……。



ISHIKAWA, Hiroshi

(Professor)

Author's Note: This is a reprint of an original interview first published on Hardcore Gaming 101. Its success was part of the inspiration for this book. A face-to-face interview with Professor Ishikawa was conducted in 2013, and will be published in Volume 3. In the meantime, this is a good introductory interview.



I first became interested in Professor Ishikawa's games after discovering Kagirinaki Tatakai, an exclusive for the Sharp X1 computer, back when everyone was excited about finding the inspiration Treasure used for creating Bangai-O. The actual game which influenced Treasure turned out to be Hover Attack, which wasn't very interesting. But the search for it resulted in the discovery of Kagirinaki, an overlooked gem from 1983 and still tremendously fun to play, even today as the article explains. Additionally, it was staggeringly ahead of its time. Comparisons could be drawn to the British-developed Exile on the BBC Home Computer, but this lacked the realtime deformable landscape of Kagirinaki. I was also fascinated by the fact that the author of the game was credited on the title screen alongside the publisher Enix. It seemed like a lost gem which deserved significantly more recognition, but had apparently been overlooked due to being on hardware less popular than NEC's dominant PC-88 range.

The second time I was aware of Professor Ishikawa's work was when discovering Brain Breaker, during research for an article on the history of Japanese home computers. It was another Sharp X1 exclusive, again published by Enix and developed by the same mysterious "H Ishikawa". From here I went back to the Kagirinaki box, on the back of which was a profile of its creator, complete with fresh-faced photo of him from his high school days. It took a while trawling Japanese blogs to find a collector who could provide a high-resolution scan (thanks to Hiroshi Miyajima) which revealed the kanji for Ishikawa's first name, and then assistance from a whole series of Tokugawa regulars to translate the profile text. As the Japanese text on the Kagirinaki Tatakai box explained:

42

1

2

"Born in the 42nd year of the Showa Era (i.e. 1967). Lives in the Aichi prefecture. Is in the first year of [Japanese] high school. Has owned a microcomputer for 2 years."

With this we trawled the internet until we discovered the professor's university page, along with a photo which confirmed we'd found our developer. It also listed his contact details. One of our main questions when contacting him was whether there were any other hidden releases

to discover. With the high quality of both Kagirinaki Tatakai and Brain Breaker, we were eager to find more.

There must be few things as disconcerting as waking up to find an email in your inbox from a group of Japanese computer enthusiasts nearly 10'000 kilometres away, asking you about games you made as a high school student nearly 30 years previous, and linking you to a forum topic where not only do they have your entire life mapped out (with personal contact details), but they have side-by-side comparison photos of you from when you made the games and more recent photos, taken from the faculty website of the university where you work. Hell, some people might even describe this as *downright terrifying*.

But that's precisely what we, the writers of HG101 and Tokugawa forums, ended up doing. And thankfully, rather than reporting us to the police for stalking, Professor Ishikawa seemed impressed at our determination.

Hiroshi Ishikawa: No problem about using English. Where did you learn Japanese? That you could figure out who I am seems to indicate you know more of the language than you are letting on. Anyway, good detective work!

Kagirinaki Tatakai was my first original game that was completed. It was motivated by the novel *Starship Troopers* () by R. A. Heinlein. The book features powered suits like the one in the game. I tried to imitate the powered suit depicted in the cover illustration for the Japanese translation. I just Googled the Japanese title and found a page with a picture of the book and some plastic models. Isn't the internet wonderful? Anyway, if you read the book, there is a scene toward the end where they go down the tunnels inhabited by spider-like aliens. Hand grenades and portable rockets to make holes in walls in Kagirinaki are taken straight from the novel. You may also remember some yellow spider-like aliens in the game.

I also remember playing the famous Moon Lander game about that time, that led to the physical motion of the powered suit in the game. There was also a game called Time Pilot that I liked around that time, which had the homing missiles, which also appear in Kagirinaki Tatakai. By the way, in some ad for the game that appeared in magazines, Enix advertised the "Exocet-like" missiles. Exocet was a real-life anti-ship missile that became famous by sinking British warships in the Falkland Conflict about that time. It was sold to the Argentinians by the French.

JS: Did you develop any other games besides Kagirinaki Takakai and Brain Breaker?

HI: Those two games were the only games that became commercial. I had written a few games before Kagirinaki Tatakai on the Commodore VIC-1001, which is the same as the VIC-20 in the US. I bought it, I still remember, in March 1981, my first computer. VIC-1001 had a 6502 CPU and had about 6KB of RAM, using an expansion RAM pack. Most of the games I wrote were half done and the only completed one I remember was a copy of Scramble, which I wrote by "hand assembling", meaning I had to first write 6502 assembly language and then assemble it by hand using a table that was in the manual. It's amazing to think that they included the machine instruction table in the manual of a personal computer! I bought a Sharp X1 in May 1983, when I had just entered high school. In Japan, the school year begins in April.

JS: "Kagirinaki Tatakai" is also the Japanese name for the *Led Zeppelin* song "Battle of Evermore", and the title "Brain Breaker" is also the name of a song by 1980s Japanese heavy metal band *Dementia*. Not to mention that your mothership in *Brain Breaker* is called Zeppelin. Are you a big heavy metal fan?

HI: The only song I know by *Led Zeppelin* is "Stairway to Heaven." So I am sorry to say that I am not really a *Zeppelin* fan. As for *Dementia*, I've never even heard of them, sorry. At the time I listened to some random heavy metal bands that happened to be played on the radio or my friends liked, such as *Accept* and *Quiet Riot*. But I also liked pop songs like *Duran Duran*, *Hall & Oates*, *Prince*, *The Police*, *Billy Joel*, and *Joe Jackson*.



JS: Describe the start of *Kagirinaki*. (above)

HI: Enix held its second game programming competition in the summer of 1983, when I'd just turned 16. I wrote the original version of *Kagirinaki Tatakai* in just one month, using the BASIC compiler from Hudson Software, which you might also know as the maker of many games for X1 at the time. I originally named the game "Assault V", which pretty much didn't mean anything. There was already a game from the first Enix competition that was named

(*Starship Troopers*). So I couldn't use the title. After they informed me that my game was chosen as one of the ten winners, they suggested I change the name to *Kagirinaki Tatakai*. I agreed because it reminded me of another SF novel called the *Forever War* (

) by Joe Haldeman, which also featured powered suits. At the time I did not know that it was the title of a *Led Zeppelin* song.

JS: Did you do other work for Enix?

HI: After the X1 version of *Kagirinaki Tatakai* was published by Enix, they asked me to port it to PC-8801, which is another 8-bit computer sold by NEC. It was much more popular than X1 and I imagine if it could be ported, it would have sold much more. By the way, *Kagirinaki Tatakai* eventually sold about 3'000 copies, I think. The porting, however, turned out to be impossible (for me anyway). The bitmap graphics scrolling was too much for the 8-bit CPUs of the time. You needed some hardware help, like sprites that came later, to move a lot of graphics around the screen. X1 managed to do it through the use of the PCG, as it was called then, which stands for Programmable Character Generator.

On X1, you could basically design your own letter characters and move them around as a unit of 8x8 pixels by just writing one byte to some memory location. Without it, porting to PC-8801 was impossible. At first I thought I could do it by using letter characters for terrain and only using full-graphics for aliens and such. But eventually Enix turned it down as not good enough. I was paid nothing for this effort, which was much more than the effort required to write the original game since I also had to use the assembly language for speed.

JS: How did *Brain Breaker* start?

HI: In about the spring of 1984, I went back to the X1 and started making *Brain Breaker*. It was an ambitious project, written entirely in assembly language and eventually taking up the whole 64KB of RAM. It took me until November of 1985 to complete the game, dangerously close to the entrance exams for university. Subjectively, the work required for *Brain Breaker* was something like 20 times that for *Kagirinaki Tatakai*. It was too much. I didn't want to do any more programming. So once I entered university, I went without doing any serious programming for two years. After that, I did some game programming paid by the hour. It was for the MSX version of *Kaiketsu Yanchamaru*.^{[298](#)} But it was not much effort, which suited me.



JS: I played through Brain Breaker and wrote an article. I thought it was *amazing!* (top & right)

HI: I read your feature on it. I had completely forgotten the details. I am glad it sounds like a very fun game. I do remember the game Elevator Action, from which I took the, well, elevator action. The obfuscation you talk about was really necessary if you didn't want the game to end in two hours, as the amount of sheer information that can be incorporated in the game was limited both by the amount of memory and storage, and by the fact that it was written by a lone teenager after school! <laughs>

JS: Why did you choose to study natural sciences at university, as opposed to continuing with programming?

HI: Why did I go to natural science? Well, I had two interests toward the end of my high school years. Elementary Particle Physics and Artificial Intelligence. I eventually went back to the latter but I first tried some physics and mathematics. I had done too much games programming at the time and I was really fed up by all the work it involved. Also, the two commercial games were not that much of a success, sales-wise. I remember meeting a few times with someone in Enix even after I went to Kyoto, discussing the possibility of developing more games. But eventually, I decided I didn't want to use up my college years developing more games.

So to answer your question about my other games clearly: there were the two commercial games, the failed port to PC-8801, and earlier games that I wrote on VIC-1001. That's it. None

other than the two commercial games can be retrieved now, as they were never out and I don't have them any more.

JS: So you don't have any source code? One member of the Tokugawa forums expressed an interest in translating it, possibly porting it to the PC-98 using Turbo C++.

HI: About the source code - I wish I had it but nothing is left except for the retail packages for the two games, which I can't load since I don't have the X1 any more. At the time I didn't have a printer so there is no printout either. Since there are emulators and the tape file for the game on the internet, I suppose it is not completely impossible to reverse engineer the games from their machine code.

We left the questions there, but on my travels to Japan I met Professor Ishikawa at his university, and we went into great depth on his recollections of game development, and also the future of Artificial Intelligence and robots developing human-like visual perception. The rise of the machines starts here!

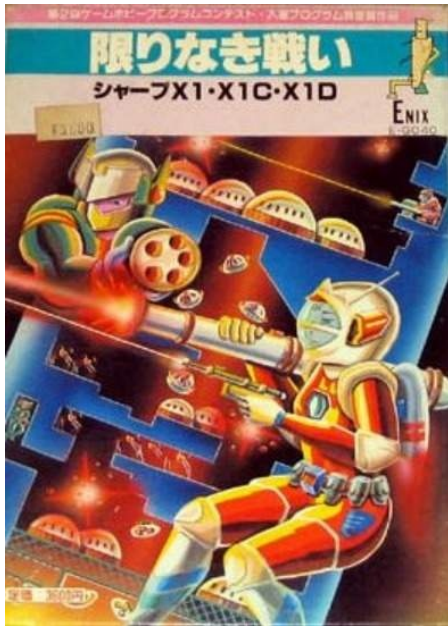
If you'd like to play either of these two games, please see the original HG101 articles for instructions.





Kagirinaki Tatakai

Sharp X1 (1983)



Archaic Japanese home computers offer the potential for amazing discoveries. It's not easy acquiring old computer games and it's not easy running them. So finding a hidden gem is a challenge. But when you do, it's all the sweeter.

Kagirinaki Tatakai came to people's attention via Bangai-O. In 2003 there was an interview with Treasure's Yaiman and in 2008 someone translated a piece of it: "**Bangai-O started as a remake of an X1 game called '____' [name purposefully cut], but I mixed in anime influences, and pretty soon it was didn't resemble the original, and so its being a remake became 120% a bluff/lie.**"

This kind of epic news is like finding Bomberman was actually released in 1983 on the ZX Spectrum. You **will** want to play it! Trawling the X1's library, Kagirinaki was the first that seemed similar enough. Then it was discovered the real influence was actually Hover Attack.

Unfortunately... Hover Attack is actually a bit awful. Kagirinaki on the other hand, could be one of the greatest games released in 1983. Imagine Activision's H.E.R.O. meets Mr. Driller. You control a man with an unlimited jetpack, a laser, and limited supply of rockets and grenades. Your goal is to descend through a vertical world, killing enemies, destroying the landscape with grenades, and trying to reach the greatest depth.

Kagirinaki did many things which put it ahead of the curve. The main sprite isn't mirrored, it has separate graphics for facing left or right. You've got three weapons which have distinct traits (shooting a rocket will send you flying backwards). Falling too far will also kill you; fall enough and your inertia will kill an enemy below, but too much and you die. Best of all is that you can destroy the environment in real-time. Any part of it. If you don't feel like navigating a maze of enemies, just bomb your way through the floor and avoid them. This adds a **huge** tactical element, since you can bomb holes in the environment and let enemies pop through to take them out, or avoid them altogether. But your grenades are finite and essential to passing later sections, so use them carefully. Enemies are also diverse and inventive. Bullets cancel each other out. You can even ride on an enemy's head and, if careful, ride the heavy blue missiles they fire. If you hold down a directional button you automatically walk over small gaps, instead of falling through. It does so much **right**.

Kagirinaki has a strong internal coherence and is full of clever ideas which go beyond what you think the hardware capable of. Many later games with nicer graphics and audio were so utterly devoid of substance and cleverness. It's sad to think this never reached a wider audience and took 25 years to be found by the West.

SCORE: 3400 HI-SCORE: 1370
BOMB= 18 ROCKET= 8 MAN= 2 140m



Brain Breaker

Sharp X1 (1985)



[00] テープ版

シャープX1/X1C/X1F
/X1 turbo

ブレイクブレイカー

スーパーリアリズムロールプレイング



Brain Breaker is an epic 2D adventure exclusive to the Sharp X1 computer. It was also vastly ahead of its time. Although Metroid did not influence BB, fans of the series might see similarities in both the music and gameplay. Structurally it plays like an overworld version of Metroid crossed with Elevator Action - though it's considerably more complex than both.

Entering the atmosphere of a seemingly dead alien planet your podship is destroyed, leaving you stranded. The planet's inhabitants have mysteriously disappeared, but their enormous cities remain. The left path is blocked by an immobile droid, forcing you to head rightwards into an empty wilderness. You come across a laser rifle and, with nothing on the horizon, the only option is to pick it up and return to the city. But the robots have been activated and try to kill you. There's a jetpack on the ground, but it's booby-trapped. This is the first of many red herrings. Later there's a hover bike which explodes, killing you. There's also a broken rocket launcher which can't be picked up, and de-activated droids in strange places.

Eventually you find a green building with elevator, except you can't reach the upper floors. Inside is a working jetpack which allows access to a floating island high above the building. On the island and you'll find a red vending machine, but it's seemingly useless - you can only remove an ID card. With this you can return to the green building, ride the elevator to the upper floor computer and communicate with it, whereupon it relinquishes a weapon. Except when you try to leave, it traps the elevator, lectures and then kills you. The solution is to use the new-found weapon on the computer, since it disables electronics.

You explore the city, eventually riding an elevator into a giant room with a blocked tunnel. Here things get clever, since to proceed you need to drop your laser rifle on the manhole cover and then fire rockets at your own gun, causing it to explode and destroying the blockage. From here you reach another building, with a gun that can melt walls, and eventually you find a special room with a crystalline alien lifeform, which grants psychic powers (basically Super Saiyan mode).

The objectives are so obscure and esoteric, it's doubtful anyone could finish the game without a guide – certainly not without a lot of trial and error. All of this obfuscation is what makes the game so fascinating. It's a beautiful example of the era; in many ways it represents the pinnacle of obfuscated design in the mid-1980s, standing alongside such masterpieces as Legacy of the Wizard and Simon's Quest. It represents a style no longer provided by modern developers. Each bit of progression feels like an achievement, and the game's biggest joy is its sense of discovery.



コノカイヨリウエハカンケイシャイカナイタチイリテキマセン。

ASX

SAVE

HIT

LEFT 333



TSURUTA, Michitaka

DOB: 4 June 1961 / Birthplace: Kitakyushu-city / Blood Type: O

~Selected Portfolio~

(with Director's Commentary! "All quotes" are by Michitaka Tsuruta)

/ **Swimmer** (ARC, 1982): *"This was the game that got me started in the industry. When you're just waiting to transition from part-time to full-time employment, it sure is hard to anticipate what's ahead. This was an action game in which you played as a character trying to swim upstream in a river."*



/ **Guzzler** (ARC, 1983): Wander a maze drinking up water puddles to put out fires, the more water you carry the slower you are. **(right)** *"A fixed-screen shooting game, the sort where you had to destroy enemy generators."*

¥ / **Bomb Jack** (ARC, 1984): An all-time arcade classic. Collect the bombs in the correct order for big scores. *"This was a fixed-screen, target-clear style action game."*



× / **Solomon's Key** (ARC, 1986 / FC, 1986): *"I guess this turned out to be one of my best games, huh? It was a fixed-screen action-puzzle game. I worked on the game design, character design, technical specifications, and level design."* Received multiple worldwide ports, including Famicom; later remade for GBC as Monster Rancher Explorer.

/ **Tsuppari Oosumo** (FC, 1987): *"This was a competitive sumo wrestling action game. I worked on the in-game wrestlers and technical specifications."*

/ **Captain Tsubasa** series (multiple, from 1988): *"This game was the result of a lot of talent and hard work from the entire development team. It was the first soccer simulation game with a real 'continuity system'".²⁹⁹ I worked on the technical specifications for the matches, the structure of the continuity system, and created the continuity data. It was the rare game where we managed to achieve exactly what our original plans were. I still feel Captain Tsubasa 2 is the best game in the series."* First out in US as Tecmo Cup Soccer Game (1992).

× / **Necros no Yosai** (PCE, 1989): Curiously linear JRPG for PC Engine (world map is akin to Dragon Buster), based on a 1980s toy line.

/ **Catrap** (GB, 1990): A remake of the 1985 puzzler for computers by Yutaka Isokawa (see Vol.1). Mr Tsuruta was in charge of redesigning the characters. *"This is a puzzle game where you break rocks and destroy monsters."*

× / **Solomon's Key 2** (FC, 1992): Create blocks of ice to put out fires (aka: *Fire 'n' Ice*). "This was an original game. Initially, the protagonist was a snowman. It was a puzzle game with a few action elements."



F1 / **F1 Boy** (GB, 1990)



/ **The 100 World**

Story: Tales on a Watery

Wilderness (FC, 1991 / fan-tr., 2007): A board game RPG! Fan-translated. (right, image via romhacking.net)

¥

/ **Zico Soccer** (SFC, 1994)

/ **Dokapon Gaiden** (SFC, 1995)

¥

/ **Dungeon Creator** (PS1, 1996)

/ **Dark Half** (SFC, 1996): Unusual RPG where players control both hero and villain. Developed by Westone Bit Entertainment!

/ **Imadoki no Vampire: Bloody Bride** (PS1, 1996): Mix of JRPG and dating-sim with a vampire theme.

/ **Willy Wombat** (SAT, 1997): 3D platformer for Saturn with overhead camera; started as a 2D side-scroller for SFC, but with the shift from 16-bit to 32-bit was reworked to feature 2D sprites in 3D environments.

M / **Sotsugyou M** (PS1, 1998)

/ **Monster Tactics** (GBC, 2000): "This was one of my more recent major titles. We had an excellent team working on this one. It's a really good game, I swear. This was a large-scale turn-based RPG."

/ **Puzzle Pom** (Mobile, 2003): "This was the first puzzle game I worked on in a long time. It was completely original. I guess this was my programming debut? <laughs> Duties: Outside of the audio, I did everything."

/ **The King of Automobiles** (Web, 2003~): "This was supposed to be a six-month project but it took over a year. We finally unveiled it... And then, they shut the servers down. It was a long project. It was an automobile company (automobile factory?) simulation game that you played with your browser."

/ **Deep Labyrinth (Mobile, 2004):** "This game made me think: 'It's a small world.' Explore dungeons and solve puzzles! You cast magic like you were using a cell phone, which was novel!"

/ **Light Stream (Mobile, 2005):** "If you have a W21T, you should play this! Otherwise, you'll die a lot. This was my first time handling a game's scenario. I think I pulled it off. Those Matsuya's pork rice bowls sure taste great after an all-nighter. A space racing game with graphics and music that are simple and sparse! Traverse the void of space with a high-speed Trancecraft! Strive to win the Lightstream GP!"

Monster Kingdom Jewel Summoner (PSP, 2006): "This was the first consumer game I'd worked on in a long time. Before I knew it, this turned into a Tehkan reunion. This was my first project since being transferred to Tokyo. It was Mr Okada's first solo project. Lots of well-known game composers worked on this. Pokémon for grown-ups. <laughs> I know that's blunt, but it's the simplest way to explain it. **Battle System:** handled the system concept, system specifications, and the difficulty data for all foes except the bosses. **Training System:** worked on the system concept, did all the system specifications and training data."

Astro Zill (Mobile, 2009): "The first original game I made in a long time. I'm very proud of it. It's a puzzle game where you try to assemble and clear four balls of the same colour by absorbing balls and spitting them out."

Interview with Michitaka TSURUTA

22 September 2013, Tokyo / Duration: 3h 41m

Many factors led to my interviewing Michitaka Tsuruta, a developer with a hand in many classic and beloved titles. First was Ryuichi Nishizawa's encouragement, since they had been colleagues and friends while at Tehkan. He put me in touch with



Mr Tsuruta, which led to regular correspondence. Next was the suggestion of Andrea Babich; a passionate fan of Mr Tsuruta's, he had conducted an interview some years ago in Italian, and translated it into English for me to use as base research. Another factor was my scheduled interview with Yutaka Isokawa, who had created the original *Pitman*, which was remade by Mr Tsuruta as *Catrap* on the Game Boy. With so many connections, it was essential I document his words. Though best known for various puzzle games, his skill is wide reaching and includes sports titles, simulations, action platformers, and a diverse selection of JRPGs which all tried something different from the norm.

Unfortunately Mr Tsuruta lived a considerable distance outside of Tokyo, reachable only via a series of different train journeys - his home was not on any direct line. After some discussion he suggested visiting me in Tokyo. I agreed, promising to cover the train journey and provide refreshment on arrival. Mr Tsuruta woke at 4am to begin the journey, carrying a backpack filled with sketchbooks and dossiers, full of art and design documents from various games (including some unreleased). Annotated scans are dotted around these pages, and I intend to make the remainder available online.

The interview structure was different to the others, since I was also filming footage for a DVD, so it launches right into game discussion. During the interview Mr Tsuruta was flipping through his notepads, so the conversation changed topic quickly. It has undergone heavy editing to place the topics of conversation in a chronological order of when they occurred back in the day. Unfortunately this interview could not be retranslated during transcription - instead it uses the original interpretation with spot checks.

Before sitting down to talk we began with Nico taking photos and, though not recorded, I gave a gift of *Solomon's Key* on the ZX Spectrum, which he was pleased to see. Surprisingly most Japanese developers were unaware of the official conversions to British home computers which their games received. For anyone who enjoys this interview I highly recommend the interviews by Andrea Babich, and "L'enculé en tongs" of NESblog.com, both of which acted as preliminary research for my own. Here are the two interviews on Gamasutra, along with larger images of the design docs around these pages:

http://gamasutra.com/blogs/JohnSzczechaniak/20150610/245663/Michitaka_Tsuruta_a_history

In addition, Michitaka Tsuruta keeps a well maintained website of his own, featuring interviews, design documents and sketches, plus a detailed portfolio with comments:

<http://www.turu3.net>

JS: What was the first game you saw?

MT: Ahh... *Pong*.

JS: When did you want to work in games?

MT: Not yet at that time, because I was very, very young then, when I was playing *Pong*...
<reflects>

JS: I believe you took courses in animation at the Faculty of Art at the University of Nihon?^{[300](#)}

MT: <surprised> Yes!



JS: Did you see yourself doing traditional animation for television or film?

MT: Initially I was sort of thinking in that direction, but just to give you the background as to how I became involved in this industry... There was a game called Swimmer³⁰¹ that was made by Tehkan, which later became Tecmo.³⁰² There was an ad for a part-time worker, or *arubaito* worker, to do the graphic design work for more characters. So I applied for it and I worked for the company as a part-time worker, and then I ended up joining the company as an employee.³⁰³

JS: Was this advertised in a paper? How easy to join a company! Today there's so much competition.

MT: You are quite right in saying so. At that time I was flipping through a magazine which was a collection of different sorts of part-time work, called the *Arubaito News*. When I flipped through the section where Tehkan was located I just saw the ad.

JS: So you joined the industry almost by accident?

MT: <laughs> That's right!

JS: Can you describe your games prior to Bomb Jack? There was Swimmer, and Guzzler...

MT: To talk about Swimmer, it was already almost completed. There was an idea to increase the number of enemy characters, so I was hired for that purpose. Just to digress a bit, you know Nishizawa-san? He was my interviewer for that job.



JS: He mentioned it in his interview. You later worked with him on Willy Wombat and Dark Half.

MT: Yes, that's right.

<flips through pages - stops at caricature of a man>

MT: <laughs> Oh, Ueda-san!³⁰⁴

<everyone laughs>

JS: Mr Ueda was your mentor, who helped with Bomb Jack, right? You told Andrea Babich: "The success of Bomb Jack was not because of my design, but only because of Mr Ueda's feeling for video games."

MT: That's right. This is Ueda-san as drawn by another designer. <laughs>

JS: Are you still in contact with Mr Ueda? He made Mr Do!³⁰⁵ for a time people wondered who it was.

MT: Yes, that was Ueda-san. I'm not necessarily in constant contact with him - I did see him

once, a while ago.

JS: Bomb Jack was extremely popular, especially in the UK, receiving many home conversions.³⁰⁶ These are based on the arcade original, unlike the Famicom conversion which was entirely different. Are you aware of the conversions outside Japan?

MT: No, not in detail, I did not really know.

JS: How did the Bomb Jack project start?

MT: Initially the concept was to use a ball, not Bomb Jack, and the concept was that as the ball bounces off the ground, and as the ball touches the ground, if you press the button at the right moment then the ball would jump really high.

JS: Yeah! In an interview with NESblog.com, when asked about life at Tehkan, you said: *"The unit price of PCBs ranged from 100'000 to 200'000 yen, with a development duration ranging between 3 and 6 months. This required a core development team of several people. Profit margins were large, and it was the time when the arcade market was in constant development. Even in the case of a project failing, it was possible to save the situation by turning it into a new game. This is potentially why the development of games happened in a free and open way."* Because Bomb Jack changed too, right?

MT: <nods, smiling> At that time Xevious was very popular, so the original Bomb Jack idea was some kind of metallic ball would bounce about and aim for the goal. But it was actually very difficult to time it right, to press the button as the ball touches the ground. The controls were less than ideal. Around that time Mr Ueda joined the company, and he had this idea of having the ball stopping in mid-air as you press the button, and then it would go for the target. That's when the concept changed, or how it came about to be Bomb Jack in the end.



JS: <sees Bomb Jack comic> The character has a cute design, with helmet/cape. Anything inspire it?

MT: I didn't design the characters for Bomb Jack. <laughs> So this folder I brought contains some things which were drawn by others, actually. Not everything was drawn by me.



JS: Can you describe the music licensing for *Bomb Jack*? Later versions replaced the licensed tracks.^{[307](#)}

MT: At that time, when we had the arcade version of the game, *Spoon Obasan*, or the title of the music, was being played on NHK.^{[308](#)} So we were able to use it as it is. The amount that you

would have to pay to JASRAC,³⁰⁹ they are a copyright organisation, was only a few yen per music. And when you deal with the sale of arcade PCBs, the transaction amount would be like more than 100'000 yen per unit.³¹⁰ So as a proportion of what you would have to pay for copyright [licensing], it was very, very small in terms of the unit price of what was sold to game centres. But when it came to the Famicom, the amount that Tehkan would get to keep, as the profit gets split between Tehkan and the hardware manufacturer, was only a few thousand yen. So the proportion of the music rights, or the amount you have to pay for the music rights, was very large. So it was decided that it's better to use originally developed music to secure more profit.

JS: Can you give further details on the profit margins for arcade PCBs at that time, and also figures per Famicom cartridge?

MT: The amount you have to pay for the music is only several yen, but what you sell to the arcade can be sold for more than 100'000 yen. So only several yen out of more than 100'000 yen was a very small, negligible proportion. Whereas when it came to Famicom, what the company would get is only around 2'500 or 3'000 yen [per cartridge]. So yes, you pay the same amount, several yen, but several yen out of 2'500 or 3'000 is a big proportion. It wasn't feasible to license the music in that case.³¹¹

JS: Nintendo had strict contracts for games to be published on Famicom. Can you recall any details?

MT: *<pauses to reflect>* Hmm... I'm not sure if this is published information, but apparently Nintendo's contract had several different phases, or different variations of contract, and depending on how much the company paid for a license, Nintendo would disclose the technology associated with Famicom to varying degrees. So there were several different versions and depending on how much was paid, a lot more technical information would be shared. To give you one example, in some games the screen would scroll horizontally, while in other games the screen would scroll vertically, and some games would partially scroll both ways at the same time. So when Tecmo asked about how that technology can be incorporated, when Tecmo asked Nintendo to teach them how to do that, the answer was, "Well, we don't know ourselves, because some other company came up with that."

So for the ending scene for Solomon's Key, we wanted to make the temple, the constellation space, sink into the ground, but we didn't know how to program that, so we had no choice but to simply make the entire screen move downward.

JS: Scrolling was related to memory management controllers.³¹² Nintendo made their own; others also made specialised chips. SMB3 used the MMC3.³¹³

MT: In that sense, if you are to use the MMC chips that were developed later on, then as a proportion of the sales cost, what you have to pay to Nintendo would become higher. So oftentimes you would say something like, "Well, as things stand, we can only use this level of MMC." So there were some cases where the functionality of the game would be limited due to

concerns about sales and profits.

JS: I've heard that too!^{[314](#)} What did you think of the conversion of Bomb Jack to Famicom? Yesterday I played the original PCB at a sales warehouse.^{[315](#)}

MT: *<intense laughter>* I'm surprised to hear that - to know that it still exists, the arcade version!

JS: Collectors like PCBs for an authentic experience. Emulation isn't the same. Yesterday I noticed the vertical screen and scanlines between pixels, and the way the colours interacted on CRT.

MT: Right! *<laughs - nodding>* When you create the pixel art, you would place the colours in such a way, or you would be very mindful of the space between the dots of the raster grid. In older monitors, the colours are arranged R, G, B, R, G, B and so on, and if you intentionally place the colours in a particular way, then it would appear as though additional pixels exist in-between, effectively increasing the resolution. The pixel artists were aware of this and used this technique intentionally. But those kinds of techniques have been abandoned now and probably aren't very useful now. *<laughs>*

JS: Please describe the process of creating pixel art.

MT: At Tecmo, or rather Tehkan as it was known, there was a special, dedicated tool for making pixel art, called *Ediputer*,^{[316](#)} and you would use a light pen and place the dots on a CRT screen. The graphics designer would have the original picture on hand, and would choose the colours, and fill out the 16 x 16 dot matrix. With the Ediputer you would use the lightpen to draw pixels, you could check in real-time how it would appear onscreen. So you can make adjustments or fine-tune it. Even though it may look clean and clear on the enlarged version, or the zoomed-in version, if you look at the character at its real size, then it may look distorted. So you have to make fine-tune modifications, and that's how you would acquire the skill.

JS: Mr Nishizawa described the Digitizer, where they saved work by burning it to ROM chips. Kouichi Yotsui from Capcom described a system without a lightpen - graphics were done via keyboard!^{[317](#)}

MT: Back when I was working with Nishizawa-san, that was in the early days, the way debugging was done was different. These days debugging is done at the time of programming, but in those days where you would burn the ROM chip, you would colour in the squares on graph paper. And then after you coloured those individual squares, you would convert them in to numbers, and then you would key in the numbers in hexadecimal using a ROM writer. Then you burn a ROM chip, mount it on the circuit board, and then check on the screen to see if a dot was missing or if too many dots appeared onscreen. So that's the kind of debugging we had to do back in those days, as well.

JS: Crazy! I've played around with hexadecimal and it's tricky to get your head around![318](#)

MT: Hexadecimal is very tricky! *<laughs>*

Nico: *Arigatou gozaimashita. <makes to leave>* I'll try to come tonight! See you all!

MT: *Otsukaresama deshita.*



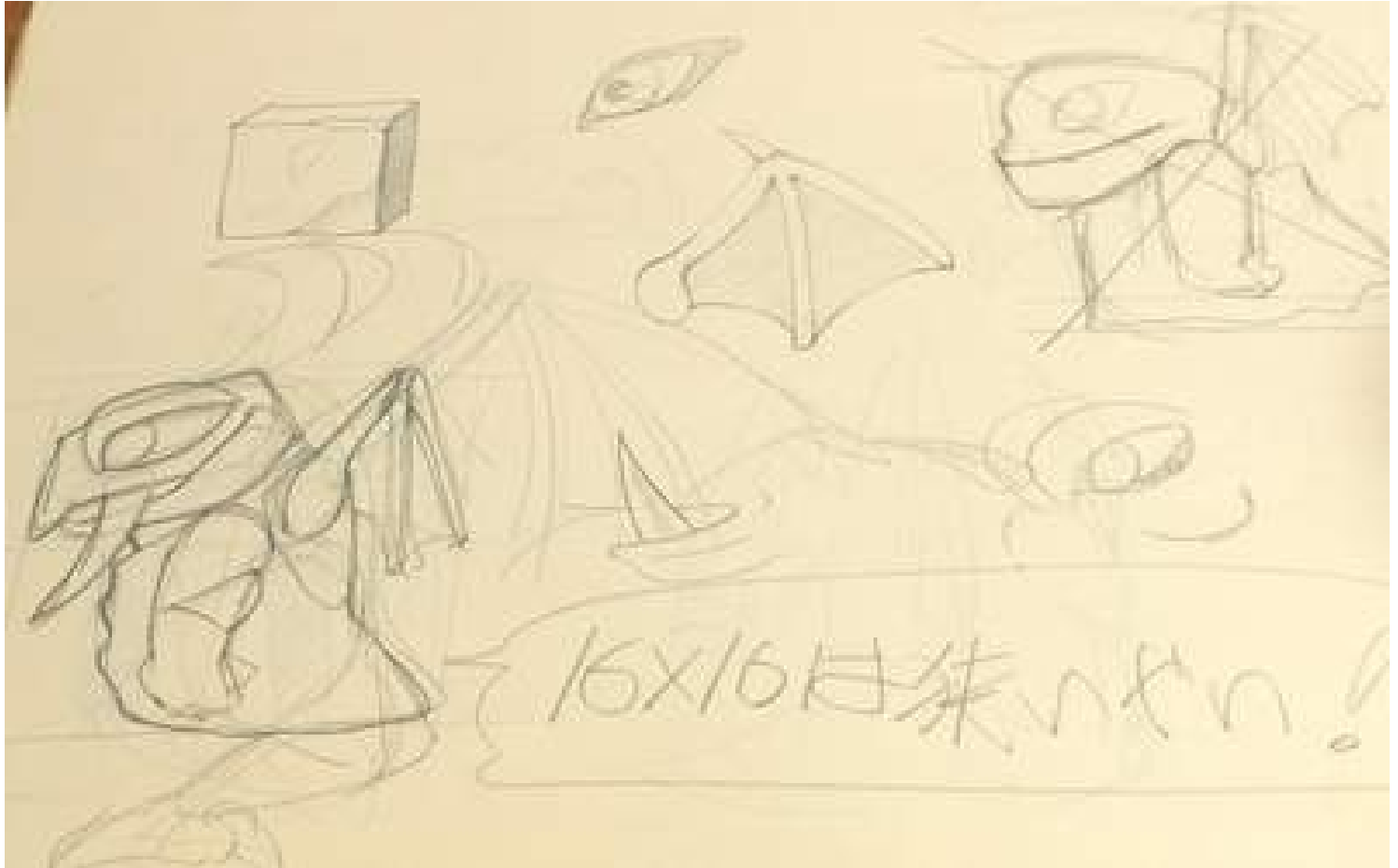
JS: See you at Sony Indies Stream![319](#)

<author starts filming>

JS: We're about to be shown design documents for... Solomon's Key?

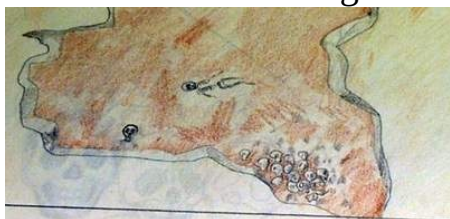
MS: Yes. These are some of the initial phases of sketches, in preparation for the arcade version of the game. *<point to papers as author photographs - image of Dana o'Shee>* This is close to the finalised version of the Solomon's Key character.

JS: Later converted into pixel art?



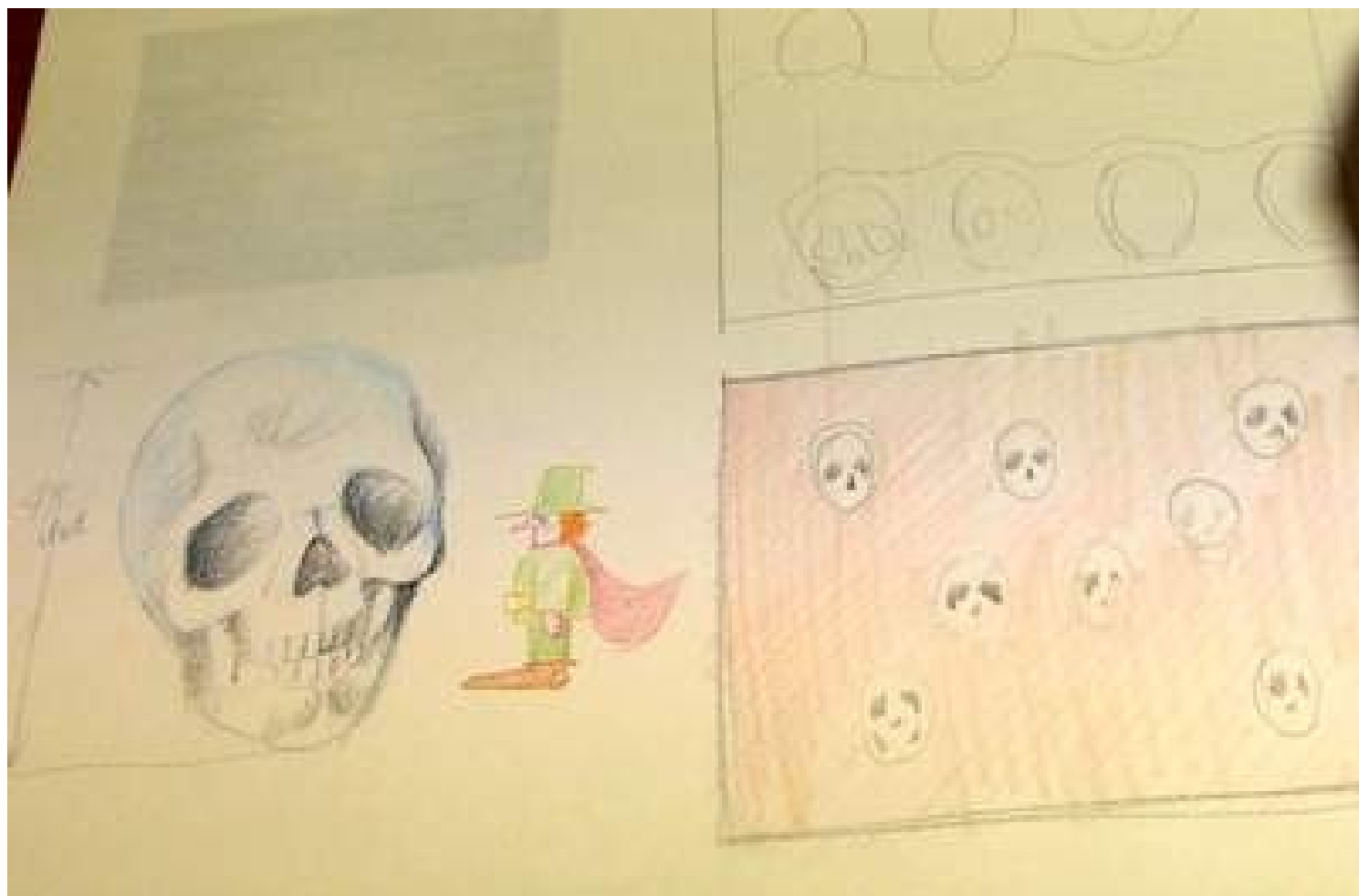
MT: Yes, that's right. *<various pages - places thumb/forefinger over image of enemy>* This size image... That would be 16 pixels.

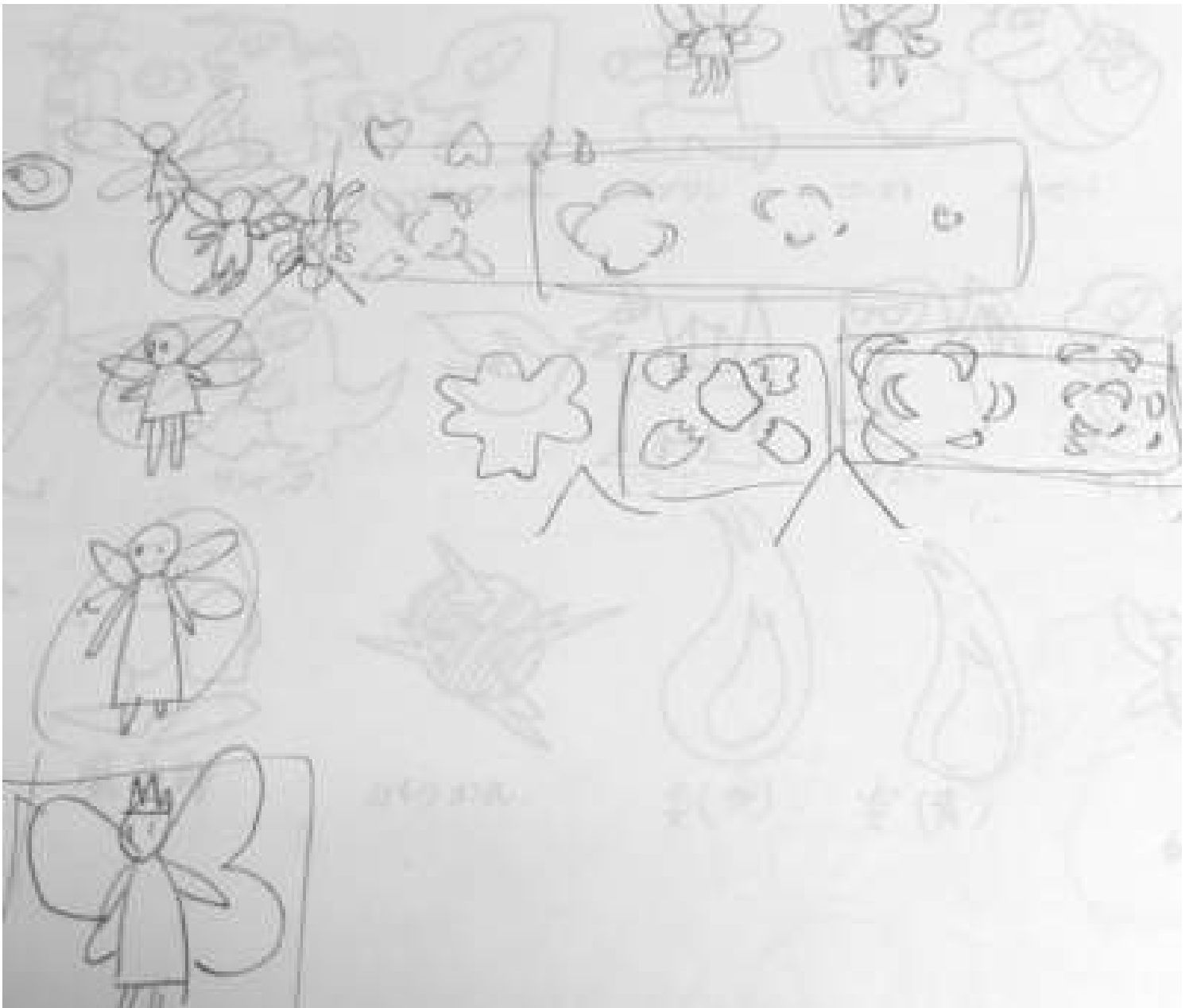
<points to drawing of smaller player character> While this would be 10 to 12 pixels. These are closer designs to the final one used.



<shows a cave with skeletons> This is one of the few sketches that I drew, as I thought about how to fill out the background for the arcade version - I had some difficulties with that.

<skull enemy> This is 48 dots in height.





JS: Developers say it was a challenge to create beautiful art, not only because of the limited pixel size but available colours.³²⁰ **MT:** When I was with Tehkan, we were to pick 16 colours out of 4'096 colour variations, so I didn't have much trouble with the colours. But when it came to size, it was small and also you need to have it in motion. So you had to have a certain margin around it. You need to think about the design in a stationary state and in motion, and you have to fit that into a given limited size. So that was quite time consuming, to make it work.

JS: It's worse when converting to FC, with its reduced palette and sprites.

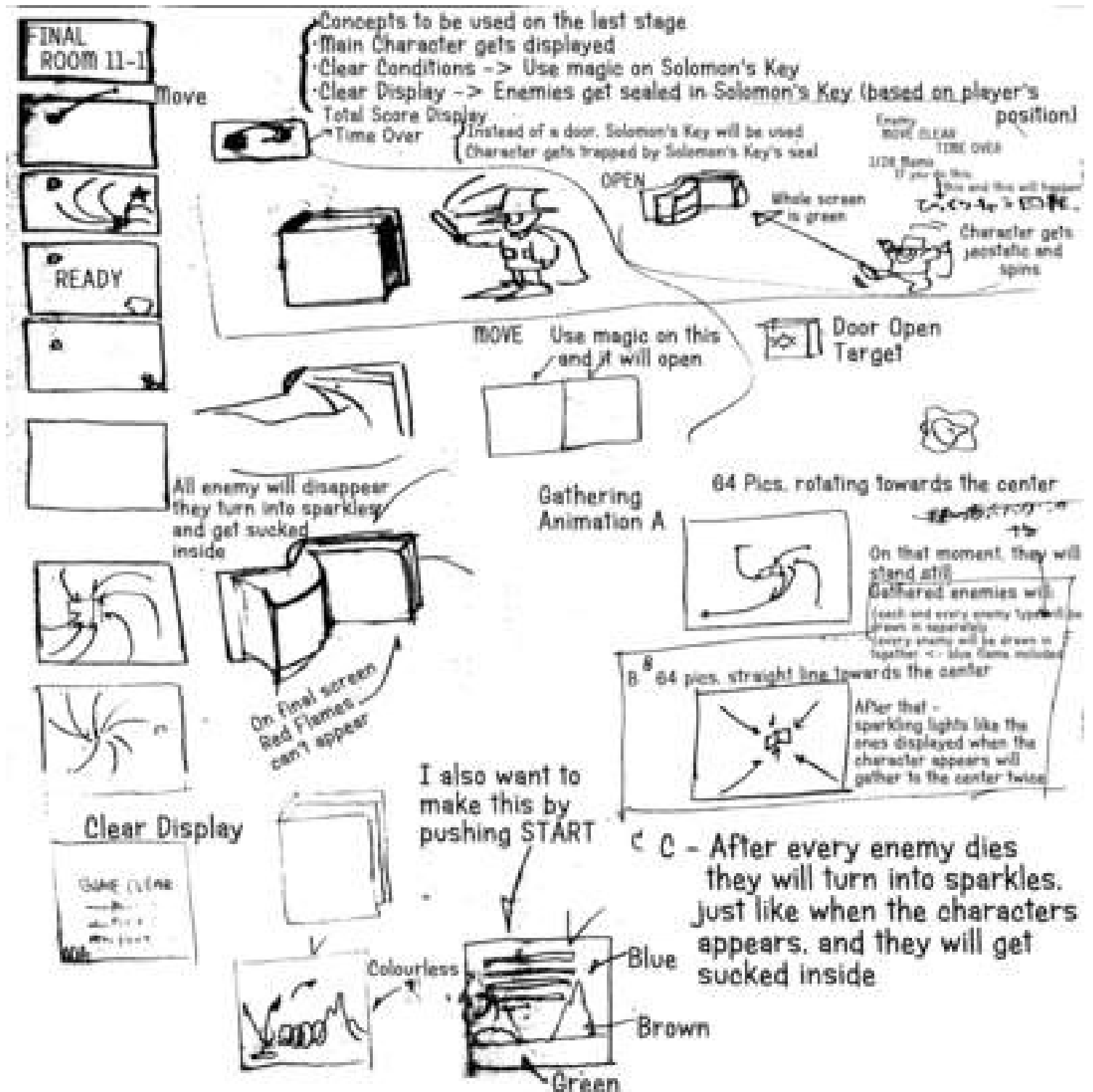
MT: <laughs> Indeed, you are quite right! <hands over sketchpads for photos>

JS: You kept these after leaving Tehkan?

MT: These sketchbooks were something I bought myself, they were not something which

were supplied to me by the company.

<points to text near a large enemy> I was playing around here and wrote: "16 x 16 is too small!" As I said earlier, these wings would be in motion, so you have to take that into account - you have to make sure it would fit in the given space. <points to body> If I were to draw this part smaller, then I can make the wings bigger. But then the overall thing would be smaller. So it was very challenging to strike the right balance between dynamism and the form.



JS: This artwork is great. People enjoy seeing the conceptual evolution of ideas.

MT: <referencing sketches> This is the original drawing for the instance where the fairy

would be animated. *<points>* This is a situation where you accidentally strike the fairy with a fireball, by mistake, and end up burning the fairy.^{[321](#)}

<everyone chuckles - we go through dossier>



MT: <pauses, page **above**> This is the design work for the very end, or the final stage, for Solomon's Key on the Famicom. When you use the key of Solomon and the book of magic opens up. I designed different animations in which either the monsters get sucked in, or Dana gets sucked in if you haven't fulfilled the necessary conditions.³²²

<flips page> A different designer drew the main character in Solomon's Key! <laughs> (see [above](#))

JS: <flips page> Ahh! There's the character we saw earlier, with the wings.

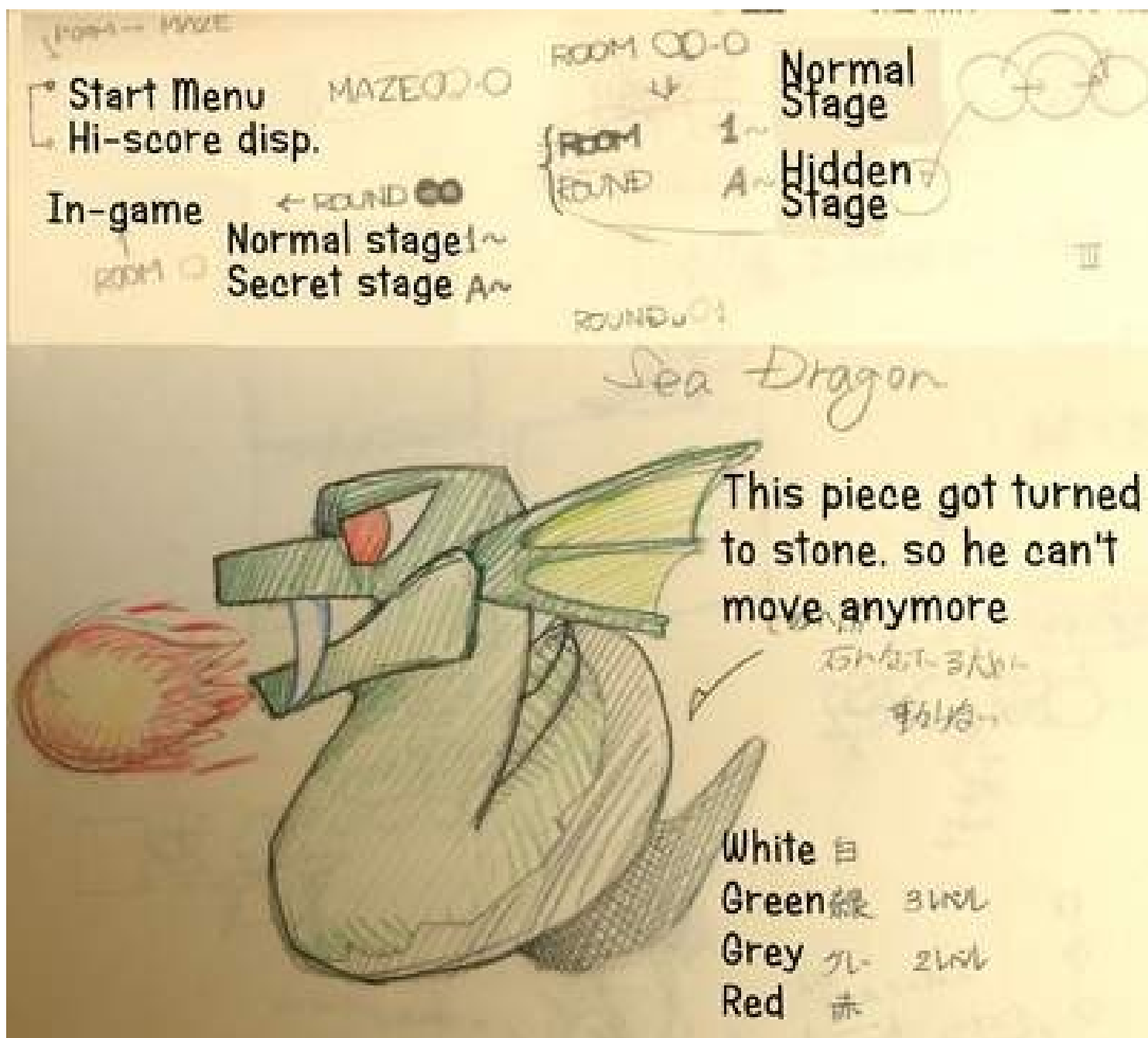
MT: Indeed. This is the Sea Dragon. Would you like to take a picture?

JS: Could you sketch the office layout of Tehkan - perhaps for Solomon's Key?

MT: Sure. <begins sketching>

JS: My editor was impressed that I was interviewing the maker of Solomon's Key.

MT: I am very happy to hear that Solomon's Key was received so well. <laughs> Because in Japan at that time, it only sold like 300'000 copies. In those days 300'000 copies was not that big of a deal! Nowadays 300'000 copies would be considered a major hit, a smash hit, but back in those days, 500'000 was an easy target, so 300'000 was less than average. Of course there are some really hardcore fans, so I could talk about the game with such fans. But from a sales perspective, if I were to talk to a salesperson, he'd be like, "Eh, it's just an ordinary game." Or that kind of thing. <laughs> So I'm very happy to know it was regarded highly.



JS: May I continue to look through the sketchbook?

MT: Please. There are some drawings that are rather embarrassing, because I drew them only for very personal reasons! <laughs> [323](#)

<sketches layout> So this is how the office layout was set out for Tehkan. The company occupied two floors. The first floor or ground floor, and then the floor above. On the ground floor there was the sales section as you walk in. There was a reception desk, then the president's desk would be there, and the sales managers or general managers. The president would be in the back. And the head of the sales divisions would be sitting there.

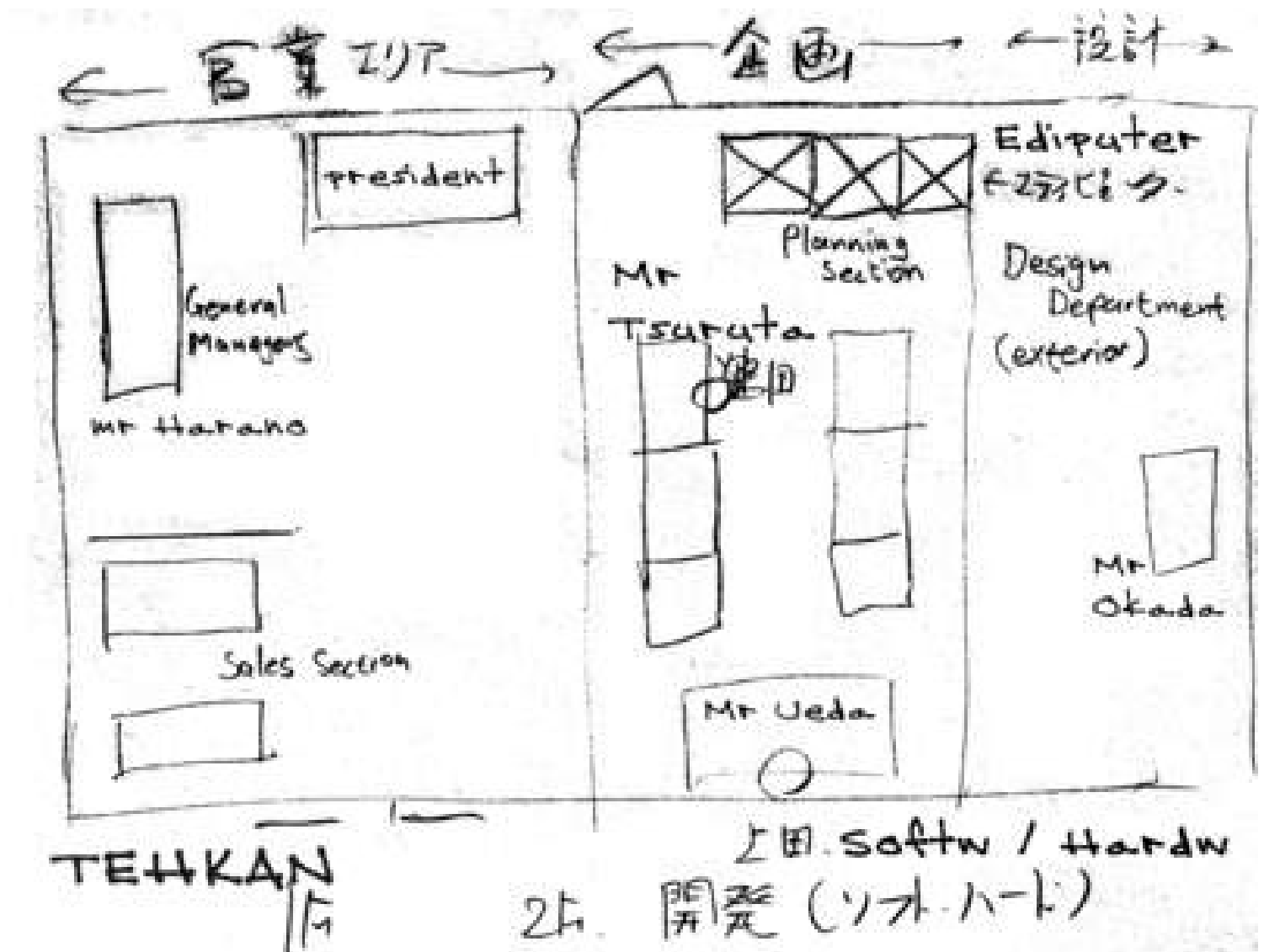
JS: Let me annotate this.

MT: The planning section was here. Back in those days the planning and graphics design

sections were one and the same. Nowadays planning and design is its own section, but in those days, if you were part of the planning, you were also doing the visual design or drawing. This is what I did, so I was in this section. This is where Ueda-san was sitting. <draws circle on paper> I think this is where I sat.

The [physical] design section was in here, and they would work on the design of the arcade cabinet, the how-to-play diagrams, things like that. The artwork and outer casing. And then there were Ediputer machines, three or four of them I think, installed or set-down here. <writes romaji> It's a portmanteau of "edit" and "computer".

The original founding members of Atlus were Harano-san, here, and Ueda-san, and then... I forget the name of this person, which I feel bad about - the head of the mechanical design section. <laughs> And then there's one other person, whose name I just cannot recall.³²⁴ Oh, I remember! One of the two was "Okada". But I don't remember where he sat. Maybe... here? <points - English> Mr Okada's desk. He made Megami Tensei.³²⁵



JS: Can you recall when they founded Atlus?

MT: I think Harano-san and Ueda-san went to America, sort of out of the blue, all of a sudden. And I think at that time there was a movie called Labyrinth that was playing, that was

back in 1984 or 1985. They founded the company Atlus and they made the game associated with that movie.³²⁶

JS: Megami Tensei was popular; its spin-off Persona is huge. This is divided into three sections, which floors did they occupy?

MT: *<English>* Ah! This map is all the same floor. So on the 2nd floor³²⁷ there was the team for software and hardware development. That was referred to as the development section. So planning was different from development.

JS: *<pointing to vertical lines>* Are these walls?

MT: There were partitions, but very simple partitions. You could hear people talking from different rooms across the partitions.

JS: Sorry to diverge. Have you heard news on Atlus' parent company, Index Holdings, in recent months?³²⁸

MT: You're talking about the company being acquired by Sega?

JS: Yes, and a news story: Index Holdings raided by the police due to fraudulent record keeping.

MT: *<pause>* I don't know about the details myself, but I don't think it was about the fraudulent record keeping, *per se*, of Atlus. Sega acquired Index Holdings and one of the companies under Index Holdings was Atlus, and Index Holdings was the subject of the investigation.

JS: In other news, Hiroshi Yamauchi just passed away.³²⁹ Did your work bring you in contact with him?

MT: I never met him in person, but I have done some work with Nintendo. At that time... And this is something I heard from people that know Yamauchi-san directly, so this is sort of like hearsay, and I did not hear this directly from Yamauchi-san. But at that time, I was working on Monster Tactics,³³⁰ for Game Boy, and this was to be released by Nintendo, and the story was that the game was quite popular inside Nintendo. So I heard indirectly that Yamauchi-san said something like, "If the game is so good, then we have to sell it right and make sure it does well." I really appreciated that kind of compliment.





JS: I want memorial pages in my book. Due to the language, Westerners are seldom aware.

MT: Yes, I agree.

JS: Mentioning Monster Tactics reminded me of a story.³³¹ A Tecmo staff member was explaining Monster Rancher Explorer on GBC.³³² It was a remake of Solomon's Key, but the person didn't realise that you made the original version.

MT: <intense laughter> Yes, yes! That was - at the time - at a game show! The Tokyo Game Show. <laughs> I was playing it at the Tecmo booth, and then as I was playing, a staff person came over to explain how you're supposed to play the game. And I thought, "Oh, I should just stand here quietly and listen to the explanation." <laughs> I forget the title of the movie, it was something like "Zipang",³³³ and the characters were taken out of that movie (**above**), but the rest of the game was pretty much Solomon's Key. As I looked on, as he played, I remember thinking to myself, the fairy got transformed into such a hideous thing! <laughs>

JS: Are you ever recognised as a developer?

MT: I don't think I'm that famous...

JS: I need to introduce you to some European fans.

MT: <laughs>

JS: I'd like to give you a second gift, which provides an interesting talking point on Europe. *Douzou*. <presents Bomb Jack II for Amstrad CPC>



Left: the old fairy sprite looks like a fairy. Right: the new design is an elephant!

MT: <laughs> Thank you! <looks at box, intense surprise> Two?!³³⁴ (C64 screen, below)



JS: The company which converted the original made their own computer sequel. It has nothing to do with Mighty Bomb Jack or Bomb Jack Twin, and the mechanics are unlike traditional Bomb Jack.

MT: Wow, I did not know anything about this at all! <laughs - looks over box>

JS: This shows that the original game was so popular, the publisher wanted to recapture its success. <starts video of C64 version>



MT: <intense laughter> It's quite different! <watches> It doesn't quite look the same. <laughs> To begin with, the main character should be red.³³⁵ The screen looks very different - like in the previous screen, it looked more flat. The original game was all about height... <noting level 2, set in the clouds> This screen looks more like the original, whereas the other one, with the bushes or hedges, that looked very different.

JS: How do you feel about so many conversions, this licensed sequel, and *doujin* games?
³³⁶

MT: <with strong emotion> I didn't know anything about these things, until you just told me. <laughs> So my very honest feeling at the moment is I feel happy in a sense, but it also

makes me feel nervous or awkward. <intense laughter>

JS: <laughs> Sorry! I'm surprised. All these years companies were sending games out to the West like messages in a bottle, never knowing the reaction of those who found them.

MT: I feel very honoured to know my games were regarded so highly in Europe. I'm happy to know that games like Bomb Jack and Solomon's Key were regarded so highly in Europe, and that I was given the chance to talk about these times gone by, which I feel all nostalgic about. I'm really glad.

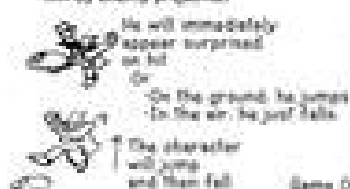
JS: Bomb Jack isn't so known in America because they didn't have the home computer conversions Europe had. Just the NES remake and arcade original.

MT: In the case of Solomon's Key, it wasn't changed that drastically from the arcade version to the Famicom version. But in the case of Bomb Jack it was modified quite significantly. The reason why that was changed so much, was because Ueda-san was not involved in the Famicom version.

JS: Let's take a break. Here's a mag I write for, and a book I was managing editor on. <passes Retro Gamer and Sega Arcade Classics>

MT: Ahh, this is so nostalgic! <intense laughter - flicks through> This game was for the X68000, and here's the PlayStation 2 version. It's hard to remember all this stuff from the 80s! <laughs> You've interviewed Nishizawa-san already?

Character death pattern
diff by enemy properties



This kind of exchange will have priority
losing block move!
If standing on the ground he will fall
and then wriggle and disappear

When hitting the ceiling
will be displayed
Right after that, the character will have a surprised look while falling

Game Over D.S.



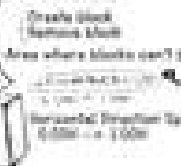
Target Type 30



Panel Bomber



He can destroy blocks with his head



Area where blocks can't be created

Horizontal Direction Speed UP 1
0.000 -> 1.000

Step

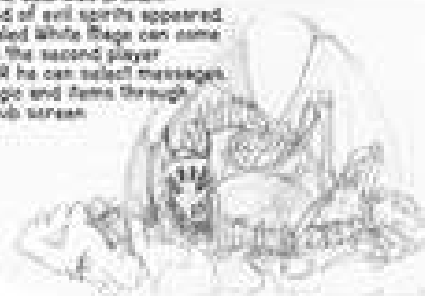
- Door and key will switch places the screen will shake
- Turns every blue flame into a red one
They will not switch back
- Every Demon's head/salamander on the screen is destroyed
- Crystals empty again points
- Crystals that gets replenished
- Cartoon types on monster's change back to features
- If cartoon were turned into enemies by magic
- Enemies will move at half-speed for a while, has no effect on the floor
- The player obtains a temporary horizontal speed boost
0.000 -> 1.000
- After completing a certain number of algorithms, player will get an extra crystal



He rattles down
(sala-pala)

ala

When the seal was broken,
an island of evil spirits appeared
The sealed white flags can come
back as the second player
OR he can select messages,
magic and items through
a sub screen



One way passage
Can only go down

No horizontal
movement

S.A.

Going up 3 Actions
0:37

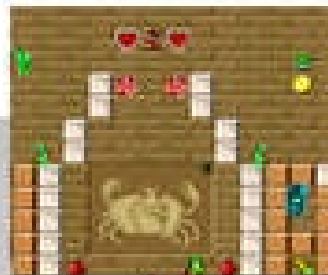
Block destroy
Going up (headbutt)

Only one
frame



Block destroy
Going down (kick)

Take
jump



This is how Dene
will be <3

Gnome - Gargoyle - Panel Bomber - Goblin - Ghost - Serpent

Demon's Head - Salamander - Dragon - Mael - Eel

Slime - Magician - Spark - Flame (Red) - Flame (Blue) - Fairies

Sheet - General movement - Block destroy (General)

Block destroy (General)

Block destroy (General)

Block destroy (General)

Block destroy (General)

Block destroy (General)



JS: Yes, at the Westone office.

MT: I think Nishizawa-san was involved in quite a few of these Sega games. <points to pages>

JS: Yes! Flick ahead, there's an interview with him.

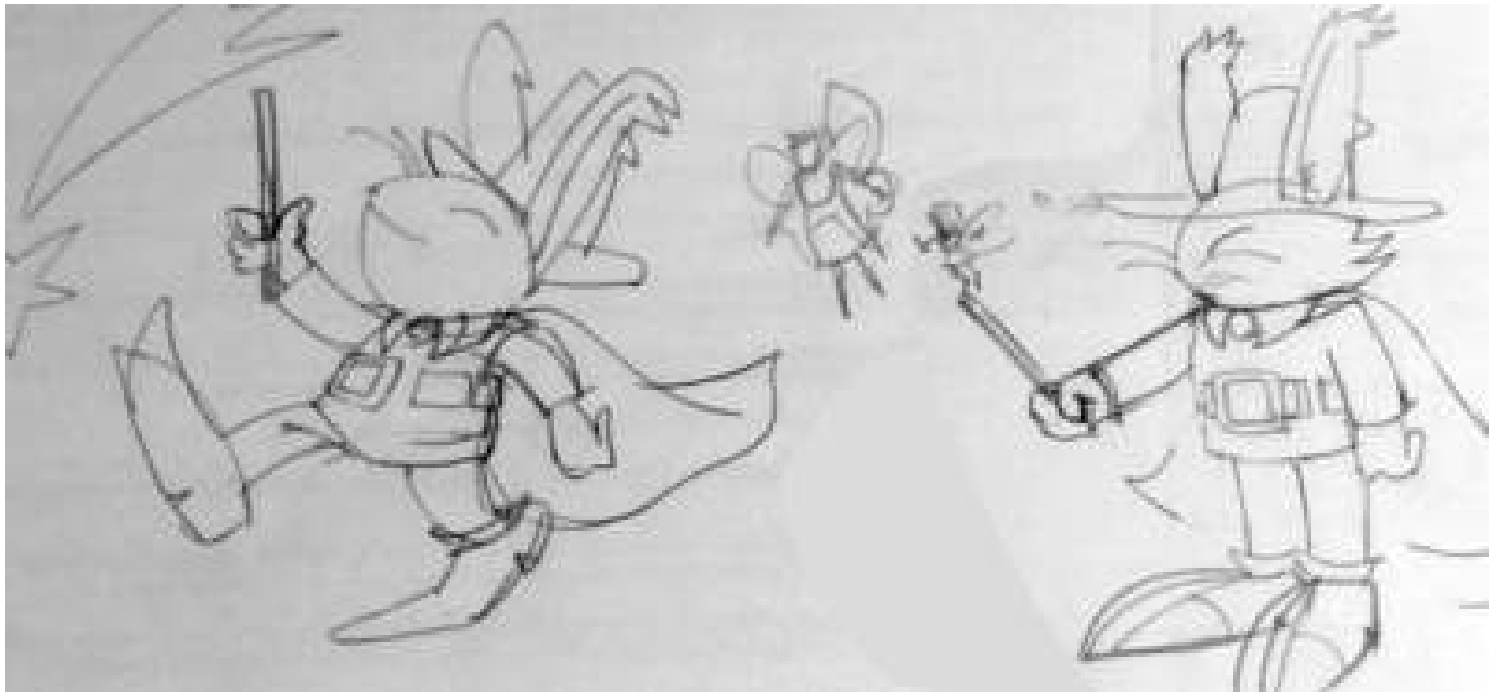
MT: <flicks over> Oh yes! <laughs>

JS: It was a busy day: I interviewed Mr Nishizawa, Ms Ohzora, Mr Yotsui. You're my only interviewee today, so it's a leisurely pace. I like to be *thorough*!

MT: <laughs> Just looking at these, <points> I can tell how much detail you cover and how in-depth you go with your work. <opens Sega book> It probably was not easy to cover all these variations of just Space Harrier! <laughs>

JS: Few writers are as meticulous as me. Both myself and Kurt, author of that Space Harrier article, are interested in comparing *all* variations of a game.

MT: That's quite wonderful! I am in awe! <laughs>



JS: Which is why for this new book I want to collect details on office layouts, mysteries, secrets and trivia, plus unreleased games. All the arcane knowledge not meant for regular people...

MT: <pointing to page of notebook> This is actually design work, I think, for something that was for... *Tecmo Rabbit*?³³⁷ I'm not sure if you know this, but there was a character called Tecmo Rabbit, and this was used as the mascot for Tecmo. So I think this is something I drew

for that purpose. This is "Dana the rabbit". I do not remember if it was meant to be the Tecmo Rabbit or if I drew this while I was getting agitated with work. It did not appear in Solomon's Key, but it's a fun picture. <laughs>



<http://retrogamegoods.com>

JS: I wasn't aware the rabbit was playable...?

MT: I do not think this particular character ever appeared in any specific game.

JS: I always ask about unreleased games - if it never came to market, your words could be the only historical record. Tell me about unreleased games.

MT: After I joined the company Tecmo I was on the development team that was developing a driving game, and we came up with the idea of using hardware to create a pseudo-3D environment, using arcade-style wireframes to some extent to draw the roads.³³⁸ That was what the game was about. But on location testing, that game didn't perform so well. So it just didn't get developed further! <laughs>

JS: But it reached a playable state for testing!

MT: Yes, so it was completed...

JS: What happened to it? Was it put in archives? Did someone keep the arcade PCB? Is it lost?!

MT: Presumably it may have been saved for a few years. But the company did not have any comprehensive system or a consistent system to preserve things. So I would think that it probably got thrown away when the company relocated offices.

JS: That pains me to hear.

MT: There's a similar story involving Captain Tsubasa. I created the specifications [design documents] and I preserved them rather meticulously. But after 10 or 15 years, maybe it had even already been 20 years since I left the company, I happened to read in a paper that there was a mobile phone version of the game,³³⁹ which is a bit similar to Captain Tsubasa's game system. And according to that article, there were no specifications left for Captain Tsubasa, so the developer had to look at the game, and sort of copy off of the screen, to replicate it on the phone. It's a process similar to transcribing music by ear. Reading that, I was really disappointed! <laughs>

JS: I often hear stories like that³⁴⁰ - devs losing code or materials. Gone forever because no one archived it. Even when it's kept, magnetic media degrades and newer computers can't read old data.

MT: I think the likelihood [of material being saved] is higher for the cases where individuals who work on a particular project would take back everything that was created,^{[341](#)} because it was done using personal belongings. In that case, things are preserved better.^{[342](#)}

JS: Speaking of Captain Tsubasa... In an interview on NESblog.com you said: *"I quit Tecmo in 1988 after the development of the first Captain Tsubasa. I got married to my university sweetheart. Her parents were owners of a photo studio and I became their employee. But I didn't stop developing, I continued freelancing."* **Do you still work there?**

MT: Now I just help them out sometimes! *<laughs - flips page>* These are some basic enemy patterns.

<flips to page showing archery game>

MT: By the way, this is the drawing I did for a meeting, to work on yet another game where it was never actually developed into a game. But there was a meeting to discuss the plan for the game, which was in consideration.

Zako Mr II
Mr II SR holds a bow

- 2P simultaneous play
- Carton (?)
- Shooting Item
- Horizontal Screen
- Basic Weapon Select
- Bow - Sword (in bubbles)
- Power up based on timer
- Medicine (in bubble)



JS: Incredible! Is this all that exists?

MT: Yes. This was just material to be submitted to the meeting, where we would talk about the plans for this game, which never got developed.

If this game were to be developed, it probably would have looked like *Makaimura* by Capcom.³⁴³ I can't say for sure, because oftentimes what happens is that as you work on the game, the concept of the game may change, or the character design and the game design may change. But initially, we had this vague idea of a side-scrolling game in which you progress while dodging enemies.

JS: The world will see this! *Captain Tsubasa*, which you mentioned, isn't well known outside Japan. You worked on many iterations; is it close to your heart?

MT: *Captain Tsubasa* was actually developed over a very long period of time. When it first came about, or when the first idea came about, it was intended to be developed for the Famicom Disk System, so if you think about that you can tell how long the development period was.³⁴⁴

We initially started to work on the Disk System, but around the same time Tecmo had outsourced the development of a sumo game to another company, but when that came back it was horrible, the outcome was just awful. So Tecmo decided to remake it internally, in-house. The team that was assigned to work on *Captain Tsubasa* was also assigned to work on this sumo game, temporarily. That sumo game was called *Tsuppari Oosumo*,³⁴⁵ but that brought the development of *Captain Tsubasa* to a halt for some time. We worked on *Tsuppari Oosumo*, the sumo game, for about two months, and we got it done.

Then we went back to developing *Captain Tsubasa*, but in the meantime the system had already moved to MMC2 or MMC3,³⁴⁶ rather than the Disk System, so we decided to change the game concept. Back when we originally intended to develop for the Disk System, it was sort of more like a game that is similar to *Dragon Quest*, rather than soccer. So the player would be running along, and like when a monster appears in *Dragon Quest*, there would be a message saying "A defender draws near!", and the player decides whether to pass, dribble, or shoot. So that was the original concept, but as the time went on, there was more technological development and that gave us more room to sort of play around with, so it expanded over time.

JS: Is *Captain Tsubasa* your favourite game?

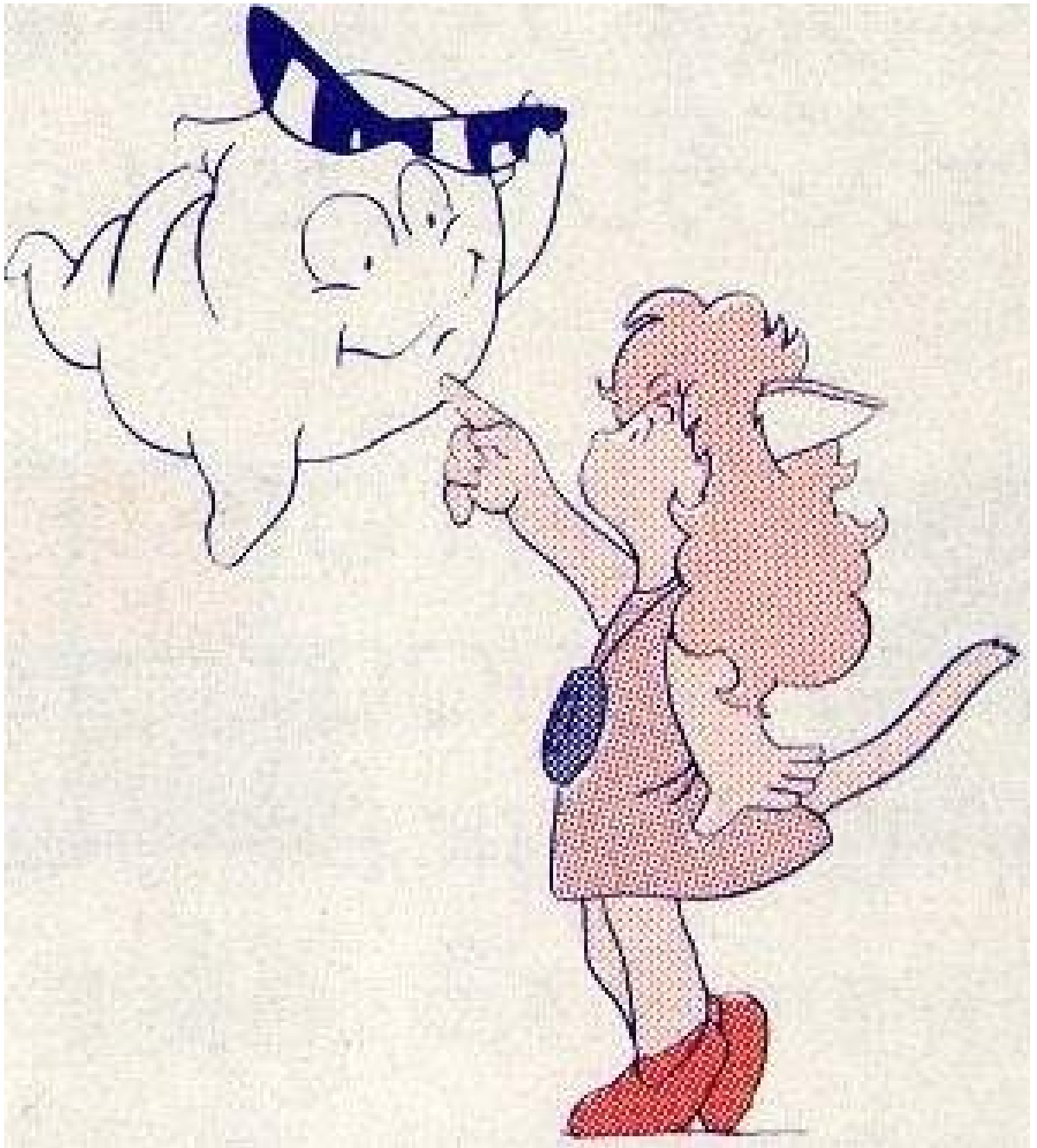
MT: Not as a game, but if I were to pick a favourite title, in terms of the development style, I would pick *Captain Tsubasa 2*.³⁴⁷ Oftentimes you're faced with the challenge of not having enough time until the delivery or completion of a game, or the specs get changed midway, and it doesn't turn out the way it was initially planned. But that didn't happen with *Captain Tsubasa 2*. Amazingly we were able to work to the schedule, as planned, and actually we had some extra time in the end compared to the original schedule. It was completed in exactly the way it was envisioned from the very beginning. So that was a very unusual case - I did not have any other experiences working on a game in that manner. We were very much blessed

with the staff members who worked on that game. So it was a very, very rare experience.



JS: What did you think of the Famicom Disk System?

MT: When it first came out, I think it was around the same time as *Solomon's Key* or maybe a bit later, but looking at the add-on, when used for *Legend of Zelda*, I thought it was such a wonderful piece of hardware.³⁴⁸ But later on I came to know that ROM [cartridges] would be much better. <laughs>



JS: Let's talk about *Pitman*.

MT: Ah, yes! You mentioned it in our emails. I was looking for any materials related to that, and I just so happened to find the character designs for *Pitman*.

JS: The GB characters are adorable. In the manual, the cat-children get up to all sorts of

mischief.

MT: Ah, yes, yes. *<flicks through pages with design sketches>* Towards the end, some of the puzzles were fiendishly difficult.

JS: **The GB version allows you to access any of the 100 levels from the start. I completed them all except the last - there's also a password system.**

MT: Just to digress a bit on passwords... If you are to solve the levels in sequence, the password becomes shorter and shorter. On the other hand, if you solve a level here and then you solve something here, *<points to pic of every level>* then the password gets longer. I wanted to keep the password as short as possible, but on the other hand I wanted to avoid a situation where if you couldn't solve a particular level you couldn't go any further. So I wanted to give the option of skipping ahead, but in that case, you would have missing information or missing links. So if you solve in sequence then there's no missing pieces, so it only has to remember the latest number, but if you skip levels and complete others, then there will be lots of missing data and the password gets longer to keep track of everything.



JS: Right, it contains data on skipped levels.

MT: <referencing artwork> This is the character design at the very initial stage, before it got finalised. I did everything, from the very initial character designs to the updated version. All the characters that appear in the game were drawn by me. I did all the drawings and artwork, including the pixel art. All the characters in Catrap³⁴⁹ are something I created. <flips page> These are closer to the finalised version.

JS: Pitman was based on a type-in listing for the Sharp MZ computer.

MT: <English> Ah, yes, yes. I didn't play that myself, but I did play a ported version of Pitman on the X68000, a Japanese computer. It was published in a magazine [as a type-in program], and an acquaintance of mine told me that I should play it, because it was a very

good game. This was after I left Tecmo. At this time, Pitman didn't have proper graphics, and instead built up a human-looking character using text characters, like circles and crosses. I realised that if we added some proper graphics, we would have a great game. So I made a suggestion that the company negotiate with the original maker of that game, to develop it into a Game Boy game.

JS: Did you work with Yutaka Isokawa?

MT: The original game was completed and solidly designed. So we were to use it as it is. And in terms of the rules, there was a certain rule that the computer players were OK with, but Game Boy players would not like. So I only met Isokawa-san in person twice, first when we talked about how I wanted to exclude that particular rule - when I was talking about Pitman being transferred to Game Boy. During the meeting, he told me about the drop rule and gave me an idea of having two lead characters and switching back and forth between them.

JS: Which rule was this?

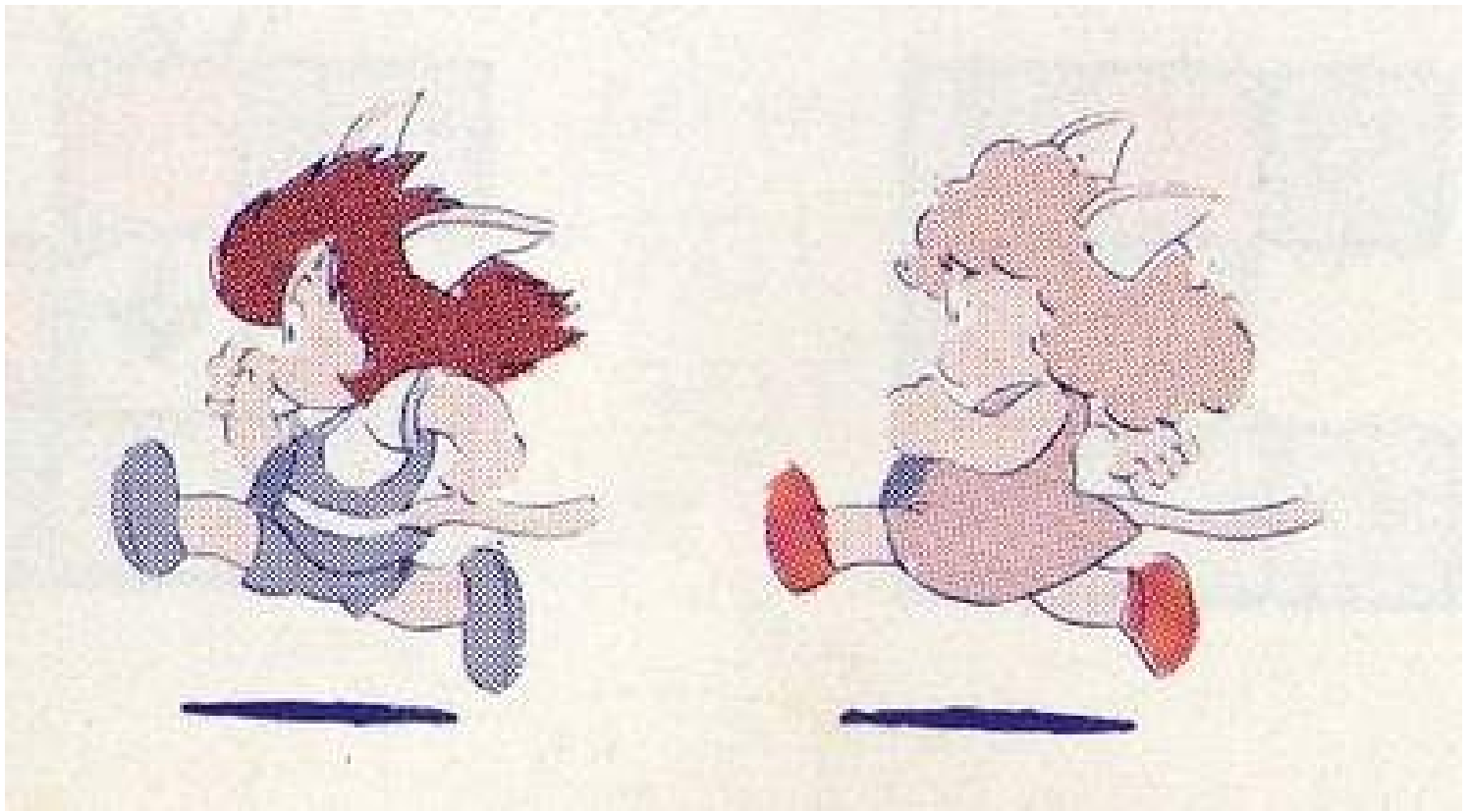
MT: In this case, the rule has to do with things falling down in Pitman. In the case of Solomon, things would fall if there's nothing beneath it. But in the case of Pitman, it would only fall only after a character passed below it. So if there's no movement of the character, this thing would stay in midair. That didn't seem to make sense, or players wouldn't understand what the rationale behind that would be. Because physically it would not happen in the real world. Like this block won't fall unless you pass under it. As long as you don't walk under it, it will float in mid-air, and you can climb a ladder and even walk on top of it. But in certain circumstances, it will just fall suddenly. It wouldn't make sense to the players.³⁵⁰

Pitman as a game was already completed - it was possible to convert it, as it was, simply by adding the characters [graphics]. So we had the permission to use the original work, except for that rule that I talked about, so it was really just a matter of converting the game to the Game Boy system. So I only saw Isokawa-san twice, first when I talked to him about changing that particular rule.

The second time was when I went to show him the completed game and asked for his opinion. He thought the actions of the characters were too exaggerated. I explained to him that having showy movements would be a great stress reliever for players since Pitman is a game with little movement. He agreed with what I said.

JS: I've got an interesting item we can look at. <author pulls out Oh!MZ magazine>

MT: Oh my! <intense laugh>



JS: This published Pitman, printing its BASIC listing.

MT: *<flips through magazine - laughs>* This is how things were back then.³⁵¹ *<flips through - English>* And also hexadecimal programming! *<points to listing>* This is already assembled, so unless you're an expert in this field, you would not be able to understand it. *<laughs>* Given the time period, the assembly was probably done by hand. There may have been an assembler, not like a C compiler, but a program that converts assembler instructions into machine code. But in the days of the PC-8001, everything was assembled manually by looking at a conversion table.

JS: Conversion tables! Right!

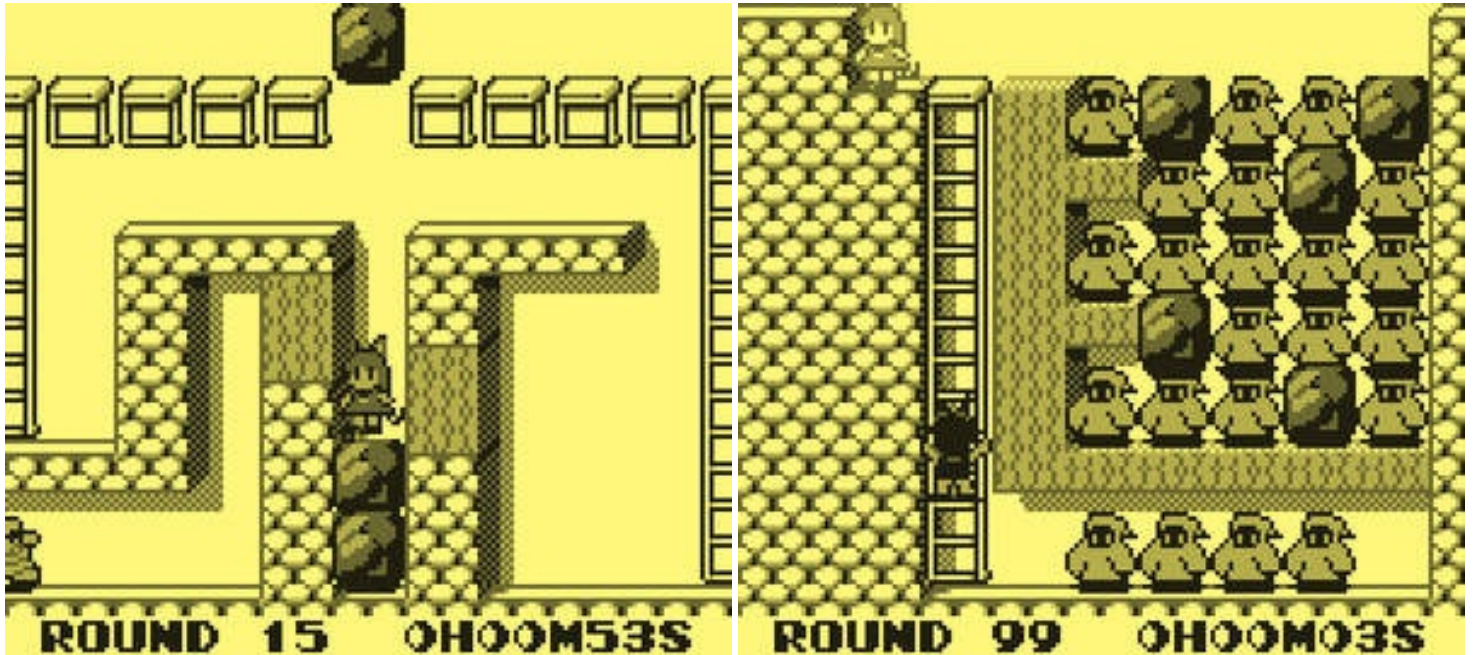
MT: *<intense laughter>* It will drive you mad if you write something this long! I've had experience of having written about this much, but you can't go much longer than this! *<laughs>* Maybe they used an assembler to produce this. Thank you for showing me something very rare and valuable.

JS: I've heard, for example with the Sharp X1, you'd program in Hudson BASIC and then use a conversion table to manually convert to assembly.³⁵²

MT: *<laughs>* You must be kidding! That must have been a lot of work! Back when I was working at Tecmo, or rather at Tehkan, back when I was working on Solomon's Key, they already had the assembler tool to make the arcade version. Even with that I thought it was a lot of cumbersome work. So I just cannot begin even to imagine how much passion you would have to have, to do the assembly manually, especially with a program of this size.

JS: It's so much easier today, including debugging.

MT: Speaking of how it was done in the old days, bugs would occur for reasons that would be totally unbelievable today. Or you would do things that you're absolutely not supposed to do in programming, as currently understood in this day and age, but which were just normal practice back in those days.



JS: What was it like with the GB's limitations?

MT: When I worked on Pitman, it was actually a relief that the system could only do black and white, because I didn't have to worry about what colours to use. So in that sense I found it easier to work on, than in the case of Famicom games. On the other hand, what I found difficult is that in the case of colour, as long as you use red and blue, the division would appear quite obvious, like the top and the bottom. But in the case of how you would draw in black and white, you won't be able to tell the difference between the top and the bottom [of a sprite/character], so you'd have to draw a line to indicate that this part is the top, and this part is the bottom part of your clothes. So in terms of design, when you think about the fact that there are only 16 dots available, you'd have to dedicate one dot just to draw the line as demarcation. This was something which I found difficult to get used to.

JS: Right, every pixel is essential when there's so few to work with.

MT: <English> Very important! <laughs>

JS: Tell me about the rewind feature, which allowed you to undo mistakes.

MT: Ah! When I played that game on the X68000, I remember accidentally hitting a key, or inadvertently hitting something, and that made it impossible to solve the puzzle for that level. This game is very, very logically oriented. So when you make a mistake, you can't go any

further. So oftentimes you would only have to go up a step in order to clear that stage, but because you just happened to hit the key inadvertently, you have to start all over again. So if you do it once, because of that mistake you made, you have to start all over again. If that happens only once then you're OK with it, but when it happens or you end up doing it twice, three times or more, it makes you not want to play the game anymore. So I thought, perhaps if there was a function to go back, that would give you the option to go further in the game. You would have more opportunity for trial and error when playing, and that would make the game more fun. So I talked with a programmer, to see if it was possible to incorporate this rewind function. It came about because I felt frustrated myself. Home console players are not as patient compared to computer game players. So I wanted to make a game that wouldn't impose that kind of stress on the players, and that's how it came about.

JS: Amusingly, I found an online writer citing it as one of the first games to feature "time-travel".

MT: *<shows artwork>* And the fact that the characters carry watches is a gimmick denoting the rewind function!

<everyone laughs>



JS: Have you heard of Braid on computers, or Blinx on Xbox? They also featured rewinding.

MT: Actually, speaking of the time travelling aspect, there was a game that was released under Tecmo when I was at the company, called Super Star Force. That was probably the first game that incorporated [functioning] time travel - and this was way before Pitman on Game Boy.

JS: I owned it on Famicom! Nice reference! I also had regular Star Force, which was very different.³⁵³

MT: You mentioned it earlier, we talked about this before, about how Bomb Jack and Mighty Bomb Jack are quite different. Part of the reason for that is because Ueda-san wasn't involved in that. But actually, the developer that worked on Super Star Force was involved in Mighty Bomb Jack. Or to put it in chronological order, he worked on Mighty Bomb Jack and then he went on to work on Super Star Force.³⁵⁴ This developer was the kind of person who really liked RPGs, role-playing games, so he wanted to develop it into a bigger story, with more extensions. So that's why Mighty Bomb Jack turned out to be quite different to Bomb Jack.³⁵⁵

JS: I love anecdotes which connect games behind the scenes.

MT: As work was done on Super Star Force we went to see Back to the Future, that developer and I. So the rule [in the film] is that what you did after going back to the past, would have an impact on the present. So likewise with Super Star Force, you go through the store into the past, and you do things, and that would have an impact on the present. And that would be expressed in the form of different topology, or different geography. So we built that into the game.

To give you more background on how Super Star Force was made, or the reason why Tecmo released Super Star Force... The original Star Force was converted by Hudson for the Famicom, whereas the original arcade version was made by Tecmo. But then Hudson tried to create a sequel to Star Force without seeking any permission from Tecmo. So the president of Tecmo got really angry about that! <laughs> Saying, "How dare them! If they want to make use of our franchise, they should at least come and talk to us first! They can't just make a sequel without our permission first!" So it was then decided that we at Tecmo would create Super Star Force ourselves. We didn't have any firm plans for what the game was going to be about yet, but the name Super Star Force was already decided on.³⁵⁶ <laughs>



Super Star Force (FC)

<we rest; flips page of notebook>

MT: This is Solomon's Key 2.

JS: Also known as Fire 'n Ice. You mentioned to **Andrea Babich** in interview: "I proposed the concept of Pitman, a pre-existing PC game, to the publisher. Working on it I acquired a taste for this kind of puzzle game, and proposed to Tecmo a puzzle game with a character who extinguishes fire using ice. At the beginning it was to be called Ice Kid, but was finally renamed Solomon's Key 2." **So the one led to the other, and is why the action is toned down compared to the original Solomon's Key?**

MT: Yes, that is correct. Exactly. <showing preliminary sketches> This was known as Ice Kid. <flips page> Solomon's Key was an action game for arcades, and a little bit of a puzzle element was added on to it. But on the other hand, Pitman was almost solely based on logic, or thinking rationally. It was a pure puzzle game. So I thought, maybe I could create a game which is somewhat similar to Solomon, but would have a logic or puzzle element behind it. So I got inspired by that, which led to Solomon's Key 2.



JS: It also had a prominent story, with cut-scenes. Was it your desire to emphasis the narrative?

MT: Yes, it was my desire to incorporate story elements. *<flips forward through sketchbook, showing sketches for the game's cut-scenes>*

JS: Those are lovely! *<takes photos>* For puzzles, did you start at the end and work backwards?^{[357](#)}

MT: As you point out, I used a method where I would start from the end and work sort of backwardly. But I wasn't the only one who made all the levels. There were several people who worked on the different levels. There was one particular rule that was used for the most difficult level - but we decided that rule should not be implemented, because it was just too difficult, or too complicated. The rule was that the main character would have to make a block of ice disappear while holding another block of ice, fall down, and use the block he's holding to create a step to go up. But we thought that was too difficult and complicated, to apply that rule, so we decided to get rid of it.

JS: Sounds like a big change. Tell me more.

MT: *<takes sketch pad>* Hmmm... It's quite some time ago, so I don't remember the exact procedure, of how it was supposed to be. *<begins sketching>* So it was set up like this... and then you make this disappear... And this is connected... And if you do that... *<sketches>* So you hold the ice up, on top of your head, and then you fall while holding the block of ice. So you fall to the floor, along with the ice... And then you move this way, to the side.

JS: Ahh, OK. You carry the ice as a portable platform.

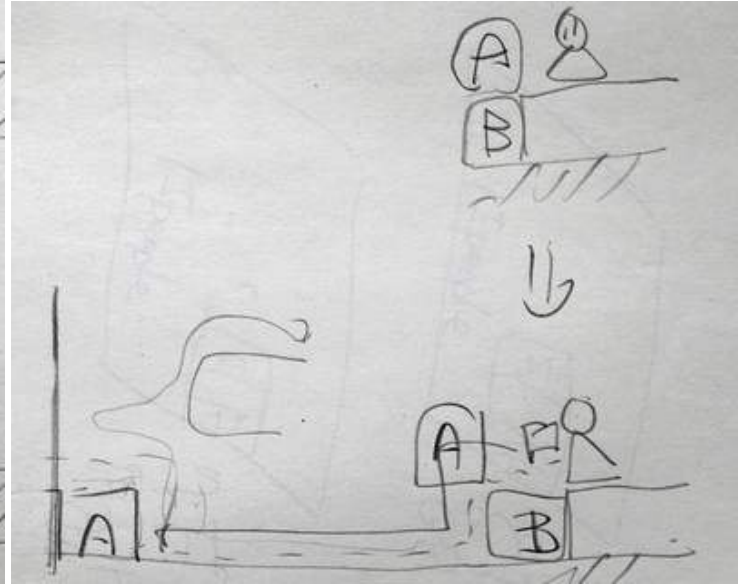
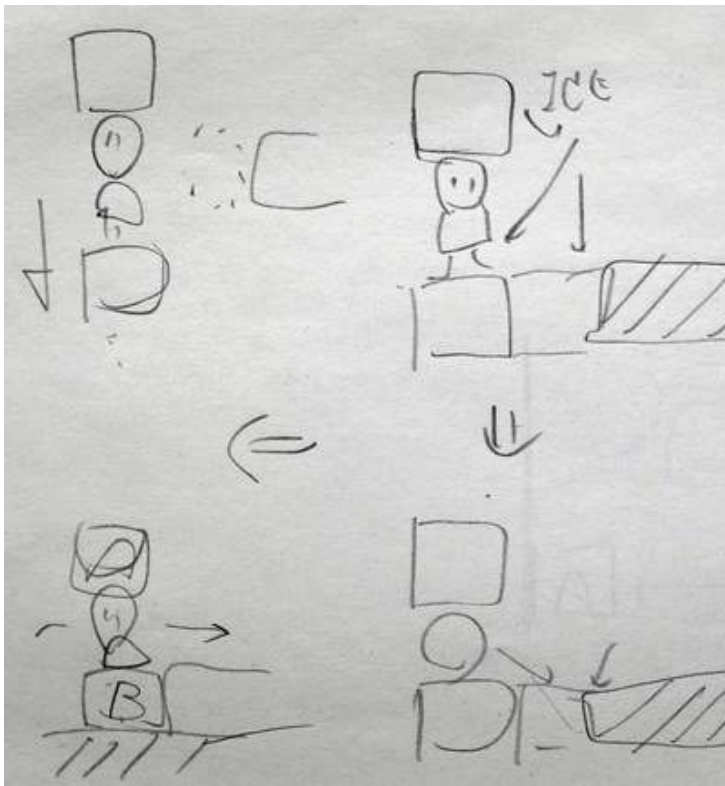
MT: *<ref. sketch>* It's more like this, because it's supposed to be a wall. And then you can walk your way up the steps. With *Solomon's Key*, you can set the blocks or the stones to the

side, but with Solomon's Key 2 you can't create blocks to the side.³⁵⁸ So using this abandoned idea there was a need to carry a block of ice and fall down at this particular spot. <points>



JS: Right, in order to climb up.

MT: Yes, exactly. <laughs> But I cannot recall how you create this situation, where you hold the ice on your head. I think it was more difficult to create this sort of situation.



JS: It changes everything!³⁵⁹ It was the right choice, the final version has puzzles like gears in a watch.

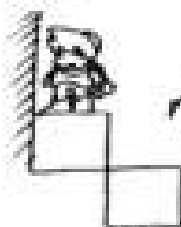
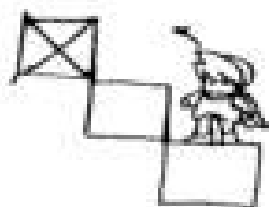
MT: The reason why the title *Solomon's Key 2* was used, is because it was actually to be called *Ice Kid* originally. If you look at the game, it's completely different to *Solomon's Key*. But we had this feeling that it probably wouldn't sell well, so the sales people had the idea that if we use the name *Solomon's Key* it will sell better.³⁶⁰ <laughs> So because of that decision I had to redesign the characters from *Ice Kid*, and incorporate the characters from *Solomon's Key* and adjust the storyline a bit, so that it wouldn't look too strange!

JS: Enix published *Dark Half*. Mr Nishizawa met Masaki Hashimoto and Tomoyoshi Miyazaki of Quintet at Enix. Did you meet them?

MT: I participated in *Dark Half* as a freelancer. I think I saw either one of them, or both of them, at some kind of a drinking party, either at the project kick off, or at the time of my joining in the project. But then sometime later I met one of the two on a different project, and I remember chatting with that person, mentioning that we both worked on *Dark Half* or some other game, and I was reminded of those old times. But I don't remember what that other project was, or the name of the game that we worked on together later.

Ahh... I don't know what became of them, because I did not meet them again after meeting one of the two on that later occasion.

ISSUES



In this instance, you can't place ice here

・ふり向きとして 十字キーを押すと 降りてしまう
 ・If you try to turn around by pushing -> the character will step down the block



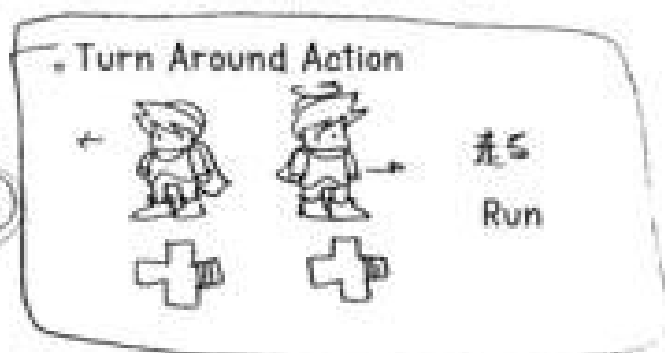
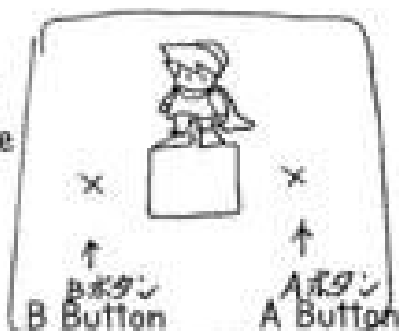
この状態でこの氷を消した一瞬
 This time, let's say we want to delete this ice block

・ふり向きとして 十字キーを押すと その氷の上に 乗ってしまう。
 ・If you try to turn around by pushing -> the character will move on the ice block itself

Resolution Methods

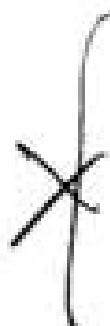
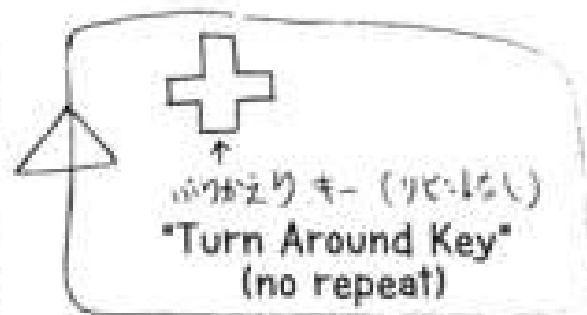
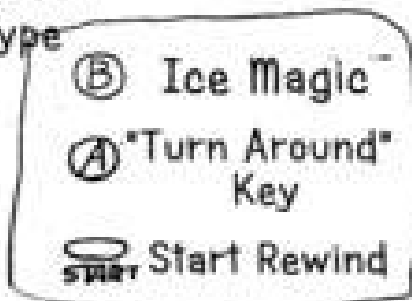
・ロードランナー式
 Road Runner type

3



・ふり向きボタン式
 Turn Button Type

2



③ Ice Magic

④ "Turn Around" Shift

START Start Rewind



の左右に付いたふり向き
 will turn around by pushing left or right

④ + ③

JS: Let's discuss Willy Wombat. Mr Nishizawa said he collected developers to work on different levels.

MT: Initially when it got started, I was involved as one of those people who'd do the level design. The idea initially was that I'd work on level design, and after I created a stage, a graphics designer would apply textures and do finishing touches. But then later I was told that I, as the level designer, should also do the texture work. So I remember thinking it was quite a difficult task to have to design a level, and also have to think of how it would appear with the final finishing touches. <laughs>

So a person was assigned to work on the action stages, whereas I was assigned to think of the puzzle sections, but when it comes to things like the distance for the jumps, at first it was very strictly decided that this would be the distance to jump, <shows width using hands> but then sometimes it would get changed later on. So when that happens, places that you could jump to before become unreachable. So it was actually quite time consuming work, to have to make adjustments. I recall that kind of reworking had to occur one time.



JS: Moving on... <takes out Bloody Bride for PS1>

MT: <surprised> Ahhhhh! <gently laughs> That's nostalgic... <very intense laughter> **How is it that you own that game?! How did you find it - how did you even manage to find it?**

JS: I thought, "This is unusual - a visual novel RPG?" So I bought it in Akihabara for today.

MT: This game! <laughs> I wasn't just making puzzle games, I also worked on RPGs, like back when I was at the company that made Pitman,³⁶¹ I made a game called Necros no Yousai.³⁶² But the development background for this Bloody Bride is quite unusual. To talk about the unusual aspect... The first director - to put it quite simply and candidly - sort of ran away from the project! <laughs>

I don't remember the name of that director anyway,³⁶³ but it's probably past the statute of limitations. At that time, Atlus had contracted out the development of the game to Jorudan - they were a software manufacturer.³⁶⁴ And the president [of Jorudan] started looking around for people who could fill in the vacant director position, and ultimately myself and one other person became involved. I worked on the system design, and the other person worked on the scenario.³⁶⁵ But anyway, the president of this company managed to find us, and they asked us to turn around this game, and that's how I got involved.

The producer at Atlus wanted both elements of visual novels and RPGs - so since he wanted both a novel portion and an RPG portion, this would require a massive amount of content. Under normal circumstances, given the staff members that we had, and the development period, it would have been a brutal project, probably causing several team members to crack under the workload - a few might have gone mad! But that was the order given by the producer, and I tried to work to that order. But now, in hindsight, I can say that we should have just forgotten the RPG element, and just made it as a text adventure with rich

visuals.³⁶⁶ That's something I can only say now, looking back! <laughs>



JS: Although never released outside Japan, a fan translated all the text into English.

MT: <laughs> I had no idea such a thing happened!

JS: Do devs in Japan discuss how bilingual fans translate games? <loads webpage,³⁶⁷ screens in English> They even made subtitles for the video.

MT: The manufacturers would probably officially say that if things were done unbeknownst to the manufacturers, then that would not be a good thing, or that would put the manufacturer into trouble. But as a developer, my opinion is that if it's something which is not sold anyway, and if the company or manufacturer has no intention of releasing it in the future anyway, then there's no losses on the part of the manufacturer. So if the fans and hackers work together, and release the translation, then that means as someone who made the game, it's all the better because it can be used by a wider audience, or it can be played more widely. So apart from the profitability issue on the part of the manufacturer, as an individual that was involved in the making of the game... Of course there are certain conditions that need to be met, but I think it's a good thing.

It's actually surprising, in the sense that there are people out there that would do this kind of localisation work as a hobby, because... <laughs> Or maybe I should not call it a hobby, maybe that's disrespectful to the people doing it... But this kind of localisation work is in and of itself quite costly!

JS: Do you have any tips for beginner players?

MT: <intense laughter> Ehhh... <pauses to reflect> I advise that in the starting scene, you should not keep fighting. At the beginning there's a sequence with a fight that was designed to kill the main character. We didn't have time in the schedule to make a cutscene, so it's a regular battle scene that is unwinnable. Skilled players can persevere and keep the battle going for a long time, but it's impossible to win. So it's better just to give up and die, because things are much easier after that.³⁶⁸

Just to add one more comment... That part of the game, with that battle, also has a lot of tutorial sections to help players understand the RPG part, but despite that, we included this scene of... some older man I think... who demolishes the main character as part of the storyline. From a game design standpoint, trying to do both of these things at once was a bad

idea. Like I said earlier, if I had the chance to remake it, I think it would be better just to make a non-interactive story sequence explaining that you fight and lose.

JS: Speaking of fan translations, Captain Tsubasa 2 was also translated.³⁶⁹ <shows screens>

MT: <laughs> It must have been quite a lot of work for whoever did it!

JS: Fan-translators are an intense group, *otaku*.

MT: <intense laughter> Hmm. <nods> What I often hear about, when people talk about translation into English, is that with Japanese the number of characters can remain small, but as you translate into English it would eat up more character spaces, and therefore what used to fit into one page [of an on-screen dialog box] in Japanese, will not fit into one dialog box for English, and you have to use an extra page. In terms of the system, some systems would allow additional pages to be inserted, but others would not. In that case, you have to go into the window system for text and dialog boxes and rewrite the program, not just do a translation. So more work was involved, more than just pure localisation, back in those days. Nowadays it's different, you create or develop the game with localisation in mind. But back then, we weren't thinking about localisation at all, so localisation probably involved a lot of additional difficult work.

JS: Can you recall any secrets from your games?



MT: It's not like a secret or anything, but my nickname appears in the end credits of *Captain Tsubasa 2*. Tecmo only allowed you to have your penname or pseudonym appear in the end credits. But usually, if you're still working on the game, you could place an order or request that your name, your pseudonym, would appear in a particular scene. But I had already left the company, so I wasn't in a position to tell them exactly where to put my nickname. But someone from the company told me not to worry, they put my name in the credits and showed me the scene later. But that scene involved, sort of like a funny character having a ball fly over and hit him in the face. And I thought that was just awful! <laughs> I wanted to get that changed, but then the game was already completed by that time, so I couldn't do anything about it.

JS: What was your nickname; how was it chosen? Why did Tecmo want nicknames, not real names?

MT: My nickname was *Akai Kitsune*. <English> It means Red Fox. <Japanese> There's a Japanese noodle product, by that same name, *Akai Kitsune*, so many people tend to think of that noodle. But it's actually quite different from that! I used the pseudonym "Fox" from the time when you could only input three characters [for a high score] when you're playing in a game centre. So that's the name I've been using since then, but also, at one point I really liked this board game. It was a World War I board game, and there was this character who was very good at shooting down other planes - a character known as "Red Baron".³⁷⁰ So I took the red

from that. And also there was another game - a World War II game - about a commander of a German armoured division with the nickname Desert Fox.³⁷¹ So there was that meaning as well. So I put both together, to have this nickname, Red Fox. But many people tend to think of the noodles. <laughs>

JS: It came from two board games! <laughs>

MT: <slight pause> Actually, I would like to clarify my nickname, Red Fox. Red is from a German ace pilot during the first World War; Fox is from a German armoured division during the second World War. I picked this nickname without thinking too much - when I was a teenager - as my name when I play games. Now, I am worried that you may not have found it too amusing, since you are from England. I have truly enjoyed talking with you - so now I am anxious, thinking I may have made you feel uneasy. I would like to apologise if I offended you. I am very sorry.

JS: It's a great nickname! When I play war games I always play as the Germans or Russians! <laughs>

MT: As for the other question, why the company Tecmo used nicknames... Tecmo was a company that was very fearful, very afraid of having developers leave the company. So if you used your real name then there was the risk of being headhunted. So the company banned developers from using their real name, as well as being in contact or having any kind of exchange with other developers. I don't know how they do it now, but back then that was the case.

JS: Now, with things like GDC, devs are encouraged to share. Western fans debate nicknames. I always say it's to prevent headhunting, but others argue there's no such thing because in Japan you had a career for life. You've helped me win the debate!

<clasps hands, everyone laughs>

MT: I think I can say this now - it's OK for me to say this. At one time, shortly after I had left Tecmo, we had this drinking party. There were several developers living in the close neighbourhoods at that time, so we all got together and went for a drink. And we talked a lot about how our respective companies were treating us so poorly, and all that. But at one point we were saying, if the company management ever found out that we got together, then we would be yelled at by our division manager, or the general manager. That's something which almost everyone was saying about their companies. So it looked like the top management was very afraid that the developers would have some kind of connection, sort of amongst each other.³⁷²

JS: Sounds like a tough place to work.

MT: Apart from the aspects I just talked about, I think the environment was a lot better compared to the work places that I experienced in more recent times. At the moment, in order

to produce console games, the company would put a lot of human resources into it, but the profits that the company gets out are very low. Back in those days Famicom games would sell in huge numbers, that you can't even imagine these days.³⁷³ Or in the case of arcade games, the newbies, or new graduates, that are working as developers... Let's say two developers that are fresh out of college, if they work on a game for six months or a year, they can come up with a title that would sell to the tune of thousands of arcade units, each of which would sell for about 100'000 yen. So the profitability was a lot better. If you went off on your own track creatively speaking, and made a mistake, and it didn't work out, there was always a chance to recuperate later.

As you saw earlier I was making a lot of doodling in my sketchbooks. The reason why there are so many things left in those sketchbooks is because there was a lot of time, or there was some kind of tolerance for that kind of time to be spent. The development environment now is such that staff members probably won't have much time to work on something that is not directly related to their current project.



JS: Times have sadly changed. What are you working on now?^{[374](#)} A game like *Astro Zill*?^{[375](#)}

MT: I'm not involved in any major game projects for consoles or arcade type games. What

I'm doing is more like development on my own. I've developed a few of those for iPhone and Astro Zill is one of them.

To comment on Astro Zill, it's based off of a puzzle game that was developed in a different way, a long time ago. I wanted to revisit it again and give it proper characters, do it right. So I spent quite a lot of time on it - because I had to learn about programming by myself. But it is a game where I worked on it all on my own, including character design and programming. So in that sense it was quite a lot of work, but on the other hand I could work on it as long as I was happy with it. Being happy with it would have a twofold meaning, in that I could work on it as much as I wanted to, up to the point at which I am fully satisfied with the game, or on the other hand, until I think, OK, this is enough and I should just kick it out the door. But that's my current situation.

JS: Good luck! Have you heard of crowdfunding?

MT: I've heard of crowdfunding. I read about the person who developed Rockman, because Nishizawa-san spoke about it on his Facebook.

JS: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

MT: I will probably continue in my current style of developing games on my own. Puzzle games are the kind of games which are easiest to make with only a few staff members involved, but on the other hand I've made such a huge variety of different games in the past, that it makes me want to try out different things, or make different types of games as well. As for Solomon's Key, Tecmo has the copyright for that, so oftentimes I am asked by fans to make a sequel to it, but I don't own the copyright, so I can't do it on my own. I can't work on it. If there is an opportunity, I'd love to be involved - for instance if Tecmo, what is now Koei-Tecmo, has the idea of making a sequel to Solomon's Key, and if they want to put together the initial staff that worked on it, then I would be happy to have that opportunity to work on the sequel.

The Last Age of Wonder: a reflection on the history of westone bit entertainment



My original plan had been to feature these three interviews in Vol. 3, alongside the remaining Sega-themed interviews I conducted. However, given the closure of Westone Bit Entertainment on 1 October 2014, and the rebirth of the *Wonder Boy* series as *Monster Boy* on 30 January 2015, now is a more appropriate time to reflect on Westone and those who worked there. The company may have closed, but the memories and legacy will live forever.

I have no doubt every reader of this book has played a Westone game. If not one of the original *Wonder Boy* / *Monster World* titles, then one of the adaptations, such as *Adventure Island* on NES. Famous for its action-platformers, which often mixed in RPG elements, Westone actually had a diverse portfolio: sports titles, pure RPGs, and a surprising number of dating-sims. The company was born into the golden age of games and saw many industry shakeups. Its closure reminds us that even the most creative stars don't last forever.

Many of its later titles never left Japan, and are undocumented in English. The comprehensive software listing adjacent was provided by company leader Ryuichi Nishizawa. As he explained: "*What Westone actually developed are the 'in-house products' and 'commissioned development' items that*

have the • mark. As for the 'license provided' titles that have the • mark, we only granted a license, and some other company did the porting development."

The Wonder Boys (and Wonder Girl), from left: Jun Watanabe, Maki Ohzora, Ryuichi Nishizawa, Masatsugu Murakami, Yuji Yoshino, Tatanobu Usui, Takanori Kurihara



Arcade Hardware Publisher In-house License Commission

1986 Wonder Boy SYSTEM1 Sega •

1987 Wonder Boy in Monster Land SYSTEM2 Sega •

1988 Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair SYSTEM16A Sega •

1990 Aurail SYSTEM16B Sega •

1991 Riot City SYSTEM16B Sega •

1993 /

Aquario of the Clockwork SYSTEM18 (**Unreleased**) •

Consoles

1986 X / Adventure Island FC Hudson •

1987 Bikkuriman World PCE Hudson •

1987 Super Wonder Boy Mk-III Sega •

1987 Jaws: The Revenge NES Activision •

1988 Super Wonder Boy: Monster World Mk-III Sega •

1988 Saiyuuki World FC Jaleco •

1988 Appare! Gateball PCE Atlus •

1989 Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair PCE CD-ROM Hudson •

1989 Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap SMS Sega •

1990 Monster Lair MD Sega •

1990 /

Majin Eiyuuden Wataru Gaiden FC Hudson •

1990 Aoi Blink PCE Hudson •

1990 Wonder Boy / Revenge of Drancon GG Sega •

2001 FISH EYES Wild / Reel Fishing Wild DC Victor Int. Soft. •

2001 Di Gi Charat Fantasy DC Broccoli •

2002/3 Neon G.E. Ayanami Ikusei Keikaku DC/PS2 Broccoli •

2004 Princess Maker 4 PS2 CyberFront •

2005 Rirakkuma Ojama Shitemasu ni Shuukan PS2 Interchannel •

2006/7 Secret of Evangelion PS2/PSP CyberFront •

2007 Monster World Complete Collection PS2 Sega •

PC

2000 Bakuchou Typing Tsuru Baka Nisshi Windows Shogakukan Prod. •

2001 Ren'ai Typing Salad Days Windows Shogakukan Prod. •

2001 NTT-wakuwaku Joy Land Windows NTT •

2002 Pita-Ten Desktop Accessories Windows Broccoli •

2002 Chitchana Yuki Tsukai Sugar D.A. Windows Broccoli •

2003 Galaxy Angel - Desktop Accessories Windows Broccoli •

2003 G.G.F Digital Accessories Windows Broccoli •

2004 Princess Maker 4 Windows CyberFront •

2007 Secret of Evangelion Windows CyberFront •

Other

2006 / "Let's make a secret base" toy Takara •

2010 Bow-Lingual (dog/human translation) iphone Index •

UPL Interview with Ryuichi Nishizawa

By Kurt Kalata, with help from Hanenashi Error

Shortly after the designing of the Westone chapter (Q3 2015), Hardcore Gaming 101 published an interview with Ryuichi Nishizawa focusing exclusively on his earlier UPL days. With kind permission, an abridged version is reprinted here. Read the full version here: hardcoregaming101.net/upl/nishizawa-interview.htm



UPL Corporation ("Universal Play Land") was at the forefront of the Japanese arcade development scene. Though relatively obscure outside of Japan, inside the country they are well known for classics such as *Majou no Bouken: Ninja-kun*, *NOVA2001*, *Gomola Speed*, and *Penguin-kun Wars*. Many of these are currently available for download on the PlayStation 4 as part of the Arcade Archives series. We spoke to Ryuichi Nishizawa, who was an early employee of the company and worked on four titles, before he left and founded Escape/Westone.

KK: What games did you work on at UPL?

RN: When I was 19, I left Tehkan and joined UPL. At that time, UPL had just started the development department. The department had only two technical staff, including me. The first task after I joined was the development of an arcade game called *Mouser*. Based on the program of Nintendo's hit arcade game *Donkey Kong*, it was developed by two people. My role was everything other than the main program. That is, game design, graphic design, and sound. The first thing I programmed was a BGM sequencer.³⁷⁶

Then, the staff was expanded and UPL designed its own original arcade board. *Nova 2001* was developed for this PCB. It could support up to 64 sprites, so in order to demonstrate the performance for this new board, we decided to create a shooting game. I was responsible for game design, character design, and programming.

Next I developed the action game *Majou no Bouken: Ninja-kun*. The hardware was more advanced than *Nova 2001*. As with the previous project, I was in charge of the game and character design, background design, and all programming. From this time, the company was further increasing staff, so I shared work with other projects.

The last game I developed at UPL was *Raiders5*. This game was completed over a short period of just four months using the same board as *Ninja-kun*. I was responsible for everything but the sound.



KK: What kind of hardware did UPL use?

RN: The hardware for *Nova 2001* was an original board by UPL. It was designed by Mr Nobuyuki Narita's engineers. I think he designed all of the boards for UPL. I believe he left the company to work at NMK³⁷⁷ and was in charge of board design there too. Before joining

UPL I knew a little bit about programming. Looking at the code written by other programmers, I learned on my own. Nova 2001 was the first game I programmed.

KK: What were some of your other favorite UPL games?

RN: I like Penguin-kun Wars. After the development of Ninja-kun, UPL increased their in-house staff to two teams. I was in charge of Raiders5, Tsutomu Fujisawa's team³⁷⁸ made Penguin-kun Wars. I thought it was bold to commercialise it.

KK: What was the inspiration for Mouser? It seems a bit like Donkey Kong.

RN: At that time in UPL, no one knew how to develop a game. The company even told us that we just had to change the characters while stealing the entire game design of Donkey Kong. But naturally we didn't think it was safe and we managed to complete the product after much trial and error. To be honest, we could not blame someone even if they considered the development process of the game to be just a copy of Donkey Kong. That's because we developed Mouser by analyzing the ROM of Donkey Kong to learn how to create a game. I think that this kind of development method was commonly done in many of the Japanese game companies in the era.

KK: What was the inspiration behind Nova 2001? The 360 degree movement makes it feel more like Robotron 2084.

RN: As you point out, Robotron 2084 had a significant influence on Nova 2001. I wanted to create a 360 degree omni-directional shooter such as Robotron 2084. However, due to the cabinet design that was common in Japan at the time, we were unable to put in dual joysticks. So by pressing a button, you could fix your ship's orientation. The "stage clear" effect was a conscious imitation of Robotron 2084. That used full graphic system hardware, but this used character generator system hardware, so I was unable to replicate it exactly, but I think it looks close enough. <laughs> I used a lot of trial and error to replicate the "Gyuoou, Gonononono" sound effects. The sound hardware was completely different, but again I was able to create something that was not exactly the same, but close enough. <laughs>

KK: Were you consulted for the sequel, Ark Area?

RN: Nope, I was not contacted at all. In fact, it wasn't until recently that I learned it was the sequel to Nova 2001. <laughs>

KK: How did you begin to develop Raiders5? What inspired a "puzzle-shooter" game?

RN: The game design of Raiders5 was not inspired by anything, but it was completely our own idea. Firstly the company ordered us to develop a game in a short period. I had some existing designs of characters for shooters, so I decided to use them to create a game that needed as little artwork as possible. That's why we settled on a puzzle shooter. We had no clear idea about the rules of the puzzle from the beginning, and we were making the rules

while developing the game. We built up the game design step by step, making a few parts of the game, test-playing it, and revising the design or adding more ideas.

UPL was very generous to its development staff. In particular, there were no requirements about the contents of the game. They had a culture where creators could pitch ideas freely. Therefore, it was not a problem to feature our names in a game. I wanted to advertise in the demo loops that these games were developed by two people. Indeed, that might not have been possible at other companies. <laughs>

KK: Nova 2001 and Raiders5 were sci-fi. What prompted the change to a comical action game with Ninja-kun?

RN: When I started development on Ninja-kun, I wanted to capture the feeling of Namco's Mappy, which was in an arcade by my house. Mappy was one game I really loved. The character design and the music was just the best. I would play every day to aim for the top scores. When I had the opportunity, that's when I started Ninja-kun.

In Pac-Man, Mappy, and Dig Dug, the idea is that the cute character will die when they come in contact with the enemy. The thrill of evading enemies makes for a very fun game, but it's also very stressful, and can end up being frustrating. So I thought, "I wish there was an action game where you don't die if you touch the enemy", and that was the beginning of Ninja-kun.

KK: Is there any relation between Ninja-kun, released for the PC-88 and MSX by Microcabin?

RN: There is absolutely no relation to Microcabin's Ninja-kun. The title being the same is purely a coincidence.

KK: Why are the *daruma* dolls enemies? (below)



RN: *Daruma* might be unfamiliar to people outside of Japan. They are ornaments used for auspicious occasions, which are familiar to Japanese people. Business people even today decorate their house with them. Although, not in my house. <laughs>

The enemy characters in Ninja-kun are Japanese-style monsters. Certainly the *daruma* is

not a monster, but I used it as a character because it's something distinctly Japanese. Since the *daruma* has a scary face, it's perfect for an enemy character. Also, because the design is simple, it's easy to create a pixel rendition.

KK: Ninja-kun has some cool effects, like the cherry blossoms when you run out of lives. What inspired these?

RN: "Sakura" is the Japanese spring tradition. The Japanese have a special feeling for the cherry blossoms. Cherry trees bloom all at once for only for a very short period of time. After full bloom, the cherry blossoms will fall. How the petals flutter to the ground is a traditional rendition that we use in Japan when you express the sentiment that life is gradually scattering.

KK: What is the relation between UPL's Ninja-kun and Jaleco's Ninja Jajamaru-kun?

RN: The Nintendo Famicom was released in 1983. The arcade version of Ninja-kun was released in 1984. Most Famicom software at the time was ports of hit arcade games. At the time, UPL did not have much interest in the home console market, so they sold the license for Ninja-kun to Jaleco. The Famicom version of this title was a big hit. When discussing Famicom software, people seem to speak very highly of it. Looking back on it now, I wonder if it was a waste for UPL not to develop and publish the port themselves.

In 1985, Jaleco developed Ninja Jajamaru-kun on their own. Jajamaru-kun seems to be the brother of Ninja-kun. Since the presidents of UPL and Jaleco had a good relationship, I honestly think he allowed him to expand the franchise.

KK: UPL had many interesting games in the mid-1980s, but their output seemed less inspired as time went on into the 1990s, before it closed. Why did they change direction?

RN: Since I left UPL immediately after completing Raiders5, I do not know much about what happened in-house afterwards, because I was busy building my own company. Many arcade games after I left UPL were created by Tsutomu Fujisawa. For better or worse, his game design is definitely unique. I think that is emblematic of UPL's work. If anything about the game's direction changed, it was because of him.^{[379](#)}

Finally, Majou no Bouken: Ninja-kun was created 30 years ago. I am very pleased that it has been accurately ported to the PS4. If you have only played the Famicom version, please try the original arcade game. You will be able to enjoy more sophisticated play than the FC version. Because the enemy of the final stage is the "alter ego of the player". Please check it out.



NISHIZAWA, Ryuichi

DOB: 04 March 1964 / Birthplace: Tokyo / Blood Type: A

Interview with Ryuichi NISHIZAWA

17 September 2013, Tokyo, former Westone Bit Entertainment office

My interview with Ryuichi Nishizawa was the third on my trip. I'd had two preceding interviews in English, on 14 and 15 September. Mr Nishizawa's interview was also one of the earliest which I had arranged before arriving in Japan, given that he'd already been interviewed by Kurt Kalata and we were all connected on Facebook. It was agreed that Kouichi Yotsui, who I had met with Roy Ozaki on the 15th, would join Mr Nishizawa, since they were old friends (later Mr Nishizawa also introduced me to Michitaka Tsuruta). The big question was whether to conduct the interviews at Mr Nishizawa's home, where there was a large TV and game systems, or at the Westone offices. Ultimately I went with the office, because I didn't want to miss the opportunity to see their work environment, have a group photo taken, or view materials related to the games. Footage of the office is included on the supplementary DVD.

We met at the Tokyo Skytree and chatted about its phenomenal height - as was explained, there was a great view of it from the Westone office. We enjoyed a leisurely stroll over, discussing previous office locations the company held (sadly this conversation was not recorded). It turns out there were quite a few offices. We reached the apartment complex, took an elevator up, and were ushered through the front door. Mr Nishizawa had prepared a meeting room to conduct the day's interviews. Adorning a wall were games developed by the company, including the dioramas photographed for the covers of *Monster World II: Dragon no Wana* (GG) and *Monster World IV* (MD). The plan was to record interview audio, film parts of interviews, photograph the office, and record Mr Yotsui playing through *Cannon Dancer*.

Discussions took place in fragments over the day, between three different interviewees, and so this chapter has been restructured to group topics together - there's a section commenting on some video, which has comments by Kouichi Yotsui, who actually only turned up later on that day. In addition, there are supplementary Q&As from Kurt Kalata's interview with Mr Nishizawa, used with permission, which are labelled **KK** rather than **JS**. These are inserted to expand on or cover specific points. It's worth reading HG101's entire interviews as a primer for what follows.

As I set-up my equipment Mr Nishizawa flicked through my copy of *Retro Gamer* (#119). Suddenly he stopped at an interview with Sandy White, creator of *3D Ant Attack*, and pointed to one of the photos...



Ryuichi Nishizawa: The information posted on Facebook is the majority of my career information. There are other titles that our company developed, but I was not directly involved with the development for most of them. *<flips through Retro Gamer - stabs page with finger>* This is what I used for the Wonder Boy music! *<pauses, reflects>* I think I used this to compose music for Wonder Boy. **(above right)**

JS: What a wonderful recollection!³⁸⁰

RN: *<laughs, pointing to photo>* It's the same kind of thing!

JS: It's all so different today for music composition.

RN: Music composition is really not my forte! *<laughs>* I only had to do it because there was nobody else around to do it at that time. *<laughs>* I am far from professional level - the professionals use a lot more sophisticated stuff.

<author sets up film camera on tripod>

JS: I've got a gift, which I was hoping we could film. It provides an interesting talking point.

RN: *<Japanese>* Yes. *<English>* OK! *<everyone laughs>*

RN: What is it, I wonder?

JS: There's definitely an element of "*wonder*" to it - I think you'll like it.

<switches on camera, explains filming limitations>

RN: *<gestures to outlet>* And please feel free to charge your batteries at any time.

JS: Thanks. Westone games, like the Wonder Boy series, are popular worldwide. I wanted to give a distinctly British gift which had meaning for you.^{[381](#)}

<author hands Mr Nishizawa a gift bag with WB in Monster Land for the ZX Spectrum>^{[382](#)}

RN: *<opens gift bag>* Oh! Published by Activision?



JS: This is for the ZX Spectrum, a UK microcomputer released in 1982. Perhaps it's loosely equivalent to the PC-6001 in Japan? *<more technical talk>*

<lots of laughter as the contents are taken out>

RN: I did not know at all that this was marketed.

Kurt Kalata: Have you seen the European console ports? They have some... interesting artwork. Personally, it looks more like Wonder Boy is wearing a diaper than a loincloth.

RN: I did not know there was a version of Monster Land for the Amiga. I tried looking at YouTube in order to verify its quality. It looks like the real thing, I was not aware of its existence. That costume was also known as a diaper even in Japan. Because it was so amusing, I was quite fond of it. I even used it as my icon on Twitter. On the Amiga, I must've played "F1 World Championship" a million times. Game software back then, that was the most realistic game on the Amiga, with beautiful graphics. Those were the good old days.

JS: I think Sega sub-licensed it to Activision for the Spectrum. I have a video on my laptop of it.

RN: So this is Monster Land. Wow. *<with awe>* I did not know there were people playing our games this way. *<laughs>* You weren't even born yet, were you?

JS: I was born before Monster Land came out. *<gives the year>* My first Famicom game was Takahashimeijin no Boukenjima, which was the Hudson adaptation of your first game, Wonder Boy.

RN: *<laughs - puts out hand to shake author's>* I'm very honoured!

JS: *<shows YouTube video on laptop>* This is Monster Land on the ZX Spectrum. Although Western computers had conversions of Japanese arcade games, more complex adventures or RPGs like this were rare.^{[383](#)}

KK: The original Monster Land didn't seem to have an official English arcade release, but there was a bootleg which was badly translated into English. Is there any story behind it that you're aware of?

RN: Yes, I am aware of it. It's on MAME, isn't it? Hardware is always evolving. When I want to confirm a game I developed in the past, I use MAME. It is a very convenient program. At that time, I knew there was an English version; I did not know whether it was a pirated edition. Because I am interested in making new products, I do not mind these things from the past.

KK: The recent download versions of Monster Land use the same translation as the European computer ports. Do you know why? Was there originally an official English translation that just wasn't released?

RN: I developed the English version of Monster Land in 1987. When the staff of Sega was in charge of the English translation, I kept a record of it. In other words, the English computer versions were based off this translation. But I do not know whether Sega sold the English arcade version abroad. The English version delivered [now] is based on the master ROM from 1987. The producer of this project found the ROM [while] looking in a Sega warehouse. Therefore this is a completely genuine article.

KK: *Are you familiar with how the series was handled in Brazil? The games now star characters from the "Monica's Gang" series.* [384](#)

RN: Yes, I am familiar with it. Because of the popularity of Monica in Brazil, Wonder Boy was able to draw fans over there. There is even a fan page for it on Facebook, but unfortunately I cannot read Portuguese.

<everyone watches videos - then we switch to the original WB on ZX Spectrum, music plays loudly>

RN: So it's the old, original BGM...

JS: **Sounds like it.**

RN: I wonder who converted the first game to the ZX Spectrum?

JS: **No one knows! Sega and Activision are shown on the box and title. But I've yet to find a credits listing, either in-game or online.**

<we switch to a video of Strider conversions, showing 14 of them - Mr Nishizawa and Mr Yotsui discuss the pixels being redrawn for the C64>

JS: **These conversions show how far both your games travelled, to audiences around the world. Japanese games are an international export.**

<silent pause>

RN & Kouichi Yotsui: *<laughs>* What can we say to that!

<everyone laughs>

RN & KY: We were not aware at all. *<laughs>*

JS: *<laughs>* **My next question was - to what extent did you know of these licensed conversions?**

KY: The coin-op versions were meant for the international market from the very beginning.

RN: In our time, *<gestures to Mr Yotsui>* games were originally designed for the worldwide

market. A little later, the Japanese language started being used within the games themselves,³⁸⁵ so it was no longer possible just to publish them overseas immediately. So as time went on, only the really successful games would be picked up for an international release.

JS: So a global market was the original intention - you made it seem effortless. Nowadays devs are so anxious about appealing to the West...

KK: How do you feel about so many independent Western developers taking inspiration from Japanese videogames of the 80s and 90s?

RN: I was a boy who loved movies. I was very impressed when watching "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "Star Wars" in the movie theatres. I came to think that I wanted to do creative work such as filmmaking. My production activity is always affected by movies, from Hollywood in particular. In other words, I get inspiration from Western creators, too. The game industry has become huge. Therefore game developers must make products for a global market. In the near future, developers of various countries will combine teams and will come to develop a game.



JS: How did you meet Michitaka Tsuruta?

RN: I don't know which year it was, that doesn't come to my mind. *<laughs>* But I used to work for a company previously called Tehkan, then later it was called Tecmo, and now it's Koei-Tecmo.³⁸⁶ During my Tehkan years I developed a game called *Swimmer*.³⁸⁷ *<laughs>* Essentially *Swimmer* was my first - the first game that I ever developed. I was handling graphics and planning. I wasn't able, or I felt that I wasn't going to meet the deadline for graphics, so while I was doing a lot of work solo until then, I got approval to hire part-time workers, or outside contractors, and I interviewed three people. One was Tsuruta-san.

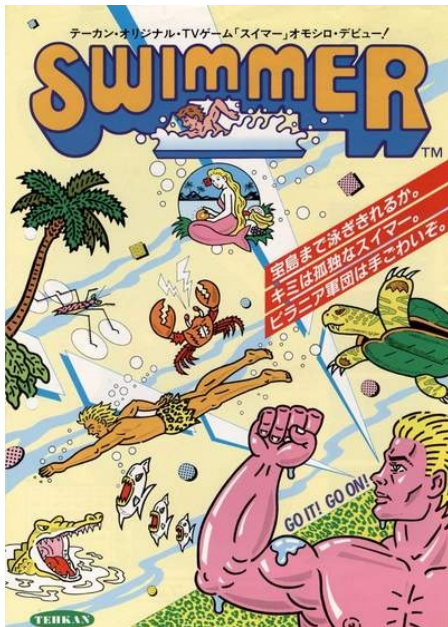
<Mr Nishizawa looks up the Swimmer artwork on his phone - passes it to author>

JS: Can you describe joining Tehkan - had you always wanted to work in games?

RN: I was a high school student before I joined Tehkan. During my last summer holiday as a high school student, which is the third year in a Japanese high school, I was playing in a game centre and I was headhunted, to go work for them. Where I was headhunted was in a game centre that was in Kinshichou, in Tokyo, which is slightly beyond that building you see right there. *<points out the window>*

JS: Wow! You stayed close to where you started.

RN: Yes! *<laughs>* You could say that! I used to live around that area, to begin with. So I was playing in a game centre. I was asked, "Do you want to work for us, part time?" And it turns out I was actually playing together with Ishizuka-san.³⁸⁸



As you know, <laughs> the company name Westone is a combination of West, which is from my name Nishizawa, the Nishi part, and "stone" is the first character in Ishizuka-san's name.³⁸⁹ So I was headhunted to go work for Tehkan, as a part time employee. When I graduated from high school I joined them as a formal employee.



JS: After leaving Tehkan you co-founded Escape³⁹⁰ with colleagues. What was your motivation for going independent?

RN: So the motivation for going independent was always there. <laughs> Ishizuka-san and I always talked about founding a company together, and we felt it was time to do so. Ishizuka-san stayed with Tehkan for a while as a programmer - I quit Tehkan pretty quickly, and I moved to a different company called UPL,³⁹¹ where I worked as a programmer to develop three games, and I felt that I had learned enough about game development, so I launched out, ventured on my own, to found my own company.

JS: Can you name the three arcade games?

RN: Yes. *Nova 2001*,³⁹² *Ninja-kun: Majou no Bouken*,³⁹³ and *Raiders 5*.³⁹⁴ It's a shooting game. *Nova* is also a shooting game. Whereas *Ninja-kun* is an action game. (centre, descending)

JS: I played the *Ninja-kun* sequels on the Famicom.³⁹⁵ **RN:** I made the *Ninja-kun* arcade version, which was the first *Ninja-kun*, and then others followed - not me - others followed to create the second version onwards. And it was a huge hit, *Ninja-kun* was a huge hit in Japan.

JS: It spawned a series of titles, still going now!

RN: Right!

JS: I'm curious about the coding environment for arcade games. What kind of language and equipment did you use?

RN: First of all, for arcade games, we create the hardware from scratch. The hardware is an original. So the programmer works with the hardware manufacturer, as a team, and if there are problems or issues with the programming, they must be solved by the hardware side - we ask the hardware developer to modify the hardware. So that's the kind of flexible environment we had, that's not around anymore. I think that's a major change. The development environment was always a headache. <laughs>

When I was at Tecmo, or Tehkan as it was formerly known, we used workstations to develop games. I think it was a Unix environment, as far as the Operating System. By the time I moved to UPL the computers used were more sophisticated - I think PC-9800 was around already.

So for graphics creation tools, we made our own software using computers; to make graphics, the software was developed in-house. The first development that I did at UPL was to create a graphics editor, on the computer. Using a Fujitsu computer, the FM-8.^{[396](#)}

JS: Predecessor to the FM-11 and 7!

RN: That's for graphics. As for the programming environment I think it was dependant on each company - it varied. In other words, there was no unified environment, no standard set-up for programming. During my UPL years I used CP/M^{[397](#)} and also a Z80 assembler.^{[398](#)} <laughs> Does that make sense? The CPUs during the 8-bit years, for arcade games, were mostly Z80. The first programming language therefore, that I learned, was Z80 assembly language. A company called Zilog developed this Z80 CPU. Later on we saw the launch of a more sophisticated development tool called ICE - this is an acronym, I-C-E, meaning In-Circuit Emulator.^{[399](#)} <laughs> So finally we had Z80, the assembler, and a debug environment, all together. Before that, debugging was done by using a tool such as a logic analyser. <laughs>

JS: I've seen logic analysers - not easy!^{[400](#)}

RN: You have to connect it to the legs of a CPU, and look at the record of what's being done to check for any problems.

JS: It's also used for reverse engineering hardware.

RN: Yes, that's right.

JS: In an interview with *Pix'n Love* magazine, you mentioned a "Digitizer" used at Escape to create graphics. It was described as having two screens contained within a casing, or shell.

RN: For any game manufacturer at that time, an important technical mandate was to develop pictures, or graphics, in an efficient manner. The tools didn't exist yet. Programmers didn't know what to do with graphics. The programmers, even the professional ones, were not skilful artists, and didn't have a good grasp of the graphical limitations.

So when people of my generation started making games,⁴⁰¹ graphics tools emerged - and the way they emerged was that young people in the company, the up-and-comers like us, myself and Ishizuka-san, would go through trial and error to make the graphics tools on our own, in-house. I think that was done in almost all companies in the industry. So the graphics tool at Tehkan was developed by Ishizuka-san, and that tool was used at Tehkan for a very long time, by everyone in that company. Likewise, my graphics development tool created during my time at UPL was used by the company for a long time. And at the same time Sega, I believe, had someone doing the same thing, developing their own or in-house graphics tool which was used for a long time.

JS: Mr Tsuruta mentioned a graphics tool at Tehkan called "Ediputer". Is it the same as the tool created by Mr Ishizuka?

RN: Hmm... I'm not sure. Ishizuka-san and I used computers to develop the tools, graphics development tools, and every company had its own style. So Sega used this "Digitizer System". *<laughs>* Which is a graphics tool created for an arcade infrastructure. It was so big this Digitizer, that when we first saw it we were really surprised! It was this big, two monitors.

<Mr Nishizawa gestures with his hands, showing how big the system was in relation to himself - wide enough for two people to sit comfortably side-by-side, in front of a monitor each>

RN: *<gestures to his left>* One would show the end result, the output of the program. The character maps.

<gestures to his right> The other one had a light pen. *<laughs, makes a motion of tapping the monitor with the pen accompanied by a "psh" sound>* To draw pixels. And when someone used a pen to draw pixels on this monitor, the other screen would show them at their real size.

What's astounding was that once you drew something, you had to save it somehow, store the data. The external device was a ROM writer. *<laughs, motions with hand the placing of a blank ROM chip>* So the ROM is connected to a ROM socket, and then you clip it down. *<laughs, motions both hands as if closing an old-fashioned cassette lid>* Then you push save, and writing begins. For loading, likewise, you have to connect a ROM device. *<laughs>* It was very inefficient!

JS: Even a small change was hugely inconvenient.

RN: Yes, that's right, that's right. Meaning you *don't make small changes!* *<laughs>* Because it's too much of a hassle. *<laughs>*

JS: It has to be a hole in one.

RN: Right, because each ROM chip, I think at that time, was priced around 500 yen.⁴⁰² ROM

is a one-off device, you can't re-use it. Well, you can delete the content, but there's a separate device called an eraser, to erase what's there.⁴⁰³ Compared to today, where you have a computer with a disk drive, it was a lot of hassle indeed. <laughs> I think a tape would have been a faster option. But without that system Sega could not develop or create the graphics data for its arcade boards.

Although Wonder Boy used that Digitizer system, because it was so inefficient, from the second game, Monster Land,⁴⁰⁴ we developed our own graphics tool. <pauses to reflect> Actually, correction, Monster Land still used the Digitizer! <laughs> I think it was the third title, Monster Lair,⁴⁰⁵ where we made the shift... Right, so Monster Lair was developed using an in-house tool. Whereas Wonder Boy and Monster Land were born using this Digitizer system! <laughs - in Japanese> Ne!



Who can spot Opa-Opa in the centre?

JS: Would it be possible to draw a sketch of it?

RN: <laughs> I've seen it once, somewhere... I have seen a picture online.⁴⁰⁶

JS: I'll check! An interesting Digitizer story is it was delivered from Sega by Mr Hiroshi

Aso.^{[407](#)}

RN: Yes! *<laughs>* Exactly.

JS: Did you know Mr Aso? I believe he had the nickname "Shy Guy Aso" at Sega.^{[408](#)}

RN: He's not shy at all! *<laughs>* Indeed, Aso-san brought the Digitizer in a van, and that was when or how our relationship started. He planned games at Sega for a long time. We're still good friends now.

JS: I checked a list of nicknames, and I just wondered if that was accurate.

RN: I wasn't aware of this nickname at all. I don't know how it started.

JS: It could be a mistake. As for nicknames, did you, or colleagues, or Westone staff, have one?

RN: *<laughs>* Before I launched Westone, my nickname in the game industry was *Bucha*. *<spells it: B-U-C-H-A, pronounced similarly to butcher>* Because this was my nickname during my middle school years, or junior high school. So whenever I played games and I hit a high score, I would enter this nickname, *Bucha*. At UPL, as I mentioned, I created three games, and the tradition at UPL was: at the very beginning of the game, when the power is first turned on, the developer's nickname would show up. So as the number one high scoring player, my nickname *Bucha* would show up, at the start.^{[409](#)}

JS: Regarding names, I read an interview with Mr Yotsui - he said he came up with names for games because he liked things which sounded unusual but didn't have any meaning.^{[410](#)} This gave me an idea: to ask each interviewee if they had a name suggestion for the book.

RN: Ooh! What did Yotsui-san suggest, as far as your title goes?

JS: He said, "Let's have some *sake*, and come up with an idea later!" However, by the end of the evening, my recollection becomes hazy...

<everyone laughs>

JS: I was going to ask again today.

RN: I think that's a great idea! When I looked at the Kickstarter page, I thought it sounds like an interesting project, but it also sounds too serious. Obviously it's a fundraising site, so you need to show some seriousness and diligence to raise money. But my suggestion is to come up with a slogan, buzzword, catchphrase, a title that appeals to a wide audience, and the content of course has to follow as well. Something catchy, with regards to various aspects of the book, would lead to greater sales and everyone would be happy I think.

JS: I'll do my best!^{[411](#)}

RN: Fight for it! I will too; let me think about it.

JS: Regarding Wonder Boy, in your *Retro Gamer* interview with Kurt Kalata^{[412](#)} you said: *"I wanted to make an action game with the feeling of pressure. Therefore I made a horizontal scrolling platformer where the player could not stop moving. It was too difficult, and I was unable to play it, so I regretfully had to change it. That became Wonder Boy. The skateboarding item is a remnant of the initial plan."*^{[413](#)} **Do you feel this prototype is a predecessor of today's "Infinite Runner" genre? Now there are many games where the character keeps moving.**

RN: Temple Run would be one example? Yes, I'm aware of the genre. Hmm... *<pauses, reflects>* If you're asking me whether there's a continuity or a connection, I don't think so. *<laughs>* Because now we're talking about a [hardware] platform, like a smartphone, which uses a touch-screen. The action-game genre on those platforms would dictate that the characters keep on running, because otherwise it would undermine operability. Because if I were to create Wonder Boy today, using a smartphone, I would avoid having "virtual buttons" and I would like the player to keep on tapping, which would dictate that the characters keep on moving automatically. Game design is all about, in my mind, an inevitability. You create out of constraints. *<laughs>*



JS: When I read the interview, it felt to me as if you'd created a forerunner to the Infinite Runner. I'm fascinated by the origins of defining ideas.

RN: <laughs> It's a tough question! There's a category of games which uses side-scrolling, it used to be called "jump action", now I think it's called a platformer. This was the optimal game design that was enabled by the available hardware at that time, in my belief. The hardware now is sophisticated, it offers high performance, and there are various angles, various approaches that one can take to game design. But in the past, because of low-spec hardware, people had to come up with creative solutions to stand out in the game centres, to entice or invite people, to encourage people to put their coins in. So side-scrolling action became the leading game design as a solution.

KK: Was there any communication between the Hudson team that made Takahashi Meijin⁴¹⁴ and Westone? The later games in that series (fourth for the Famicom; second for the Super

Famicom) seem to borrow heavily from the Monster World structure.

RN: My company was not involved with the game design for the Adventure Island series at all. I'm not really familiar with Adventure Island 4 and Super Adventure Island 2 either. Of course, my company still approves the license. I did, however, supervise the first Super Adventure Island. But otherwise, the staff at Hudson developed the series on their own.



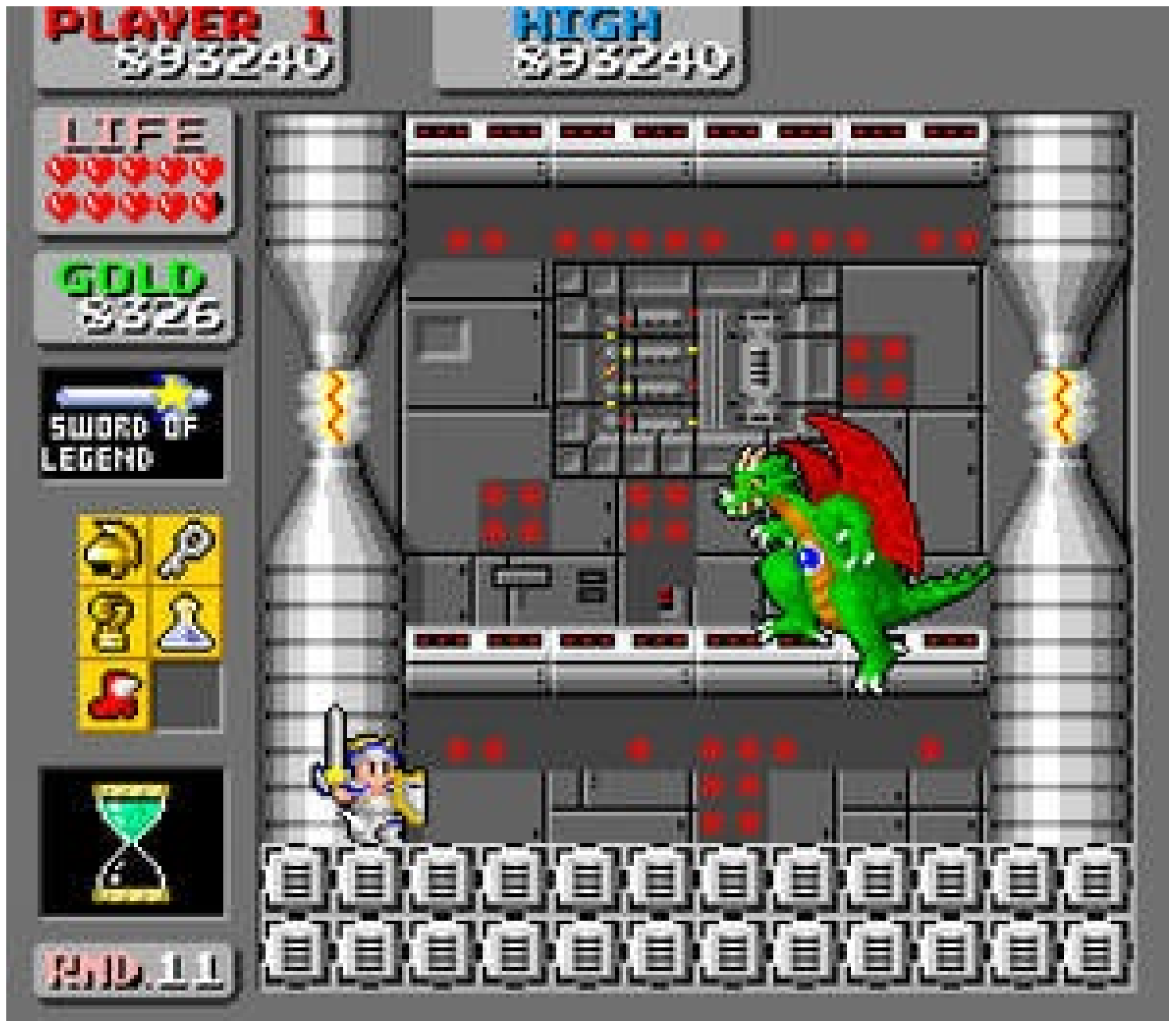
The apartment where levels for Wonder Boy / Adventure Island were conceived. (Mr Nishizawa takes a nap, centre.) On the right is the veranda with skateboard - whoever left it helped influence a generation

KK: When creating Wonder Boy you originally wanted a platformer that scrolled automatically. Was this the inspiration for WB III: Monster Lair?⁴¹⁵

RN: Your inference is not bad. But, the answer is no. Because Monster Lair had two players at the same time, it was easier to play an automatically scrolling game.

KK: Is the character from Wonder Boy (Tom Tom), supposed to be the same character from Wonder Boy in Monster Land (Bocke)?

RN: I'll leave it your imagination whether they are the same character. Tom Tom and Tanya are not the names that I originally gave them. They were initially called Bocke and Tina. Tom Tom may be the name given by Sega for the overseas editions.⁴¹⁶



JS: You incorporated RPG mechanics into Monster Land, which is surprising for arcade games. I know you've explained it before, but could you recap?

RN: I've been asked this question a few times, and I always say that I was into Wizardry at that

time. I played Wizardry every day at the office, on my computer. No work was done! <laughs> So here was this game, that I was really into. So when starting to work on Monster Land, I wondered if it's possible to create an RPG game for the arcades. It was a very natural consequence.

KK: *I thought maybe Tower of Druaga or Dragon Buster were an influence, since they both combine action and RPG elements in an arcade setting.*

RN: I often played Tower of Druaga and Dragon Buster, but I don't like either of them very much. They both irritated me, maybe because there is no one to talk to in the stages. On the other hand, there was no one to talk to in Wizardry either. <laughs> But, I love the music of Dragon Buster.

JS: **Monster Land upset arcade owners; games are meant to be played for a short time, unlike RPGs.**

RN: <laughs> Yes, yes. Exactly - they really did not like it. The game centre owners did not welcome this new genre. <laughs> They said, "It's too long for 100 yen!" However, the customers wouldn't quit, so they couldn't take the game away either. So this was a curious game, which stayed in the game centres for a long time, without generating much revenue.



JS: I've seen the game's many secrets.⁴¹⁷ What kind of process did you have? Were they all placed during initial layout, or was it gradual refinement?

RN: How I do it is, I complete the level designs first, and then I go back and play the game. When I feel that there's something missing I then have new ideas about what would be fun to do, what I could hide - what secrets can I hide here and there? So the secrets come after the level design.

KK: In Japan, Monster World III for the Mega Drive⁴¹⁸ was released before Monster World II for the Game Gear.⁴¹⁹ How did this come to be?

RN: When we were working on Monster World III the Game Gear was released, and Sega wanted to port Monster World II from the SMS to the GG. However, the GG is a portable game machine with a tiny LCD screen, so it was difficult to port without compromising the

game. It was necessary to remake the game because of the small screen. I then decided to develop the remake myself. This was the only port developed in-house. Since I made Monster World II twice, I was able to perfect it.

KK: *Is there any particular story behind that smoking, eye-patch wearing pig shopkeeper in The Dragon's Trap? He's such a silly character!*



RN: One of the designers drew that on their own. The instructions I gave her was to create "a character like an animal but not an animal". Thank you for liking the "one-eyed pig".

<discussion regarding taking a break for lunch, and meeting Kouichi Yotsui later that afternoon>

RN: Last week, Yotsui-san and I met for the first time in a long while, and traded conversation over a few drinks. Would you like to hear how I met Kouichi Yotsui?

JS: Yes please.

RN: There's a game called Willy Wombat.⁴²⁰ <laughs> Ishizuka-san was the programmer, while I did the planning. This was the last joint project of ours. I decided that I was going to design this game with other people - it would not be a solo effort, so I gathered about seven people. That's how I met Yotsui-san. He was a freelance game designer. We worked on the game together, and I think Yotsui-san designed the last stage, the level design. That's how we met and we hit it off right away. He's a very rare kind of person, who works as an artist - he's a rare soul in this industry. I'm the logical type, whereas he designs by feel, following his intuition; it was very refreshing.

Out to Lunch

Mr Yotsui turned up shortly afterwards, and we all decided to head out to lunch together. Mr Nishizawa showed us the route to his favourite lunch spot during work days, and treated everyone to a meal (it was at a tucked away little diner, serving delicious cutlets and rice). On the way we passed many people, and I asked if he was ever recognised. I felt a sadness as he laughed and then explained that he's never recognised - this from the man who created a game which rivalled the original Super Mario Bros. Westone's first game Wonder Boy, or if you owned an NES, Adventure Island. A game and series which spread across the world, on all major formats. In my view, there is no doubt that Ryuichi Nishizawa and his team at Westone are as creatively significant as Shigeru Miyamoto and Nintendo. My first NES game was not Super Mario Bros, but Hudson's adaptation of Wonder Boy, renamed Adventure Island.

There was a lot of conversation during lunch which was not recorded - my recollection is there was a brief comment about wondering if the company's shift in direction towards "gal games" had been a mistake. This topic is discussed towards the end of this chapter. There was also lots of talk regarding fun things to do in Tokyo, not related to work. Upon our return I interviewed Mr Yotsui for a few hours.



Willy Wombat (SAT)

<after Kouichi Yotsui interview>

RN: Aren't you tired?

JS: <with enthusiasm> **I AM NEVER TIRED!**

RN: <laughs> I asked Ohzora-san to come at 16:30 for her interview.

<at the start of the day I had been given several folders of Ms Ohzora's art, to illustrate her interview. During some down time between interviews I went through and photographed them - there was an enormous quantity of sketches and concept art for Westone's games!>

JS: Her artwork is unique. It has a distinctive, upbeat style.

RN: Her artwork *is* unique. She has a free hand to draw what she wants, but sometimes I must... <laughs> Ask her to tone down the uniqueness because of market considerations. <laughs>

<... Maki Ohzora interview ...>

<more questions with Mr Nishizawa>

JS: Let's ease in with a nostalgic question... I read a story where on a school trip to Kyoto you made a Japanese teacup, and you placed the *Star Wars* logo on it.⁴²¹ What did everyone think?

RN: Ehh... I don't remember! <intense laughter>

JS: Did you keep the cup?

RN: No, no, I didn't. <takes booklet, sketches Star Wars logo> Did I start this correctly? So anyway, I had this on my teacup. That's how avid I was about *Star Wars*, and I was drawing this logo everyday - day in, day out! <laughs>

I was 14 when I first saw the movie, and it left a really deep impression on me. It came as a shock almost. When I was a little older I really liked the *Star Wars* game by Atari,⁴²² I liked to play it in game centres. I must have played it a million times.

<everyone laughs>

JS: You mentioned you were friends with Quintet founders Tomoyoshi Miyazaki and Masaya Hashimoto.⁴²³ You met them at Enix?

RN: <laughs> I was working on an RPG game for the Super Famicom, for Enix. I was working on the title *Dark Half*, during which time the president of Enix invited everyone to his housewarming party, because he had rebuilt his house.⁴²⁴ And that's how I met those two gentlemen.⁴²⁵ I was a big fan of their previous creation, *Ys*. I was able to speak with them, it

was good to chat, and I was very pleased and honoured to meet them. And then Hashimoto-san told me that he had always been a fan of Monster Land. So it was quite a surprise to learn that we had influenced each other without knowing.



Dark Half (SFC)

JS: A great story! I was trying to get in touch with these gentlemen, but they seem to have disappeared. Many fans wonder what happened.

RN: Yes, I know the fans are looking. Miyazaki-san was running a company, but he was arrested a year or two ago. Since then I have not been able to get in touch with him. So I thought I shouldn't talk too much about him, for the benefit of the fans! *<laughs>* And I don't know what happened to Hashimoto-san. You're right, he's gone missing, sort of... I'd like to know, out of curiosity, why is Ys so popular abroad?

JS: The main versions outside Japan, back then, were for Master System and Turbo CD.

In both cases Ys was one of the best RPGs on that hardware.^{[426](#)} <detailed explanation>
Today the series is popular because the updates have high-quality localisations by XSeed. I like the original Ys because combat is streamlined, eliminating the slog of grinding and backtracking; fighting enemies produces a sensation akin to popping bubble wrap.

RN: Ahhh! <English> I see! <laughs>

JS: Which machine was your first Ys on? Why do you like it?

RN: I played the computer version, on the PC-9801. The Ys series was always very impressive in terms of the graphics. In Ys III they achieved multiple scrolling backgrounds.^{[427](#)}

JS: Yes, parallax scrolling!

RN: I was very impressed. I wanted to know how they do it, technically. How did they achieve it? So that was an appeal for me, and also I understand when you say that it's the sensation of popping bubble wrap. It's a very smooth progress, which I liked in the game as well.



Appare! Gateball (PCE)

JS: Westone made diverse games, like a croquet simulator and *Princess Maker 4*⁴²⁸ on PS2. How did you come to make these?

RN: The croquet game was called *Appare! Gateball*,⁴²⁹ and there were many things that came into play. But it resembles a billiards game. It was difficult, the game itself was difficult to achieve with the existing hardware spec at that time, but Ishizuka-san personally was asked by the company Atlus, to program it. Because we enjoyed a good working relationship with Atlus we decided to go for it.⁴³⁰ Ishizuka-san, from our side, single-handedly worked with the Atlus people to develop it.

With respect to *Princess Maker 4*, this falls under the genre of what call "gal games" or *galge* for short.⁴³¹ I stopped making games personally, <laughs> at some point - and at that time, a guy called Sakamoto, who made the music for *Monster Land*, assumed the position of

a director, and his competence was in this genre, *galge*, or *gal games*. Under Sakamoto's direction, we started taking on [subcontracting] a lot of work in this genre. There are lots of such games, let me show you some examples. <goes to shelf>



Princess Maker 4 (PS2)



JS: I wanted to ask about this shift, away from your traditional action games.

RN: We did a lot of business with Sega as well as Hudson, and Hudson was focusing its efforts on the PC Engine and on CD-ROM; games which came with voice acting were very popular. And it so happened that *gal games* were very popular in that category [of games featuring voice acting]. I think that because of our relationship with Hudson, we had many opportunities or occasions to create games in this genre of *gal games*.⁴³² <laughs>

JS: Atlus requested you develop games, like *Jaws* for NES.⁴³³ How did they acquire the film license? Were there restrictions dictated by the license?

RN: The commercial flow was such that a US toy manufacturer got the license,⁴³⁴ to create products out of the *Jaws* franchise, and that toy manufacturer consigned the game development to Atlus. <laughs> So we got the order once the licensing situation was cleared.

There was no "check process" where we had to seek approval for content or the type of games we created - there was no such obstacle. I don't know why! <laughs>

KK: Tokei Jikake no Aquario⁴³⁵ was never released. Tell us more. Any chance of releasing it?

RN: The program is located in the archives of my company, so I do not have any screenshots. If Aquario of the Clockwork were released as part of the Sega Vintage Collection, would people be interested in buying it? I'd be interested to know.

JS: I also wanted to ask about Aquario...

RN: I mentioned that this game went unreleased, during my interview with Kurt Kalata. And people who saw or read the online article started requesting me through Twitter to release it. Because there was a lot of response like that, I thought maybe we should try to release it. So I looked into past resources, to see if it's recoverable, or reproducible, and we discovered that only the sound data is missing. So right now we have enough resources to reconstruct it, without sound, and I provided all the details to M2 - the president is Horii-san - to see if they can try to recover or reproduce it in their spare time. But he is a very busy person, and M2 is a very busy company. <laughs> So I think he probably does not have enough time. I don't want Horii-san to sound bad. It puts Horii-san in an awkward spot.

JS: Please pass my regards to Mr Horii. I think M2 produces the best retro re-releases in the world. Work by other devs, like Backbone Entertainment, is so shoddy! Whereas M2's work is flawless!⁴³⁶

RN: I'll convey that next time I see him. The point is, regarding my earlier answer, is that our company cannot provide the development environment that existed previously, back in those days. But Horii-san has that environment at hand. So that's the situation.

JS: I understand. I also wanted to ask about Riot City for arcades, and its follow-up Crest of Wolf, or Riot Zone in English.⁴³⁷ What's the situation on ownership? The publisher retained certain rights, which is why it was remade as a sort of semi-sequel?

RN: It's a tough question! <laughs> The way Westone's games are licensed, it's pretty delicate - sensitive in the sense that what we do is practically not feasible, or not possible, for other companies. Meaning our game is licensed to Sega, for their household or family platform, Hudson likewise with their hardware. And then yet another, third company for the Famicom. So a single game, our game, is licensed to multiple platforms. It so happened this way because our games were sought after by various entities, and it's just coincidental in a way. So it's a cultural factor, that we came to work with many companies, and it's a unique situation in that various companies allowed it to happen.



JS: Go on...

RN: Well, to put it simply, our original game is licensed directly to Sega for their family platform, and Hudson is allowed to use our games as long as they change the graphics and title. So that initial rule has persisted until this day. But the substance of the games has not changed. We at Westone thought this was a given, but we only later discovered that it's quite an unusual situation.^{[438](#)}



Riot City (ARC)

JS: As an arcade developer your origin of profit was the sale of units to game centres. These owners benefited the most from good games by keeping all coins put inside. Did this arrangement disadvantaged small developers like Westone?

RN: At that time I was enthusiastic about game development, so I had no interest in the sales.

JS: When you licensed arcade games for home conversion, did Westone receive a further royalty on every home unit sold?

RN: We received a licensing fee, a royalty, based on or according to the number of units sold.

JS: This isn't about Westone but, given your arcade connections, do you know Ikegami

Tsushinki?⁴³⁹

RN: I've never heard of the company.

JS: I always ask just in case. Regarding co-founder Mr Ishizuka, are you happy to explain how he left Westone?⁴⁴⁰ He's literally half the company name.

RN: <laughs> That makes sense. When did he quit? I think it was before Dreamcast launched?⁴⁴¹ It was simply a divergence of managerial direction. We had a difference. But actually this is a long story! <laughs> Let me give you a short version. My management policy was to retreat from the frontlines myself, and leave it to my people to work on games, so they would grow [in the sense of gaining experience] and the company would grow as a result. That was my policy. Ishizuka-san was against that idea. He believed that him and I, we should have a hands on approach in development. He was afraid of what would happen if we stopped being directly involved. He insisted that the company would be successful as long as he and I continued to make the games together.

So our views diverged in that sense. He told me he believed the company would be better off without him. So that's what he did, he left the company. He joined other companies, and every time he insisted on having a hands on approach. Being on the front lines of game development. He is still a game programmer, to this day.

I recently... Looking back, I did not understand his point at that time. But now I kind of see his point. I think he was quite right in his decisions or views. <laughs> I used to think that anyone can design and plan games, if they chose to. But then once I relegated game design to other people, I discovered that it really doesn't work that way. You might complete and ship a game that way, but it won't sell well. Coming out of the experience, I realise that I have to do it myself. To put it simply, I realise that I have a certain talent for this. <laughs> In retrospect, looking back, I now realise what I didn't see back then. So now I try to handle the work that only I can do.

What we should have done is entrust Westone to someone who had a talent for managing the business, so that [Ishizuka] and I could focus on game development. I really regret that now. But it isn't too late. From now on I'm going to focus solely on game development, as that's where my own talents lie.

KK: Any chance for a new MW or WB instalment?

RN: Yes, I'd like to make one if I have the opportunity. I have ideas for both Wonder Boy and Monster World already in my head. Of course, I want to make both in 3D. I want to start from creating an image of the world, but where to find a good 3D artist?

I downloaded Shantae: Risky's Revenge for iPhone and played it. The heroine and world are drawn with beautiful 2D graphics. WayForward's staff is very talented. In Japan, 2D graphics designers are becoming rare. I would like to release 2D games on a regular basis from now on.

KK: Where do you think a new Monster World would work best: digital distribution or handhelds?

RN: It is a very puzzling problem. Because I want the world of *Monster World* to be filled with deep emotion slowly and carefully, a console game may be better. But, as for me, a handheld game may be better because I want children to play. Please tell me which game platform is appropriate for *MW*.

JS: Thank you very much for today. I hope my questions were interesting.

RN: <laughs> They were not boring! Did you get enough creators to interview? If you're still short, I might be able to introduce people to you. Some days ago I met with Aso-san, formerly of Sega, who we discussed earlier, and when I told him that you were interviewing me, he said that he could put you in touch with other former Sega creators, so feel free to contact him. These are the people that created the Sega arcade games of the 1980s, such as Yu Suzuki-san, Naka-san, and Ishii-san. It's something to consider. If there is a Japanese creator whom you want to interview elsewhere, please request it. The person may be my acquaintance.



Aurail (ARC)

Tokyo Tour by Ryuichi Nishizawa

After my interview with Mr Nishizawa, while I was still in Japan, we kept in contact via email. He gave several recommendations for places to visit. It was a great honour to speak so personally with the creator of my favourite games; Mr Nishizawa has always made time to speak with fans via social media. I thought it would be fun to share his recommendations of where to visit while in Tokyo. If you're in Japan, be sure to check out the Japan-Guide.com website and visit these places knowing it's where the cool game developers like to go.

"If you are a friend of Kurt Kalata, you are a friend to me. Because you have so many plans in Japan, myself and Mr Yotsui worry about your health. Though it is not bad to work hard, please take care of yourself, and rely on me anytime if you have any trouble in Japan.

"If there are any places where you want to visit, or something you want to eat, please ask. Because you are visiting Japan with much effort, make sure to see the sights too. You're staying in Japan for a long time, so you should take a holiday as well. Here are some tourist attractions in Tokyo that I recommend."

秋葉原でショッピングめぐり
(ゲーム、フィギュア、模型)

Tour the shops in Akihabara (games, figures etc.) www.japan-guide.com/e/e3003.html
お台場でガンダムと記念写真

Take a souvenir picture with Gundam in Odaiba www.japan-guide.com/e/e3008.html
浅草で下町を楽しむ

Enjoy the downtown area in Asakusa www.japan-guide.com/e/e3004.html
横浜まで足を伸ばして中華まんじゅうを食べる

Visit Yokohama, eat a yummy Chinese steamed bun www.japan-guide.com/e/e2156.html



This photo isn't from Tokyo, but if you're ever in Kyoto, this author recommends the soft-shell turtle restaurants, where you can pick a live specimen from a glass tank

Making connections

Mr Nishizawa kindly contacted various developers, resulting in multiple interviews at Arzest, including Yoji Ishii (*Flicky*), Naoto Ohshima (*Sonic*), Yutaka Sugano (*Shinobi*), and Manabu Kusunoki (*Panzer Dragoon*). I was also put in contact with Yu Suzuki, though did not have time for an interview, and Yasuhide Kobayashi, who is in the next volume (and discusses *The Last Guardian*). Mr Nishizawa also contacted former Hudson front-man Master Takahashi (star of *Adventure Island*), and Takazumi Tomoike.^{[442](#)} Mr Tomoike declined, though his words were so poignant that I'm reprinting them. I hope another journalist interviews him.

"Regarding the interview, since there are few Sega veterans for the book of interviews with many Japanese developers, I think it would be natural for Yu-san's, Naka-kun's, and Ishii-san's names to pop up. But I would feel a bit out of place on that list. My time at Sega was only for three years, so I feel like I can't really speak with any authority about development at Sega to international readers. On the other hand I could talk about my time at Koei, but that would detract from the purpose of the interview, and at any rate I decided to leave the company. Thank you very much and my regards."

- Takazumi Tomoike

After Westone

When transcribing this interview more than a year later, and many months after Westone's closure, it hit me how poignant and prophetic Mr Nishizawa's final, softly spoken words were that day. Westone was living on borrowed time, and while unknown to me amidst the office bustle, I now realise that perhaps Mr Nishizawa sensed it. On 5 August 2014 he explained they had changed offices, and asked that complimentary books be sent to his home.

The overwhelmingly sad feeling I have is that Ryuichi Nishizawa is one of the most creatively talented people in the Japanese games industry, repeatedly creating games which either see success or lead to increasingly successful sequels. But almost all of his output has benefited others, rather than himself. *Ninja-kun* spawned multiple sequels to this day, while his original *Wonder Boy* spawned two long running series (*Monster World* and *Adventure Island*), which then primarily benefited publishers of the console adaptations.

This calls into question the nature of arcade games, where most of the profit is generated by the arcade operator, while home conversions mainly benefit the licensee or publisher. For a company like Capcom which converted and published its own games, it would reap 100% of the reward for its own intellectual property, whereas a smaller company like Westone was dependant on others. The images and layouts which exist in Mr Nishizawa's mind have almost certainly touched everyone who plays games - and he deserves a place in the videogame hall of fame.

The following answers were via email, or based on messages Mr Nishizawa posted publicly:

JS: What are your plans now?

RN: I transferred or sold off all of the copyright.^{[443](#)} There are no plans to start a new company. Currently I am freelancing.

JS: When did you feel it was the end for Westone? When I visited, the office was busy, it seemed OK.

RN: The game industry cooled significantly around the year 2000, when software abruptly stopped selling. Japan's videogame industry was dramatically reshaped in that era; Sega split itself up and withdrew from the Dreamcast market, Enix and Square merged, Atlus fell under Index's control, Bandai and Namco merged, and so on. No one would've been surprised if Westone went under at the time, but we pushed ourselves really hard and somehow we managed to keep the business running.

But recently, the headwinds have started blowing again, and it didn't seem like we would be able to continue the company any longer. Your visit, John, really came at the perfect time. If it had been even a little bit later, the company would have been gone. I'm so glad you came when you did - now we all have a wonderful memento of it.



JS: Thoughts on *Monster Boy - And The Cursed Kingdom*?^{[444](#)}

RN: When we released *Monster World 2*,^{[445](#)} it was into a Nintendo Famicom dominated marketplace, where Sega's Mark-III had few fans. So our game was not widely known in Japan. However, things worked out differently in Europe and North America, where a lot of kids grew up playing games on the Sega Master System. Those kids are now adults, and often tell me how much they loved it, saying: "*Monster World 2* is my favourite game!" More than a few of them have been inspired by that love to begin pursuing game development themselves, and that includes the developers of *Monster Boy*. I think that's wonderful, and I have nothing but deep admiration for their game. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to meet them.

JS: More devs are using crowdfunding. Thoughts?

RN: The spiritual sequel to *Clock Tower*, *NightCry*, achieved its target of \$300'000.^{[446](#)} Horror is one of the game genres I'd like to make once, but I think that even \$1'000'000 dollars would not be enough.

JS: Any final message?

RN: I've taken advantage of the May holiday season to read your manuscript. I am so grateful for your "After Westone" piece - it was the best elegy for the company I could ever hope for. It made me happy to see you write candidly about the way you felt. I imagine that the book

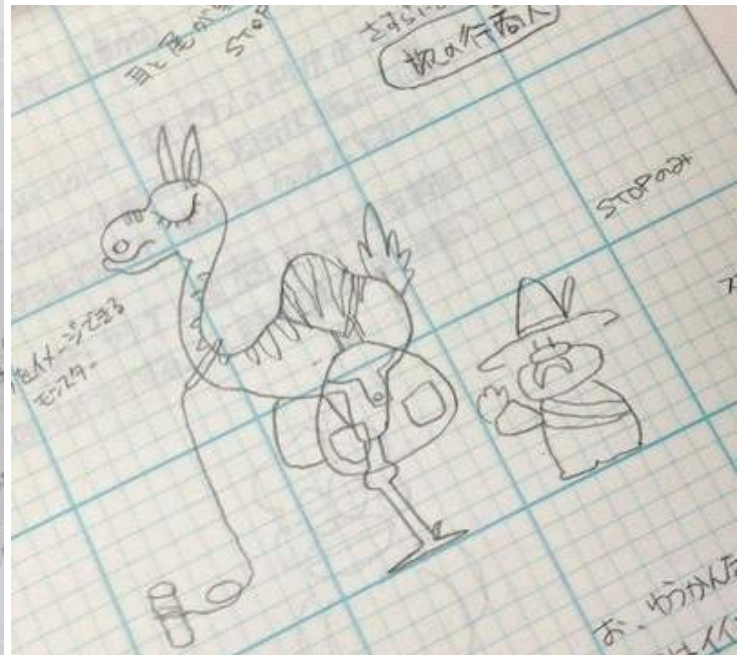
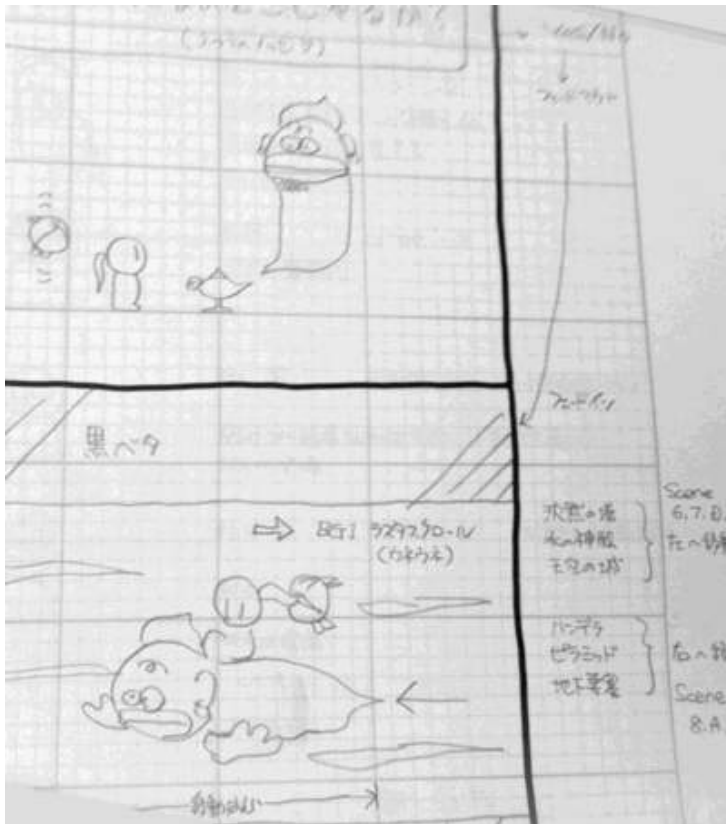
you've created will be an important keepsake for me. I am truly grateful.

Westone Bit Entertainment was officially closed due to bankruptcy on 29 January. The company was established in May of 1986, so it actively pursued game development for some 29 years. I've been observing this industry with a developer's eye from the dawn of the game industry until the present day. I haven't directly involved myself in much game development since the start of the 32-bit generation, but as a fan of the medium, I've played a wide variety of games.

When I first joined the game industry, awareness of videogames as a medium was low, and arcades were perceived as hangouts for delinquents. It meant a great deal to me to see games evolve into a source of national pride for Japan, just like manga and anime. I believe we were able to achieve this by carefully balancing the artistic and business sides of game production.

Creating high-quality games and expanding one's business are entirely separate concerns. In independent game studios, I'm sure there are many cases where a single person is shouldering both duties. But if you have talent as a game creator, then I strongly urge you to focus entirely on making a high-quality game. The world is full of people with an aptitude for business administration, but those with a talent for making interesting games are few and far between. I wish it hadn't taken me so long to realise that.

I intend to keep making games, but I doubt I will involve myself with the administrative side of the business again. Good management is important in game development, but I need to leave that to someone with a talent for it, and focus on making the high-quality games that only I can make.



Mr Nishizawa has shared on social media the design documents for Monster World IV, the last in the series he worked on

It's the Aurail deal

Released exclusively in arcades around 1990, Aurail is a fine example of how diverse the Westone library is. Part top-down tank game, part first-person on-rails shmup (created using scaled sprites), all of it hardcore and born of passion not market trends.

Being a fan of shooting games, and having created mainly comical action titles, Mr Nishizawa started the project as a means of utilising the skills of his entire team. Masanori Yoshihara (The Dragon's Trap) drew the mechanical designs, while Maki Ohzora handled backgrounds - it was her first role at Westone! Mr Nishizawa meanwhile created the enemies in the 3D sections. Originally the plan was to have the entire game in 3D, making use of the sprite scaling capabilities of Sega's System 16B hardware. However, due to time, the traditional 2D stages were added to bolster content.

The result was a unique game which didn't fit into any one specific genre. Kurt Kalata of HG101 conducted an interview on Aurail - which is partially reprinted here. In addition to explaining Aurail, it reveals a lot about arcade development during that era. Visit HG101 for the full interview!

KK: What were the inspirations behind Aurail?

RN: The original story was basically the anime *Space Runaway Ideon*.⁴⁴⁷ <laughs> It was directed by Yoshiyuki Tomino, who also created *Gundam*. Although it wasn't very popular, I loved the scene when a volley of missiles was shot from the body of an ancient robot. Aurail is an homage to that.

KK: What is the storyline?

RN: It wasn't until the final days of development that I thought about the story and wrote the ending. <laughs> The story in games was not important back then, particularly for arcade games. Games are interactive, so the act of playing the game, being excited, and having lots of exhilarating moments, I believe these are the most important aspects. Someone who wants to enjoy a story should probably watch a movie. I also think that plot and drama are important to create something more realistic, but for the time, a story was really nothing more than a bonus. For that reason, I did not write a full plot for Aurail, only suggesting that there was a more profound backstory. It must have worked, if this question is being asked! <laughs>

KK: Aurail has a sci-fi feeling, but some structures look like ruins from an ancient civilization.

RN: I didn't really create much of a story, but rather a view of the world. Without a world view [*sekaikan*], then the design can't be determined. Here is the basic concept: "Aurail is the name of an ancient civilization. Many years ago, they created an advanced society. However, they left into outer space for unknown reasons. Beneath the ruins of their civilization they left behind a force of great power. Modern humans, technologically immature by comparison, wage war for control of this force."

KK: Aurail is a very difficult game.

RN: I guess we considered it OK to play on several credits, and adjusted the difficulty accordingly.

KK: Blood Gear (PCE) is referred to as Aurail Scenario 2 in the credits. Is it a sequel? It seems to parallel Wonder Boy, in that it started as an arcade game, then became an Action-RPG for consoles...

RN: That's an extremely geeky question! <laughs> I didn't even think Blood Gear or Aurail were released in foreign countries. I don't even think there's anyone in Japan who can answer this question! <laughs> I think that calling it "Aurail Scenario 2" was a joke from the younger staff members developing Blood Gear. Aurail was produced for and known by hardcore gamers.

KK: Is there any connection between Aurail and the Cosmo Tank (GB, 1990)? It was developed by Asuka, published by Atlus. They're similar; you control a tank from an overhead view, and there are first person parts. But, they're still different.^{[448](#)}

RN: I looked up Cosmo Tank on the internet. I can see the resemblance, but I have not played it.

KK: Was Aurail considered a success?

RN: I had been told at the time that "tank games" will not sell. However, I made a tank game anyway. Aurail is really more of a "robot game", technically, but it's "almost a tank game", isn't it? I made the game because I wanted to make it, not because I thought it would sell. As a result, it wasn't popular at all. As for myself, in spite of the hard work that went into it, I didn't think it turned out all that fun. Maybe I shouldn't have created a "tank game". <laughs> But, I'm proud I made a 3D game using the hardware at the time. The things I learned during its development are still useful, particularly for programming 2D objects in a 3D space.

Player 1: 15530

SEARCH AND DESTROYED.
-DETECTED: 5
-DESTROYED ENEMY.
LEFT: 4



SHIELD

ROUND 11

Monster Land in the UK - an interview with Robert L. HYLANDS

After Kurt Kalata's inquiry regarding the English localisation of Monster Land on modern download services matching the text of the earlier computer ports - none of which had any connection to the poorly translated arcade bootlegs which surfaced in the 1980s - I decided to solve this mystery by interviewing the gentlemen behind one of the conversions. It's clear that while an official English localisation was completed for arcades, and provided to those doing conversions, it was seemingly never mass released.

For those who haven't seen the name, Robert Hylands was a programmer involved in a selection of interesting titles, though not always credited. In his online profiles he's mentioned working on a version of Back to the Future and Die Hard. At first I wondered if this might have been the mysterious NES version, but alas no. [449](#)

JS: Your portfolio on MobyGames - are there gaps?

RH: There were a few; I took some time out a couple of times and there were also times when I was working on low level routines. I also did a few rescue jobs on projects that didn't go according to plan. Most of which I didn't get credits for. On R-Type for Spectrum, written by my old friend Bob Pape, I wrote the sound driver and effects module.

JS: Do you know who converted the original Wonder Boy for home computers? The title says Sega and Activision, but there's no credits.

RH: Sorry. I don't know.

JS: How did you get involved with Images Design, and the ZX Spectrum conversion of Monster Land?

RH: I saw an advert asking for people who could program games on the home computers. I had done some commercial programming and had written a few things for myself, on the old ZX81 and Spectrum; I used to hand compile my code and type it in using a hex editor that I had written myself. So, I knocked up a couple of demos to show what I could do and went along to see them.

That's when I met Karl Jeffery, he was impressed by what I had achieved with limited development tools, but he didn't need anyone on the Spectrum at the time. He needed someone to help him on the Atari ST version of R-Type, so they gave me an ST and a manual and said, "Go away and come back and show me what you can do on this." I remembered that whilst I was being interviewed there was a programmer working on a pinball game and he was having trouble getting a ball to bounce around the screen, so I decided to do a ball bouncing demo.

One week later I had several balls bouncing off of the backgrounds and each other. Needless to say they were very impressed at how quickly I got to grips with the ST and I got the job. Whilst working with Karl on R-Type ST, Bob Pape was writing the Spectrum version and having some issues with getting a decent sound driver, so he gave me some specs and I wrote the driver for him. So when Images got the contract to do Super Wonder Boy, already



being familiar with the Spectrum, I was the obvious candidate for the Spectrum version.

JS: What was the lead platform? The Amiga, ST, C64, and CPC versions were by Images Design; Laura Paul and James Smart are listed as coders.

RH: The Amstrad version was based on my Spectrum code and was a quick conversion. The C64 was done by Jim Smart. The ST and Amiga versions were being done by another programmer, I forget his name now, but for some reason he never finished the job. Those versions were completed by myself with some help on the Amiga version from another old friend, Rob Brookes. "Laura P Paul" was a joke name, for the fact that a lot of people had worked on the game. There was no lead really, they were mostly developed separately, but we all worked in the same office and shared ideas and techniques.

JS: Here's a mystery: an English version of Monster Land for arcades... <asks question by Kurt Kalata>

RH: That's easy! We based it on a version of the arcade machine, given to us by Activision. It was, I believe, the official English version of the arcade game. That's where the text came from.

JS: The original was long and difficult, yet you included so much in the Spectrum conversion.

RH: We could set a switch on the board to give us infinite lives and played the game to get to everything we needed to see. Graphics and sound were reproduced in house and I programmed the game code in Z80 from scratch. Out of all of the games I worked on back then it is still my favourite.

JS: The ZX Spectrum conversion was a multi-load. What other challenges did you face?

RH: The biggest challenge was the lack of hardware on a Spectrum, and the lack of any real graphics hardware - no hardware scrolling and no sprites. It only had 48K of memory, a big chunk of which was taken up by the screen, hence the multi-load system. Even then a lot of time was spent cramming as much as we could into the RAM, which was crammed full for each level. Every single byte was important.

JS: What happened after Monster Land?

RH: I stayed at Images for a while, working on a few games, mostly rescue jobs where the development was going wrong or getting behind. Most of those games were done under a different name (Laura P Paul for instance) or not credited at all. After leaving Images, I went to Probe first, then I set up a small group of programmers in my hometown to do some conversion work.

JS: Which version of Die Hard did you work on?

RH: I was involved with Die Hard Trilogy on Saturn. The main work was done by the programming team I set up. I led the team, advised and assisted.

JS: What was it like working on Stargate for the Mega Drive? Which was the lead version? Coding on the SNES is attributed to Tantalus Entertainment.

RH: There was no lead, both versions were written independently. Stargate was done in house at Probe; I was away from my family for great chunks of time and it was hard work, but still great fun. There were some great people working there and a lot of titles being produced.





OHZORA, Maki

DOB: 4 July 1968 / Birthplace: Saitama-ken / Blood Type: B

Interview with Maki OHZORA

17 September 2013, Tokyo, Westone Office

Duration: 33m

Although my interviews with Ryuichi Nishizawa and Kouichi Yotsui had been planned well in advance, with preliminary questions sent over, this interview with Maki Ohzora was both sudden and fortuitous. Initially she was nervous about being interviewed, but as the day and initial two interviews progressed, this bonus interview was finalised, and I was allowed to photograph Ms Ohzora's entire portfolio. What is perhaps not conveyed through the following interview text is the animated way in which Ms Ohzora answered questions, with elaborate gestures and expressions - it was clear she has the spirit of an artist.

In addition to creating the adorable character art for a variety of Westone's games, she produces an enormous amount of art outside of Westone, including her own *doujin* materials distributed via conventions. Furthermore, Ms Ohzora illustrated Volume 1 of the *Evangelion* spin-off manga, *Petit Eva Bokura Tanken Doukoukai*, from 2007 to 2009, by Kadokawa Shoten.



JS: What was the first game you saw? How did you enter the industry?

Maki Ohzora: I think I was a 5th grader maybe, about, in elementary school. When I saw an *Invader* game.⁴⁵⁰ I used to play that quite a bit, back then. As for how I entered or joined the game industry - before this industry I spent about a year drawing animation for the TV industry. That was my initial aspiration. Then I discovered during my year working on TV anime, that it's actually hard to make a living as an animator, in that field. <laughs> So I quit. So I had some idle time, my in-between period. I knew someone who worked here, at Westone, and that person told me the company was looking for someone who can draw and that's how I started here.

JS: Your first game was Aurail?

MO: Yes, that's right.

JS: You worked with Mr Nishizawa, who created the 3D sections?

MO: Ah! Hmm... I joined this project, by the way, halfway through. The 3D sections were complete by the time I joined. I did the backgrounds. So I did the background artwork, and there was already a predecessor who quit. She got married and quit the company. So I took over her task, her assignment. So I took over the background artwork from my predecessor and I also designed the big boss who appears on the last stage, who does those big

movements. <gestures> (above right)



JS: Who was your predecessor at Westone?

MO: Hiromi Suzuki.^{[451](#)}

JS: One of the co-founders of Westone.

MO: That's right!

JS: You also worked on *Riot City*?^{[452](#)}

MO: Yes I did.

JS: What was your role?

MO: This too was background artwork, which I handled.

JS: Were you at all involved in the sequel to *Riot City*, called *Crest of Wolf*?^{[453](#)}

MO: No, I was not involved in that one.

JS: You worked on *Blood Gear*?^{[454](#)}

MO: That's right.



JS: Can you describe your role?

MO: Erm, the character, how would you say it... *<laughs>* I handled the pixel pictures, the visual scenes in-between the gameplay, where there's a narrative piece involving the characters and dialogue. That's what I did.

JS: In cut-scenes the artwork is large, compared to characters seen during the game

itself. Was it a challenge to maintain stylistic coherence?

MO: A major challenge was the limited number of colours that were available. It's hard to draw a small picture, with few colours, but it's also difficult to draw a big picture with a limited number of colours.

JS: You're also credited on *Dark Half*, [455](#) by Enix.

MO: For *Dark Half* I designed the characters and I also designed the small player characters in-game. And the monsters.



JS: The designs in MWIV are adorable. Did you do all the animation? What was the inspiration?

MO: I handled or created all the animation. Previously to *Monster World IV*, there was *Monster World III*, which was a combination of all the *Monster World* work, created by the company president. For *IV* he wanted something entirely different, because *III* was already a culmination, so he wanted to switch gears and create something new with an entirely different world incorporated into it.⁴⁵⁶ Because I had joined halfway I didn't know much about the previous versions, but I was given a free rein. <laughs> One of my inspirations was the Arabic world, or Arabian world. The other *Monster Worlds* were all fantasy, or conventional fantasy, so I switched gears to create a new *sekaikan*, or type of world. That's more or less what happened.



JS: There was going to be a male character, alongside Asha. Why wasn't he included ultimately?

MO: Actually, there is a character who appears in the castle in the sky [Aegis Island], and that

is a male character which is a slightly modified version of the original male character, that I had envisioned. So he hasn't completely disappeared.

JS: I didn't realise! (see comparison upper right)

MO: <laughs>

JS: I liked the secret about the character in the castle - do you have any other secrets?

MO: Hmm! <laughs> Secrets... <laughs> Actually, I have some graffiti in places that people can't see.

JS: You mean... In the games, right?

MO: Yes.

JS: Which games?

MO: In Aurail, for example. But you can't see it on-screen at all. **(below)**





0

17124

May the power of light
overcome darkness







An alternative design for Asha

JS: I know some hackers who could find it.[457](#)

MO: <laughs> There's a very big graffiti in the leftover ROM area in Aurail. I drew pictures of my people, of the other people, team members.

JS: I looked on your websites,[458](#) which have the same cute cat people as this art book.[459](#) Is this independent artwork, is it related to Westone? Please tell me about it.

MO: This is purely my hobby, it has nothing to do with work at the company.

JS: Do you go to Comiket with your art?

MO: Yes, I do display my artwork there.

An illustration of three anime-style girls with fox ears sitting at a dinner table. The girl on the left has brown hair and a blue jacket, leaning forward. The girl on the right has pink hair and a pink dress, clapping her hands. The girl in the foreground has orange hair and a black headband, looking up. The table is set with plates of food, glasses, and a blue bottle. The background shows a window with a view of a building.

大空真紀画集

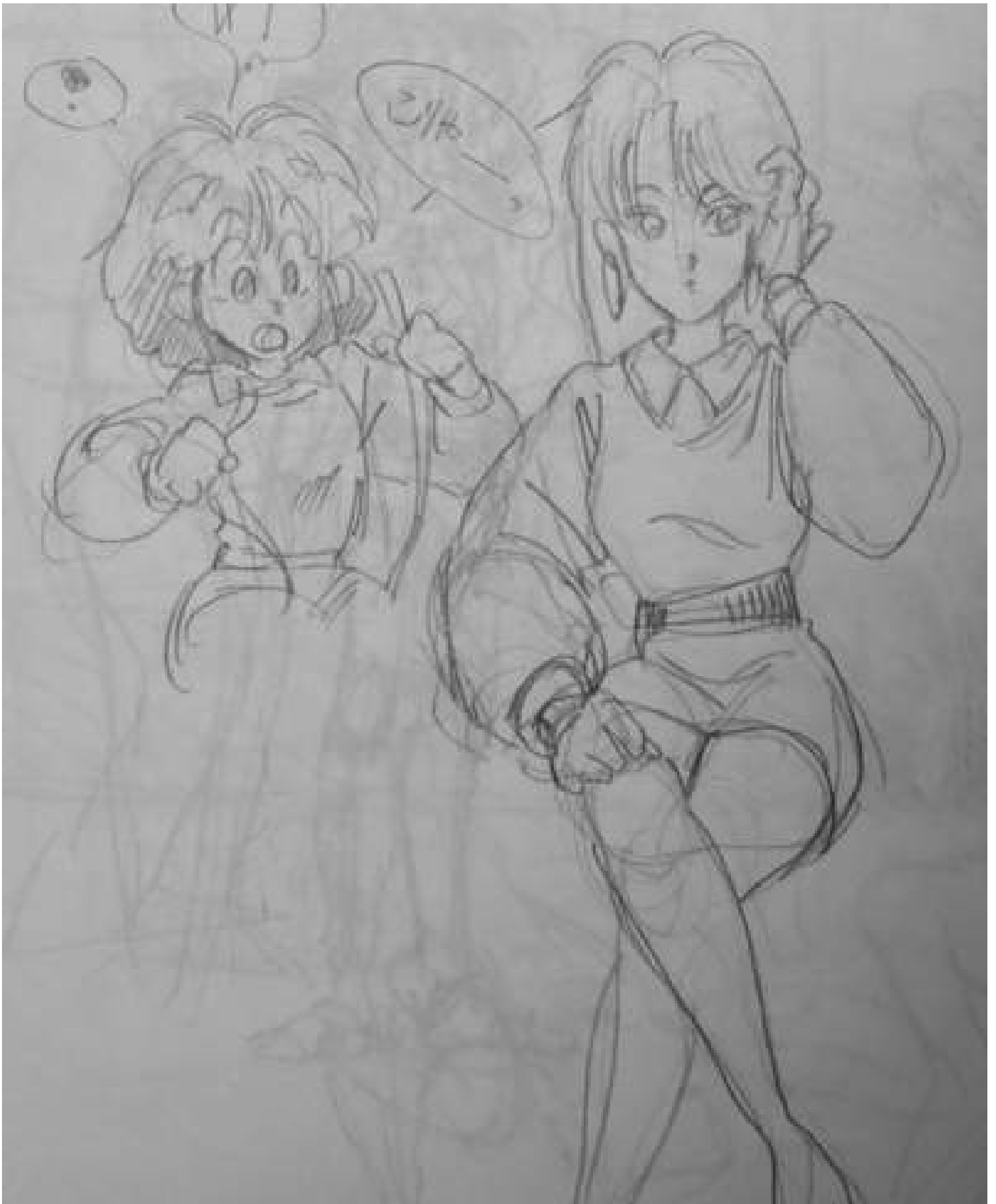
空色絵巻

そらいろえまき

JS: I've never been to Comiket; can you describe it for readers who have never been?

MO: Comiket is a three day convention held at this big convention centre, called The Tokyo Big Site, and it attracts 500,000 people during the three days. It's devoted to comic characters, and I'm there to show my own artwork, my own manga. But it also attracts anime and game fans, and it's also a place to share what's called *doujinshi*, or "fan art", [460](#) which is a secondary creation of manga. And people also engage in cosplay, there's a lot of cosplay during the convention. People enjoy having a get together that way. <laughs>

JS: In America and Europe there's intense discussion about women in games, and the challenges faced. What are your thoughts?



MO: Well, during busy times we all end up staying in the office over night. When that happens it can be a little bit difficult for a woman to stay in the office with a bunch of men. I

can't just lie around with them; I can't just crash anywhere in the office. So that's a little bit difficult. Hmm...

Another thing, this industry is actually a lot about math as well. I personally like math, calculating coordinates for example, so I enjoy the process of development production. But because many women are averse to numbers, to math, they simply think they can use their drawing skills to get ahead, and it may be difficult. For example 3D is a lot about numbers and math. But you see a lot more women these days. When I joined the industry there were only a handful.

Having said that, with respect to our company, as you know there was a woman among the founding members to begin with. There was always a designer who happened to be a woman. So it's actually a comfortable environment for me.

Limiting the topic to the office. I think the fact that the company's titles are known for bright colours, may be attributed to some extent to the fact that there were always female designers, women designers.



JS: By creating the art a game is built around, do you feel less pressure during crunch time at the end of a development schedule?

MO: That's true. I would say there's less pressure on me to develop designs during the latter half, because the artwork is done already, as you said.

JS: Is it harder for female staff who have children?





MO: I married later than... Well, I married at a certain age, and don't have any children. But I agree, or I think that it would be harder for women with children to be in the industry, because of long hours and such.



JS: Is there anything else you'd like to add, or share with readers?

MO: Hmm...

JS: It's not obligatory.

MO: <laughs> I just want to say thank you to all the fans.



Ms Ohzora did the character designs and graphics for Milano no Arubeito Collection on PS1

JS: When are we going to see another Monster World from Westone?

MO: I don't know!

<everyone laughs>



As printed on HG101

SAKAMOTO, Shinichi

aka: Sintan, Cheabow

DOB: 7 January 1966 / Birthplace: Tokyo, Japan / Blood Type: A

Selected portfolio as composer:

Psychic 5 (AC)
Wonder Boy (AC)
Wonder Boy Monster Land (AC)
Jaws (NES)
Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair (AC)
Appare! Gateball (PCE)
Aurail (AC)
Aquario of the Clockwork (AC - unreleased)
Mashin Eiyuu Wataru Gaiden (FC)
Monster World II (*Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap*) (SMS)
Jinkuu Senki Mu (GB)
Monster World II: Dragon no Wana (GG)
WB V: Monster World III (*Wonder Boy in Monster World*) (GEN)
Dungeon Explorer (Sega CD)
Aoi Blink (PCE)
Power Eleven (PCE)
Blood Gear (PCE CD) - opening music
Star Parodier (PCE CD) - PSG music
Tobidase! Panibon (*Bomberman: Panic Bomber*) (Virtual Boy)
Kekkon (PS/SS)
Akihabara Dennou Gumi Pata Pies! (DC)
Fish Eyes Wild (DC)



This secret screen from *Psychic 5* (AC, 1987) has staff portraits, including Sakamoto. On the project his nickname was "Cheabow"

Interview with Shinichi SAKAMOTO

Q&A originally by Kurt Kalata - July 2013

Supplementing the two live interviews I conducted at Westone, Kurt Kalata of Hardcore Gaming 101 kindly gave permission to reprint his interview with Shinichi Sakamoto. Originally a composer for Westone, Sakamoto would later assume the role of director, shifting the company's direction towards *gal games*, which Westone produced as a subcontractor to other companies. Ultimately this was part of the reason why we saw fewer and fewer Westone games released outside of Japan. Something which Ryuichi Nishizawa expressed regret regarding.

Although this is only a short interview, it's interesting to discover a little bit more about this influential member of the team. Below is the interview as originally published on HG101.

Shinichi Sakamoto was a composer at Westone Bit Entertainment, creating music for several of their titles, along with some occasional works for Hudson. His work on both Wonder Boy in Monster Land and Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap were nominated in HG101's Best VGM of All Time poll.

Kurt Kalata: What is your background and education in music?

Shinichi Sakamoto: I took piano lessons from between when I was three and eight years old. After that, I was all self taught.

KK: How did you first join Westone?

SS: I was invited by someone when I was at Tekhan, the first company I worked at.

KK: Were you familiar with arcade and videogaming before you joined Westone?

SS: Everyday I played videogames. Space Invaders, Galaxian and Pac-Man.

KK: What was the computer game development scene like in the 1980s? Did you know the other composers; did you receive feedback from fans?

SS: My music was developed using an IC microcomputer development machine based on CP/M.^{[461](#)} Although I did not know any other game music composers at the time, I liked the music from Namco. By all means, I want to hear feedback from fans.

KK: What was your favourite hardware?

SS: Sega System 16.

KK: How long did you work at Westone?

SS: Until 2010.

KK: What was it like to work for the company? Did you often going drinking with your coworkers?

SS: Westone was a great environment for producing work. This is because we were able to work freely, and we were able to be challenged.

KK: What are your favourite types of music?

SS: Although I loved Herbie Hancock^{[462](#)} and music like European Jazz Trio,^{[463](#)} I was heavily influenced by country folk. Even now I listen to it in my car. I also like Taylor Swift, Lady Antebellum, Sheryl Crow, Brad Paisley and James Taylor.^{[464](#)}

KK: What is your personal favourite soundtrack that you worked on?

SS: Wonder Boy: Monster Land.

KK: What devices did you use to compose music?

SS: I used sound modules: Guitar and SC-88 / TG81Z / TG-55 / MT32. And sequencers: Vision, Como on Music, Cakewalk, Ballade, Logic

KK: Where do you work today? Do you still compose music?

SS: Nowadays, I am working at Media Vision. I no longer compose music.

KK: Do you have anything you'd like to share with English-speaking fans?

SS: From the bottom of my heart, thank you for enjoying my music.

For extensive interviews in English, regarding Aquario, check out the Lost Levels forum:

forums.lostlevels.org/viewtopic.php?p=31408





Interview with Yukiharu Sambe
R&D manager of the unreleased Taito WOWOW



For years the the only information on the Taito WOWOW came from a report on the 1992 Tokyo Toys Show, from the French videogame magazine *Console+*, page 10, issue 10, June 1992. They stated:



"Another alliance between publishers and manufacturers has been established in Japan. It's about JSB (it controls satellite channel WOWOW), ASCII and Taito. A prototype has been developed. It's small and equipped with a CD-Rom player. The basic idea is innovative: it's about distributing games via satellite, like the streaming of TV programs, and to charge only the time spent playing.

"The other interesting thing about the console is that the games that will be released to the public will be the same of the arcade versions, with the video and audio quality of the originals. The first games available will be *Darius*, *Bubble Bobble*, and *Parasol Stars*.

"A released date has not been disclosed yet."



Note from this book's author: One of my holy grails was discovering the unreleased Taito WOWOW console. None of my interviewees knew about it, so it is with great pleasure that I reprint the interview conducted by Damiano Bacci for Unseen64.net, published 10 August

2015. How did he solve this mystery? He contacted Taito's international email address and asked if anyone knew anything. Sometimes the most direct methods are the best!

Unseen64 Interview

We got in touch with the Research & Development manager of Taito Corporation - Mr Yukiharu Sambe, a professional engineer at the time the Taito WOWOW console was created. He was kind enough to share some previously unknown information about this unreleased console. Many thanks to Yukiharu Sambe for his time.

DB: How did you start in the videogame industry? What did you do at Taito - were you involved in Darius?

Yukiharu Sambe: I was an electrical engineer and interested in the microcomputers of the late 1970s. One day, I happened to see Space Invaders at an arcade and it really caught my attention. After I joined Taito, I designed and managed many types of arcade hardware and game programs. I'm happy that you know Darius, which I directed; I managed the hardware, game concept, software development and so on.

DB: How did the WOWOW project start? What was the idea behind it?

YS: A Japanese administrator had a plan for data broadcasting. Meanwhile, I wanted to deliver games to home television sets. And I happened to know, JSB⁴⁶⁵ was trying to combine a CPU and [data] memory on its satellite receiver. So I talked to JSB and the project started.

DB: Why was there a partnership with the broadcaster JSB and ASCII corporation?

YS: JSB has their own satellite and its accompanying channel; ASCII was developing satellite data communication systems.

DB: Could you describe your role on the WOWOW project?

YS: I was a manager of new technology, research & development, at Taito during this time. I directed some of Taito's young engineers and developed/designed this WOWOW game console, including hardware, sample game software and menu selection programs.

DB: Was the console based on some specific arcade hardware from Taito?

YS: I selected and modified arcade videogame hardware because I was used to it.

DB: How did the satellite connection work? Did you use the satellite to download games, stream games? How was customer payment handled?

YS: The JSB satellite had not only a video broadcasting channel but a data stream channel also. Taito sent a data stream to the JSB satellite base, which was located near Tokyo, through an RJ45 connector. Then JSB transferred this data stream to its satellite. A home receiver would detect the data flow and store it into the receiver's memory. If a subscriber selected a game to play, the game program stored in memory would then run.

We were responsible for the game delivery, JSB was responsible for satellite communication, and ASCII was responsible for the data interface. We intended to collect the game subscription fee through JSB.

DB: What games were planned? Mostly arcade ports?

YS: We had to think about the game's memory size. Smaller games were best and I planned to use some early 1980s arcade games, since they are small in size. As a demonstration and presentation game, we modified and minimised the game *Darius*.

DB: Were there any exclusive games designed specifically for the console?

YS: We modified *Darius* as the only game. Though we developed menu selection software which also had original graphics and sound.

DB: Why was the project cancelled? Too much competition? Technical problems? Was the satellite technology insufficient?

YS: We had two reasons to suspend this project.

1) The data transfer speed was not enough and the many "error correction packets" would eat up what precious data speed was available. The user would wait more than several minutes to download one small game. And if we tried to broadcast several games at the same time, the downloads needed even more time.

2) At the beginning, JSB intended to combine game hardware with the home satellite receiver. However, memory was expensive and the "all combined receiver" made the cost estimation very high. Five years later, Nintendo absorbed the satellite music company St. GIGA and started its satellite download business in 1995.⁴⁶⁶ Its data stream had almost the same structure that we designed, and Nintendo used its game console with special satellite game equipment. However, Nintendo did not find good success with this business. It faced similar difficulties that we encountered before.

DB: When cancelled, how complete was the console?

YS: The project was suspended at the early stages. We made a presentation and demonstration for newspapers, administrator people, and so on. The demo was good, however it was difficult to plan for a successful future satellite game business, and I decided to suspend it.

However, and perhaps fortunately, these experiences helped me to create a new entertainment business in 1992: "telecommunication Karaoke", in Japanese *tuushin-karaoke* X2000. And this was successful. I also founded the home karaoke business X-55 mediabox in 1995, by using analogue telephone lines and distributing games to the home.⁴⁶⁷ Every life experience is precious.

DB: Are there any images or video about the console? Maybe a press kit or advert? Does a working console still exist somewhere in Taito's headquarters?

YS: Unfortunately, I have no pictures and no sample console either.



Only other known scan of the WOWOW, thanks to Andro from the Assembler Forum, translated by @painapple9

As far as download services for games that use satellite transmission go, with the licenses of these systems possibly coming in as early as this year, implementation is making progress. One might think it's difficult to make this new technology the standard for games in the course of this year. Still, it is a fact that these developments are continuing and 1992 is becoming a crucial bridge building year for the next generation of games. A system receiving software sent via satellite, that let's you obtain new games at home. It's been announced this was one of the capabilities of the new system proposed by JSB. The image shows a screen in experimental phase.



KISHIMOTO, Yoshihiro
(Professor)

DOB: 22 January 1959 / Birthplace: Japan / Blood Type: O

namco

- 1984 (25 years old)

Jan MSX "Mappy" programming, graphics

Oct ARC "Pac-Land" programming

- 1985 (26 years old)

Sep ARC "Baraduke" programming

- 1986 (27 years old)

Mar ARC "Toy Pop" programming

Dec FC "Family Stadium" planning, programming

- 1987 (28 years old)

Aug FC "Star Wars" programming

Dec FC "Family Stadium'87" programming

- 1988 (29 years old)

Feb NES (NES) "R.B.I." programming

Mar PCE "World Stadium" programming

Dec PCE "Pac-Land" programming

- 1989 (30 years old)

Apr FC "Famista '89" programming

Dec FC "Famista '90" programming

- 1990 (31 years old)

Dec FC "Famista '91" programming

- 1991 (32 years old)

Jan PCE "World Stadium'91" programming

Dec FC "Famista '92" programming

- 1992 (33 years old)

Feb SFC "Super Famista" director

Oct SNES "Super Batter Up" programming

Dec SFC "Super Oozumou - Nessen Daiichiban" director

Dec FC "Famista '93" programming

- 1993 (34 years old)

Apr SFC "Super Famista 2" director

Sep SFC "Prime Goal" director

Dec FC "Famista '94" programming

- 1994 (35 years old)

Mar SFC "Super Famista 3" programming

Jun SFC "Prime Goal 2" director

- 1995 (36 years old)

Mar SFC "Super Famista 4" programming

Jun SFC "Prime Goal 3" director

- 1996 (37 years old)

Mar SFC "Super Famista 5" programming

Oct SFC "Super Family Gelände" director

- 1997 (38 years old)

Dec N64 "Famista64" director

- 1999 (40 years old)

Apr WS "Tekken Card Challenge" director / planning

Via i-Mode, "Kosodate Quiz My Angel" dir. / plan.

- 2000 (41 years old)

Oct GBC "Seme COM Dungeon: Drururuaga" director



Drururuaga on GBC was an interesting rogue-like take on Namco's The Tower of Druaga



- 2001 (42 years old)

Dec PS2 "Se-Pa 2001" planning assistant

- 2002 (43 years old)

Mar PS2 "Teitoku no Ketsudan IV" support

- 2003 (44 years old)

Mar Xbox "Crimson Sea" producer

Apr PS2 "Naval Ops: Warship Gunner 2" US producer

Jun PC "Sangokushi Gekiten" (typing tutor) producer

Jun PS2 "Dynasty Tactics 2" US, EU, Korean producer

- 2004 (45 years old)

Mar PS2 "Naval Ops: Commander" US producer

- 2005 (46 years old)

Aug PSP "Sangokushi V" Taiwan vers. producer

Oct PSP "Sangokushi VI" producer

Dec PSP "Sangokushi VI" Taiwan vers. producer

Dec X360 "DW 4 Special" dir. (Koei's first X360 title)

Dec PSP "Nobunaga no Yabou: Shouseiroku" producer

- 2006 (47 years old)

Feb Xbox360 "Dynasty Warriors 4 Empires" director

Feb PSP "Sangokushi VII" producer

Mar Xbox360 "Dynasty Warriors 4 Empires" US/EU dir.

Mar PSP "Nobunaga no Yabou: Reppuuden" producer

Jun PSP "Gitaroo Man Live!" (conversion) producer

Jun PSP "Gitaroo Man Live!" Korea, US, EU producer

Aug PSP "Winning Post 6 2006" producer

Aug PSP "Taikou Risshiden IV" (conversion) producer

Sep DS/PSP "Dynasty Warriors Mahjong" (conv.) producer

- 2007 (48 years old)

Mar PSP "Sangokushi VIII" producer

Jul NDS "Dynasty Warriors: Fighter's Battle" US/EU/Kor prod.

- 2008 (49 years old)

Mar Wii "Opoona" US/EU vers. producer (**below**)

Mar NDS "Okashi Navy DS" (utility) director

Sep PSP "Neo Angelique Special" (romance game) director

Dec - Participated in the "multi one-segment on-site verification test at the Sapporo underground shopping centre," one of the ubiquitous zone projects led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs

- 2009 (50 years old)

Sep Mobile visual novel "Love Summit" (romance) director

- 2010 (51 years old)

March - Sengoku event "Sengoku Rakuichi Rakuza" (stage, product sales, exhibition) director; 12'000 people admitted over two days



Will you pick up a Tea?

Yes
No

Interview with Professor Yoshihiro KISHIMOTO

25 September 2013, Hachioji Campus, Tokyo University / Duration: 2h 53m

After launching my Kickstarter campaign for *The Untold History of Japanese Game Developers*, I was approached by several developers interested in being interviewed. In the case of Professor Kishimoto, formerly of Namco, his student Takahiro Hori contacted me and acted as liaison; a third year student at Tokyo University of Technology, he had a keen interest in the history of Japanese games.

As with most interviewees, I sent questions before hand. Professor Kishimoto kindly gave preliminary answers to these questions, which have been woven into the main interview, alongside in-person elaborations. Collectively we arranged a day for the interview and, given the campus' location, reaching it was quite the adventure, as myself and my photographer navigated the greater Tokyo bus routes. We arrived in plenty of time, to be greeted by Mr Hori who ushered us into the university and the professor's office. The walls were adorned with maps and posters of an academic nature; a shelf held various publications related to Japanese games history alongside Namco-themed mementos.

As soon as we were seated Professor Kishimoto began sharing his inside knowledge of Namco - including a valuable world exclusive: a list of staff credits for early Namco arcade games. My hope is that you will cut this page out and use it to fill in the blanks on websites such as Wikipedia, MobyGames, and anywhere else appropriate.

YK: If you're interested in the history of Namco, the *old* history, then I've something *very* rare to show you.

There's a list of people that made games from the time of *Gee Bee*,⁴⁶⁸ that's when Namco started its first videogames, to the time that I come in, when I made *Pac-Land*. But this list cannot be disclosed to the public in Japan. <intense laughter>

JS: Oh really?! And outside Japan?

YK: If I were to write a book myself, in Japan, and if I were to include that list, then when Namco checks the content, Namco will probably say: "Remove this list." <laughs> So I cannot really make it public. But I want to have it kept somewhere, in the UK or somewhere.

JS: I'm honoured to have this responsibility. I'm not beholden to anyone. You can tell me anything.

YK: I forgot to bring that list today, actually! <laughs>

JS: You can email it. I've also brought a gift.

YK: <English> Oh, thank you!

JS: I wanted something that had special meaning, but would be distinctly British. <gives *Pac-Land* on C64>

YK: <English> Thank you very much. <Japanese> May I open it? <surprise> Oooh! This is Commodore's version?

JS: Yes, it's an adaptation of the arcade version.

YK: <opens box> The Commodore version came on tape! <jokingly mimes turning the tape reel by hand - everyone laughs> This is great! I did not know about this. Wonderful!

JS: I also brought a small gift for Mr Hori, who helped organise today. <hands to student>

YK: <peeks at student gift> Oh, what did you get?

<casual chitchat, everyone laughing, eating snacks>

YK: <looking at screens on back of box> It looks to be a faithful representation or replication.⁴⁶⁹

JS: It's closer to the arcade version than the Famicom port.

YK: The Famicom version is not so good. <laughs>

JS: Nico, when did you want to take photos?

YK: Let's have a picture taken altogether. Where should we face? And what should be the background...

<talking about where to take photo - student uses our cameras - we joke around whether to say cheese, peace, or peas, since they all sound similar in English - laughter>

YK: So, what are your questions?

JS: I sent these via email, and you answered them, so we can elaborate as we go. I like to start with a nostalgic question. What was the first videogame you recall seeing?

YK: The very first game I played was Pong, in a bowling alley, when I was a student in junior high school. In Japan bowling alleys were popular, and in the corner of the bowling alley there would be a games section, and I played Pong for the first time there. From that point on, even in those days, it was played for 100 yen.⁴⁷⁰ As for when I wanted to join the games industry, when I was a university student I was studying programming. At this time I played Space Invaders and Galaxian at game centres, but I still did not think I actually wanted to make games yet. The feeling of wanting to make games came around the time of having a job interview with Namco.

JS: Which languages did you study?

YK: I studied Cobol and Fortran,^{[471](#)} among others. At that time it was still rare for universities to teach programming; in Japan there were only a few universities where you could study programming.

V_number	Title	Announced	Planning	Hardware	Programming	Sound	H S
V-1	Gee Bee	1978	Toru IWATANI	Shigeichi ISHIMURA (1)	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	-	-
V-1	Bomb Bee	1979	Toru IWATANI	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shouichi FUKATANI (2)	-	-
V-1(rev)	SOS	1979	[external]	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shouichi FUKATANI	-	-
V-1(rev)	Navarone	1979	Shigeru YOKOYAMA	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shuichi NAKATOME	-	-
V-1(rev)	Kaitei Takara Sagashi	1979	[external]	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shuichi NAKATOME	-	-
V-1(rev)	Cutie Q	1979	Toru IWATANI · Shigeru YOKOYAMA	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shouichi FUKATANI	-	-
V-1(rev)	Warp & Warp	1981	Shinichirou OKAMOTO	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shouichi FUKATANI	Nobuyuki OHNOGI	-
V-2	Galaxian	1979	Kazunori SAWANO	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Kouichi TASHIRO	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	-
V-2(rev)	King & Balloon	1980	Kazunori SAWANO · Shigeru YOKOYAMA	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shouichi FUKATANI	-	-
V-3	Pac-Man	1980	Toru IWATANI	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shigeo FUNAKI	Shigeichi ISHIMURA · Toshio KAI	↓ or "a wa
V-3(rev)	Ms.Pac-Man	1983	Bally Midway	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Shigeo FUNAKI	-	-
V-4	Rally X	1980	Hirohito ITO	Kouichi TASHIRO	Kazuo KUROSU	Toshio KAI	-
V-4(rev)	New Rally X	1981	Shigeru YOKOYAMA	Kouichi TASHIRO	Kazuo KUROSU	Nobuyuki OHNOGI	-

V-5	Mini Golf	Unreleased	Shinichirou OKAMOTO	Tohru OGAWA	Tohru OGAWA	-	-
SBO(rev)	Tank Battalion	1980	Shinichirou OKAMOTO	Atari / Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Kazukuni HIRAOKA (3)	-	-
V-6	Pole Position	1982	Kazunori SAWANO・Shinichirou OKAMOTO	Kouichi TASHIRO	Kouichi TASHIRO	Nobuyuki OHNOGI・Yuriko KEINO (4)	-
V-7	Galaga	1981	Shigeru YOKOYAMA	Tohru OGAWA	Tohru OGAWA	Nobuyuki OHNOGI	-
V-8	Dig Dug	1982	Masahisa IKEGAMI	Shigeichi ISHIMURA	Toshio SAKAI・Shouichi FUKATANI	Yuriko KEINO	-
V-9	Bosconian	1981	Seiichi SATOU	Tohru OGAWA (Rally X)	Kazuo KUROSU	Nobuyuki OHNOGI	-
V-10	Xevious	1982	Masahisa IKEGAMI・Hiroshi ONO (5)・Seiichi SATOU・Shinichirou OKAMOTO	Shigeru SATOU	Masanobu ENDOU	Yuriko KEINO	-
V-11orV-11B	Super Pac-Man	1982	Yasunori YAMASHITA	Tohru OGAWA	Shouichi FUKATANI	Yuriko KEINO	-
V-12	Stargate	Cancelled	Shinichirou OKAMOTO	Tohru OGAWA	Shouichi FUKATANI	-	-
V-13	Grand Slam	Cancelled	Seiichi SATOU	Tohru OGAWA	Shouichi FUKATANI	-	-
V-14	Mappy	1983	Hideharu SATOU	Tohru OGAWA・Shigeru SATOU	Kazuo KUROSU	Nobuyuki OHNOGI	-
V-15	Libble Rabble	1983	Toru IWATANI・Seiichi SATOU	Tohru OGAWA	Kazuo KUROSU	Nobuyuki OHNOGI	-
V-16	Phozon	1983	Yasunori YAMASHITA	Shigeru SATOU	Hiroki AOYAGI	Yuriko KEINO	-
			Shinichirou	Shigeru	Shinichi		

V-17	Gaplus	1984	OKAMOTO · Hajime NAKATANI	SATOU · Akira OHKUBO	KOJIMA (deceased)	Junko OZAWA	-
V-18	Pac-Land	1984	Seiichi SATOU · Tsukasa NEGORO	Tohru OGAWA · Shigeru SATOU	Yoshihiro KISHIMOTO	Yuriko KEINO	C
V-19	Olympic	Cancelled	Hideharu SATOU	Tohru OGAWA · Shigeru SATOU	Hiroki KOREEDA	-	-
V-20orV11(rev)	Pac & Pal	1983	Yasunori YAMASHITA	Tohru OGAWA	Nobuhiro GOTOU	Yuriko KEINO	-
V-21	(3D object)	-	Shinichirou OKAMOTO	-	-	-	-
V-22	Dragon Buster	1984	Hideharu SATOU	-	Hiroki KOREEDA	Yuriko KEINO	C
V-23	Pole Position II	-	Shinichirou OKAMOTO	Kouichi TASHIRO	Kouichi TASHIRO	Nobuyuki OHNOGI · Yuriko KEINO	-

Names follow the English naming order (First, LAST), with the family name capitalised

- (1) Some places incorrectly romanise 繁 as Shigekazu Ishimura
- (2) Passed away 1985
- (3) Mysteriously very little online, apart from multiple patents attributed to him via SNK, and a brief mention in the "Critical Issues in Electronic Media" book, describing him as general manager of the computer graphics department at Namco
- (4) Maiden name Natsume
- (5) AKA: Mr.Dotman http://lalabitmarket.channel.or.jp/feature/imas_dot/

JS: Cobol and Fortran - this was on large mainframes?

YK: Uh-huh, mainframes. It was a huge computer, like this. *<gestures with hands>* And there were big tapes on the reels, circulating or rotating. *Ga-cha ga-cha ga-cha!* *<mimes reel movement>*⁴⁷² So it was like there was only one computer at the university.

JS: Right! It must have had a time-share system, where everyone used it concurrently.⁴⁷³
Describe joining Namco.

YK: Since I studied programming I wanted to get a job at a company where I would be using it. Typically that would be in the accounting section. That was the time at Japanese companies when all the accounting previously done on paper was shifting to computers. So I tried for job interviews at various companies in various industries, like banks, manufacturers, apparel, distribution, and I wanted to work in the programming section at one of them. I was not particularly looking to join the game industry.

JS: So it was almost an accident.

YK: Yes! So when I was a university student I would play games like Galaxian, in the arcade, but I didn't think that I wanted to make games. I happened to find the name Namco in a book containing job ads. But Namco wasn't famous then at all, because it was way before Famicom. When it started selling Famicom games, that's when "Namco" became a name that everyone recognised. Before that, Namco was only making arcade games, so it was only known by a few groups of young people. But when I saw the name in that book, with the want ads, I thought, "Oh, this is the company that makes Galaxian, which I used to play. Maybe I should just go and give it a try?"

At that time I was living in Kyoto, and I came to Tokyo for an interview with Casio, which is known for its calculators. So I came all the way to Tokyo to have an interview with Casio, but I thought it would be a waste if I only took a job interview at Casio alone. So I looked for another company, found Namco, and thought I should give it a try, because it made the games that I played.

So I went to Namco and I noticed that people were dressed in a very rough, casual way. They looked like they were having fun. They were doing demonstrations of a robot - and robots were quite popular back in those days. The demonstration involved a robot getting out of a maze. So that demonstration was really fun too.

At that time Namco was still only making arcade games, but the company was becoming really big and they wanted programmers. As I mentioned earlier, there were not that many universities that had programming courses. So there were four other college graduates who joined Namco the same year I did, as programmers. But actually I was the only one who had studied programming!

JS: The four other programmers were self taught?

YK: They learned after they joined the company! *<intense laughter>* Like I was saying, there weren't that many universities, there were only very few universities that gave programming as education courses.

JS: Namco provided programming courses for employees?

YK: Yes, they did. *<English>* Maybe for half a year? *<Japanese>* You can become somewhat functional after you work at it for six months.

JS: Did you program in assembly? Was it on a PC-9801?

YK: I can only write in assembler! *<laughs>* The MSX used Z80, Pac-Land was 6809, and the Famicom was 6502 assembly. NEC's PC-98 was not used. Development at Namco was done on Hewlett-Packard machines.

JS: Your first game was converting Mappy from arcades to MSX1, in 1984?^{[474](#)}

YK: Rather than convert it, I made the game [from scratch] by looking at the original paper

specifications. Since I did not see the arcade version much, when comparing the two versions after completion, there were parts that were quite different! *<laughs>*

JS: Was it easier just to start afresh?

YK: Nowadays with C++ you can convert it as it is, right away. But back in those days, the programming language was assembler, so if the CPU is different then you have to start from scratch. So what I did was, I looked at the schematics for Mappy, and I did it exactly the same. At the time I didn't really look at the arcade version of Mappy - now that I think about it in hindsight, it makes me wonder why I didn't. So after it was completed I went and played the arcade version of Mappy and came to realise it was actually somewhat different.^{[475](#)}



JS: Who developed the original arcade Mappy?

YK: The planner was Satou-san, one year my senior. *<spells name>* The sound programmer was Ohnogi-san, two years my senior.^{[476](#)} He made the music for Mappy. *<spells out surname>*



Photo of a 64100A kindly supplied by Jon Johnston of the HP Computer Museum, Australia. The slot to the right of the keyboard is the PROM programmer. www.hpmuseum.net

JS: There are few records on who created arcade games.

YK: Hmm, hmm. *<nods>* That's exactly what I want to make sure of - that it's kept on record.

JS: Memories fade, papers are lost, it becomes difficult.

YK: Yes, it's very important.

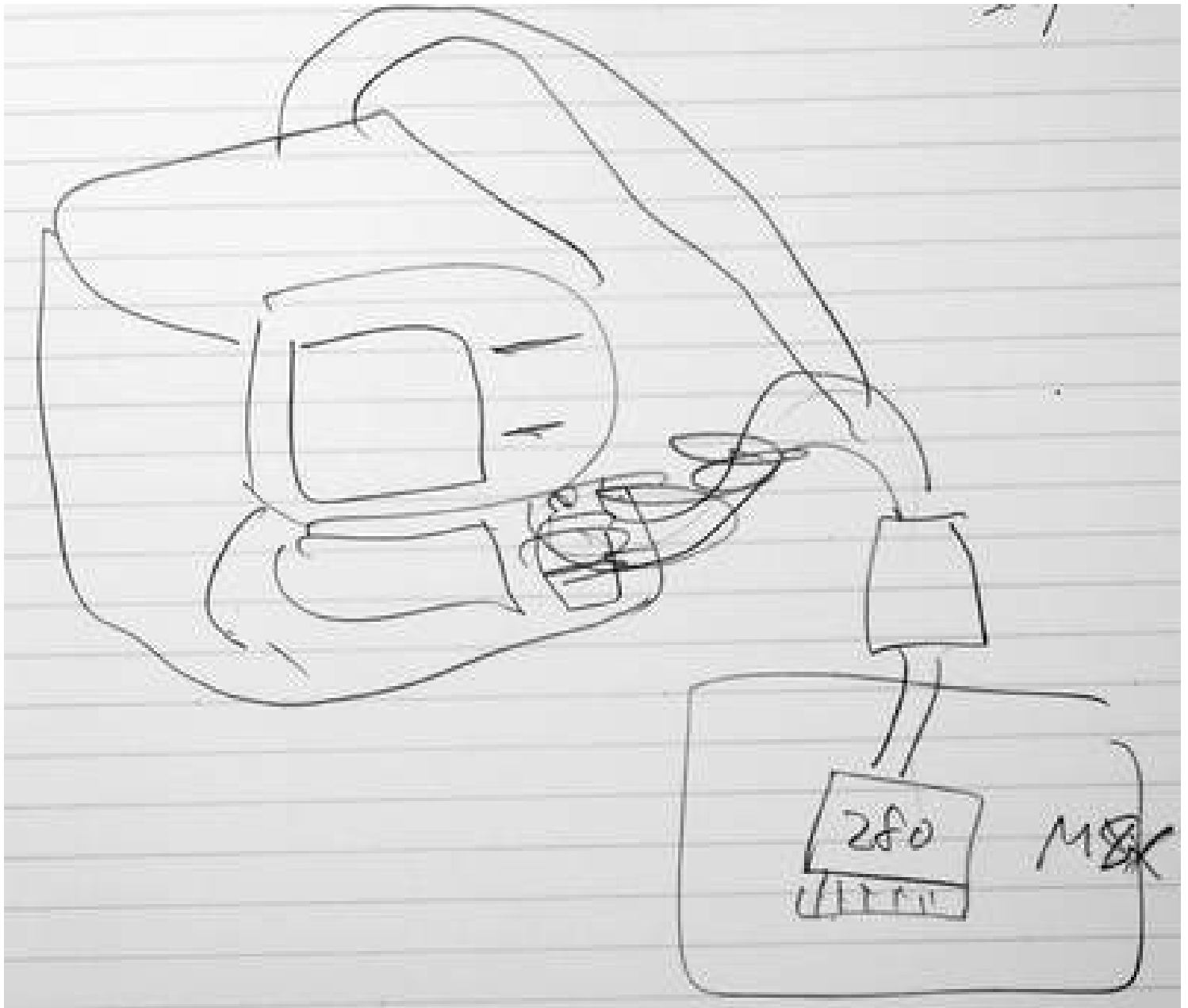
JS: You mentioned Hewlett-Packard. Which model? I spoke with a Konami programmer⁴⁷⁷ and he said it could be switched into MSX mode to simulate the machine.

YK: *<during question being asked>* It was 64000! *<after question>* Now that I think about it, yes it did. I used that machine that way. The MSX used the Z80 CPU as I recall, and I would remove the CPU chip, insert it into the HP emulation system, and test out the program. So there was an emulator for the Z80, and then there was another emulator for the 6809, which

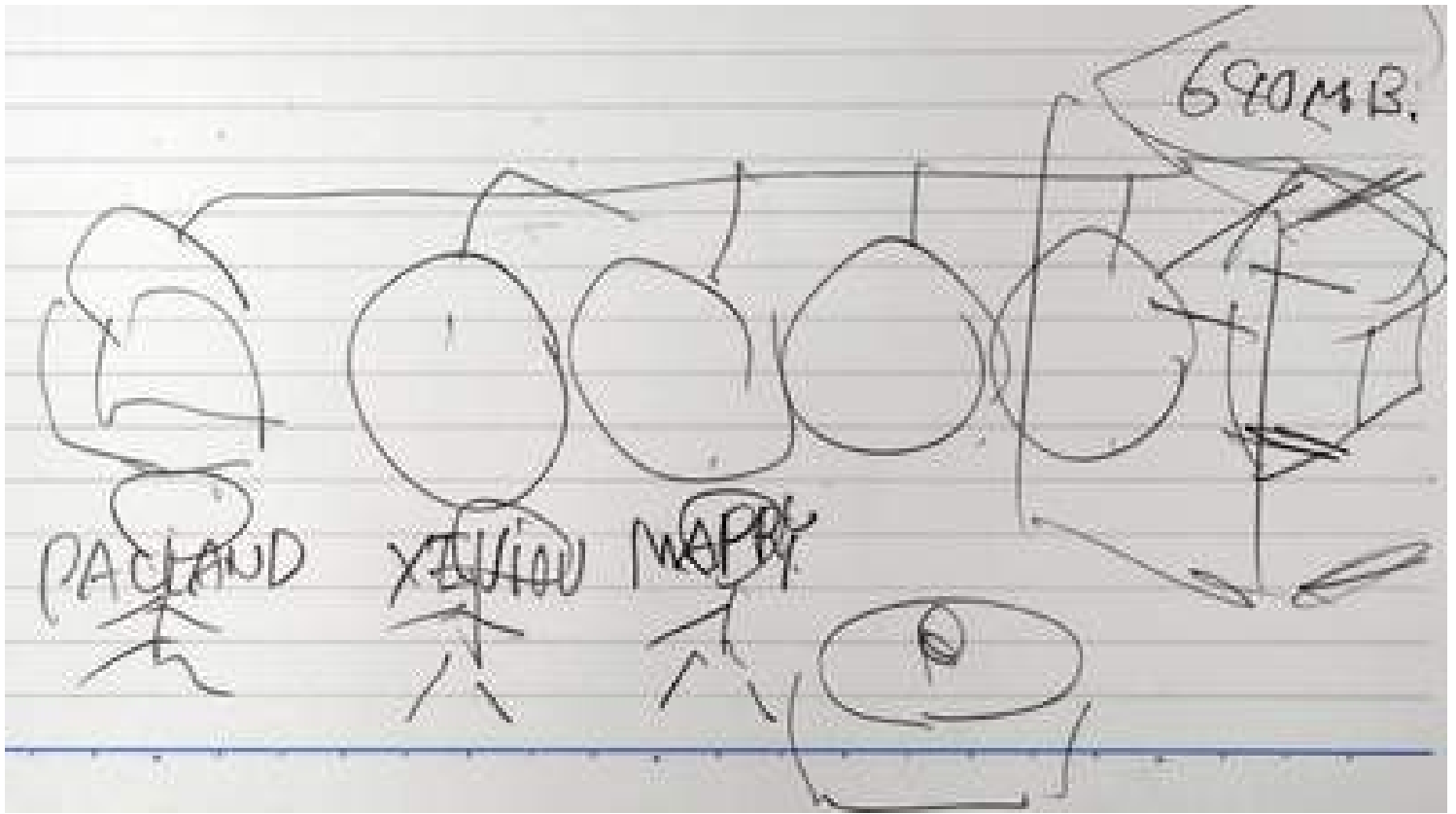
you would plug into the HP computer. Then you would connect that to the MSX.^{[478](#)}

JS: Could you sketch the set-up?

YK: I think there was an image of the HP64000 somewhere around here... *<searches>* One moment... *<flips through book>* How nostalgic - here, here, here. *<taps page>* This is it. So that's what the main body looked like. *<shows large photo of computer>* There's the keyboard, and it was all housed in one unit. And there was a ROM writer here. *<gestures to slot beside keyboard>* You take that out, and there's a cable running from here and then there's something like this... So the emulator for the Z80 was inserted in the space where the CPU was taken out in the MSX.^{[479](#)}



This is how the HP computer was connected to other hardware



Taking turns at Namco to program code

JS: So an office full of these...

YK: Hmm! *<nods>* Here and here and here! *<gestures with hands a row of computers>* This is how it looked, kind of. *<sketches office>*

JS: I can image the tangle of cables, all hooked up.

YK: *<looks at sketch of HP64000>* Maybe this is wrong... Maybe the cable came from behind, like this. So I think this is the accurate or true picture of what it looks like. This end here is where it would be inserted into a CPU. *<points to CPU in sketch>* Here it says Z80.

<looking at sketch showing computers hooked up> Amazing. I would really like to find photos like this! *<intense laughter>* So nostalgic. At that time, one unit of this computer was 2 million yen.

JS: That's expensive now; when you factor inflation...

YK: I remember this very well. There were five units of this console, all lined up. And there was a hard disk drive here. *<sketches>* It was placed in what was called a "clean room"⁴⁸⁰ - it was covered with transparent sheets, so that no dust would get in. The hard disk inside was about the size of a curling stone, in the sport of curling you throw those big stones, it was as big as one of those. *<gestures>* But the memory capacity was only 640 megabytes! *<intense laughter>* I remember this so clearly!

JS: <Japanese> Six hundred and forty megabytes?

YK: Right! *<intense laughter>*

JS: My camera has a piece of plastic the size of a postage stamp, and it holds 64 gigabytes!

YK: So using this hard disk we would develop five games in parallel, or at the same time.
<writes the names> So for instance somebody would be working on Pac-Land, and next to him somebody else would be working on Xevious, and then next to him there'd be Mappy.

JS: So you'd be sitting here, *<points to Pac-Land>* and Mr Endou would be sitting here... *<points to Xevious>*

YK: Yes, Endou-san was sitting here, and Ono-san⁴⁸¹ would be here, so we were all working on the programming. Back then one person would work on programming.

JS: Today it's more like teams of 20 programmers.

YK: *<intense laughter>* Yes, it's so different now.

JS: Can you draw an office sketch? *<shows other maps>*

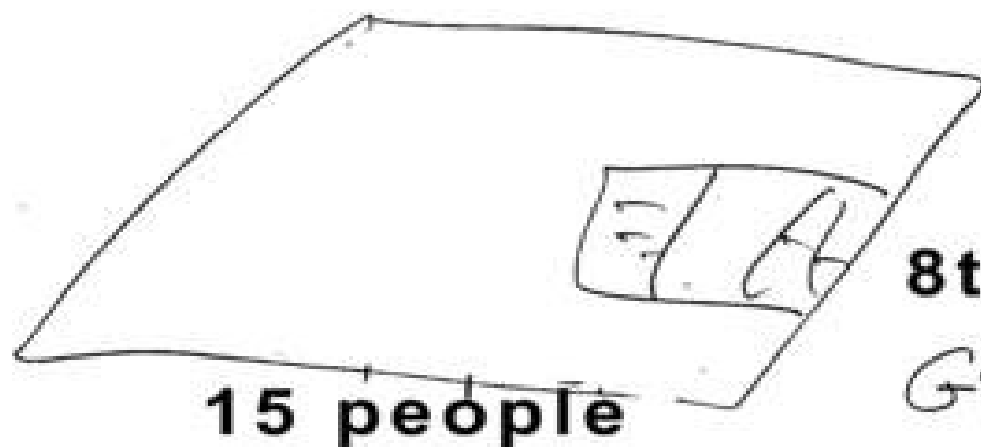
YK: Oh, this is amazing! *<looks through book - finds blank page>* Which year should I pick...? How about 1984. So that's 8th floor, 7th floor... And 6th floor. Game design was... Sorry, game planners were on the 8th floor of a particular building. Programmers and hardware engineers were on the 7th floor.

JS: Separate floors? Wouldn't that make communication between planners and programmers difficult?

YK: They didn't get along! *<laughs>* And this was the room where they had the HP64000 units, it was the "computer room". Hmm... *<whispers>* I'm trying to remember how it was laid out. There were stairs here. *<draws stairwell middle rightside>* Those were the days where there was no security card, so it wasn't like you swiped a card as you entered. *<laughs>* There's a little button or something, on the top of the door, and you would have to press it to enter. This building was the kind of building where anyone could just walk in. This computer room, I remember this clearly, this had a very special door, with a special locking system. You had to press the button to open the door. Then here was the hard disk I was talking about earlier, and there was a series of HP64000 units, the machines, lined up here. *<sketches>*

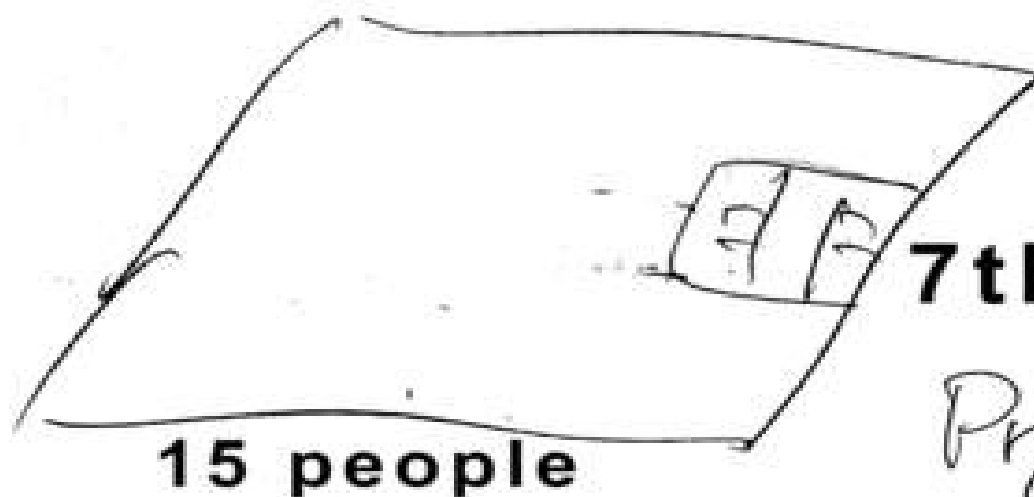
When I joined the company there was only one of these systems, [with stations allowing up to five people to work simultaneously]. And then four new people joined the company. So if one of the *sempai*, someone who had been working at the company for longer, was using one of the five stations, we had to wait at the back of the room for them to finish. And then when a *sempai* would finish or maybe decide to take a break and leave the room, one of us would sit and work on the computer. *<taps fingers as if typing>* And then sometime later the company bought another system, which added five more stations, so everyone could work at

the same time. <*laughs*>



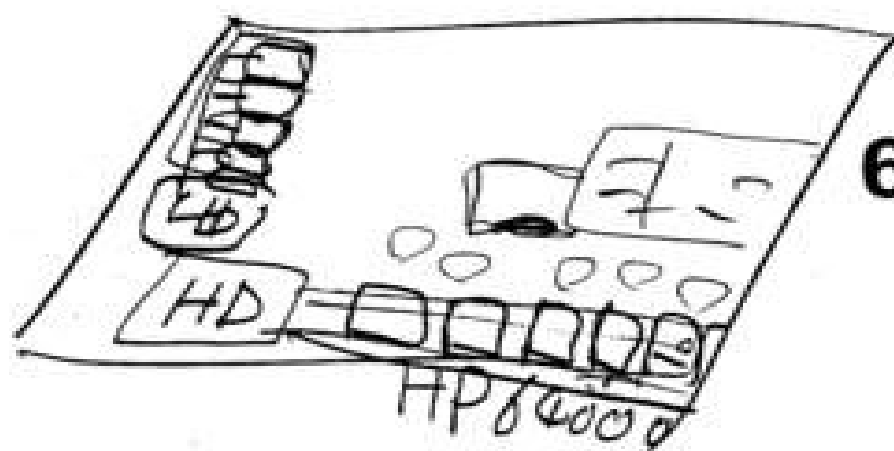
8th Floor

GP



7th Floor

Prq HE



6th Floor

HP64000

1982.6 ~ 1985.6 Omori 3 years
1984 NAMCO

JS: I never imagined there'd be a PC shortage at Namco! Obviously Namco doesn't talk about this, but I like to picture in my mind the environment games were made in.

YK: I think there were about... Maybe 15 people on each of the floors?

JS: But if programmers were on the 7th floor, and computers were on the 6th floor, they would have to travel between floors to do coding?

YK: Hmm, *<nods>* that's right. That's how we were doing it. We would work on the 6th floor and when we wanted to take a break, we'd go up to the 7th floor. I think back in those days we were still drawing out flow charts for programming.⁴⁸² So I think we would draw the flow charts on the 7th floor, and bring them down to the 6th floor to program with. This building was in Ohmori. *<pauses to reflect>* We were there in Ohmori from June of 1982, until June of 1985. *<English>* So we were there for three years. So after that a new building was built in a place called Yaguchi.⁴⁸³ So the development [department] moved, relocated to the new building. But before that, these two floors were completely devoted to the development team.

JS: Any funny stories you can share?

YK: This is something I remember very well too. Back then, the air conditioning systems were not very good. There was only one air conditioning unit for every two floors. They had two ducts going this way and that way. *<gestures with hands>* We were on the 7th floor, but we found it too hot, so we blocked the duct which brought the air up to the 8th floor! *<intense laughter>*

JS: I like where this is going! *<laughs>*

YK: The planners in those days would write the schematics on a piece of paper, using a pencil. The 8th floor is the very top floor of that building. The 8th floor was incredibly hot, because the duct was blocked on the 7th floor. Everyone had a towel wrapped around their neck, *<mimes draping a towel>* but when you're sweaty, and especially if your hands are sweaty, *<laughs>* you can't really draw properly, or write properly. *<laughs - gestures as if hands are stuck to paper, tries to shake it off>* I remember that vividly, that's how it was in the summer!

<everyone laughs for a time>

JS: You mentioned joining in 1982, but Mappy for the MSX was 1984. What happened in the interim?

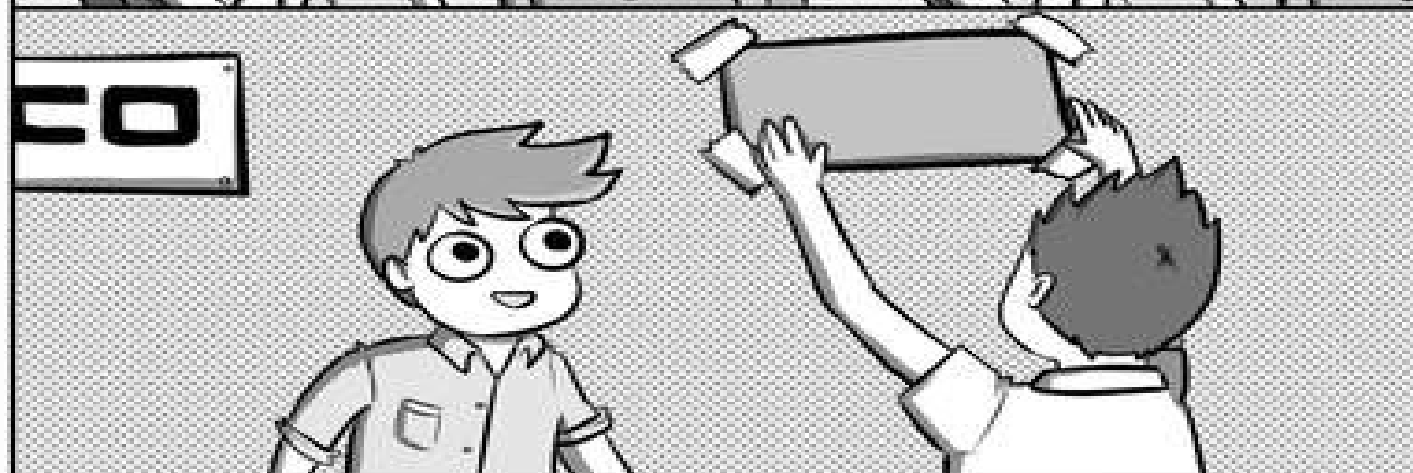
YK: I was working on Pac-Land, but initially when I joined Namco in April, I went through sales training from April to July, where they'd put me in different locations throughout Japan. Then after the training I was making a computer for about six months, after I was assigned to the division.

JS: Making a computer - like a prototype?

YK: What I was first given was a CPU and eight pieces of DRAM, and the CPU was 6809. I was given those and I was told, please make a computer out of these. And I was also told about other things you need to make a computer - like IC chips and LSI.⁴⁸⁴ All the tools are here, please feel free to use them as you like. So the assignment or expectation was that all the college graduates who recently joined the company were to make a computer, his or her own computer, one unit per person.

JS: Like a challenge - a test of your computer knowledge?

YK: A challenge! I was into programming, so I had no knowledge about electronic technology. So even though I was given these things I did not know what to do with them. So I had to ask around among my seniors, who were already working in the company, to find out how to make it! *<intense laughter>* So that was the first training.



JS: Right in the deep end.

<everyone laughs>

YK: We were told, if there's anything you don't understand just ask your seniors. Actually, in hindsight, I'm impressed I was able to make a computer that worked! <laughs> It took a lot of effort to get up to the point where the computer actually functioned. After that I made a reverse assembler, but that was easy! <laughs> Because I was a programmer! <laughs> So you write the program on your own, and then you translate it into machine language. To make sure that it works on the CPU. Assembly was the only thing that was available back then. <laughs>

JS: Your nickname was Kissy - please elaborate.

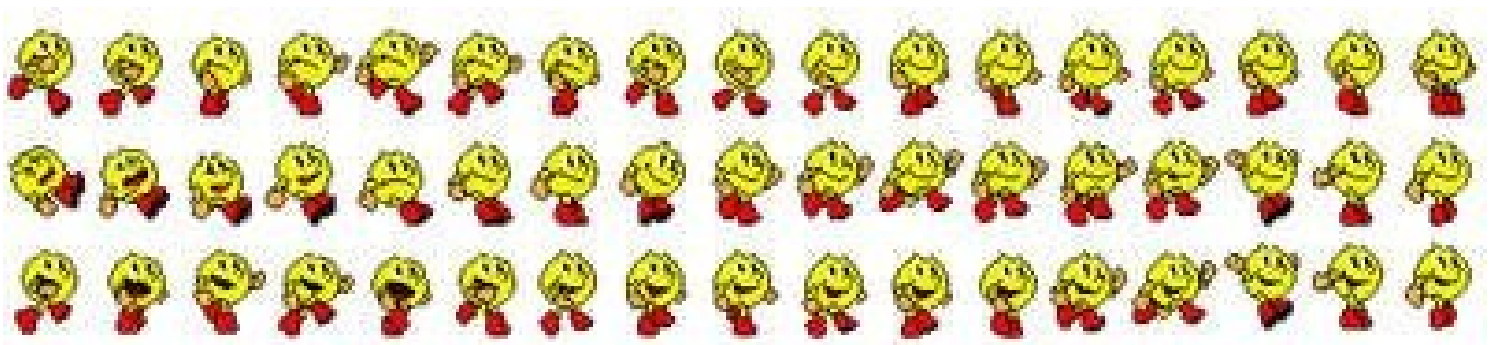
YK: My family name is Kishimoto, so my nickname was "Kishy", or Kissy. As for the reason why we used nicknames, at that time there was no such thing as the end credits for staff. For example there were end credits for movies, for staff, but not for games. This was the era before there were even staff credits, so instead we'd do something like make it so that when you enter "KISSY" onto the high-score screen, the characters would light up.

The names of people on development teams were kept secret by the company so they wouldn't be lured away by competitors. That's why they used nicknames. When I joined the company, which was 1982, my supervisor told me it was kept a secret, *a company secret*, as to who was working on or who created which games. Because if that was known then rival companies would come and headhunt you, and take you away from your company, if they discovered that you made fun or interesting games.

JS: Please describe the development of Pac-Land. Was it difficult working with pre-existing characters?

YK: The difficult thing about Pac-Land was that I was first shown the American cartoon or animation,^{[485](#)} and I was told to make a game based on that animation. Pac-Man is Namco's creation, but the animation was a bit different - I was told I had to make the game based on this American cartoon version.

So games in Japan back then only had like two patterns - two frames of animation. But with so few patterns you can't really have a proper sense of animation. Since Pac-Land was made with characters from the hugely popular American animation of Pac-Man, we wanted to have beautiful backgrounds and characters that moved as smoothly as in the animation. So even though game characters would only have two or three walking animation patterns, for Pac-Man's spin-off Pac-Land we had 16 patterns, ranging from walking to jogging to running at full speed! So we had different sets of patterns for those movements - and there were quite a few patterns for the walking animation alone.^{[486](#)}



JS: <quickly calculates> 16 patterns for animation would be between 6x and 8x the norm for that period.^{[487](#)}

YK: Actually... In total, altogether, there must have been around 24 patterns.

JS: I'll find a sprite sheet and count them.^{[488](#)} What did you think of the Famicom port of Pac-Land?

YK: I didn't work on the Famicom version, but it seems like it didn't turn out very well. I did do the PC Engine version, which I think turned out quite well.



JS: Did you have other inspirations, such as games? What I find interesting is it came out in 1984, meaning it's part of a collective of scrolling platformers which predate Super Mario Bros.,⁴⁸⁹ and so contributes to the genre template...

YK: *<immediate answer>* The number one influence was Konami's Hyper Olympic.⁴⁹⁰ *<begins tapping table rapidly, mimicking the game's controls>* DASH - DASH!

JS: Ah yes, Track & Field. It broke many controllers...

YK: Uh-huh! *<nods - laughs>* So I took that as a reference. So rather than prior games, in which you just press the joystick left or right in order to move the character left or right, *<tapping table>* you have a left button and a right button, and the faster you tap the buttons, the faster you move left or right. *<taps faster>* It was an idea I wanted to try out.

JS: Do you feel Super Mario Bros. perhaps took influence from Pac-Land?

YK: I heard this from somebody else, but I heard that Miyamoto-san said that was the case. Iwatani-san was saying that; Iwatani-san the creator of Pac-Man. According to him, Miyamoto-san actually said that, but then again, you cannot really tell if that was really the truth!

<everyone laughs>

JS: I'm fascinated by genre precedents. It looked better than the TV animation, because you don't see parallax backgrounds like that in cartoons. It added depth.

YK: We wanted to make it look like an animated cartoon, so we created new hardware in order to enable two-layer scrolling. Pac-Land was [one of the earliest games] where the screen would scroll in two different ways.⁴⁹¹

JS: I wanted to ask about the hardware. The screen is curved like a fisheye lens, so the image curves and affects the perspective.

YK: *<laughs>* Indeed, that's true. In the old games it would appear to drop down. There was no flat screen back then, that was the only thing available - with a curve to it.⁴⁹² Maybe it's similar to a picture which is on folded sheets of paper, to give a sense of depth? *<laughs>*

JS: It's especially notable in Pac-Land. I've read that Baraduke used the same hardware as Pac-Land - did it share any of the code or "game engine" at all?

YK: There was no such thing as an "engine" at that time. *<laughs>* I was the programmer on both, but I made them from scratch - I programmed them by myself.

John, I want you to mention the names of the staff.⁴⁹³ Pac-Land's planner was Negoro-kun. *<English>* His family name is Negoro.⁴⁹⁴ *<Japanese>* He did the game design for Pac-Land, and I was the programmer.⁴⁹⁵

JS: Of course, certainly. As one of your early titles, what kind of challenges did the programming present?

YK: It wasn't that difficult from a programming perspective. The hardware aspect I think was difficult.

JS: The eponymous "Namco Pac-Land" arcade board.⁴⁹⁶ New hardware was designed as needed for new games?

YK: Hmm, hmm. <nods> To use a modern day analogy, it's like you create one game for PlayStation, and then you create another game but you make the PlayStation 2 for that, and then you make yet another game, but you create the PlayStation 3 for that one.

Going back to Mappy on the MSX1, I made that in just one month. <English> One month! <Japanese> The reason is, as I mentioned earlier, we created the hardware for arcade titles every time. At one point, the hardware engineer told me to slow down. He needed more time to design the circuit board for mass production, based on the prototype hardware we had created, so he told me to wait a little while. So I asked him, how long will that take? And he said two months! So during that time I would have nothing to do. So I decided to start working on a new MSX game, and that's how I made Mappy for MSX.

JS: There's an original Pac-Land machine in Akihabara at...

YK: ...Oh, the one at Super Potato, on the 5th floor!

JS: Yes! I played through it. I'd played Pac-Land when I was younger, but I could never pass the springboards...

YK: <recognition> Hmm! <nods> That was the difficult part. The springboards were very difficult for beginners.



Pac-Land (ARC)

JS: I finally beat it. I noticed tapping the button slows your fall. It seems so easy now that I'm older.

YK: *<laughs>* When players continually missed them during location testing, they'd cock their head to the side and look shocked for a moment, but once they put another coin in we knew: "This game was going to be a hit!"

JS: Can you describe the location testing?^{[497](#)}

YK: Location testing was tremendously fun. The developers of consumer games these days, I pity them, because they don't get to see the faces of the consumers - the players who play their games. Whereas back in those days, when you made a game for arcades, you did the location testing and you were able to see the players first hand. So you would walk into a game arcade and stand by the wall, pretending that you don't have anything to do with the games, but you'd be watching. We were not supposed to talk to players.

We did location testing in Yokohama - I remember this clearly. *Pac-Land* was my first arcade game, so I was watching very closely, standing by the wall. So a young adolescent, dressed like a delinquent, or *yankee*,^{[498](#)} as we say in Japan... *<everyone laughs>*

JS: Yes, they dress in an exaggerated way!

<Professor Kishimoto described each event with flair, performing the actions of the person

being described>

YK: So this *yankee* comes over to *Pac-Land*. He sits down. He puts the coin in. *<makes swaggering gestures of putting coin in>* At first he doesn't know what to do. So he gets started. He doesn't realise that you're supposed to make a jump - so initially he taps the button and the character just falls into the pond. *<mimes falling in lake>*

On the second time, he taps again. *<slams table hard>* But the character falls in the pond again. *<splash!>*

He tries one more time, presses the button, *<light tap>* but the character just falls into the pond again.

<Pr. Kishimoto stands - look of comedic fury>

So the *yankee* hits the table *<fists go down - BAM!!>* as he gets up. *<laughs>*

<moves back, look of surprise and anxiety>

So I was watching, I was standing in the corner, thinking: "Oh shit, what would he do to me if he finds out that I'm the developer?!" *<intense laughter - sits>*

So he hits the table. *<hits table>* Gets up. *<stands>* Then he sits again. *<sits - intense laughter>* Then he puts another coin in the machine! *<elaborate hand gesture for coin placement - more laughter>*

And he was able to jump the pond next time.

Ehhh! *<theatrical brow wipe - whispers>* I was so relieved! *<intense laughter>*

So I thought then, it's difficult, but that's what makes it fun to play. That's what I thought.

<everyone laughs>



JS: An amazing story! As I mentioned, I cleared the pond only the other day, at Super Potato.

YK: <laughs>

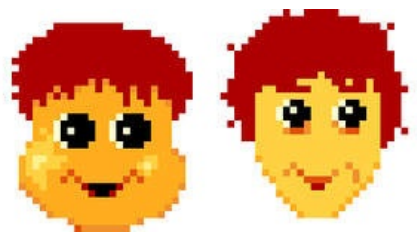
JS: After Pac-Land you made Baraduke. Your nickname, Kissy, ended up being the name of the main character.⁴⁹⁹

YK: Ah, right, right! Yes they used it, I think it's mentioned somewhere here. <flips through Namco history book>⁵⁰⁰

Player one is Kissy, which refers to myself, Kishimoto. Player two is Takky, which comes from Takahashi,⁵⁰¹ who was the planner for Baraduke. As you can see here. <points to screenshot with TAKKY in the 2P spot> Takahashi was a newcomer then, and he was practising drawing. At that time there was no visual artists as such, the planner would draw things. So he was practising. At one point he drew the face of myself and his own face, and he said he wanted to have these faces appear in the game. So I said fine.

If you continuously kill Paccets,⁵⁰² the faces appear after every 10th one. They're pictures of KISSY, myself (**left**), and TAKKY the planner. You must not kill the good Paccets!

JS: I've got screens! But isn't the Kissy character for 1P a woman?



YK: Hmm... It's a bit different from that one. The main character in the backstory was a woman. This was originally supposed to be 1UP and 2UP. <pointing to character names at top of screen> But we said, since we're still in the development process let's make it Kissy and Takky. So that's why we changed the names to our own. If it were done today, at the very final stage somebody would have checked it, and somebody would have found it, and they would have asked, "What is this?" But back in those days nobody checked, nobody said anything about it, so it got released as it was. So like with these faces, nowadays somebody would have asked why these were used. But back then nobody said anything or checked, so they got put into the product. That was a nice age back then! <laughs> The more good old days.



JS: There are also three mysteries I was hoping you could explain. There's a **Helmet & Gun**, **Bone Mountain**, and **Totem Pole** players come across while playing.^{[503](#)}

YK: They are all grave markers, indicating the places where the main character died previously. They are there to warn of dangerous locations. All three are displayed in order.

JS: How were Dempa involved with Baraduke?^{[504](#)}

YK: It's a company, the name is Dempa Shinbusha... That's the publisher of this book. With Baraduke there was no Famicom version, so Dempa Shinbusha probably didn't have anything to do with the game itself...

JS: They were credited on the X68000 adaptation.

YK: Back in those days, like I was saying with Mappy, you watched Baraduke and then would recreate it off of that. So it wasn't like there was a request to give them the source code. Whoever made Baraduke for the X68000, created it by watching and imitating the original.

JS: Some devs say that when making arcade conversions, they weren't given any materials. They'd take a camcorder to an arcade, play through, and recreate it like that...^{[505](#)}

YK: <intense laugh> Yes, that's it! Those were the days!



Baraduke has a lot of iconic sci-fi elements, including from the Alien films. It's also a rather fun and intense free-roaming 2D shmup

JS: Do you know anything about the sequel, *Bakutotsu Kijuutei: Baraduke II*?^{[506](#)}

YK: Ah! The sequel, *Baraduke II*, was a game made by Takahashi, the planner from the first game. I wasn't involved in that at all.

JS: Do you know that Namco took this main character in *Baraduke*, who was named Toby "Kissy" Masuyo, and created an elaborate backstory regarding her and other Namco characters, for *Mr. Driller*?

YK: Ahh, *Mr. Driller*! Yes, the mother of Susumu Hori-kun, the main character! <intense laughter> I forget what her first name is.

JS: I had to look it up - Toby Masuyo. According to the Baraduke.wikia.com, her nickname is Kissy because she gets drunk and likes to kiss people.^{[507](#)}

YK: Eeeeeeeh?! *<surprised laughter>*

JS: That's maybe just fan-fiction. But according to Namco she married Taizo Hori, the main character in Dig Dug, and together they had Susumu Hori.

<everyone laughs>

YK: I was quite happy! *<stifles laugh>* But I also wondered why, because that new story didn't have much to do with Baraduke - I didn't think they were related much.

JS: I bet you never envisioned her marriage to Dig Dug!

YK: *<intense laughter>* Quite true!

JS: Next was your last arcade game, Toy Pop. Please introduce it for readers.

YK: Ah, Toy Pop... Do you know Libble Rabble?⁵⁰⁸ Toy Pop uses the same arcade board as Libble Rabble. There came a point where Libble Rabble wasn't selling well, so that board had to be discarded or removed. There was a three month period and we were asked to create Toy Pop during that time.

Anyway, regarding Toy Pop, **(above)** do you know a game called Sheriff by Nintendo?⁵⁰⁹ There's a gunman in the middle. *<defines game screen in the air with hands>* And the enemies are approaching. That's the game I wanted to make, under the title Space Alamo. You land on a different planet, *<moves arms in a circular pattern>* but the evil spacemen, or aliens, would circulate or lurk around and attack you. That's the game I came up with out of the blue. *<places one hand atop the other, replicating the different floors of the Namco building>* But like I was saying earlier, the planners' division and the programmers' division did not get along.



JS: I'm sensing some friction...

YK: So the planners would say to the programmers, "Make the game exactly as we tell you to." But I didn't listen to them. So I said, "This is the game *I* want to make." And we proceeded as far as the alpha version. But they said, "This game is no fun!" and they just scrapped the idea. And what came after that was *Toy Pop*. It was like a fairytale, a cute fairytale kind of game. The target players were those who came to the arcade as couples. *Toy Pop* had a very interesting system - the two players would play the game side-by-side, and together they would use the lever and the buttons. <shows diagram in Namco book>

The pictures were really cute, so if a couple comes into the arcade, typically the girl would say, "I want to play this game."

And the guy would say, "OK, I'll play as well."

So the two would start playing the game. But it's actually a difficult game to play, so the girl would end up dying before the man does. Of course the man can help out or try to save the girl, but the girl ends up dying, so for the girl to continue playing you have to insert more money. So we expected the man to keep paying to have the girl continue playing. So we thought it would make for a lucrative game. So that was the intention behind this.

JS: Can you tell me about other unreleased games?

YK: *<reflectively>* Hmm, unreleased games... As far as the games that I was involved with are concerned, the one that I mentioned [*Space Alamo*] is the only one that I can think of. That's about all I can remember, but there were many games like that by other people. Some games were cancelled, or turned into something completely different mid-development.

So *Xevious* was the most famous back then. Originally with *Xevious* they were going to use a very realistic looking fighter plane, like the F-4. The game was supposed to be a very realistic flight game, involving the cutting edge fighters, or the most advanced weapons.

<flips through Namco book> This was before I joined the company, so this is something I heard from somebody else: the planner for that game, one day suddenly took off to travel to Africa. He resigned from the company. At that time Masanobu Endou was the programmer. And Masanobu Endou wanted to make the game into something with a sci-fi world - which is what you now see in *Xevious*. So he changed the whole thing, and that's *Xevious* as we now know it.

JS: Wow! That original *Xevious* is now lost to history...

<we take a break to enjoy some snacks>

YK: *<English>* In which part of England do you live?

JS: The south coast, Southampton. Before that it was Bournemouth. Right now I'm near Shinjuku.

YK: *<English>* For how long are you in Japan?

JS: *<Japanese>* Until November 15.

YK: *<English>* When did you arrive?

JS: *<Japanese>* 10 September.

YK: *<English>* So for two months?

JS: For 10 weeks. Lots of interviews.

YK: *<refers to All About Namco I & II books>* You should probably buy these books.

JS: These are wonderful - there's some great archive material. *<flips through book>* Ah, *Tower of Druaga*!

YK: From Namco, which games do you like, John?

JS: For older titles, I played a lot of *Mappy* on the Famicom. And I loved *Rally X* in the arcades. Obviously *Pac-Land*, too, which was amazing. [510](#)

YK: Oh, thank you! <laughs>

JS: <flips through book, notices Tank Battalion> Oh, and the adaptation of this, Tank Battalion, for the Famicom.

YK: Ehhh! For Famicom, right! On Famicom it was Battle City. So Famicom games were sold in England back then?



Evolution of baseball from left to right: Famicom PC Engine Super Famicom



N64 and GameCube

JS: It's complicated. [...] I started with a Japanese Famicom - my games came on little coloured cartridges. I moved to England when I was young, and was surprised to find NES cartridges were big and grey and ugly. Famicom exuded fun and had a more diverse library.

YK: Right, right. I've got some Famicom cartridges here. <we walk over> Here they are. This is Famista!

JS: This takes me back. Burgundy pads, pastel carts.

YK: Yes, it is beautiful.

JS: Around 1986 you moved from arcade to console development, with Famista for Famicom.⁵¹¹ Why?

YK: Because Famicom was such a hit, Namco's arcade department was split into an arcade and consumer division. Up until that point, the same department worked on both. I had been making consumer titles ever since Famista, so I moved over to the consumer department; before that there was only one development section. If you wanted to develop something for arcades you could, and the same if you wanted to make something for Famicom.⁵¹² Those were the good old days. You didn't have a supervisor telling you what to do. You could choose, whether it meant working on the Famicom or arcades.

JS: So it was your decision to work on the Famicom.

YK: Hmm, yes, largely speaking. Before I made Famista I made Toy Pop. After I was done making Toy Pop I went to the supervisor and asked what I should do next. And I was told, "There won't be work for you for some time. So you can do whatever pleases you."

At that time I had not done any programming for Famicom, so I said, "I want to make a baseball game, to be played on the Famicom."

So he said, "Well, you should do that then."

JS: It was your first taste of assembly 6502.

YK: Yes, that's correct!

JS: Let's talk Famista. You worked on it for many years, it must have special meaning.

YK: I was involved from the original Famista on Famicom, all the way until the Nintendo 64. As a programmer in the first half, and a director in the second half; it sold over 10 million copies. I like baseball, so it was nice to contribute to and increase the awareness and the appeal of professional baseball in Japan.

I touched upon this briefly, earlier. It was after Toy Pop, but the planner for Toy Pop was someone with the family name of Hyodoh.⁵¹³ This planner came from another section. It was his first time working as a planner. So his work was really slow. So I didn't have anything to do as a programmer. So everyday I spent most of the day playing Nintendo's baseball game.⁵¹⁴ I spent most of my time playing games with my colleagues. <laughs> And as we were playing, we would say things like, "This game would be more interesting if it did this instead."

Like for instance, with Nintendo's baseball game they didn't mention the names of players, and they didn't give any indication of the competence or ability of each of them. So we said it would make it more interesting to play if we made that information available. Another thing with Nintendo's baseball game, you could not play on the defence.⁵¹⁵ So we said it's better if you could play on the defence as well. So we were having these talks, chatting, and when I was done with Toy Pop, I thought I should make a baseball game on my own.

JS: Because it was updated regularly, Famista reflects improving coding skills and the

evolution of hardware.[516](#)

YK: Right. Famicom, PC Engine, Super Famicom, N64...

JS: As the programmer for many games, can you recall any secrets you hid inside?

YK: My memory isn't clear on this, but I think if you push the reset button 16 times on the original Famista, the staff credits might appear.

JS: When I return home I'll check![517](#)

YK: I don't know if it's true or not though. *<laughs>* You should try it! That's the answer I gave, but I'm not sure if it was 16 times, or 256 times! *<laughs>* But I think it was 16 times...

JS: I like to ask, because as a programmer you saw things no one else could see.[518](#)

YK: I didn't really like those kinds of things. So like with Kissy and Takky on Baraduke, I thought if you wanted to have some kind of special thing, you should put it on the forefront. Leave it out in the open. It is true that at that time it was sort of popular to plant secrets that only programmers knew about. But I didn't like that.

JS: Have you heard about the messages disgruntled coders hid in their games?

YK: I know... And there are certain things that I cannot say, even now.

JS: I ask, because there was a news story about an Atlus developed title, Erika to Satoru no Yumebouken on the Famicom,[519](#) **and a message inside. Someone discovered you could read it.**[520](#) **A crazy story about life at the company!**

YK: *<strong laughter at various points of the question>* It's just like today, with people posting things anonymously on internet forums.

<idle chitchat about the Famicom and author's first games played on it - student knocks on classroom door, has brief conversation with Pr. Kishimoto, leaves>

JS: Do your students have an interest in older games? What are their views?

YK: Not interested. There's not much interest in it.

JS: That's a shame.

YK: The reasons being, because the graphics are not as attractive, and there's no storyline... *<intense laughter>*

JS: *<incredulous>* But that's why I like older games! Pure interactivity, not weighed down by narrative. Older games look fantastic because of hand-drawn pixels - true

craftsmanship. It's sad kids today are not interested...

YK: *<laughs>* John, you're a very rare individual, because you're still young but interested in old games!

<everyone laughs>

JS: I played the old games when new. I just never stopped liking them, even when discovering newer things. I now appreciate older stuff even more. It's illogical how today consumers attribute a decreasing sense of worth to things once they exist. They live only for the anticipation of what's coming; something is most valuable before it's out.

YK: I tell the students. I explain about the history of games to the students, like starting out with arcade games, moving on to Famicom games and the Super Famicom, the PlayStation... But the students are just not interested in old games. *<laughs>*

JS: Really? How can we change this? We must indoctrinate the youth!

YK: *<intense laughter>* So you are quite rare, John, and also valuable.

JS: Over a thousand people showed an interest in this book; there *are* people who value older games.

YK: That's very good!

JS: Should we take a break? Nico can take some photos.

YK: Sure thing. Nicolas-san, you're our cameraman?

Nico: Certainly!

<we break for portrait photos - idle chitchat and joking - lots of laughter>

JS: Namco moved offices in 1985, meaning you started Star Wars in the new building.⁵²¹ Describe the day you were told about the project...

YK: I had no particular emotion. *<laughs>* It was kind of a strange era, I must say. If someone were to come up to me today and ask me to be the programmer for a Star Wars game, I'd be thrilled. *<look of surprise - WHOA!!>* But at that time I just didn't feel anything in particular. I remember that everyone said it looked like a lot of work, so they weren't too keen to work on the project. Because it didn't give the freedom to make everything or anything you wanted.

JS: Because of the Famicom's limitations?

YK: The Famicom was being used, and at that time we were still unable to produce 3D on it.

Everything from the first "Long, long time ago..." introduction text, until the final section, where the X-Wing drops a bomb, was only in 2D unfortunately.

JS: What it was like working within the framework of another's creation? What were the increased risks or rewards in developing from a franchise like Star Wars?

YK: It was just cumbersome - too much work! *<laughs>* It's also strange to think about how little awareness there was for such a popular franchise. This was the good old days, when even if a game did not have a popular license, it would still sell, so long as it was entertaining. Back in those days, just because you released a Star Wars game didn't mean that it would sell better than an *original* game.

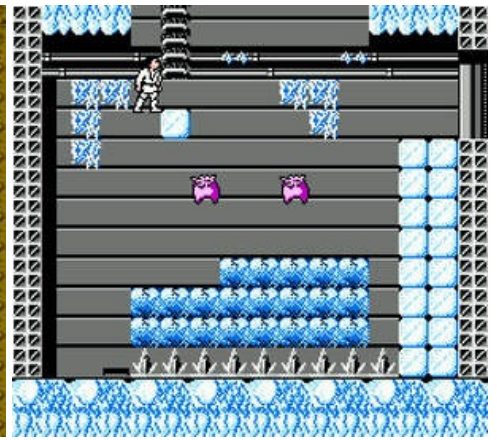
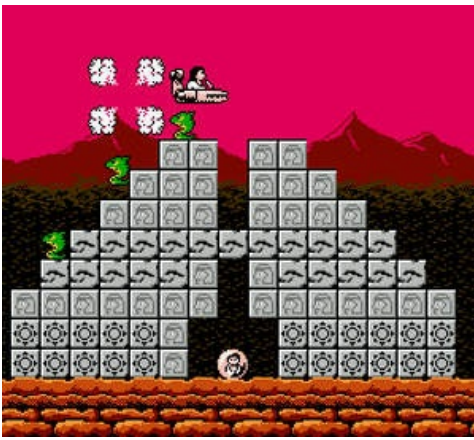
JS: But the project was difficult?

YK: To begin with it was just *impossible* to express Star Wars on the Famicom console. Like for instance at the start of the game, there's the Star Wars opening text moving towards the back, saying "Long, long time ago..." At first, a destroyer or whatever it's called, a huge ship, flies overhead. So those who watched Star Wars the movie were very much impressed with that scene, with the Star Destroyer flying over, and the title text moving upwards. *<mimics a viewer's reaction>* "Oh my! That's amazing!" But you can't replicate that on the Famicom.

Another famous scene from Star Wars the movie is, towards the end of the movie the X-Wing will fly through the narrow passageway to destroy the Death Star, but you cannot express that, you cannot replicate that on Famicom, because it doesn't do proper 3D. The planner on the game was Shinichiro Okamoto.⁵²² *<author writes it down>* The planner was Shinichiro Okamoto, and prior to this he made a space battle game in 3D for the Famicom, called Star Luster.⁵²³

JS: Did the planner create the bosses? Darth Vader turns into a scorpion, pterodactyl, and even a shark!

YK: When I was first told to work on Star Wars as programmer, my first reaction was, "What am I going to do? How can that be done?" Because it was just not possible to do it on Famicom. So I remember thinking that I was at a loss. So there was nothing else that could be done, so we came up with this idea of Darth Vader turning into a scorpion when you hit him. The planner was Shinichiro Okamoto, three years my senior. That was when Sega had their console game, Alex Kidd,⁵²⁴ which was the influence for Darth Vader turning into a scorpion. Looking back, it's a mystery why the licensor allowed us to get away with that! *<laughs>*



Star Wars (FC)



Alex Kidd (SMS)

JS: Yes, there were scorpions throughout Alex Kidd.

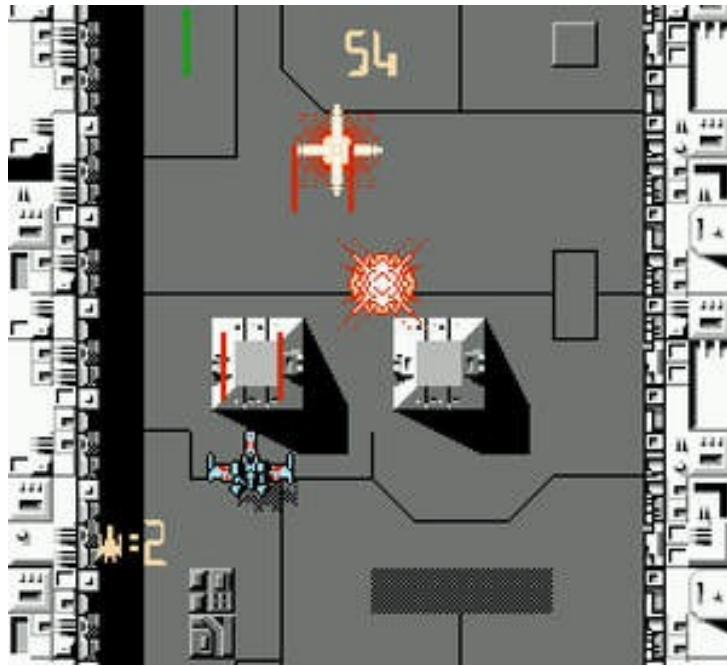
YK: Just like with Alex Kidd, the screen would move or scroll to the right, and all kinds of enemies would appear, and at the very end the boss would appear. I discussed it with Okamoto, and we felt our only option was to make Luke the main character and do it that way as a side-scrolling action game.

JS: Later on Luke also swam underwater. I get a sensation of Alex Kidd from that... *<realisation>* Star Wars also had blocks to break and a vehicle that jumped obstacles!

YK: Hm-hmm! *<nods>* Right, right, right! *<laughs... pauses>* But then, we couldn't think of any other way to make some kind of game out of it. However, Shinichiro Okamoto made Star Luster before that, it was a 3D space combat simulation game for the Famicom...

<flips through Namco book>

YK: Ah! This is Star Luster. It's in 3D. Or rather, it's a simulated 3D space game. You'd see something like the Death Star in it. So in hindsight, we should have made the game more like this. *<points to Star Luster>* [525](#)



Right: Star Wars (FC)

The Death Star trench run was a top-down 2D shmup with a tight time limit - run out of time, and it was Game Over, without the option to continue

JS: Was it affected by the available mapper chips? The sophistication of FC games increased with newer chips.

YK: They weren't really graphics chips, they just increased the memory; the chips just increased the amount of memory available for graphics.

JS: Did you know that in America they received a completely different Star Wars, developed by Lucasfilm Games, for NES.^{[526](#)} This was later also released in Japan.^{[527](#)}

YK: No, I didn't know that!

JS: It was made by the games division of LucasArts. But I preferred Namco's version because it's so strange...

YK: <laughs>

JS: The one by LucasArts stuck to the film, so I knew what to expect.^{[528](#)} Namco's version was like: "Whoa!? What the heck was that?" <further praise>

YK: <intense laughter throughout author's explanation>

JS: Do you know how Namco acquired the license for it?

YK: I don't know anything about that.

JS: Do you have any other anecdotes?

YK: *<pauses for reflection>* There was no checking mechanism at all. Nowadays the licensor always checks to see if the graphics look similar, and make sure the content is appropriate [in line with the existing IP]. But at that time there were no checks at all.

JS: **You had freedom to do whatever you wanted.**

YK: We weren't given any sort of materials or data to work off of, either.

JS: **It also incorporated elements from the second film.**

YK: That may have been the case.

JS: **Working outside the narrative of the films gave it a fresh perspective.**

YK: *<laughs - English>* Thank you!

JS: **This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Famicom. What are your memories of it?**

YK: Thanks to the Famicom I was able to spend my time as a developer during what is regarded as the "golden age" of games, for which I am grateful.

JS: **It lasted a long time. Games until 1994, the hardware manufactured until 2004. Recently Mr Yamauchi passed away.⁵²⁹ Did you ever meet him or the late Gunpei Yokoi?**

YK: Sadly, no. I never got to meet Hiroshi Yamauchi, nor the late Gunpei Yokoi.

JS: **Mr Yamauchi was strict with licensing. Can you recall Namco's dealings? It was one of the first licensees.**

YK: There was someone by the name of Udagawa-kun.⁵³⁰ He was a very good programmer, he went out and bought a Famicom, and analysed the inside on his own. He made the very first game that Namco released on Famicom, a conversion of *Galaxian*. He worked completely on his own. At that point he didn't receive any kind of technical information from Nintendo, whatsoever.

JS: **Wow, pure reverse engineering!**

YK: So at that time some top executive at Namco took the game and went to Nintendo, and said: "This is the game we created. Can we sell it?" And Namco didn't need *any* technical information from Nintendo, because Namco could already do it. From Nintendo's point of view Namco had lots of famous games, and that *Galaxian* game was of a very high quality. So Namco signed an agreement with Nintendo under very different terms and conditions compared to other companies.

JS: **Namco could influence its own terms due to showing technical expertise?**

YK: Yes, that's correct. In other words, the technical level of Namco was very high.

JS: You've been involved with a lot of games over your career. Do you have a favourite?

YK: *Famista* is something I worked on over a very long period of time, and I was always involved in the creation of it. So I have some special feelings about *Famista*. *Pac-Land* as well, that was the first ever arcade game I made. So I have strong feelings for that as well.

JS: Did you want to comment on why you left Namco?

YK: I was subject to restructuring. I was made redundant.

JS: I'm sorry, I didn't realise. When was this?

YK: When I was 39 years old.

JS: So around 1998? You later worked at Koei and are credited on *Opoona* for Wii.⁵³¹ It had a strong emphasis on characters making connections with each other. What was your involvement?

YK: I was in charge of debugging for the Japanese release, and was the director of the overseas edition. I thought both the game and the *sekaikan*⁵³² was really wonderful.

JS: Tell me about your university work. What does it involve - how did it start?

YK: I quit Koei in 2010. Koei is the company that makes games like *Dynasty Warriors*. After that I did homestay for six months in New Zealand.

JS: Oh, very nice!

YK: The reason for that is because I wanted to give a presentation on my own games, or the games that I created, in English. So the thinking back then was when I studied and became sufficiently fluent in English, in New Zealand, I was going to come back to Japan and start making games again. But over there, I was doing a homestay program and attending an English school, living and studying with other college-age students. And that was a lot of fun. I was not teaching games back then, but I realised that there are a lot of things I could teach. So when I came back to Japan I started looking for jobs where I would be teaching about games. And so here I am now.

JS: You discuss game structure with your students, and...?

YK: Yes, I do. Game design, game producing, how to make a game. And also "gamification". I was subject to restructuring or redundancy at Koei as well. That's something I talk to my students about - I do talk about that in class.

The students think that since I'm a famous game creator, and I'm a lecturer at the university, I must have succeeded in everything I did in my life. But I will tell my students,

these are the kind of hard times that I had to go through. And the students are surprised hearing that.

JS: I hear it often - the games industry can be a difficult place. For example crunch times seem to be ubiquitous.

YK: Ah, crunch time!



Opoona (Wii)

An overlooked gem on the Wii; the story and styling are quite delightful, while the complex character relationships add a layer of depth. Be sure to read the article on HG101

JS: I've got a strange question. I was looking at your Wikipedia page and there was a section talking about *omelette rice*...[533](#)

YK: Ah, *omurice*. <laughs> When the internet first became popular in Japan, it was a popular thing to have a website. At that time I liked ramen very much. But there were many people who had web pages about ramen. I wanted to do something different, and then I came to realise that I've always been eating *omelette with rice* from the time when I was very young. So I started one [a webpage about omelette rice] - I have this urge to say something to the world, to send some information out to the world. I think it's very similar to creating games and making people happy.

JS: The cooking of *omurice*?

YK: I don't cook! <laughs> But I want to let people know about it.

JS: So people know the joy of eating it.

YK: <laughs>

JS: Is there anything else you want to say to readers? Please consider my book an open

platform.

YK: In Japan there are many things that I cannot say in public. This is one of the reasons for my agreeing to your interview. Like for instance if I were to mention the names of the people that I did planning with, like Hyodoh, or Shinichiro Okamoto, this probably would not be accepted or approved by Namco for publication in a Japanese book. They would say it's no good, you have to take that out. So I want to document it for the record, for future generations.

JS: Why is Namco reluctant to have the names of creators known? Everyone knows about Masanobu Endou, so why would Namco not want people to know that Shinichiro Okamoto was a planner?

YK: Because it's not good business for them, or it does not result in any business for Namco. That's why they don't really approve of it.

JS: Email me the list of names, I'll print them all. Websites like MobyGames can use this to fill in their database. Knowledge will spread.

YK: The information should be published by a reputable source. It doesn't have to be official, or officially approved, but the information should be credible. For instance with Wikipedia anybody can add to it.



JS: Exactly! MobyGames has a good reputation for accuracy. I've used it throughout the research of this book, and the staff credits are reliable.⁵³⁴ When I read Wikipedia I find errors everywhere.

YK: Masanobu Endou has thought a lot about how to convey to later generations how old Japanese games were developed. He wants to make an archive, not of the games themselves, but of how the development was done. But what's difficult about that is, if you are to make it in the form of a book, then the final check that Namco would do will eliminate the names or list of names.

As another example, last year I received an interview request for a series of web articles about how the *Famista* series was made. The reason why I accepted or agreed to do that interview is because I wanted to document all the information. But when I checked with Namco, I was told no.

JS: That's awful! They're trying to control history!

YK: It's not so much that they want to control it, rather it's more like they don't want to have to check everything because it's troublesome, or a lot of work.

JS: Why would anyone need to check? The responsibility is with the speaker...

YK: For example I wrote a book myself. It's right over here. *How to Make Games*. You may

not be able to read it, John, but this book... <flips through>⁵³⁵

JS: That's nice. Let's get a photo of you holding it.

YK: I interviewed a developer at Namco in this book. So that means I want to keep an amicable relationship with Namco. So if I didn't care anything about Namco, then I can just write whatever I want and publish it. I would have that freedom. But if you want to maintain a relationship with the gaming industry in Japan, that's something that you cannot do. There are two ways of documenting how game development was done. One is to turn it into academic research. And the second way is to have it published by an overseas publisher, which will not be subject to checking by Japanese companies. And that's where *you* come in, John! <laughs>

JS: Thank you for your faith in me! Did I ask all the questions you hoped I would?

YK: Yes! One thing is President Yamauchi, the former president of Nintendo, he died but that's very widely known. The president of Namco was Masaya Nakamura, but he's quite an interesting person as well! The reason why Nintendo was able to create such great games is because President Yamauchi was there. On the other hand, the reason why Namco was able to produce such great games, is because Masaya Nakamura was there as the president. That's what I feel, very strongly.

JS: Any interesting stories regarding Masaya Nakamura?

YK: Before I get into that, I wanted to talk about something a bit different. For instance I'm currently teaching games at a university. Iwatani-san of *Pac-Man* is another former game creator that is teaching at a university now. As is Endou-san of *Xevious*. And Nakamura-kun, of *Mojipittan*.⁵³⁶ And myself. So when you go to an academic conference those four, the four of us, would get together. But from any other companies, there is virtually no one who is teaching at a university. So we started to wonder why, and many people actually - or everyone - was wondering why people who formerly worked for Namco ended up being in academia. I came to this thought: Masaya Nakamura, the president of Namco, thought about the action of playing in a very academic way. Or had a very philosophical thinking about "play".

In terms of books on playing which are famous, there's a book entitled *Homo Ludens*.⁵³⁷ It's written by Johan Huizinga, who is a very famous scholar. In this book, Huizinga says that playing is what makes us human. When Namco offers you a job,⁵³⁸ before you actually join, Namco sends you a copy of this book. You're told to read that book before your first day working at Namco. You read it, but it's not at all enjoyable - it's very, very difficult to read. It's very academic and difficult to understand. But I talk about Huizinga when I teach games at university.

So Mr Nakamura was the kind of president who was thinking about something that was very academic. I think in his mind, in President Nakamura's mind, a "game" was something that we were making, not because it makes money, but simply because games were something entirely wonderful.

JS: What a fantastic philosophy. How long did it take you to write your own book?

YK: It took about six months to write it, and another six months to edit it, or rewrite it. *<laughs>* So then it finally came out. *<humorously referring to book's cover>* It's very good, isn't it? *<intense laughter>*

JS: A fine academic publication!

YK: It's unusual to have the face of the author printed as such a big photo.

JS: It gives me ideas for my own cover!

<everyone laughs>

JS: I've been collecting signatures, could you sign these?

<signing commences - idle chat about publishing plans>

YK: I have to practising autographing! There will be an autographing session during publishing events, which are scheduled to happen twice.

JS: So signing copies in a book store?

YK: That's right. *<notices form>* What's this?

JS: A profile form for your address, correct kanji, date of birth, and blood type.

YK: You're interested in blood types?

JS: A lot of Japanese profile pages put blood type, so I thought it would be fun.

YK: *<laughs>* I thought it was unusual!

JS: What I find unusual is how few people in Europe know what their blood type is.

YK: Young people these days don't seem to care much about blood types.

JS: You should know your blood - what if you're in the trenches and suddenly need a transfusion?!

YK: In Japan everyone knows his or her blood type. *<discussion with student about blood types>* And there's the personality types associated with blood types, like type B is... The opposite of detail oriented.

JS: *<notices form>* You have O type blood! Same as me.

YK: I'll send that list of stuff. In English, that would be best. *<referring to student>* We can have Mr Horii here translate it.

<everyone laughs>

Mr Horii: Maybe you'll be receiving weird English messages from me. <laughs>

JS: *Daijoubu desu.* (That's alright.)

YK: Thank you - it was fun! Please write a good book. Like I did! <laughs>

JS: I'll do my best! *Ganbarimasu!*

YK: I think you should, I really recommend that you check out and buy these Namco books.

JS: **Indeed. I intend to pick up old books and mags as reference material.**

<idle chat about different publications>

YK: You can get it on Amazon too. Buy them while in Japan for delivery here. [...] This was a very good, valuable opportunity. Like the HP64000 we talked about today, it came back to my memory.

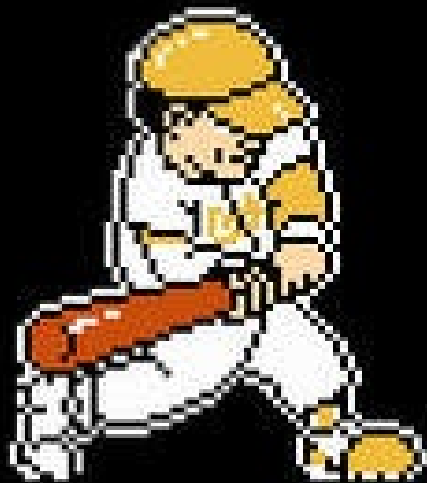
JS: **Have you kept anything from games you worked on?**

YK: I don't have anything from the old days. We used to store things on paper, and that was left at the company. But when they relocated the office they chucked everything. Discarded it all. I should have taken them home, which would have constituted a violation of the non-disclosure agreement I signed with the company, but that way I could have saved it.^{[539](#)}

JS: **At least your words will be documented. Thank you.**

YK: Right! <laughs> That's great, I'm happy.

STAFF



たくたく



くんちゃん



きつしい

In Famista 91 there are hidden staff portraits. "Kisshy" on the far right



~In memory of~

FUKATANI, Shouichi

1954 - 1985

It's a sad fact that few readers will recognise Mr Fukatani's name, given that he passed away in 1985 and only a few of the games he worked on left Japan. Joining in 1977 he was there right from the beginning of Namco and, as a programmer, was instrumental in solidifying the company's reputation; this was the era where good programmers defined a company. He was a central figure in development, well liked by colleagues, and even up until 1987 memorial messages were still being left for him in Namco games. He died aged 31, a reminder of how fragile we all are.

~Portfolio~

Bomb Bee (ARC, 1979) / SOS (ARC, 1979) / Cutie Q (ARC, 1979) / King & Balloon (ARC, 1980) / Warp & Warp (1981, also later MSX conversion) / Dig Dug (ARC, 1982) / Super Pac-Man (ARC, 1982) / Bosconian (MSX conversion, 1984) / Mappy (FC conversion, 1984) /

Tower of Druaga (FC, 1985) / Warpman (FC, 1985 - released posthumously) / Stargate
(cancelled) / Grand Slam **(cancelled)**

"I was close with Mr and Mrs Fukatani both professionally and personally, and we played tennis together often. They were the only people from the company that we invited to our wedding. The wife of the late Shouichi-san has entrusted me with a photo, which I have scanned. It was taken during his honeymoon to Greece; he's wearing a Pac-man T-Shirt."

Pr. Yoshihiro Kishimoto, friend and colleague

I was reverse-engineering arcade games to acquire knowledge of a higher level of programming. I ended up analysing Cutie Q. I thought it was excellent, and Namco's most interesting game. When I analysed the Cutie Q program, I was amazed. This program, from 1979, is like an entire operating system all by itself. It's extremely efficient, genius-level code. Namco was at its peak in the early 1980s; you can look at its early work and realise its later success was guaranteed.

- Mikito Ichikawa, programmer

Memorial messages taken from Namco games, as detailed on Shouichi Fukatani's Japanese Wikipedia page:

- **Motos** (Sep. 1985) - "Special thanks to chief Fukatani"
- **The Return of Ishtar** (July 1986) - "This game is dedicated to our master: the late Mr Shouichi 'God' Fukatani"
- **Genpei Touma Den** (Oct. 1986) - "God is dead and the Devil is gone [...] We are in a wasteland where neither God nor the Devil will tread // Dedicated to the late Mr Shouichi Fukatani."[540](#)
- **Dragon Spirit** (June 1987) - "Special thanks to the late Mr Shouichi 'Chief' Fukatani"



The names Masaya and NCS essentially belonged to the same entity - and in the West, it was probably best known for big robots and big muscled dudes. Its long-running *Assault Suits* and *Cho Aniki* series saw releases across multiple systems, either receiving localisations or capturing the interest of the import crowd. However, the company produced an extremely diverse range of games, from the mid-1980s through to the millennium, including one-shot cult classics like *Gynoug*, and import favourites like the *Shubibinman* tetralogy. As long as this chapter is, it could easily be doubled by attempting to document every Masaya release.

Far more significantly, Masaya contributed to the formative days of the turn-based strategy genre. While *Langrisser* became its flagship strategy series, several earlier Masaya games laid its foundation. Obviously the concept of turn-based strategy is older than chess itself, but Masaya's *Elthlead* from 1987 sits between the genre's emergence in videogames from around the end of the 1970s (including titles like Koei's *Nobunaga no Yabou* from 1983), and the popular and well established series of *Famicom Wars* (1988), *Fire Emblem* (1990), *Shining Force* (1992), and so on. In fairness, *Langrisser* itself deserves to be on this latter list, having competed against the aforementioned three. Although you seldom saw Masaya's strategy titles outside Japan, all of the strategy titles from various companies which *were* localised would have originally been developed with an awareness of Masaya's work.

My original intention had been to list every single Masaya developed game, but this seems redundant. My two interviewees, Masayuki Suzuki and Satoshi Nakai, spent only part of their careers at Masaya, though they have much to reveal. Instead I recommend visiting the expertly curated Masaya Games website (www.masayagames.com). It lists all the games, along with a gallery of images for easy browsing. The two interviews meanwhile convey a wide slice of Masaya history, in addition to divergent topics such as Taito's formative years, the mysterious outsourcing company Winds, technical tricks for increasing the perception of colour in games and also parallax scrolling on PC Engine, unused *Resident Evil* enemies, plus a whole lot more!

Interview with Masayuki SUZUKI and Satoshi NAKAI

04 October 2013, Tokyo / Length: 4h 22m

These two interviews were part of a collection of interviews conducted at Success Corporation (makers of the *Cotton* shmup series). Initially I was put in touch with Masayuki Suzuki and Satoshi Nakai through Yusaku Yamamoto of *GameSide* magazine (he did the foreword for Volume 1). The intention was to document NCS/Masaya, though as a side benefit I was also able to interview Mr Suzuki's employer, Takato Yoshinari, and colleagues Ken Ogura and Masahiro Fukuda. It was a busy day!

I corresponded with both gentlemen via email, pre-sending questions and receiving portfolio lists. That day's interpreter had to leave an hour earlier than requested, but I still managed to glean a reasonable amount of information. For the day Joseph Redon brought in an enormous collection of original games and magazines to refresh everyone's memory. Mr Nakai arrived later, and throughout the interview we alternated the questions between him and Mr Suzuki. For coherence every paragraph has been repositioned; for maximum accuracy, the original spoken Japanese was later transcribed and translated by a professional on-the-fly.





SUZUKI, Masayuki

DOB: 8 September 1965 / Birthplace: Tokyo / Blood Type: O

~Selected Portfolio~

(Dates taken from masayagames.com don't always match those on MobyGames & elsewhere - reliability unknown)

TAITO

Wyvern F-0 (ARC, 1985, month unknown, pictured right)

Vertical shmup reminiscent of *Xevious* with unique cabinet. www.lucaelia.com: "*Much of the appeal, and rarity, of Wyvern F-0 comes from the dedicated cabinet it uses. The game boards produce two separate video outputs that are sent to two different screens housed in the cabinet. A half-silvered mirror is used to mix the images from the two screens in such a way as to produce a pseudo-3D effect. Backgrounds and enemies on the ground are displayed in the lower screen, while player ship and enemies in the air are displayed in the upper screen. These appear to be at different depths to the eyes of the player, thus giving the illusion of sprites in the air floating above the ground. To further enhance the effect, the cabinet also has two speakers. The sound of enemies on the ground is heard from the bottom speaker, while the sound of enemies in the air is heard from the top speaker.*"

Metal Soldier Isaac II (ARC, ~1985, month unknown)

Player controls the eponymous Isaac; top-down action, a bit like *Commando*. According to interview answers, this was most likely released after *Wyvern F-0*. An unreleased predecessor is listed around 1984.

Scramble Formation (ARC, 1986)

Ported to MSX2 1987; vertical shmup allowing control of a bi-plane formations in a circuit of Tokyo.



Screen taken from lucaelia.com;
visit site for more info on *Wyvern F-0* and the right drivers for use
in MAME, plus photos of the
unique cabinet

NIHON COMPUTER SYSTEMS

SO MUCH / **Sekai Yaruhodo So Much** (PC-88/X1, Oct 1986)

Quiz game where you're rewarded with pictures of naked anime ladies. Published under Peacock brand name.

/ **Elthlead** (PC-88, Sep 1987)

Masaya's first strategy title. Position troops in "regions" on a large overworld map, before switching to localised battle maps containing a misaligned grid of squares.

/ **Gaia no Monshou** (PC-88/X1, Sep 1987)

Strategy title following on from Elthlead, and later ported to PC Engine (Masaya's first console title). Part of the lineage leading to Langrisser.

/ **Dione** (PC-88, Mar 1988)

Strategy game published by Hudson, bearing a striking similarity to Hudson's later released Nectaris.

/ **Gaiflame** (PC-88/X1, Mar 1988)

I've seen this also spelled GuyFrame, GaiaFlame, and other variations. For the entirety of this chapter I use the PC-88 box cover romanisation of Gaiflame. Like a futuristic version of Elthlead.

/ **Dosekiryyu no Densetsu** (PC-9801)

Possibly unreleased educational title (about mudslides).

MASAYA

× / **Moto Rader** (PCE, Feb 1986)

Top-down racer, screen always focuses on lead car.

/ **Assault Suits Leynos / Target Earth** (MD, Mar 1990)

Predecessor to Valken/Cybernator; control a customisable walking robot, battling through various sci-fi stages. Originally meant to tie in with X-Serd on PCE.

/ **Langrisser / Warsong** (MD, Apr 1991)

Start of an epic strategy saga; battle enemy kingdoms on various square-grid maps. Only iteration to reach the West.

改造町人シュビビンマン3異界のプリンセス / **Kaizou Choujin Shubibinman 3: Ikai no Princess** (PCE-CD, Feb 1992)

Anime platformer with nice art, faux-transparencies and parallax scrolling. A graphical showcase for the PCE-CD.

× / **Macross: Eien no Love Song** (PCE-CD, Dec 1992)

A superb refinement on Langrisser's strategy mechanics

/ **Langrisser: Hikari no Matsuei** (PCE-CD, Aug 1993)

II / **Langrisser II** (MD, Aug 1994)

/ **Der Langrisser** (SFC, Jun 1995)

III / **Langrisser III** (SAT, Oct 1996)

The Langrisser series evolved with the subsequent hardware generations. Although Mr Suzuki

stopped at III, the series continues to this day.

2 / **Assault Suits Valken 2** (PS1, Jul 1999)

Less like its predecessor, and more of a 3D strategy title like Front Mission 3, which makes sense given that the original Front Mission was a spiritual successor to X-Serf, which was the progenitor of the Assault Suits series.

/ **Cho Aniki: Otoko no Tamafuda** (Wonder Swan, Feb 2000)

Muscle themed shmup on the monochrome 'Swan

Masayuki Suzuki

JS: Thank you for being interviewed - there's so much to ask about Masaya. People loved the company's output.

Masayuki Suzuki: Thank you. I'm happy to hear that. They are games with the best memories for me, too. I worked in the operations department of Nippon Computer Systems, or Masaya, from the company's inception until its demise, making me its longest serving employee. I hope that I will suffice to answer your questions about Masaya. It means a lot to me to hear there are people outside of Japan who are interested in the fun but gruelling campaigns that we waged on the battlefield of game development. Few records remain, but I will strive to provide you with whatever help I can.

JS: <to JR> Joseph, people love Masaya, right?

Joseph Redon: Oh yes. *Moto Roder*, *Double Dungeon*, so many great games!

MS: It's been a long time since I've heard anyone mention titles like *Double Dungeon*. That really takes me back! I am truly honored that anyone even remembers these games.

JS: Plus we have Mr Nakai arriving later.

MS: He was never an NCS employee but he was very active in the company's golden age as a contractor. In particular, he had major roles in the development of titles like *Gynoug* and the Super Famicom version of *Valken*. He worked on different teams than I did, so he would probably be able to tell you different stories than I could.

JS: Can you recall the first game you ever saw?

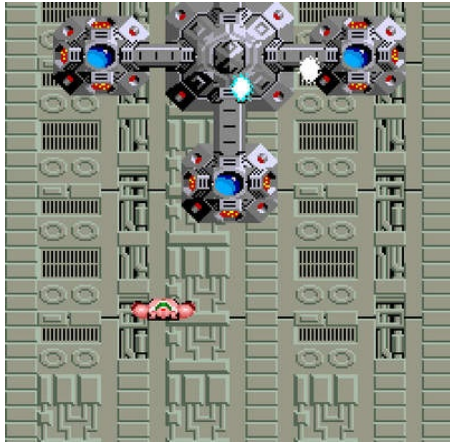
MS: It may have been *Space Wars*. Was that by Atari? It was a vector scan game, with a triangular ship. It was a versus game.^{[541](#)}

JS: When did you feel you wanted to work in games?

MS: It was when I was in high school, when I saw *Xevious*. I was already playing games prior to that, but when I saw *Xevious*, I realised how much potential existed in videogames. I was attending a technical high school, and companies would recruit students by posting job opportunities on a bulletin board. Among them was a notice from Taito, and when I saw it, I thought, "This is it. This is my chance to enter the games industry. I have to take it." So I applied to Taito, passed a company employment exam which is a common requirement in Japan, and was accepted as an employee. This was 1983.

JS: You worked on three arcade titles at Taito: *Wyvern F-0*, *Metal Soldier Isaac II*, and *Scramble Formation*.

MS: That's correct. I drew the enemy character graphics for *Metal Soldier Isaac II*. Taito did a location test for the previous game, *Metal Soldier Isaac*, but the consumer reaction was not very positive. So they decided to reuse the assets and create a new game, *Metal Soldier Isaac II*. One of the goals was to greatly increase the enemy variety, so I was put in charge of designing new enemies.



Metal Soldier Isaac II (ARC)

JS: And the original? Was it never mass produced?

MS: No, it was not mass produced.

JS: What happened to the data or motherboard?

MS: I have no idea!

JS: <shows list> Online records credit a Masayuki Suzuki for graphics on the following.⁵⁴² Three are by Taito; were there two artists called Masayuki Suzuki at Taito?

MS: No, I don't have anything to do with any of those. That must be someone else with the same name. Suzuki is an extremely common name in Japan.

JS: Why leave Taito after *Scramble Formation* to join NCS?

MS: It actually happened gradually. First, I quit Taito after *Metal Soldier Isaac II*, and went to an outsourcing company that did graphics work for Taito. It was called Visual Arts. The company originally focused on cel colouring, or in other words, painting production cels for TV animation, but they branched out into doing similar work for videogame graphics. However, at the time, few people knew how to create pixel art, so they were looking for someone with experience in that area.

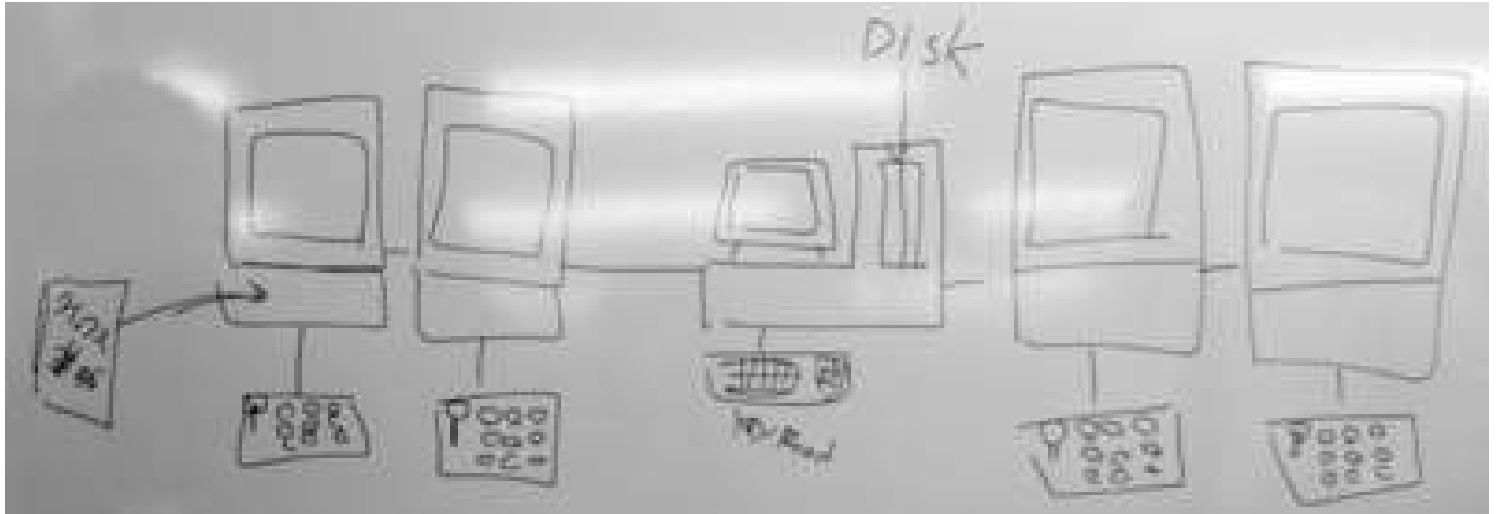
JS: Did you create graphics on paper, a computer, or both?

MS: This was right at the time of the transition from drawing on paper to drawing on a computer. For Taito's *Wyvern F-0*, we used a specialised computer to input graphics one dot at a time onto a screen. But back then, we didn't have a device for saving the data. I was able to draw pixel art, but not store it. So I had to look at the screen and manually copy everything onto paper.

JS: What year this was?

MS: It was immediately after I joined Taito, so around 1983. But by the time of *Metal Soldier Isaac II*, we had a device that could save data. We used these big 8-inch floppy disks. It was not like a regular personal computer. It was Taito's own proprietary system. They created graphics workstations by modifying circuit boards from unsold arcade cabinets for the game *Qix*. The monitors were salvaged from old cocktail arcade cabinets. <laughs> Computer mice weren't available back then, so we operated these graphics workstations with a custom

control box that incorporated a joystick and about 20 buttons, almost like a keyboard.



JS: You used a game to create more games?

MS: Yes. *<laughs>* So we had these graphics machines, and for every four machines, we had one device for saving our data. *<sketches>* It looked something like this. **(top)**

JR: So we could call that the "Qix Station"! *<laughs>*

MS: You could say that!

JS: Did the machine have a name?

MS: I don't remember what we called them.

JS: So you had one central station to backup data.

MS: Yes. A keyboard was attached to the central machine, but the individual graphics stations only had the metal control box with a joystick and a bank of buttons, of the same type as the ones used in arcade cabinets.

JR: So was this like a table? *<points to sketch>*

MS: No. We just salvaged the displays from table-style cocktail arcade cabinets and installed them upright in custom-fitted boxes. The internals of this were all from old arcade hardware.

JS: Did you have any computer programming experience?

MS: Not programming, no. I was creating the pixel art.

JS: Did you take any photos of this setup?

MS: No.

JS: Then this whiteboard sketch is a world first...

MS: *<laughs>* Well, this was only used at Taito. It was their custom setup. When I joined we didn't have this part. *<points to central machine>* So at first we couldn't save any data! So when I arrived at work every morning, the first thing I had to do was look at my drawings on paper and re-input everything into the machine. And then, before leaving work at the end of every day, I needed to manually copy everything that was on the screen back to paper.

JR: This must have been a great system in the 1970s, but for 1983 it seems a little archaic.

JS: Did the electricity ever cut out - a power failure?

MS: I don't remember anything like that. Conversely, we were less likely to lose work that was on paper. We never had any disk errors, either.

The main difficulty was the tendency for the graphics stations to hang up and freeze. We had to worry about the motherboard overheating due to runaway processes, or being damaged by static electricity.

JS: So you *could* potentially lose an entire day's work?

MS: That's right. That's why we started saving data to disk several times each day. Old Apple computers used to behave in the same way. You were guaranteed to have a system crash and see the bomb icon at least once every day. Similarly, these old *Qix* boards were unstable. Sometimes you'd see an error screen immediately after turning it on. In that case, I'd have to open up the box and pull out the circuit board.

Static electricity was a real danger back then, so I would periodically remove the circuit board, wrap it up in a towel, gently pat it down to discharge any electrical buildup, and then reinsert it into the machine. It sounds crazy when I think about it now.

JR: Were you using a computer yourself at home?

MS: No. Computers were expensive back then! *<laughs>*

<Satoshi Nakai arrives and we all go to the roof for Nico to take photos. There's some chat about the weather and how it's suddenly gotten cold in Tokyo>

MS: This is a rare opportunity for us to be photographed!

Satoshi Nakai: Indeed! *<laughs - strikes a pose>* It looks as though I'm about to start wrestling.

<after photos I finish my first round of questions for Masayuki Suzuki - Satoshi Nakai joins for some answers>

JS: After leaving Visual Arts, how did you enter NCS?

MS: I think I joined NCS around 1986. After I left Visual Arts, I took a part-time job at a toy store. I stayed there for about six months, observing how children play games. Equipped with these new insights, I decided to return to the game industry.

JR: So you were not a full-time employee at Taito or Visual Arts? Were those temporary or part-time positions?

MS: No, I was a regular employee.

JS: Did you have a particular reason for leaving Visual Arts?

MS: That's a private, personal matter. *<laughs>* It's a long story involving my girlfriend at the time... *<laughs>*

JS: I understand - top secret!

<everyone laughs>

MS: I found a job opening at NCS in a recruiting magazine, so I applied.

JS: I believe Masaya was founded in 1985?

MS: NCS, or Nippon Computer Systems, existed before that, and early games were published under the NCS label. The name "Masaya" was created by the president of NCS as a new brand label. Masaya appeared suddenly during the PC Engine era. Our first games for the PC Engine, such as *Gaia no Monshou*,⁵⁴³ were published under the NCS label. The first game under the Masaya label was *Moto Roder*.

JR: That's the first game you worked on for the PC Engine?

MS: Yes, that's correct.

JS: Do you have any photos from those days?

MS: Unfortunately, virtually no photos from that era remain. It was before digital cameras, so we didn't take many photos at all. Most of the images from our games were also left behind with the company. Masaya no longer exists, but there is still a company operating under the name NCS.

JS: What was the meaning behind the name Masaya?

MS: *<laughs>* The president of Nippon Computer Systems at that time was Masaya Fujita, so it's just his first name. However, the brand is pronounced like "messiah". At first, the games were published under the NCS label, but the president wanted to create a cool new brand name. He asked an ad agency to devise a new name, and they came up with Masaya / Messiah.

JS: Did this ad agency also design the logo?

MS: Yes. This style of logo was popular in the mid-80s. *<laughs>* None of the creative staff at the company liked it. It was embarrassing.

JS: Why Pegasus? Because it was cool, or is there some kind of meaning behind it?

MS: It's just simple symbolism. The explanation I heard was that the company was going to "soar out into the world", or something like that.^{[544](#)}

SN: It sounds embarrassing when you explain it now. *<everyone laughs>*

JS: The president sounds like an egomaniac.

MS: He was like that, yes.

JS: There's also another Masaya mascot, Uminin (). Do you know who drew him? He appeared in Cho Aniki, and also I think in Shubibinman 3?

MS: That's correct, he appeared in Shubibinman 3 as a hidden character. At the time, we were running a contest with one of the PC Engine magazines, asking readers to submit original characters. Uminin was one of the winners. The man who designed him was Shubibinman's biggest fan - I wish I could remember his name.^{[545](#)}



JS: What did NCS do before making games?

MS: It was just an ordinary staffing agency that supplied computer programmers for temporary assignments.

JS: It seems ironic that after working in a toy store and wanting to make games for kids, your first NCS game was for adults - *Sekai Yaruhodo So Much*.

JR: <shows MS a copy of the game> How long has it been since you last saw a copy of this?

MS: A long time! That was an adults-only⁵⁴⁶ quiz game from the early days of the company, so I'm afraid I don't have any materials from it anymore. It was developed and marketed by NCS but sold under the "Peacock" brand name. It was actually the first game I worked on as an employee at NCS... I'll be executed in public for this! <laughs> I haven't seen this in about 20



JS: How did this come to be your first game at NCS?

MS: When I joined, this game was already out of the planning stages, and development had

already started. They needed another artist, and I had just joined, so they handed it to me. So suddenly I became the lone designer. I never imagined that something like this would be my first project for them. I thought it would be something more like Maidum,⁵⁴⁸ an earlier NCS game.

JR: It looks like this was an accident, because it was the only adult game that NCS ever released.

MS: Yes, an accident; an unlikely coincidence for me.

JS: Do you remember the sales numbers?

MS: I don't know the exact numbers, but it sold fairly well.

JR: It seems there was another version for the Sharp X1. Can you confirm this?

MS: The graphics were the same, the only difference was the program. Before this, NCS had released Maidum and one other game called Mr. Bump, but both were unsuccessful and a loss for the company. Sekai Yaruhodo So Much was the first profitable game for NCS. <laughs>

maichim

冒険にコト・バロシは自分たち
 一体化するリアルタイムのメ
 の人工知能によるアドベン
 ム。登場 //

あなたの冒険心が、
 伝説の扉を開く。



マインクラフト、マインクラフト、マインクラフト
 マインクラフト、マインクラフト、マインクラフト

マインクラフト、マインクラフト、マインクラフト
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NCS

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メイドウムお問い合わせ TEL03(4861631) SPJ担当田中まで

世界ヤルホド SO MUCH

君の画面に彼女が生まれたま体の姿で登場。
 でも残念(?)なことにも6つの部分は隠されて
 いる。これを取るためには彼女が出す問題を
 答えなくてはいい。見事20問中6問正解す
 ればラブ・アフェア2人はいい関係にな
 るというわけだ。女の子は5+びる。彼女
 たちが君を待ってるぞ。

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 ピーコック担当まで ☎03(4861631)

人気爆発

ラブ・アフェア2はいい関係。



JS: If successful, why did NCS stop making adult games?

MS: Back then, the popularity of adult games in the Japanese game industry came and went in a series of waves. *Sekai Yaruhodo So Much* was released right at the beginning, during the first wave, and was quite successful for its time. However, because it was successful and became famous all of a sudden, NCS also faced a public backlash. Critics said that the game was immoral, inappropriate for the young kids and teens who were mostly playing these computer games, and so forth. At NCS, the thinking was that if we continued on this path, we would lose popularity and face a difficult struggle. So NCS decided to return to traditional, non-adult games.

JR: You're right, and at this time many companies such as Koei, Enix, and even Falcom were doing the same kind of games. The content of these games was very divisive, or risqué. But even so, I think they are a kind of mirror of the times, and a part of game history. What are your thoughts?

MS: I think that kind of content, which was part of the subculture in Japan, suddenly jumped into the mainstream and started to spread. At the time, everyone was pushing the boundaries and wondering how far things would go.

JR: There was an exhibition in London of old Japanese erotic art, called *shunga* in Japanese. *Shunga* was prohibited at one point in Japan and much of it destroyed, with the exception of works which were taken to foreign countries. So this culture was saved in part by foreigners. Now the Japanese government may be about to enact a new law to make this kind of material, like erotic videogames, prohibited.⁵⁴⁹ You would be in trouble if you kept this material. Your thoughts? Do you think this kind of content should be destroyed and disappear from history?

MS: I do believe there are certain boundaries that we should respect, a line that we as creators should agree not to cross. On the other hand, I think that rigidly defining the line according to the mood of the government, without understanding the perspectives of both the creators and the consumers, is a problem. Content should not be suppressed according to arguments and theories from those who do not understand it or seek it out. The rules should be devised appropriately, with input from the creators and the consumers.

JS: Eloquently put! If the government asked you to destroy your old creations, would you do it?

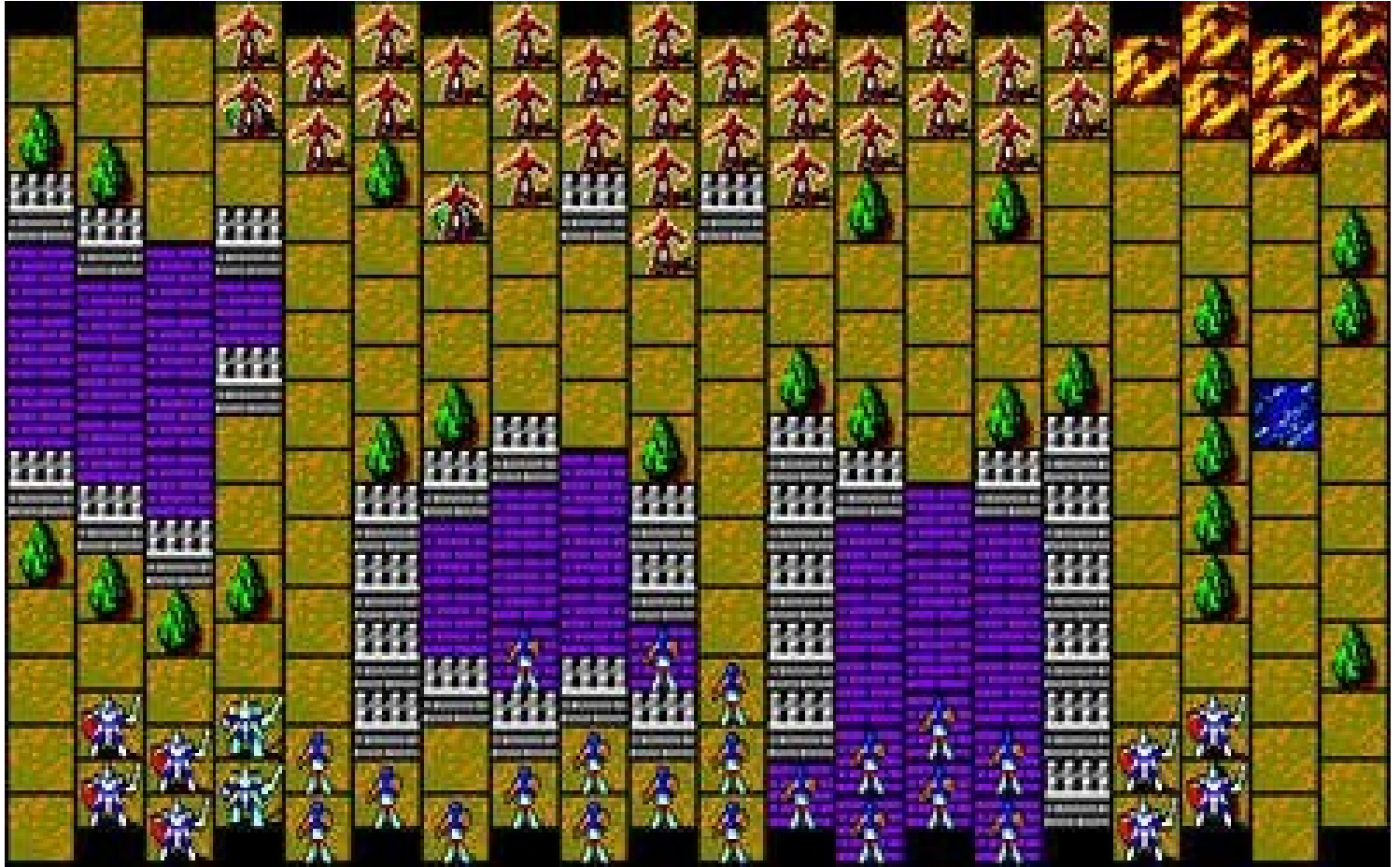
MS: Well, honestly, I don't even have a copy of this game anymore, so... <laughs>

JS: Why was it published under Peacock, not NCS?

MS: I don't know about that.

JS: You're credited on *Elthlead*. Describe your role.

MS: I worked on the game system, graphics, story, basically everything. <laughs> I was on my own.



Elthlead Senshi (PC-9801); mercenaryforce.web.fc2.com

JS: The package says that you worked with someone named Robert Timbello.⁵⁵⁰

MS: He was a planner who worked part-time at NCS back then, in Japan. Robert was an American, and was living in Japan because his father was in the Marines.

JS: Did he stay at NCS for a long time? His name is on several games.

MS: I don't think he stayed for very long. At the very beginning, we all worked together in creating the overall design and themes of the *Elthlead* series. At the time, the *Daisenryaku* strategy game series was very successful,⁵⁵¹ and fantasy RPGs were also quite popular. Robert had the idea of making a strategy game like *Daisenryaku*, but set in a fantasy world. He was the first one to suggest the concept, but that was basically his entire contribution. He quit his part-time job shortly after that. So I took that concept and expanded it into a concrete game system.

JS: Did you work on the PC-9801 version?

MS: I was not directly involved with the PC-9801 version. The PC-9801 version is called *Elthlead Senshi*. It was outsourced. By that time the company had grown larger and had more

employees, but for the games in the *Elthlead* series, the original planners and designers were still listed in the credits. That's why so many people are credited.

JR: Is it the same for *History of Elthlead* on the X68000?

MS: Yes. That version was actually made by a different company, not Masaya.

JR: So this is probably also true of the MSX2 version? The resolution is much lower in that.

MS: Yes.



JS: *<shows picture, top>* Do you remember this graffiti picture is hidden within Elthlead?

MS: Yes... I remember that. I was the one who drew it. At the time, secrets like these were really popular in Japan, so we'd put pictures and characters like these into the games for fun.

JS: When NCS entered the console market, Famicom was the highest-selling system. NCS chose to develop for the PC Engine. Why?[552](#)

SN: That decision was made by the producers, not me.

MS: Well obviously the Famicom was considered, and at first, the Famicom was a target. But

at that time, the Famicom market was huge, and there were so many companies already competing in that space. There were so many new titles being released every month. So we reasoned that launching a new series in that saturated environment would be fruitless. Meanwhile, here comes NEC, one of the biggest computer makers in Japan, with a brand-new console system that was rumoured to completely outclass the Famicom. In that case, we believed that if we jumped onto this new system early on, before there was much competition, we would become well-known and establish a solid fanbase.

JR: One question about your first PC Engine game, *Moto Roder*.⁵⁵³ Could you tell us why the extra courses were not available from the beginning?

MS: The extra courses were still being tested and were not balanced at all. They were still experimental, but at the same time, it felt like a waste to cut them out of the game, so we left them in.



JR: I heard that people at Hudson played *Bomberman* every day. Were you playing *Moto Roder* every day too?

MS: Back then, we played it quite a bit. Whenever we had extra time, we would get together and play it.

JR: Who had the highest score in the company?

MS: It was always a close match between myself and one of the department managers.

JR: And were you enjoying the extra courses?

MS: Not really, to be honest. <stoutly, with great masculinity> **Real men** compete on the

official courses! <everyone laughs>

JR: There is a kind of hidden ending in *Moto Roder*, which has a very low, 1 in 256 chance of being seen.^{[554](#)}

MS: Yes.

JR: In Japanese we say *maboroshi no ending*, the phantom ending. Is there any hidden meaning in this ending?

MS: There's no special meaning, but back then it was normal to insert secret tricks and codes called *urawaza* into the games, which would then be published in the magazines. By inserting a special *urazawa*, there was a higher chance of being featured in a magazine article. So almost all games from that time had two or three special tricks, secret characters, or hidden levels. It was a widespread practice. Knowing this, we would also insert something interesting or even a little baffling.

<we shift to focus on Satoshi Nakai>



NAKAI, Satoshi

DOB: 24 February 1967 / Birthplace: Hokkaido / Blood Type: O

Satoshi Nakai

JS: <introduces self in Japanese> I'm sorry for not being able to speak fluently in Japanese.

SN: It's me who should apologise for not speaking English! The best I can manage is broken English with people from Sweden or Columbia.⁵⁵⁵ Even though I watch BBC dramas and drink Islay Malt Whisky, English just does not stick. <laughs> *Sherlock* and *Utopia* are great, but liquor doesn't actually improve one's English. Too bad. <laughs>

JS: Speaking of language... The kanji in your family name was written , but now is written . May I ask why?

SN: Is the concept of *seimei handan* known in the English-speaking world?⁵⁵⁶

My real name is Satoshi Nakai, which is written in Japanese as ". A long time ago, when I was too lazy to come up with a good pen name, I decided to replace the character " " from my first name with the character " ", which is used in Taiwan and other countries.⁵⁵⁷ In my youth, I thought this was so esoteric and cool! <laughs>

Most people aren't even able to read my original kanji name " " correctly as "Satoshi",⁵⁵⁸ and changing it to some obscure "old Chinese character" certainly didn't make it any easier! Eventually I had a change of heart, and thought, "Enough with this name that no one can read!" and changed it back.

As for the *seimei handan* I mentioned before, it's a way of telling if a name is lucky or unlucky based on the number of strokes used when writing the Chinese characters. Someone who was an expert at this technique told me that adding the " " component to the side of the " " in my name would make it better, so I figured I'd give it a shot! <laughs>⁵⁵⁹ Man, this is not going to be easy for you to explain in English! But hey, you're the one who asked - not me! <laughs>

JS: I'll try! Do you remember the first game you saw?

SN: As a child? It was some tennis game, which is very old now. I was in elementary school at the time. From around that time until I started working in the industry, I had absolutely zero interest in games.

JS: Really? So your interests were purely in art?

SN: No, not at all. Before I started doing games, I was a waiter for a long time. I had always liked drawing, so I started looking around for art-related work, and eventually found some doing art for computer games.

JS: Describe your first job in games - it was Last Armageddon on computers?

SN: That was 25 years ago, when I was 21 years old. A quarter century ago! <laughs> Hmm... How old was I? In 1997, I was working on Biohazard, before that was Gun Hazard... <pauses, reflects, goes back chronologically>

JS: Going way back there's Valken... I want to discuss that, because it influenced both Gun Hazard by Omiya Soft, and Metal Warriors by LucasArts...

JS: The chapter for you gentlemen will be over 30 pages.

SN: I'm happy to hear that! Personally I've never really been aware of the influence of my own work. After all, it was 20 years ago. I'd be happy to talk about whatever you want - but is it alright to devote so much space to just me? There are many other creators, and I think their interviews are important.

JS: I have over 80 interviewees, it's fine. I want to ask about all kinds of secrets...

SN: I'd be happy to tell you anything about myself. For example, in Virtua Fighter for Genesis, which was never released in Japan, I was the one who drew Jacky! Stuff like that, right? <laughs>

JS: Exactly! Plus everything about Masaya and NCS.

SN: The first person I need to mention is Suzuki-san from NCS! If we are referring to Masayuki Suzuki,⁵⁶⁰ he is my friend. He definitely knows plenty about NCS. So if it's Masa-san, it's good to interview us together. I think we'll be able to correct each other if we misremember something, and help fill in the blanks. Suzuki-san would be the main person to ask about Assault Suits Leynos, while I'd just be an extra. From the perspective of leading up to Valken, it was a good idea interviewing both of us!



JS: That was today's plan! You mentioned having a part-time job as a waiter and also enjoying drawing, which is how you became involved with the industry?

SN: The first art assignment I did was for Brain Grey, for Last Armageddon. I designed many of the monsters or creatures. It was a part-time job at their office. I drew many of the monsters, and also the event graphics used in cutscenes, such as the opening sequence. (bottom)

JS: Did you draw the pixel art on paper first?

SN: No, I entered it directly on the computer with a mouse. I think I used a mouse to draw up until Culdcept.

JS: MobyGames says your first job at NCS was Leynos?

SN: No. <shows Lightning Vaccus> This was it. I think my first NCS job was drawing this character on a computer.

JS: This would have been in 1989?

SN: Hmm... I don't remember. It was around that time.

JR: <looking at GPS database> It was 1989. It was released in March, so I guess you did the job in 1988.⁵⁶¹

SN: Wow. I guess you're right. <laughs> Your database is amazing. If you are specifically looking for people who were involved with Nippon Computer Systems, I worked on the following: Target Earth, Wings of Wor, and Cybernator.⁵⁶² My involvement with NCS was mostly concentrated in those projects. I also did some other, smaller work with them, but it's been over 20 years and my memory is a little fuzzy. <laughs> If you want to know more about any other titles, please give me the names and I can ask my colleagues.

JS: There's some interesting stuff your name is on: Sol Bianca,⁵⁶³ Head Buster, Astro Boy... <lists whole portfolio>

SN: OH MY GOD! You know all these? However, I wasn't involved with Sol Bianca. Where did you hear that?!⁵⁶⁴ The fact that you even know about Head Buster... that's maniac territory.⁵⁶⁵ <laughs> For Astro Boy I did background pixel art and enemy characters (left). Astro Boy was sold abroad but Culdcept was not. I've been drawing Culdcept illustrations for 16 years, since 1997.



JS: I think a couple of Culdcept titles reached the West... Do you have photos from the old days?

SN: Photos, hmm... It was just so long ago, I don't know if there are any photos or anything. Personally, I still have piles of notes and design sketches from my previous work. However, if you're interested in my old materials... Maybe coming to my home would be best. I have an extensive "paper archive". But don't worry, I still brought materials.



JS: Thank you! These are great, I'll photograph it all.

SN: By the way, up until last year I drew the cover for a *World of Warcraft* specialty magazine for a publisher in Sweden! I wonder if they sell it in the UK? I'm always busy... As a freelancer, being busy is a really good thing. But, at the same time, I really would like to take just three days or so and go on a trip. In August it was the *Obon* holiday season in Japan, but I was extremely busy. It was maddeningly hot in Japan this summer, but I'm still sitting in front of my Mac every day and drawing pictures in Photoshop - it almost makes me want to cry.



JS: I'm glad I arranged my trip to arrive in September.

SN: September is still during the period of lingering summer heat called *zansho*. It really was hot this year.



JS: Earlier you said you were not involved in Sol Bianca. But there's a Satoshi Nakai credited for monster design, under the name Winds. And also on Wrinkle River Story...

SN: Wow, you know everything! Winds is a graphics outsourcing company, and still exists today. And Wrinkle River Story! I had totally forgotten about that. Wow.

JS: Well, I always do my research.

SN: <with super intensity> Are you spying on us with satellites?! <strong laughter>

JS: The book documents the unknown. For example, your website says you did the packaging for Sword Maniac. But in-game you're credited as "visual supervisor".

SN: Yes. However, I've never actually played that game. I never knew that my name was in the credits like that.



JS: Did you meet Satoshi Fujishima of Fupac, which made Sword Maniac?⁵⁶⁶

SN: I don't know him.

JS: Anyway, let's discuss Gynoug, your first major project.

SN: I did all of the boss characters, and about half of the backgrounds in Gynoug.

JS: I wanted to ask about *this*. <shows picture - bottom left - jokingly> It's a bit suggestive, isn't it?

SN: Yes, it's a bit risqué.

JS: <laughs> How did you get this past the censors? Did you have to sneak it in?

SN: You're talking about *this* part, <points> aren't you? <laughs> I drew that in secret, and slapped it in. <laughs>

JS: <shows image, right> This is your cover from a magazine - is this the top half of the risqué boss?

SN: Not exactly. This one's

different. This one appears on the final stage, sitting cross-legged. This image is a drawing that was used on the cover of a magazine called *MegaDrive-Fan* at the time. During this period, I drew illustrations using a mouse on the Sharp X68000 computer. Back then, we would take data of this size and enlarge it for cover illustrations.



JS: It's not easy reaching the final boss!

SN: I couldn't beat it either, until someone taught me a special trick, basically a cheat. <to MS> Masa-san, what was the trick for enabling easy mode in *Gynoug*? Hold A+B+C during power-on?

MS: No, you do it on the Options screen when you select the game level.

JS: The bosses have a cool bio-mechanical style. Were you inspired by the Japanese film *Tetsuo*?⁵⁶⁷

SN: No, but I was inspired by the [David Lynch] film *Dune*, such as the Baron Harkonnen character. I used to love the special effects makeup used in overseas films. I wasn't inspired by any one particular work, but I was influenced by horror films generally. Grotesque things like zombies just pop up immediately in my imagination. For example, this is something I came up with recently for an assignment. Maybe this looks familiar? This is work I did two years ago, for an unreleased title. <laughs> But I've gotten used to cancelled projects. It has happened so many times.



Gynoug screens

JS: Can you tell us more about this project?

SN: Unfortunately I am bound by various NDAs.

<discussion on where to eat - it was getting dark and we were going to be there for several

hours>

Meal with Masaya

Mr Suzuki guided us to a nearby pork cutlet restaurant he frequented; it was dark as we walked through the crowded Tokyo streets. Unfortunately we didn't take any photos in the restaurant, but there was a lot of fun and unguarded discussion. Due to noise, some audio was inaudible.

<casual chat about appeal of old games>

JS: Hold on, I might have a copy of *Retro Gamer* with me.

<everyone orders drinks>

JS: This is a British mag covering old games. In this issue I interviewed the director of *Akumajou Dracula*, and the top 25 Super Famicom games lists *Assault Suits Valken*.

SN: <looks through list> Oh, *Super Aleste*! I want to play that again!

JR: Europe has an intense interest in older games - more so than America. But even back then, Europeans imported games directly from Japan, playing them in Japanese when localised versions were unavailable. That custom continues today. Back then I wanted a PC Engine, but it was only available in Japan and America. So I imported one myself, and became familiar with Masaya's games.

SN: Overseas it was called the TurboGrafx, wasn't it?

JS: Only in America - you know your stuff!

SN: *Cybernator* sold pretty well. I think *Gynoug* was renamed to *Wings of Wor*, and *Assault Suits Leynos* to *Target Earth*.

JS: We want you to tell us everything about Masaya.

MS: <to SN> I did not think many people would be interested in an article about Masaya...
<SN murmurs agreement>

SN: <looking at magazine> Ah, I used to have a Jaguar. I didn't make any games for it, but I played it. <laughs>

JS: What'd you think of the Jag?

SN: I liked it. The shooting game had these beautiful reflections. I thought it was a great piece of hardware.

JS: Do you mean *Tempest 2000*?

SN: Yes, Tempest. But what were all those buttons on the bottom of the controller for? I thought the design was a little rushed. That was over 15 years ago now...

JS: Did you play Alien vs Predator? I was trying to interview its main programmer. He seems to have had a nervous breakdown, and is living on an island off the UK. [568](#)

SN: Whoa! What is he doing out there?

JS: Well, it's not a private island, it's populated.

SN: I'd love to live somewhere like that. The summers here are intense. By the way, I love alcohol, especially spirits from the UK. Bowmore, Ardbeg... I love them. The thing is, I can't read the labels. I'm not sure how to pronounce it, but there's a single malt called Caol Ila. The flavour is excellent, but I can't read it. It's not like regular English...

JS: Islay is off Scotland. Have you tried British ale? It's like a living beer, light brown, not many bubbles.

SN: I know of it. It's my dream to visit a real English pub one day. I've never been yet.

JS: Visit the UK and I can show you around. I used to live on the south coast, and learned to sail around there.

SN: Wow, you're a skipper!

JS: Yes, the Royal Yachting Association gave a certificate.

SN: <looking at Retro Gamer magazine> Which Mickey is this? Castle of Illusion...

JS: For the Mega Drive...

SN: That's right. I remember there was a Capcom Mickey and a Sega Mickey.

JR: The developer for this one was Sega AM7.

SN: I like the Sega version. Ah, World of Goo. I love this. I bought it for the Wii first, and then I got the iPad version.

MS: I played the PC version for a while.

SN: I was completely hooked on it for a time. <looks at magazine> What's this?! I've seen this! What is this called?

JS: The ZX Spectrum.

SN: The Spectrum, that's right!

JR: Compared to Japanese computers, it's a fairly low-spec system, about on par with the PC-6001. The specs are low, but it was inexpensive. Everyone could afford it.

JS: The PC-6001 had more colours though.

SN: ... there was also the ZX81.

MS: This really takes me back.

SN: *<noting a photo of floppy disks>* On those 5-inch disk labels, we had lots of space to write and draw.

MS: But the data on those floppies rots pretty quickly. Most of my old stuff doesn't work anymore. *<laughs>*

SN: I have some leftover disks too, but they're probably corrupted by now. I don't even have a machine that can read them.

JR: Actually, we can probably save them. At the Game Preservation Society, we do that kind of work every day. Even if you can no longer read the disks on the original machines, we have techniques to save the content. If you have any disks you want to save, please let me know.

SN: Wow! I had already given up on those disks.

MS: The problem is that we don't even know what's on our old disks!

SN: Shall we send them to you? I have 3.5 inch and 5 inch disks that probably contain everything I ever did for Masaya. *<to MS>* I wonder if it'd be okay, with copyright?

MS: The copyrights... [inaudible].

SN: If it's the data extracted from the ROM... [inaudible]... maybe it's okay? *<speaking to JR>* All joking aside, shall I really send you my disks?

JR: Of course. We are a non-profit organization. We do not publish the materials and data that we preserve. It's strictly a service.

SN: I have some old Valken data. Surprisingly, I have more materials on paper than digital data, like for Valken and Gynoug, and older PC games like Last Armageddon and Lightning Vaccus.



JS: People tend to save papers, but throw away floppies.

SN: Exactly.

JS: So, earlier we were discussing Last Armageddon for computers?

SN: That was my game debut. I did creature design.

JR: In that case, I have a very important question. There was supposed to be a *gaiden* or add-on for Last Armageddon, not a sequel, but everyone had high hopes for it. Whereas Last Armageddon was more of a Western-style fantasy, the spin-off was going to feature creatures from Japanese folklore such as *yokai*.⁵⁶⁹([top, centre](#))

SN: I remember that!

JS: I've seen scans of it in MSX magazines.

JR: Some preview illustrations were published, but ultimately the game was never released, to everyone's disappointment. Did you draw the illustrations?

SN: I did not do the work for that version. Only a poster. You're extremely knowledgeable!

JR: Last Armageddon is a very famous game in Japan. Everyone was waiting for that add-on. This is an important answer for me, because it means in the end there was nothing. It does not exist.

JS: Did you do the main cover image for Last Armageddon?

SN: That wasn't me. A more famous illustrator drew the package art. <goes back to magazine - laughs> Ah, the Jaguar. [some audio inaudible, discussion with MS]

<food arrives - itadakimasu - we eat>

SN: <to MS> What are you working on now?

MS: Just 3DS now. And Nameko games.⁵⁷⁰ <turns to author> The company I work with now, Success, was established 35 years ago. It's been around since the Space Invaders era.



A range of Nameko characters

JS: Any chance I can film around the Success offices?

MS: Since the company is working on a lot of confidential projects for other companies, that might be difficult. And beyond that, it's not like it used to be, with big steel racks packed with 14-inch TVs, PC monitors, and development kits, and lots of reference books and figurines crammed into the spaces between them... Our contemporary development spaces are uncluttered; just PCs and monitors lined up on desks, with virtually no trace of the way things used to be.

SN: Nameko? You have got to be kidding me.

MS: It's strange how popular it is. **(top)**

SN: Yeah. That's from Ozawa Rina, right?

MS: That's right. I thought the character was cute when I first saw it. Other people didn't think so at first.

SN: Nameko is definitely cute.

JR: Who originally came up with the Nameko character?

MS: A studio called BeeWorks.⁵⁷¹ They came up with a bunch of designs. Nameko was originally a minor character, but people thought it was cute.

SN: It's the same for the Kumamon character.⁵⁷² It was originally just a minor character, but became very popular.

MS: I think Nameko has been the most profitable franchise that Success has ever produced.

SN: Seriously?

MS: Yes.

<Success had framed artwork from all its games on walls throughout the building - at one point Mr Suzuki showed us Rondo of Swords, explaining an idea he had implemented>

JS: Earlier you said you put the Cotton character in Rondo of Swords for NDS. Did you need permission from anyone?

MS: The Cotton franchise belongs to Success, so I didn't need to obtain permission from outside the company. However, I did check with the in-house staff who created Cotton originally. That was it.

JS: Do you have any material from Cotton? Can I meet its creator?

MS: I'll see what I can find. There are several copies of the game in our president's office. And some of the staff from that era still work at Success.⁵⁷³

JS: Thanks! Mr Nakai, your interest in games only began after you joined the games industry?

SN: That's right.

JS: What's your favourite game?

SN: Skyrim.

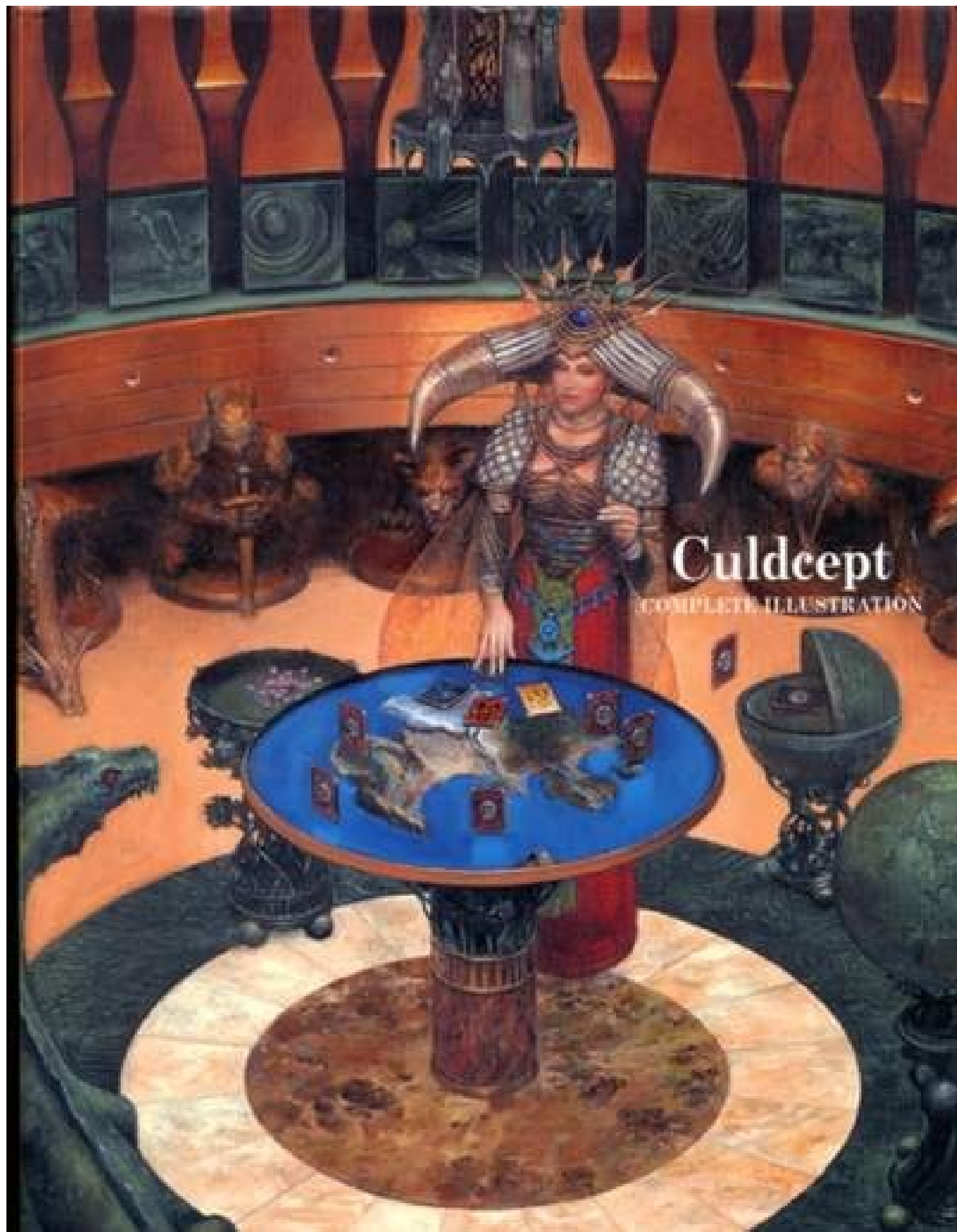
JS: Did you play Culdcept?

SN: I did. I was terrible at it, though. *<laughs>* I'm terrible at Biohazard, too. I can never beat my own games. I get so frustrated. *<jokingly>* "Who the hell made this piece of crap?!" Oh that's right, me. *<everyone laughs>*

JR: Which Culdcept characters do you like?

SN: Hmm... there are so many different cards. I try to use the items I drew with the monsters I drew, but that's not a good strategy. *<laughs>* I drew everything: monsters, items, magic.

When I play, it's like my own monsters are killing me.



Culdcept

COMPLETE ILLUSTRATION

JS: The only versions released overseas were for PS2 and X360.

JR: In Japan we had many versions, like Culdcept Expansion, Culdcept Expansion Plus, Culdcept Second, and Culdcept Saga. So many versions. But some cards were recycled. So you have cards which have been used since the beginning of the series. <to SN> There was something released a couple of years ago with all the cards included, right?

SN: Oh, the book?⁵⁷⁴ Yes. It also contains an interview with me. You should have told me you wanted it! I could have brought you a copy today. I thought this interview was going to be all about my oldest works.

JR: Well, in some senses Culdcept is also old now.



Satoshi Nakai's art style has evolved with the Culdcept series. On the left is the Migoal character from the PS2 version, while on the right is the updated artwork for the X360 version

JS: We're discussing everything. Your chapters will cover your whole lives. Also, I love Culdcept.⁵⁷⁵

SN: Thank you very much! At this point, I am the only person who has provided artwork for every game since the first. Another person, a friend of mine that also worked on the series, has passed away.⁵⁷⁶

JR: I also believe Yuzo Koshiro's sister did artwork for the first [Culdcept] game or two.

SN: That's right.

JS: Interesting! Her first job in games was graphics for The Fire Crystal, the sequel to The Black Onyx.

JR: Oh really? So it was even before Ys for Falcom?

JS: Yes, she entered a competition held by BPS, and her pixel art monster designs were used.

SN: One of the artists for Culdcept, who goes by the name of Kairou KETSU,⁵⁷⁷ was originally a programmer before becoming an artist. During the Temple Master project, in only three lines of code, he managed to completely mess up the computer he was working on, so his boss said "Go draw some pictures or something!"

Somehow he made the RGB colours become completely misaligned, so no one else could do any work on that computer. It was baffling. In one sense, it was a miracle, or maybe some sort of psychic phenomenon. No one could figure out what exactly he had done!

<everyone laughs - we get ready to leave>

Early Computer Games

Back in the conference room. Joseph had several questions for Masayuki Suzuki about early NCS computer games, so we decided to go through those before other questions which focused on console titles.

JS: Sorry to interrupt. I don't want Mr Nakai to feel left out while you interview Mr Suzuki... Mr Nakai, could you draw a layout sketch of the NCS office?

SN: It depends on which timeframe you're referring to. We used different offices at different times.

JS: Perhaps you could draw the earliest and most recent?

SN: OK, I'll try.

JS: Thank you. In the meantime, I will photograph all this artwork you brought in.

<author documents artwork while Mr Nakai sketches an office layout and Joseph interviews Mr Suzuki>

JR: I would like to talk about Dione. It is a very interesting game, because it was released not by NCS, but Hudson. How did NCS become involved with Hudson's project?

MS: Hudson approached us initially because we had experience with strategy games, having already released games such as Gaia no Monshou. They wanted to release a similar computer game, so they proposed the idea of Hudson and NCS working together to release a new

computer strategy game.



JR: If I understand correctly, Hudson was impressed by NCS and *Gaia no Monshou*, so they wanted to absorb some of your expertise in the strategy genre?

MS: Well, the content of the game was all developed internally at NCS, so I don't think their specific goal was to learn techniques and know-how from us.

JR: I ask this question because about one year later, Hudson developed a famous strategy game called *Nectaris*.⁵⁷⁸ Do you think there is a link between *Dione* and *Nectaris*? Do you think Hudson learned how to make strategy games from NCS, and then made their own strategy games?

MS: I don't know! I think you'll have to ask someone at Hudson. <laughs>

JR: So you were not surprised when Hudson later on released *Nectaris*?

MS: No, I was not surprised.

JR: Is there anything else you can remember about *Dione*?

MS: The sound designer, Hayama-san,⁵⁷⁹ went on to become very famous when *Cho Aniki* was released. For *Gaia no Monshou*, NCS composed new arrangements of some songs originally from *Elthlead*, but that wasn't enough, so we hired Hayama-san to compose some new music for *Gaia no Monshou*. Next, he composed all of the music for *Dione*. So *Dione* was Hayama's first full project.

JR: Was Hayama responsible for the sound, or just music?

MS: Both.

JR: Let's move on to *Gaiflame*. It looks like a futuristic *Elthlead* in the world of Gaia, which is very interesting. What inspired you to make *Gaiflame*?



MS: I was not the person who conceived of Gaiflame. There were actually two different people named Suzuki at NCS.⁵⁸⁰ Masayuki Suzuki, which is myself, and another person named Chikara Suzuki.⁵⁸¹ I was the designer of Gaiflame, while Chikara Suzuki was the producer. Chikara-san wanted to take the Elthlead series and do a game with a science fiction setting. The result was Gaiflame.

JR: There is something interesting thing about Gaiflame. I think the original version was for the PC-9801, but on every package, there's this black ink and a sticker indicating that this game does *not* support FM sound. And then, inside the package, there is this message. *<holds up explanatory slip of paper>* Do you remember this? It's unusual to release a game without a promised feature.⁵⁸²

MS: Originally, the game was developed **without** FM sound support. However, when the packaging was printed, the cover incorrectly stated that FM sound **was** supported. So this was simply a mistake in the package design.

JR: Did you realise that there was a mistake on the package after shipping the game, or just after the packaging was printed?

MS: I'm not sure, since this issue was handled by another department. The development team didn't receive any reports about it.

JR: My last question regarding the old computer games made by NCS is about a game, or rather a piece of educational software, called Dosekiryuu no Densetsu.⁵⁸³ I have no information - could you explain it to us?

MS: It wasn't a commercial game - it was not released onto the market. At the time, a local government agency in Kyushu wanted to create software to educate children about landslides. It's a very mountainous part of Japan, so landslides are fairly common, and the government agency wanted to teach children about the dangers of landslides. Since NCS was originally a staffing agency that sent personnel all over the country, we received work requests from all over. So that's how we became involved.

NCS was requested to develop the game by the National Land Agency - a Japanese government agency that used to oversee the construction of public works such as dams and other disaster countermeasures. It was a simple quiz game about natural disasters. We were commissioned to create the software and distribute it to local elementary and junior high schools - apparently the game was exhibited at schools when teaching about disasters. I heard that it was mainly exhibited in the Kyushu region, where debris flow disasters tend to occur.

JR: Do you remember the computer platform?

MS: The PC-9801.

JR: Did you keep any materials from this production?

MS: Ah, I'm afraid not. Today, the intellectual property rights for all NCS games are held by a company called "extreme".^{[584](#)} When NCS/Masaya ceased game development, we collected all of our game development materials and data, and put everything into a storage warehouse. So if a copy of *Dosekiryuu no Densetsu* still exists, it's sitting in that storage warehouse.^{[585](#)}

JR: Does this mean NCS still exists?

MS: Yes, but they no longer make games.

<lengthy conversation between SN and MS, discussing sketches of the office layout and positioning of different teams - we went through a few drafts, scrapping some>

MS: Masaya relocated three times, and has been in four different buildings. Even within the same space, we frequently changed the layout of our offices. If you could narrow down your request to a specific point in time, we might be able to make a sketch for you, but if you want all of the variations, that would be quite a challenge...

PC9801
or
Epson 286

PC9801
on
EPSON
286



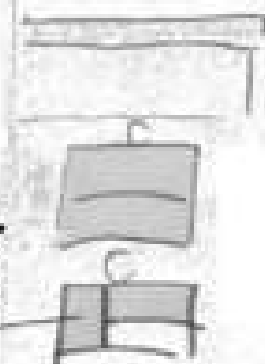
← 24-15.7
Steel Rack

14.2.9
TV
14-inch
TV

社長室
President's Office

Dept.
Head

部長

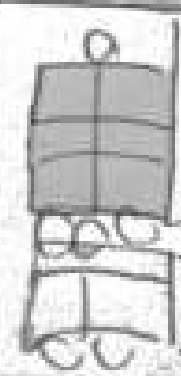
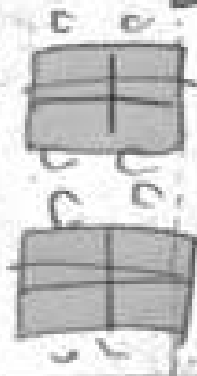
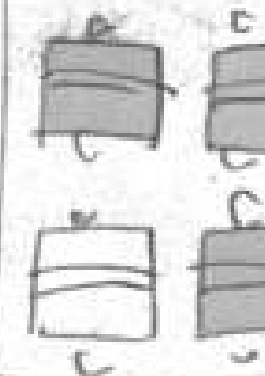


Talent
Placement
Booth

Table



Conference
Room



87 ~ 88 (3.1)
XH 1A 9F

Roughly '87 or '88

Masaya
9F

2776
Air Conditioner

古いPC
Old PC

NCS / Masaya

森ビル28@西麻布 10F

Mori Building 28 @ Nishi-Azabu

10th floor

- 1) Warehouse
- 2) Windows
- 3) Dept. Head
- 4) Section Chief
- 5) Business
- 6) Entrance
- 7) Restrooms
- 8) Programmers

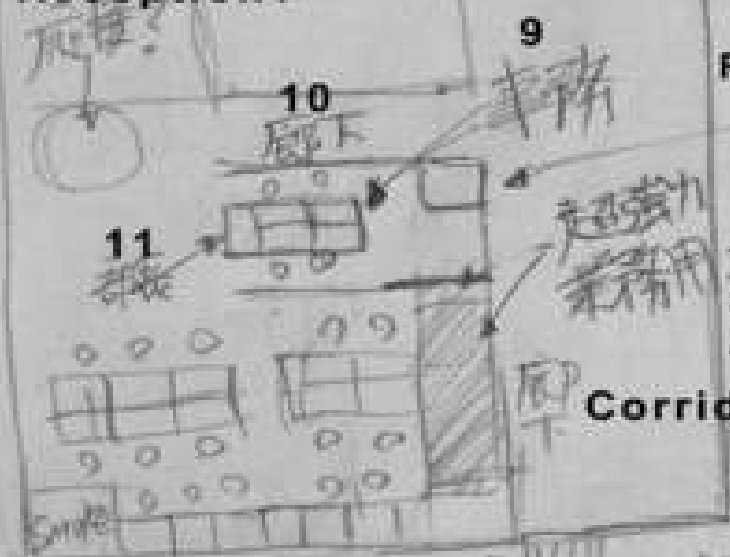
9th floor

- 9) Business
- 10) Corridor
- 11) Dept. Head



Talent Placement Booth

Reception?



Delicious Shibuya Water

Refrigerator

支店のおいしい水

By Ichimaru

Super-powerful Industrial Air Conditioner

Corridor

Windows

Emergency Stairs -
The manager will
get mad if you roll
out your sleeping
bag here.

JS: Do you have any other interesting stories about NCS?

MS: I had the opportunity to meet many different people. Everyone is scattered now, but back then, NCS was a gathering of a diverse array of talent. Many people who left NCS/Masaya went on to join other game companies. It's as though the old Masaya was a school that we all graduated from.

JS: Did you enjoy working at Masaya?

MS: Yes, it was very fun.

JR: I won't say it's unusual, but I seldom hear that working in a game company was "fun". At least in the 1980s.

MS: Well, in the 1980s, we had the freedom to do whatever we wanted.

JS: You dictated your own creativity, rather than management or sales controlling it?

MS: Yes. The creators had precedence and authority over the other departments. The sales department had a tough job because of us. *<laughs>*

JS: Do you think you've kept this spirit today at your current company?

MS: It depends on the company. Success employs a lot of people and has been making games since the 1980s, so Success is remarkably similar to Masaya. We have plenty of creative freedom, thanks to the company president. The president is a very free-willed person himself who doesn't allow himself to be restrained, so we automatically gain some of that freedom as well.

JS: Regarding freedom and enjoyment, did you have a lot of crunch time back in the 1980s?

MS: Yes. That happened a lot. *<laughs>* We would often sleep at the company working overnight, but sometimes the president would stop in, already drunk, and drag us off to a bar! *<laughs - to SN>* And you were furious! You would talk back to the president, saying, "What are you doing? We're trying to get work done!" *<laughs>*

SN: On cold nights, we would spread out cardboard flat on the floor and stuff newspaper into our clothes to stay warm. *<everyone laughs>*

MS: We almost looked like homeless people. *<laughs>*



FRAIM

JS: This was at Masaya?

SN: Yes of course. And one time the building manager got angry with us because we were drying out our sleeping bags in the emergency stairwell. <laughs>



Mr Nakai was hesitant about disclosing information on the unreleased games he's been witness to - the impression was that there were *many*. However, given the unreleased nature of Temple Master, and the fact it was previewed in magazines and had adverts printed, both interviewees were happy to discuss the title. There's some Japanese blogs discussing it online, and it's obvious Temple Master was highly anticipated back in the day. It was a JRPG with a sci-fi/fantasy setting and an unusual art style.

JS: <looking at office layout> Where was Temple Master?

SN: It's amazing that you know Temple Master. <points to author's print-out of Temple Master graphics, *adjacent*> That's mine! This is a promotional illustration I created on the X68000 during my NCS days. It was published in a magazine as part of an ad for a computer game, but unfortunately, the game itself was never published. It brings back memories... <laughs>

JS: I printed it so we can discuss Temple Master in depth.

SN: <to MS> Masaya doesn't have any rights to Temple Master, do they? Why wasn't it released? I think that since the game was never released, they never registered the trademark. I don't think it's a problem to discuss it.

JS: What year was this?

SN: We did Lightning Vaccum, and after that we switched to consoles...

MS: No, it was after Gaiflame. Was it before Shubibinman?

SN: I'm not sure, but it was around that time.

<SN and MS go back and forth about the exact date>

MS: I think it was before Shubibinman, so around 1988.

JS: Were you both involved with Temple Master?

MS: I was not involved.

SN: When I joined, the project was already underway. When I finished my work on Last Armageddon and joined NCS, they said, "Oh good, we were in need of a graphics person for this project."

JS: What genre was it?

SN: RPG. Just a normal RPG.

JS: Could you draw sketches of how the game looked?

SN: You mean like the game screen and objects? I don't know if we got that far. I think we assembled a game screen once, but that's all.

MS: The development didn't go far enough to assemble the game elements for display on-screen. There was the initial planning, design of the graphic assets, and the story. That was all. The project was scrapped because the programming was not moving forward.

SN: Now that I think about it, it's strange that the game was featured in magazines, even though very little of it was actually completed. Maybe NCS was trying to raise its stock prices.

MS: We weren't a joint-stock company back then.

SN: Then why did Masaya advertise a game that wasn't even finished?



MS: By providing information early, the magazines would continually write articles as the development progressed. That's what all the game companies did. *Sekai Yaruhodo So Much*, the adult game we discussed earlier, is another good example. The early magazine ads used completely different artwork than what I put into the game. They used an image of a girl I'd never seen before.

SN: <looks at *Sekai Yaruhodo* ad, shown 15 pages earlier> You're right! It's a totally different picture!

MS: They were already running ads before I had programmed anything to display on-screen.

SN: This is crazy! Who drew this picture?!

MS: I have no idea. Back then, the magazines would organise the advertising and articles about 2-3 months before each issue was actually released. But in those days, computer games could be published within a month after the programming was completed.

SN: Since computer games came on floppy disks as opposed to ROM chips, the manufacturing and packaging took less time.

MS: So the game companies had to submit advertising for a new game to the magazines a month or two before the game was actually finished. This ad for *Sekai Yaruhodo So Much* was created before any of the actual game graphics were ready.

JR: And yet the ad clearly says the game is already "exploding in popularity".

MS: Indeed!

SN: *<regarding the supposed customers>* **Who** were they - and **where**?

<everyone laughs intensely during SN's comment>

JS: *Temple Master* started in 1988, and magazines said the game would be released for the PC-9801 system in 1991. But that was not true...

SN: It wasn't true at all.

JS: And it was cancelled because...

SN: ...the programming was not going well.

MS: At the same time, the computer game market was taking a nosedive as the industry shifted to consoles.

JS: What percentage was complete?

SN: Less than 10%.

MS: *<laughs>* More like 20%, don't you think?

SN: Did we have the game field working?

MS: No, but we had already made plenty of assets.

JR: So it's the same story as *Moonstone* from BPS. [586](#)

MS and SN: Yes.

JS: Had the story script been written?

SN: I don't know.

MS: It was in the process of being written, but it was not yet complete.

JS: Have any files survived?

SN: I think some graphics like the monsters can be found on my old floppies, if we can restore them.

JS: I'd love to see them. Which computer did you use to create the graphics?

SN: The Sharp X68000.

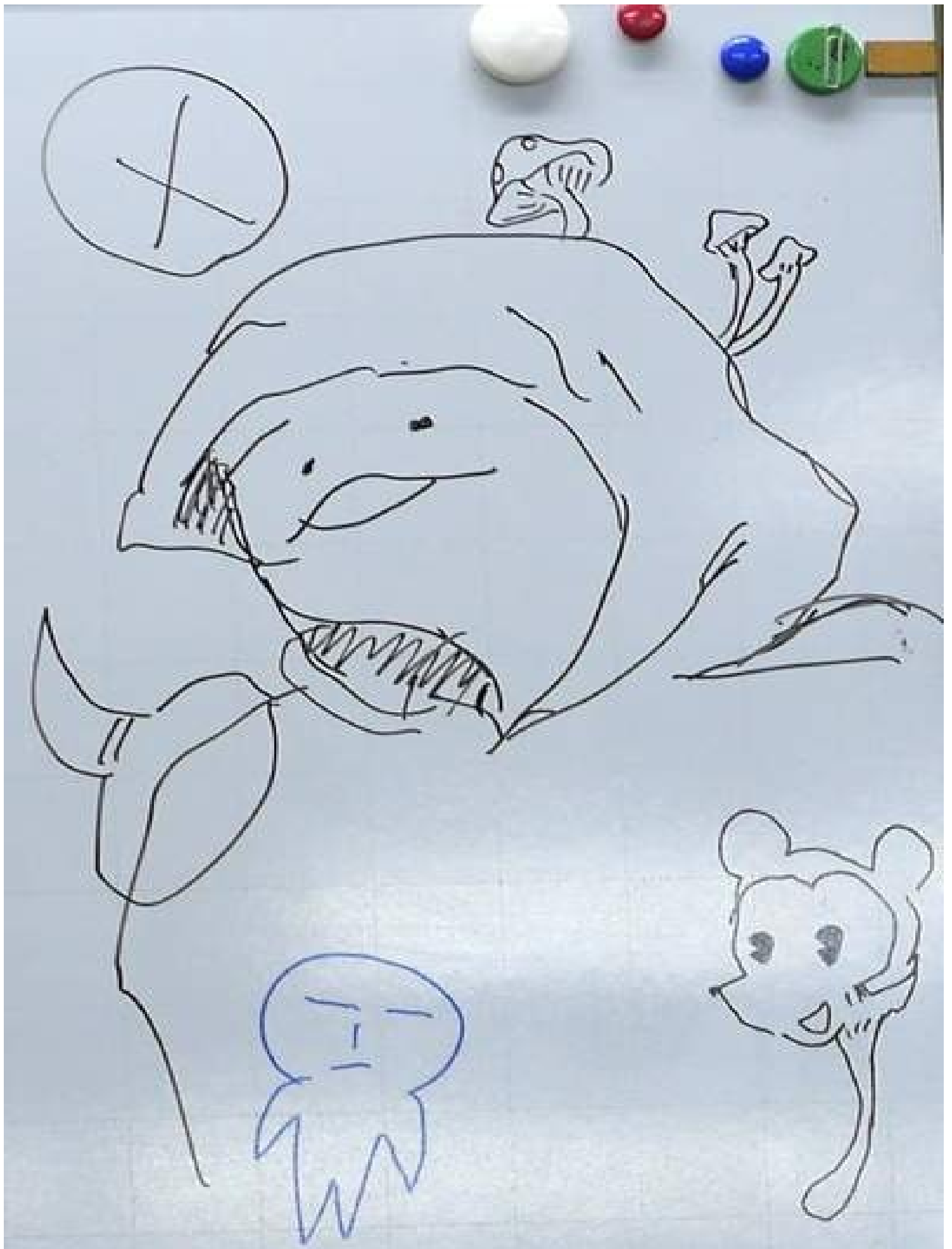
JR: Were you using a particular tool for graphics? Your own tool, or a common commercial program?

SN: A commercial program. *Z's Staff*.

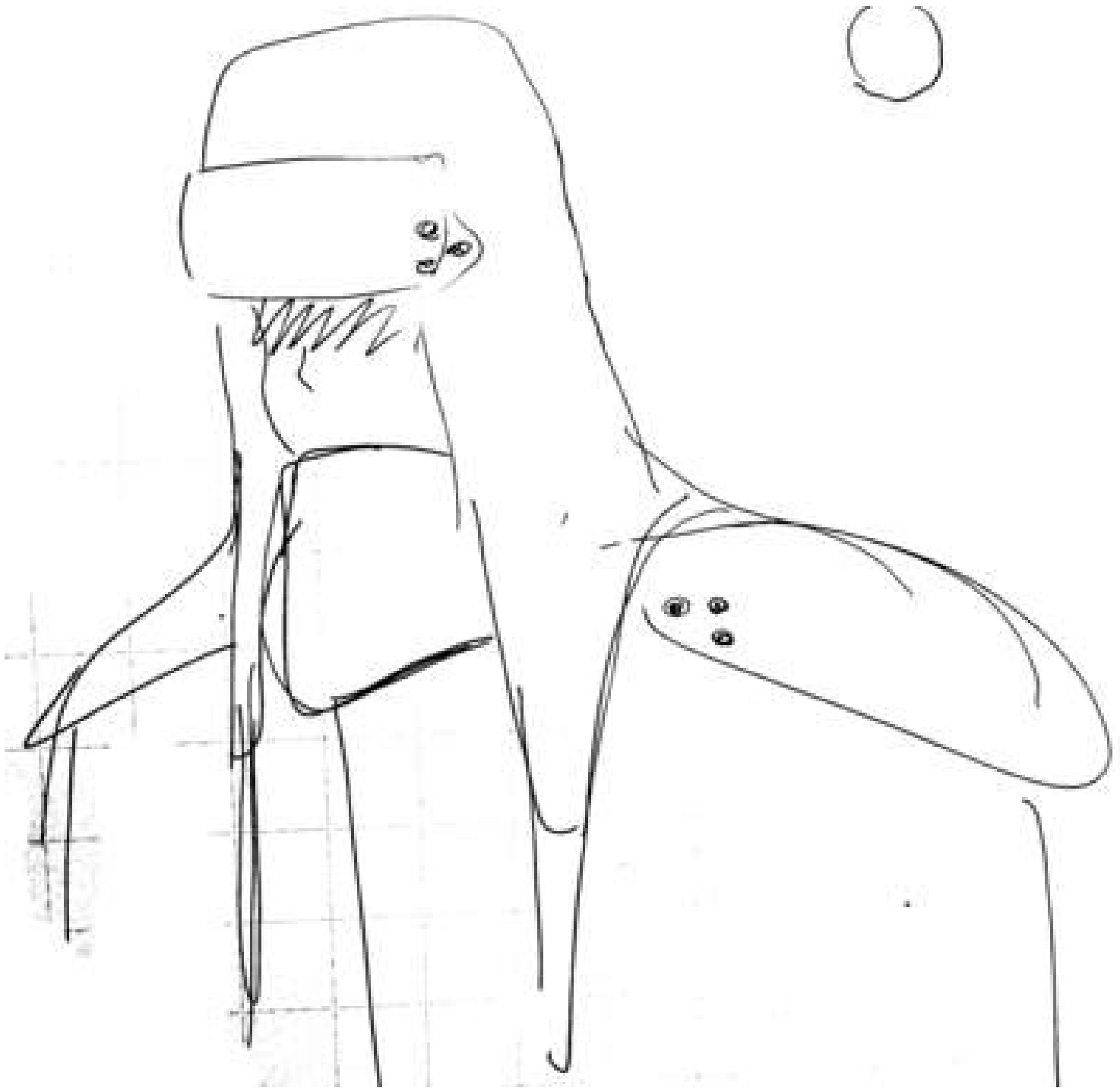
MS: Oh, that brings back memories!

JR: Looking at my database, it's very uncommon for NCS not to release a game as promised. I see *Temple Master* for the PC-9801, and also another game for the PC-8801 called *Oukyuu Kishi Monogatari*.^{[587](#)}

SN: I've never heard of that.



Satoshi Nakai's hilarious Nameko rendition of the main character on a whiteboard



Masayuki Suzuki's recreation of the main Temple Master character

MS: For the PC-8801? I think there was Oukyuu Kishi Monogatari at first, but then the project switched platforms and was renamed Temple Master.

SN: Ah! So it's same game!

MS: Oukyuu Kishi Monogatari was the original, provisional title during the planning stages. In Japanese, *oukyuu* is like a royal palace or temple. *Kishi* is a knight, but you might refer to the highest-ranking knight as the "master" knight. So Temple Master is a loose English translation of Oukyuu Kishi Monogatari.

JR: And *monogatari* means a story. So it's the story of the "Temple Master".



JS: Could you draw a game window, a sketch of the characters - anything to convey a sense of the game?

MS: <to SN> Did we ever have any of the graphics working? There was the character wearing a hood...

SN: Ah yes, the character wearing the hood! That's about the only thing I remember. A character wearing a hooded cloak, similar to *Assassin's Creed* today.

<Mr Nakai draws a humorous sketch which looks like the mushroom mascot discussed earlier at the restaurant - in the context of that day's discussions, it's rather hilarious>

JS: That can't be the hero! <intense laughter>

SN: It's *Nameko*. <laughs> No sorry, I don't remember.

JS: Apart from adverts, were there magazine previews?

SN: I think so.

MS: Yes, definitely.⁵⁸⁸

<MS starts drawing on whiteboard>

MS: It was more like this.

SN: That's it. No wait... I think that was a female character or something...

MS: So there's hood like this, with the face hidden.

SN: It has a strong 1980s or 1990s style.

JS: Was it fantasy, post-apocalyptic, science fiction...?

SN: Fantasy role-playing, but with a hint of science fiction.

MS: I think it was a reddish cloak and hood.

SN: I don't remember that, but the drawing is spot on. It takes me back.

JS: Was the game inspired by anything else; manga, anime, another game?

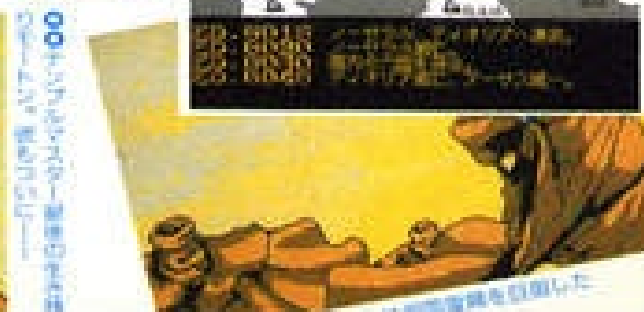
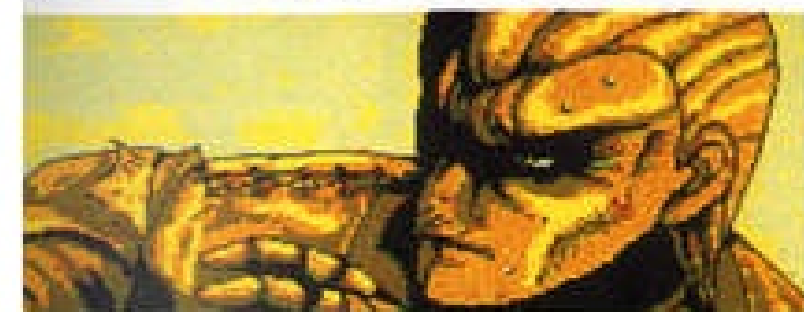
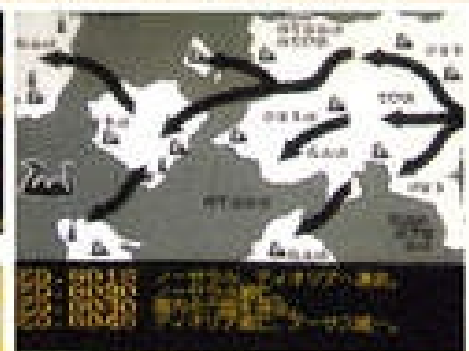
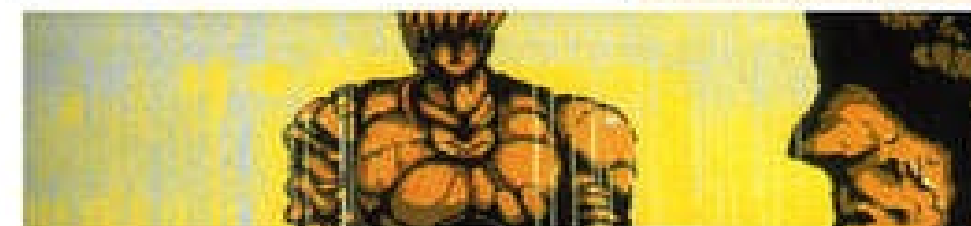
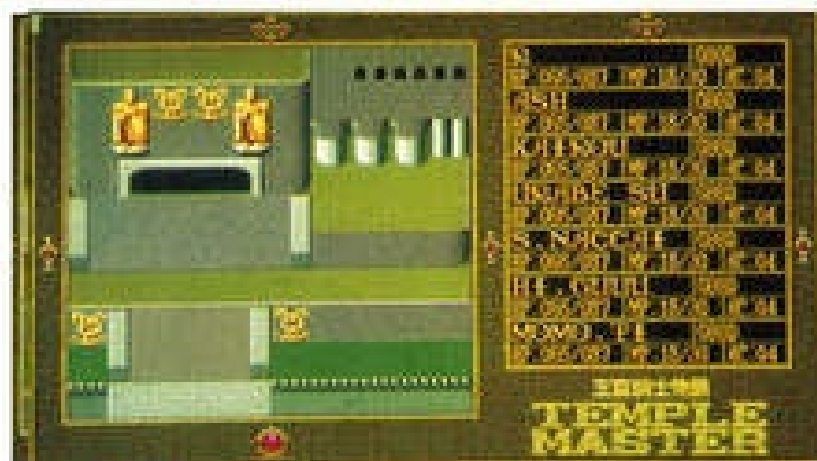
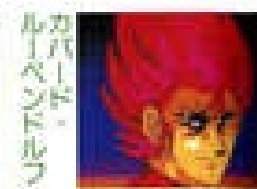
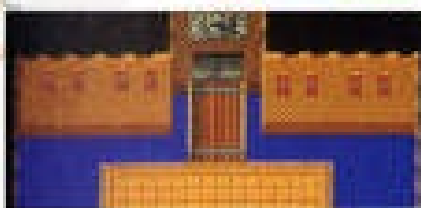
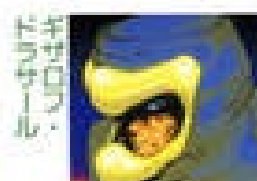
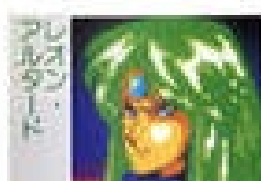
SN: Not really. I was in charge of the monsters, but I didn't take direct inspiration from anything in particular.

MS: The other graphics were created by Suu-san. Suu-san tended to draw artwork like this. His real name is Suzuki.^{[589](#)}

SN: We had three Suzukis! <laughs>

MS: This Suzuki was also the designer of Shubibinman. So there was a certain visual similarity between Temple Master and Shubibinman.

Below: Magazine adverts and scans provided by the Game Preservation Society



JS: Anything else you'd like to say on Temple Master?

SN: Hmm... I drew some monsters, but the project ended partway through.

MS: And I wasn't on the team for that project. I only have a faint memory of working on some promotional material, so I don't remember anything other than what we already talked about.

JS: What about other unreleased games? I'd love to see materials related to them.

MS: The unreleased materials from the Masaya era are at Extreme now, which is run by Satou-san, the last president of Masaya and current holder of its copyrights. That may make things difficult. The issue is that in the last few years, they've released a number of model kits from the Assault Suits Leynos and Valken games here in Japan. And the unreleased materials concern the Assault Suits series. The fact that the series still has some market viability could complicate things somewhat.

If you're interested in unreleased Success materials, I do have some monster and mecha illustrations that were drawn by Nakai-san. I'll ask [the company president] Yoshinari about that. Just when we were preparing to enter production on that particular title, I was hospitalised with a detached retina and the programmer quit. And since DS software sales were declining, we decided to halt its development.

JS: I must know more!

MS: It was a Simulation RPG, and we were thinking of doing another branching storyline like Der Langrisser. We had just finished making Konchuu Wars for the DS and had planned to use its mechanics as the basis for the game.⁵⁹⁰

It had a zombie story based on Lovecraft's *Cthulhu* mythos. It would have been set on an island where cultists had assembled and been transformed into zombies by the evil god they worshipped. So a S.W.A.T. team is dispatched to rescue the survivors on the island, and as the situation worsens they're reinforced by marines in powered exoskeletons to fight an ultimate battle between humanity and the cult.



Drone Tactics (NDS)

PC Engine Parallax & Pixel Dithering

With discussion on Temple Master over, and the mention of Shubibinman, the conversation shifts.



JS: I'm a big fan of Shubibinman 3. You worked on it?

MS: Yes. I did not work on the first Shubibinman game, but for Shubibinman 3, I did about half of the background artwork, such as the battleship and the town. We had **five-layer scrolling**! *<gestures with hands>*

SN: Wow. That was amazing.

MS: But it was really just one picture. *<laughs>* The road in the foreground was made up of sprites, while the background is a single picture. While the spaces in between the buildings were composed of smaller parts and made to move using a raster scrolling technique. *<starts drawing on whiteboard>*

So you have mountains, the sea, and other buildings, and all these parts scroll at different speeds. The pixels here just loop around as you move, and the speed of the loop is different for each section of the background. Meanwhile, the highway in the foreground is composed of sprites, and the characters are here, on top of the road. So every element is moving at a different speed, and even though it's just a single picture, a sense of depth is created, with different parts moving in different ways.

JS: You're referring to parallax scrolling?

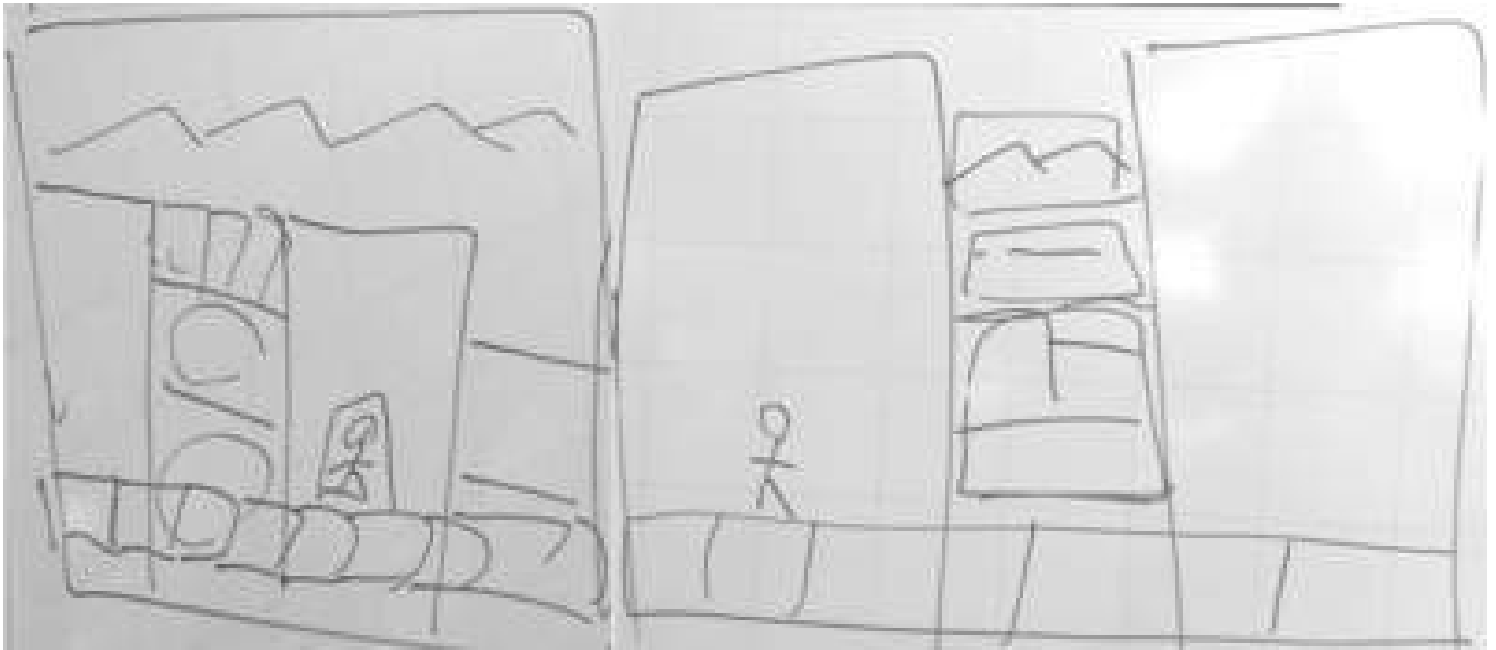
MS: Not exactly. The PC Engine only had one layer or plane of scrolling, so this type of graphic effect wasn't normally possible. This is how we did it.

JS: Can you repeat that while I film you? <films for DVD>

MS: There's only one background, BG layer, which moves continuously. Normally everything in the background moves together. But we draw buildings like this, and there are pixels here, in between. We cycle these pixels in between. So even though it's still just a single picture, this part moves differently. So we cycle various parts of the image at different speeds, faster for the nearby foreground parts, and slower for the distant background parts.

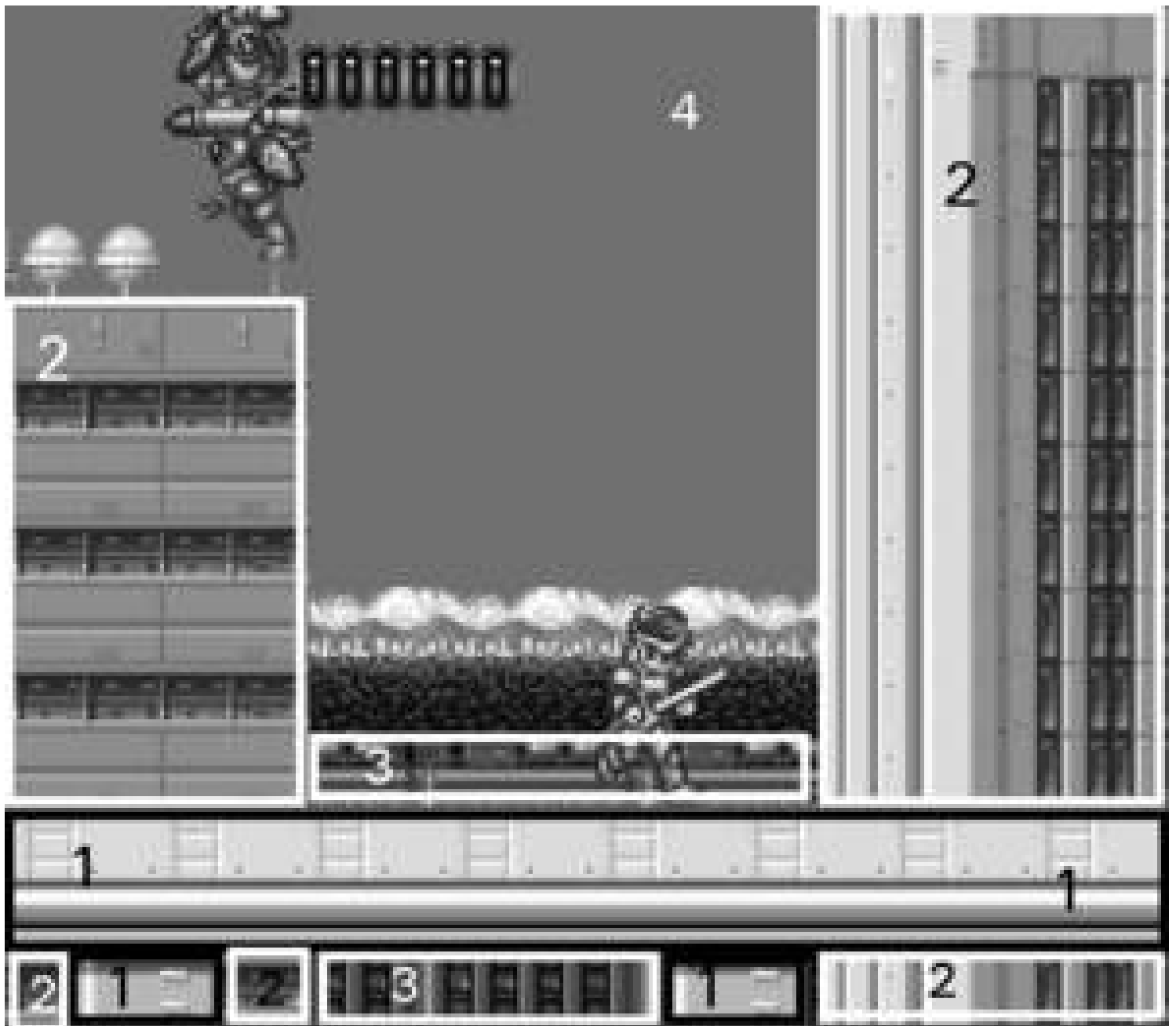
JS: <pointing> This is its own graphics block, with an animated image looping inside, giving the appearance of scrolling, and there'd be 1, 2, 3 blocks...

MS: Yes, with different speeds.



JS: And these blocks would move with the BG layer along the entire screen?

MS: Yes. So this is just a single picture, but it scrolls in a way to create a sense of depth. And then we have the sprites. In older games, we would draw and animate pictures inside these sprites. Think of them as small, transparent boards. We would arrange these transparent boards like this, and since they are unrelated to the BG, they can move at another, different speed. And then the character sprite runs on top of them like this. So in total, we have 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 different parts moving at different speeds, creating depth.

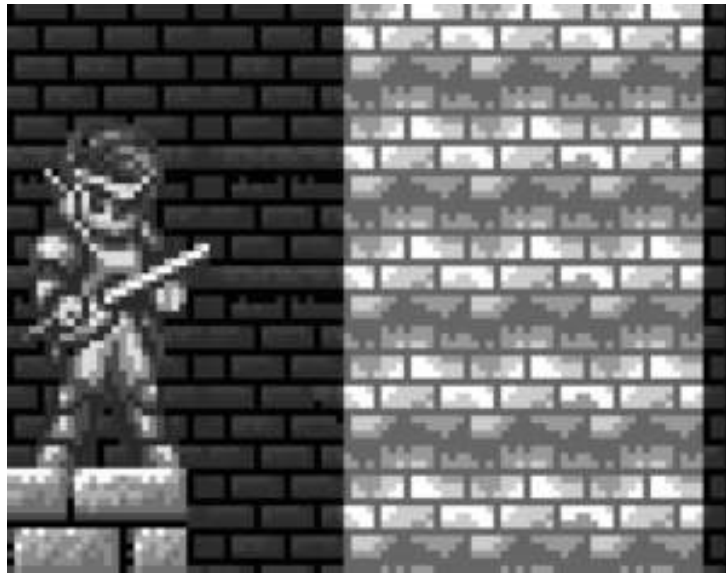


It's not easy to see in this particular static monochrome image, but each numbered box represents a pseudo "scrolling layer". Both buildings (2) move at the same speed, while the background building between them (3) moves at a different speed - this (3) layer would actually be a single block with its own animation cycle, activated when the player moves and perfectly timed in relation to the other elements to give the false impression of parallax scrolling. As the player moves to the right, block (3) itself moves to the left. Layer (4) is a giant static image (the single true BG layer). The player and enemies could be thought of as an independent layer (5)

JS: It sounds like a true form of artistry which is lost today with modern technology.

MS: Well, making stuff like this is much easier today. <laughs> We used a few other tricks for *Shubibinman 3*. Like the stage with the waterfalls. There's a visible wall behind the waterfalls, so the water appears to be flowing down the surface of the wall. But we didn't use transparency for that. That's just a single image plane. The way we did it was to create a gradient, with a different colour for each gradation, and then cycle the colours, so the colour A switches to B, then B to C, then C to D, and then D back to A, in a repeating cycle. But if that's all you do, you can't see the wall underneath. So we would also use a different colour. Let's call it F. Whereas A to D are all light shades of blue, F is a dark blue colour, and we

would use F to draw the outlines of the bricks in the wall. The colour F stays the same while the colours A to D are cycling, so the faint outlines of the brick pattern stay the same. This creates the illusion of a thin sheet of water flowing down a wall. Nowadays you would just superimpose a semi-transparent water layer on top of a wall background, but we created the same effect without any of that, using only a single-layer image.



*To make it more noticeable the water has been re-coloured.
The entire lighter section appears as a moving, pseudo-transparent blue over the bricks*

JS: Ingenious! Did you have to consider TV refresh rates?

MS: We did not have to take that into consideration. We were more concerned with the colour blending and bleed on the PC Engine and the Mega Drive. There was a difference in how colours blended on these systems, so we took that into account. For example, there was the method we used to make the water sparkle in Shubibinman 3. There's a water tank, with water inside, and light is shining down from above, and air bubbling up from the bottom. The method is just an application of the waterfall technique.

JS: Now I know your secrets! <laughs>

MS: We also used this technique in Langrisser II, for the rippling waves on the ocean. There are waves crashing against a wall which is partially underwater, so the water looks translucent. Normally, you'd have the water here and the wall here, <points to picture> and you are unable to draw the wall extending underneath the waves.

The submerged part is drawn with darker colours, so it looks like the bottom part of the wall extends underwater. We used this technique to create the partially submerged castle in the lake in Langrisser II. Let's see if I have a picture... <finds picture in magazine> Here! So you can see how it's darker here. And there are waterfalls with visible bricks underneath. And as the water flows, you can see it rippling on the surface. This is all created on a single image layer.



JS: As a graphic artist, do you miss this older visual style? Today everything is different.

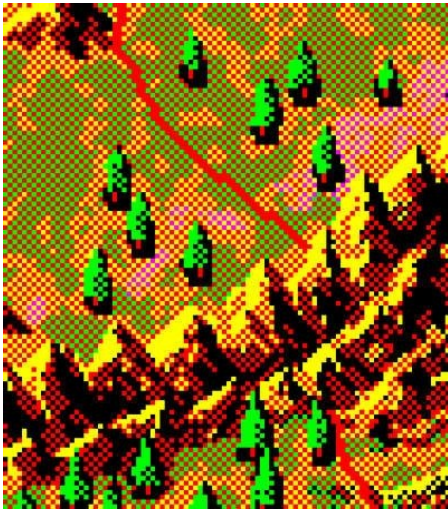
MS: Yes, I miss it. There was a challenge in creating as much depth as possible using as few tiles as possible. We were all competing with each other in that sense. The other challenge was how to make static images move and look lively. Like making lava appear to flow and bubble up, all using a single image. It's similar to the modern 3D effects that are applied using programs today. But back then, we created these effects manually, pixel by pixel. It was a different era. It must seem unbelievable, looking back at it now. *<laughs>*

JS: Creating beautiful pixel images is a dying art; the difference between building pyramids by hand or via crane.

MS: I agree. We don't have anyone to pass the knowledge on to. Nowadays, you don't need to go to all that effort. *<laughs - picks up Elthlead box and notes the map on the back>* This static image, even though it appears to have a lot of depth, was created using only eight colours. We created images by inputting the dots or pixels manually, one at a time.

JS: When two different colours are side-by-side it implies a third colour.

MS: Yes. This area right here is a light green, because it's actually a combination of yellow and green pixels. The same is true of the dark green areas. The desert area is a combination of yellow and white dots. The tools we had at the time were capable of creating these colour



patterns automatically, but when you do everything automatically, the end result is a kind of grainy tint.^{[591](#)}

<flips through magazine to find an adult game showing flat-shaded naked women>

But if you take the trouble to do it a little bit at a time in small sections, you get something like this.

<flips to another game showing a realistically toned and curved woman>

JS: A gradient look to the flesh tone.

MS: That's right. The same thing is being done here, *<points back to map>* but applied to the entire screen instead of just a small portion of it.

JS: That must have taken forever to do.

MS: Yes. I actually used the same techniques to do *Sekai Yaruhodo So Much*. *<laughs>* That was probably overkill. The games of that era had a kind of flat colouration, whereas this one doesn't. The reason is because of this graphical technique.

SN: You went to all that trouble for a game like *Sekai Yaruhodo So Much*?

MS: Yeah, it was a waste of the technology. *<laughs>*



Langrisser

Having discussed graphics techniques on early *Langrisser* titles, now seemed an ideal time to tackle this long-running and truly epic strategy RPG saga. In truth, its beginnings were in

Elthlead, *Gaia no Monshou*, and *Gaiflame*, but once started the *Langrisser* series became its own distinct entity. Only one entry reached the West, *Warson*, and so its significance might not be apparent. But alongside *Fire Emblem* and *Shining Force*, the *Langrisser* series was a defining pillar of the fantasy SRPG genre.

JS: Masaya's earlier strategy titles *Elthlead*, *Gaia no Monshou*, and *Gaiflame* are all similar; *Langrisser* took a very different route.⁵⁹² Had you seen *Fire Emblem* when making *Langrisser*?

MS: It didn't really influence us at all. After all, *Fire Emblem* was announced after *Langrisser* had already started development within Masaya.



JS: A few characters in *Langrisser* were also in *Elthlead*. Do you consider *Langrisser* to be part of that series, or is it just an homage to *Elthlead*?

MS: That was simply my own personal touch. I had a habit of taking my favourite characters from past games and using them in another game. And of course I was the one who created the story for *Elthlead* as well as *Gaia no Monshou*. I also created all of the characters and story for *Langrisser*. So it was natural for me to bring my favourite characters over into the new game.

JS: So it must have been your idea to put Rance Culzas / Lance Kalzas in both Leynos and Langrisser?⁵⁹³ <laughs>

MS: Yes, that was my idea. I put him in Leynos, and was quite fond of him, so I put him in Langrisser too. <laughs> With Langrisser I constructed a relationship diagram for characters, and included sub-episodes in the scenario. At one point I added a rival, kind of like *Gundam's* Char [Aznable], to increase the game's impact. This was the return of Lance from my previous game, Leynos. I inserted into Langrisser the "becomes an ally at the end" idea that was cut from Leynos - because in Leynos, in the end, he died for what he believed in.



JS: Did you know that because Langrisser was seldom released in English, fans are translating the series?

MS: Langrisser was released overseas as Warsong.

JS: Indeed, it even won awards!⁵⁹⁴ But the sequels didn't come out. Do you know why?

MS: I remember being asked to revise the graphics of the female characters in Warsong and even doing revisions myself. As for it receiving awards, this is the first time I've heard of that. Unfortunately I do not know why the sequels weren't localised.

JR: What is the meaning of "Langrisser", and why did you change the spelling? First, it was written as "Lungrisser", but starting from Langrisser III, it was written "Langrisser".

MS: The word Langrisser comes from the original design document, where it was originally "Light Ritter", using the German word for knight. But "Light Ritter" didn't sound good to me, so I just sort of came up with a more mellifluous title. <begins melodic enunciation> Li-li-li... la-la-la... ritter... risser... Langrisser!

JS: Why did you want to use a German name?

MS: Maybe it was a case of *chuunibyou*. <laughs> In Japan we often use the phrase *chuunibyou*, which means "middle school syndrome".

SN: Basically fantasizing about the types of things that 8th grade boys think are cool. The narcissism that accompanies that stage of puberty.

MS: To Japanese people, the German language just sounds cool. <laughs>

JS: I sense a kind of German or Euro aesthetic to Langrisser.

MS: That's my fault. <laughs>

JS: You decided to write the title "Lungrisser", but why did you change your mind later?

MS: Personally, I liked the letters L and U, so at first I wrote it as Lungrisser, which was used for the first two games. Then there was Der Langrisser, or "The Langrisser" in German. But in German, you don't use the letters L and U to make the "la" sound. So I changed it to Langrisser, to adopt a completely German-style spelling.

SN: <teasing MS> Wow, so the name was really kind of meaningless! <laughs>

MS: I liked the sound of it. And you use a lance, which is also L and A. I liked that, so I just went with Langrisser. Only a few people know about this.



Langrisser II (SAT)

JS: In *Langrisser II* there's a secret scenario with *Cho Aniki* characters.⁵⁹⁵ Can you remember anything about this?

MS: A separate team was developing *Cho Aniki* at the same time, so we decided to work together on that scenario. Honestly, since it was just a secret, we were able to have some fun and do whatever we wanted. <laughs>



Langrisser III (SAT)

JS: Was Langrisser III influenced by Sega's Dragon Force?

MS: Once again, Dragon Force was announced when Langrisser III was already in development, so it had no effect on us at all. I will tell you one little secret about Langrisser III, though. A lot of the voice cast for the characters were voice actors that the programmer and I were personally fans of. They used them because we threatened the producer - half jokingly, but half seriously - saying, "We're not going to work very hard on this project unless you hire these voice actors!"

JS: I was chatting with Derrick Sobodash, fan-translator on the Langrisser games, [596](#) and he asked the following:

"Who made the decision to carry out the massive story changes in Langrisser III? A lot of people aren't familiar with this: the Gaiflame instruction manual was a sprawling 42-page affair that included more than 20 pages of history explaining how Light and Dark came into being, the chronology of the Kings of Elthlead, the Bosers of Velzeria, and so on. It also included a more generic timeline of the 3'000 years between Gaia no Monshou and Gaiflame that introduced an entire geography that was pretty much scrapped in favour of the El

Sallia/Yeless map. Langrisser I and Langrisser II can more or less fit into that storyline with a little adjustment, but Langrisser III throws it out the window and Langrisser IV basically takes the series into a parallel universe. I've always wondered why they decided to do that when there were so many things already spelled out in Gaiflame. They could have made the stories line up.

"The Langrisser games are all connected. Erwin in Langrisser II is the descendant of Ledin in Langrisser I. Same as Cherie is a descendant of Narm and Lance Kalzas. In Langrisser III, Dieharte is the ancestor of Leon in Langrisser II and Lewin and Sieghart are the ancestors of Ledin in Langrisser I. Langrisser IV is the first game set across the ocean and off of El Sallia, so has an entirely new cast outside of Jessica and Boser. But Langrisser V goes back across the ocean to El Sallia and introduces Clarett as the descendant of Cherie (by this time, the Kingdom of Kalzas has basically taken over everything). Also, it introduces that Sigma is the son of the Duke of Eigil, a province in the far north of Kalzas. Eigil is a reference to Altemuller von Eigil from Langrisser III, suggesting that Sigma is actually a descendant of him and Varna.

"The main change from Elthlead to Langrisser was that rather than Velzeria having a succession of kings, they made Boser into a permanent entity. The concepts are mostly the same, and also most of the Elthlead/Gaia map gets recycled in the names of Langrisser I, II and III locations. In fact, in Langrisser III the kingdom of Larcuss is renamed to Elthlead after you retake it. King Raymond takes the reign name Sieghart, which is the king of Elthlead in Elthlead/Gaia. The Gaiflame in Langrisser IV and V lend stronger weight to the connection.

"My impression was that they started off by making an SRPG series loosely based on Elthlead, but when they got to Langrisser III Yoh Hazuki⁵⁹⁷ decided to retcon the Elthlead story and take things in a new direction."

MS: I was only involved with the story up to Der Langrisser. For Langrisser III, I did the original designs for the characters, the sound planning, and the difficulty balancing. The change in direction after III was largely based on my no longer being involved with the story. Incidentally, I was a big war game nut, and very into military affairs. Hazuki was an RPG enthusiast, and very into fantasy adventures. I think that should help you understand the change of direction.

JS: Which is your favourite? What's your proudest contribution to such an epic saga?

MS: My favourite is Der Langrisser for the Super Famicom. I was the one who came up with the idea of a branching story that allowed the player to join the enemy side. I also balanced the special abilities of each army.

The title to which I made the most significant contribution was the first Langrisser for the Mega Drive. I created the original designs for the game systems and characters, did the graphics, wrote the story, designed the levels, and balanced the game difficulty all by myself.



Der Langrisser for SFC has been fan-translated. This shot taken from RHDN. Other fan-translations include II, IV and the PC remake of the first. Visit: romhacking.net

JS: What was it like working alongside Satoshi Urushihara?⁵⁹⁸ He's credited as character designer on *Gynoug*, *Valken*, and *Langrisser I~V*.

MS: Urushihara-sensei was introduced to us through an agency, so I only met him in person once. But I really liked the way he did his designs. He was able to figure out the key aspects of the characters from my original drafts and develop them in a positive direction. I'm extremely grateful for his contributions.

SN: I've never met him. I was so busy working on the games themselves that I was never able to pay much attention to things like character design and promotional art. It was only when things settled down that I realised the illustrations were by the artist who drew [for various manga and anime]. That's what it was like.



Assault Suits / Gun Hazard / Cho Aniki

Long break; casual chat. SN and MS start an unrelated and hard-to-follow conversation about plastic model kits - some discussion about the model kit SN gave the author...

SN: Masa-san is actually a huge military *otaku*.

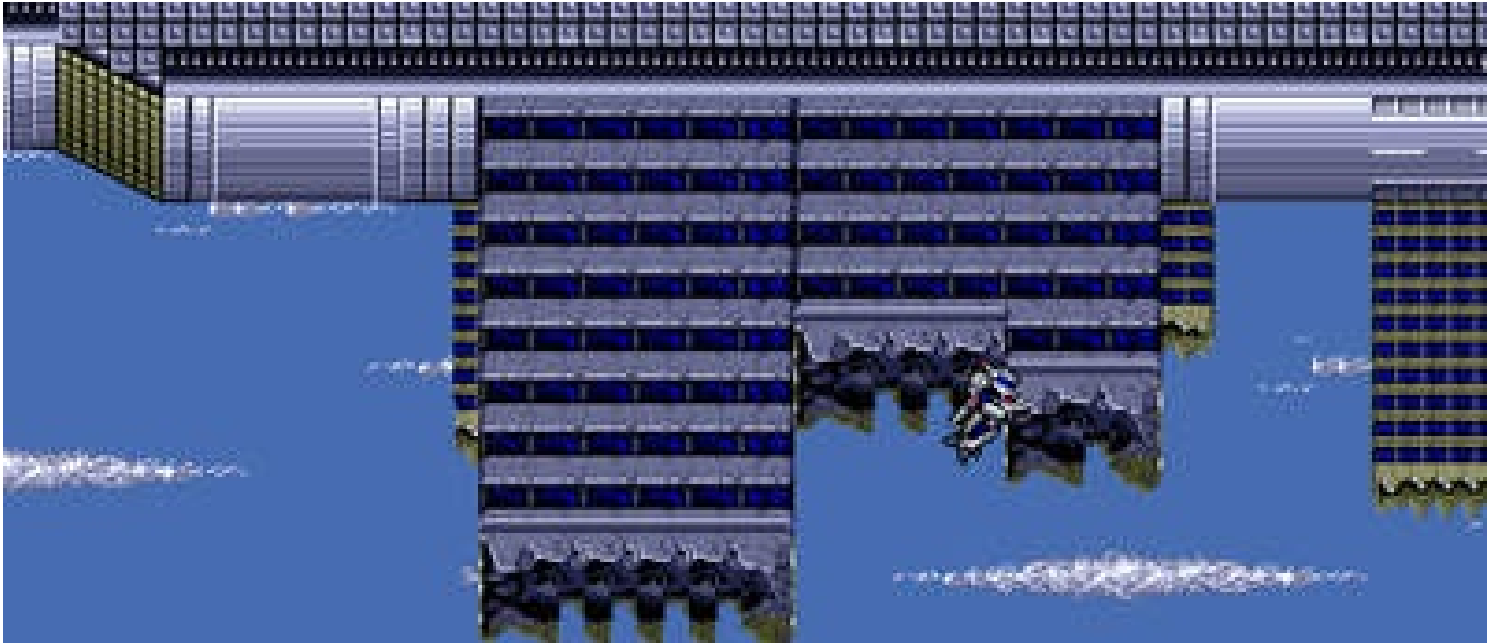
MS: <laughs>

JS: Cool. Let's discuss the Juusou Kihei or Assault Suits games this model is based on.

SN: Did you know that Masa Suzuki-san's works, Leynos and Valken, are actually connected? After the ending of Valken, if you just let the game run by itself for a few minutes, a short conversation appears. Maybe all you experts already know about this?⁵⁹⁹ <laughs>

MS: Nakai-san has already revealed the Leynos / Valken secret... But here's two more:

1) On the colony stage of Leynos, there was actually a feature in which gravity operated upwards and downwards. This feature was omitted during development, but the map graphics were created, and there is an inverted cityscape at the top of the screen. You can actually see it just a little if you jump immediately upon entering the colony, and accelerate upwards with the vernier thrusters.⁶⁰⁰([below](#))



2) In Valken, there were several stages that went unused over the course of development, with just the graphics completed for some of them. Several photos of these lost stages were printed in a strategy guide published at the time... And so on... Lots of stuff comes to me as I think back. Like how the basis for Dione was a science fiction proposal that was floated simultaneously while planning out Elthlead...

JS: Unbelievable! <looking over artwork> You've brought many paintings, Mr Nakai. Can you describe them?

SN: Hmm... <reflects> Oh, I remembered something important! This picture of a blue robot. I remembered that Tomoharu Saitou designed that robot. It was around the time he and I met... Our approaches to mechanical designs were completely different, so our illustrations had a stimulating effect on each other's styles. So I thought, "I want to draw one of your designs", and that's how that picture came into being.

JS: Indeed, the style is somewhat regal compared to other mecha designs. (see overleaf, left image)

SN: There was one other important thing I remembered. This promotional illustration for Assault Suits Leynos. You could say that this illustration was a collaboration between Saitou and myself! At the time, I was struggling with the composition of that drawing. I wasn't satisfied with the pose of the robot. Then Saitou said, "I tried drawing like this. What do you think?" And he showed me a rough pencil sketch. That solved my dilemma, and I finished up that illustration. Getting advice from a friend with a different perspective is important! (**top,**

right image)



JS: About Valken - you came up with the idea of the walls showing damage when you hit them. Can you elaborate?

SN: It goes back to Leynos. If a bullet hits a gasoline tank, it explodes like you would expect. And if a bullet hits a cannon, the cannon also becomes damaged or destroyed.⁶⁰¹ That seemed odd to me. I thought, if that's the case, then why not also shoot out the floor? I remember the programmer hating the idea. But I suggested making minor things destructible in every stage, and we talked about how that had never been done before.

JS: It's awesome; some games borrowed the idea. Have you seen Metal Warriors by LucasArts?⁶⁰² The planner was influenced by Valken. He said the retail release was different to the prototype he played at the Consumer Electronics Show.

SN: I am familiar with [Metal Warriors]. I think it was the one Konami published for the Western market? I recently watched it on YouTube for the first time in a long time, and the resemblance is even stronger than I had remembered. I'm happy that I was able to make something that someone considered to be worth imitating. After all, copying all sorts of

games and movies is how I got started, too! I know we made Valken 20 years ago, but I'm still quite proud of it.



Concept painting for an unused stage in Valken

JS: Was anything left out of Valken?

SN: So many things got cut that if you got me to start listing them, you'd end up having an entire extra volume of "*Untold History*" on your hands! <laughs> Back in those days, we'd only have between six months and a year to make a game, so there were always mountains of ideas we wanted to include but couldn't.

Even as we were making the games, new ideas never stopped flowing. Like, whenever a programmer would come up with something, they'd get all excited and say, "Look what I managed to get working - we should use this!" But then admit, "We don't have time now, but if there's a Valken 2, let's put it in that!"

When we were staying overnight at work, we'd end up drinking until morning at a bar in Nishi-Azabu, talking about those ideas. Sometimes they found homes in other projects. Every day was a blur of "This is fun!" - "We need more time!" - "I'm tired!" - "I had another idea!" It was such a wonderful time. I'm so grateful I was able to be a part of that.



JS: Oh, to rummage on the cutting room floor!

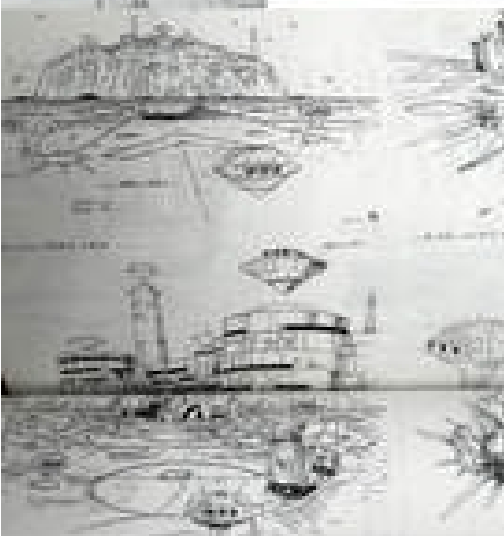
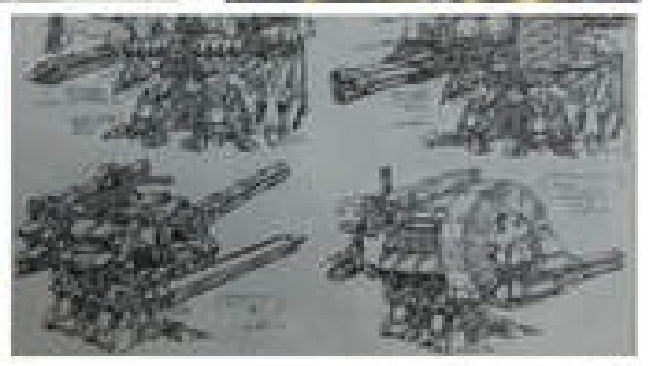
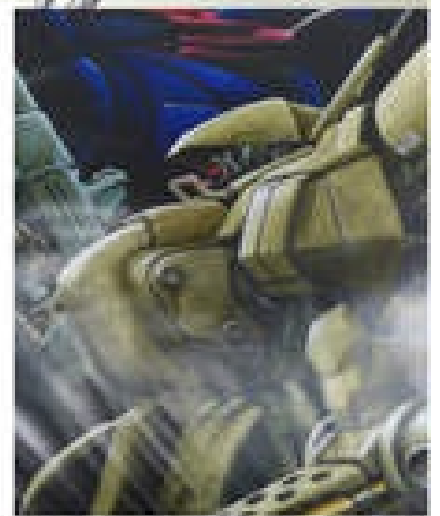
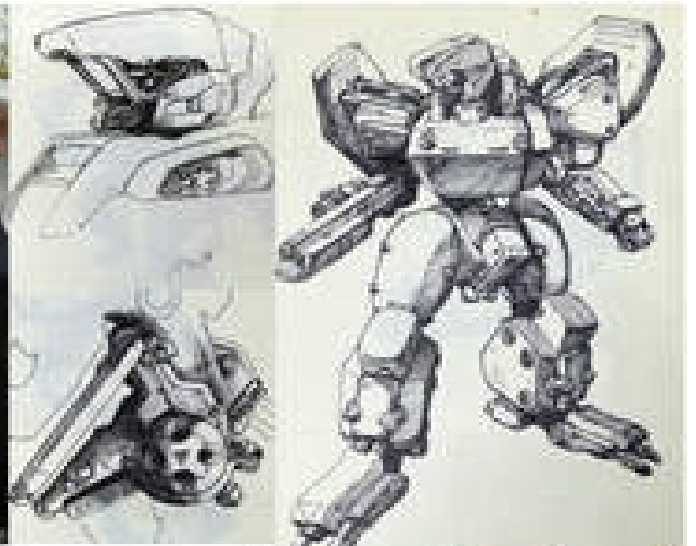
SN: There was one idea we had to cut from Valken. It was called the "X-System". Looking at it now, that sounds pretty lame... Originally there were two starting points: The Moon and the Earth. And two ending points, also on the Moon and the Earth. The Atmosphere stage was between them, so the stages were arranged in an X pattern, *<begins gesturing with hands>* with players able to proceed through Earth-Atmosphere-Space, or Space-Atmosphere-Earth order. Of course, players would also have been able to finish by going in an Earth~Earth and Space~Space order. **(page-margin sketch, above right)**

Valken has a stage where you shoot down shuttles, and a stage where a space colony crashes, and we also made a moon base stage that didn't make it into the game. A lack of time was the only reason we couldn't pull off these ideas. We made the game in a timeframe that would be unthinkable today, and if we'd had a year and a half to make the game, I think we could have done it. Now that I think about it, there was one more stage that didn't make it into the game, the Harbour stage. We even designed a submarine-style boss for it.

JS: You were involved in Gun Hazard, which had a similar style of gameplay. Can you describe joining the project?

SN: Are you asking me about my thoughts and work on Gun Hazard, or how I became involved with the project in the first place? It was by Omiya Soft.

Mr Nakai brought in an extensive portfolio



JS: Both. How you joined and what kind of work you did.

SN: Let me think. Basically we wanted to do a sequel to *Valken*, on a larger scale. And we thought that some role-playing elements were needed to extend the play time. We discussed this from the beginning. And personally, I wanted to design something bigger, something more amazing that I wasn't able to do in *Valken*, like larger enemy characters. More generally, I wanted to create the sense of destroying things on a larger scale.



JS: *Gun Hazard* was by Omiya Soft, but marketed as part of Square's *Front Mission* series. (screens all along top)

SN: Yes.

JS: But it was different from the other entries.

SN: Yes, it's a unique entry in the series.

JS: If I understand this, *Gun Hazard* started more as a sequel to *Valken*, than a true part of *Front Mission*?

SN: This has to do with Masaya, but there was a producer at Square, Tsuchida-san, who had previously left Masaya.

MS: His first name is Toshirou.⁶⁰³ More recently he was working at Gree, but he may have

left already. He was a manager of development at Gree.

SN: So Tsuchida-san from Square had some sort of conversation with Omiya Soft. I don't know what they discussed specifically, but through that process, they arranged for the developers who had created the graphics and program for Valken to work on a new title attached to one of Square's brands, and make one of the last big action games for the Super Famicom.⁶⁰⁴



Turns out both the Assault Suits and Front Mission series were born from this PC Engine game on the right

MS: Backing up a little bit, first of all, Tsuchida-san created this, a strategy game...⁶⁰⁵
<humorous tone> **Oh, that's right! These two games are brothers!** <holds up Leynos and Kai-Serd> Originally, the idea was to do a huge project encompassing a strategy version and

an action version released at the same time, with a crossover story between the two titles. So you would have an action game and a strategy game set in the same universe, released on the Mega Drive and the PC Engine, respectively. But because of various circumstances, the games diverged into their own universes. This one, Leynos, was programmed by Hideo Suzuki,⁶⁰⁶ who later went to Omiya Soft, while Tsuchida-san acted as the producer for this one, Kai-Serd. After that, Tsuchida-san left Masaya and went to Square, where he created another robot strategy game, Front Mission. Meanwhile, Hideo Suzuki remained at Masaya and created Valken.

JS: Wow, so they are all connected!

MS: After creating Valken at Masaya, Hideo Suzuki and his team left to form the independent company Omiya Soft. But for Gun Hazard, he and Tsuchida-san reunited, just like old times. They went back to the plan they had originally devised, to create a strategy game and an action game set in the same universe. So that's why we have Front Mission and Gun Hazard from Square.⁶⁰⁷

SN: So now we actually have four people named Suzuki!⁶⁰⁸ Masayuki, Chikara, Hideo who was just mentioned, and the last one, he did the artwork for Shubibinman, but I don't remember his first name. He went by the nickname Urabe Suu, so we just called him Susan. It sounds like a woman's name, but he was a guy!⁶⁰⁹

JS: Two Suzuki involved with two Shubibinman games...

SN: Yes, that's correct.

MS: Susan did Shubibinman 1 and Shubibinman 2. Susan was also the one responsible for the art design on Dosekiryuu no Densetsu. It was his first project with Masaya. We developed the game as a double-Suzuki team, where I prepared the quiz questions and rough sketches, and Suu-san created the final, polished pictures. Unfortunately, the programmer was not a Suzuki... <laughs> On the other hand, for Shubibinman 3, it was just me and Ariga. <writes down all the names>

SN: Ariga is a *managaka*. His full name is Hitoshi Ariga.⁶¹⁰ He might be quite famous overseas among Rockman fans. He created the Rockman manga. He has also drawn a cover for this magazine. <refers to mags across the table>

MS: Regarding Suu-san... His pen name was "Urabe Suu", with a unique spelling using the Japanese characters "su" (す) with a half-height "u" (う)... Can you express this in English? He never revealed his real name in his work in Japan, so maybe it's better to not show his name in kanji... In fact he used a pen name throughout his life, so I think we should respect his wishes by not printing his real name. Before Shubibinman, he drew artwork for us as an outside contractor when NCS was creating Dosekiryuu no Densetsu, which we discussed earlier.



From left, some of the Shubibinman 2 team: Suu Urabe, character artist and mangaka. Tomoharu Saitou (seated), artist and character designer. Norihiko Yonesaka, assistant producer. Toshiro Tsuchida (seated), producer. Koji Hayama, musician. On the far right, Makoto Goto

JS: Suu-san passed away in 2001.⁶¹¹ I'm including memorial pages, if you want to say anything.

<all pause for reflection>

MS: With that in mind, I leave the following comments, in tribute and gratitude... Suu-san was working as a freelance talent for NCS since before the formation of Winds. I first met him in a subcontracting interview. I was amazed when I saw his work. Previously, he'd been submitting illustrations to the Japanese hobby magazine *Hobby Japan*, and was a regular contributor. I read that magazine every month, and was already in love with his style.

One of these days, my time will come too. On that day... Suu-san, you better let me read the rest of your unfinished comic. <laughs> This time you have plenty of time until the deadline! Saying "Sorry, it's not ready yet... by next week..." won't work anymore. Get it done! What? Statute of limitation? No way. There's no way I'm going to forget it and let you off easy. After all, I'm your fan.

SN: He was my superior at work. We were pretty close in age, but he had previously done

work with Masaya. Even though his artwork was dainty and cute, he was a powerful person, full of vitality. He was the first among my friends to pass away... It's already been about 20⁶¹² years maybe? He was a great singer, with a pair of lungs like an opera singer! When we went out for karaoke, we'd be like, "You sure don't need a microphone!" <laughs>

JS: Tomoharu Saitou, of Winds, also passed away.⁶¹³

SN: It's already been 8 years since he passed away. I can't believe it'll be 10 years soon. He was one of my dearest friends. We worked together so many times. I liked his artwork, and apparently he liked my artwork, too. We spurred each other on with the good friction of friendly competition. We were both stubborn, so we also got into big arguments. <laughs>

Outside of work, we would often go drinking together. We went to Shinjuku and Shibuya a lot. In particular, we often went to a queer bar in Shibuya! We were friends with bar's matron, or *mama*.⁶¹⁴ Once you become an adult, it's very hard to make close friends. I'm so glad I knew that great big fool! It's sad, having to use the past tense.

MS: His name was "Lucky", and together with Nakai-san, was the soul of the Winds designer team. When he fell ill, and had to have his leg amputated, he went ahead with the surgery without hesitating. He said, "I don't need a leg to draw, my eyes and hands are plenty." He possessed the soul of a true artist. I'm sure he's still waving his brush around and challenging our ancestors in heaven. Godspeed Lucky! Make our ancestors stare in awe at your art!

SN: Neither of them was anything like "the character who dies".⁶¹⁵ It's so strange to think back on it. They were silly, happy, fun guys. So maybe God wanted to have them close by?... It makes you think things like that.

JS: Can you explain Winds?⁶¹⁶ **How did it start - what was its relationship with Masaya?**

SN: Winds was established in 1989 to do game artwork. I was one of its initial seven employees. I think I was 23 years old at the time? We started out doing temporary game artist placement, but now the company is also doing development work, and has developed a number of original titles too. Its relationship with Masaya was as a subsidiary company. At the time, there was a shortage of artists in the game industry, so it was established to do graphics work for Masaya's development teams. It was thanks to my work for Winds that I was able to relocate from Tokyo to Sapporo, and I'm very grateful for that.



CEO of Winds: Atsushi Mimura

As to why I left Winds, that's a long story and a secret, so I'm not telling! <laughs>

<short break - cold green tea>

SN: This is a promotional illustration I drew for *Lemmings* using an X68000. Did I show it to you before? I once travelled to see a Tove Jansson exhibit, creator of *Moomin*. *Lemmings* are

just like the *Moomin* trolls! Looking at it now, these X68000 drawings are really tiny, almost like OSX icons. <laughs>

JS: You were also involved with the first *Cho Aniki*. <referring to another image done via X68000>

SN: Huh? Wha-? *Cho Aniki* is known even in the UK? That's craaaaaazy! X68000 images seem really small now. This one's a little weird. This is before I started using a Mac. <referring to image>

JS: You did the package? (top, right)

SN: Yes, the package illustration.





JS: The *Cho Aniki* series has a bit of an unusual reputation...

SN: I know! I created the main characters. Even in Japan, the games are seen as weird. Is there a word for *bakage* in English? Literally it means "stupid game".

JS: I've not heard *bakage* before, but in English for bad games we sometimes use the Japanese term *kusoge*...

SN: <bursts out laughing>

JS: ... but this, we don't use it for this game...

SN: Well, there is a *baka* genre here. Games which are intentionally silly.

JS: **This is the first I've heard of it!**

SN: For example, the main characters of *Cho Aniki* are named Adon and Samson. Do you know why?

JS: **No. Why?**

SN: There used to be a gay magazine in Japan called *Samson*. Supposedly there was also an *Adon* magazine. At the time when we were making the game, bodybuilding was extremely popular among the staff. When we would see each other first thing in the morning, we would pose for each other like bodybuilders. We were all crazy back then. <laughs>

JS: **Some of the character designs are really strange. Do you know why *Ai Cho Aniki* was outsourced to Vanguard?**

SN: I was no longer with the company by that point, so I don't know.

JS: **You were only involved in the first?**

SN: Actually, I only created the artwork for the main characters. The stage backgrounds and enemies were all created by junior staff members who followed after me. <points to magazine> So like this picture is Thomas the Train. The junior staff competed with each other to create the interesting and fun designs.



JS: **It seems they borrowed the character style of Gynoug.**

SN: Yes, you're right. <magazine> These characters are named El & Topo, **(right)** because the person who created them was a fan of the movie *El Topo* by cult film director Alejandro Jodorowsky. You can read about him and his movies if you search for "*El Topo*" and "*The*

Holy Mountain" on the internet.[617](#)

Resident Evil

Although not related to NCS/Masaya, Satoshi Nakai has also contributed to the *Biohazard* series considerably, designing the various monsters featured in later instalments. Capcom is notoriously tight-lipped regarding their properties, so this was a wonderful opportunity.

JS: Mr Nakai, let's discuss *Biohazard*.

SN: Recently I was talking with the *Project Umbrella* website, with someone in Columbia, USA, maybe? I chatted with [inaudible] on Skype.[618](#)

JS: It's a fan website?

SN: Yes, that's correct. They said they would like to publish some of the artwork that was never used, which are still sitting on my computer. They are also getting official permission from Capcom USA.

JS: I would love to see those. Could I use those in my book?

SN: Sure. If you get permission from Capcom USA, that's no problem.

JS: I'm self-published, I don't need permission.

SN: This one was never used. Mechanical Heart. I have a huge pile of unreleased work like this.

<unrelated chat about cameras as author takes more photos>

SN: *<to MS>* Oh! Now here's a treasure!

MS: Yes, this was an unused design, by none other than Yasuhiko-san.[619](#)

SN: Aaah!

MS: Such a pity.

SN: What a waste!

JS: So which boss characters were not used?

SN: The unused ones? There are piles of them. Like this one, for example. *<showing various materials>* This is from before the zombies were introduced. These are plants. This was the design at one point. This one isn't a boss, but like this here, this is a plant monster. At this time, everything was based on plants. This one's a zombie.

JS: What do you feel was your most significant contribution to the series?

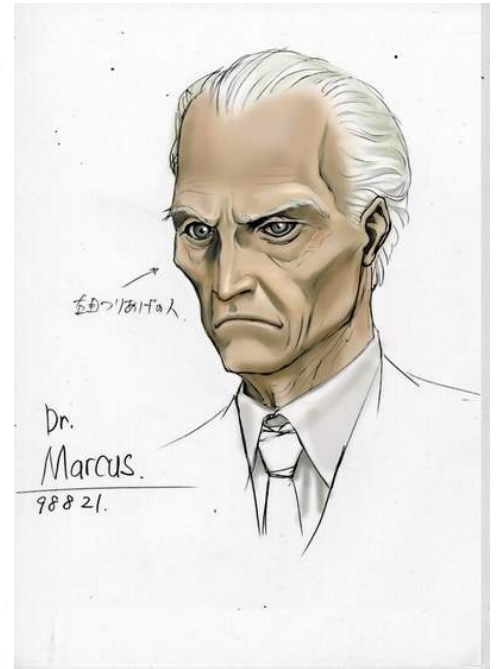
SN: My most significant contribution... I wonder! <laughs> The truth is, I am phenomenally terrible at playing Biohazard! I can't even walk straight! I'm like, dragging my head along the walls, leaving bloody streaks behind me. That's how bad I am! So perhaps my greatest accomplishment is being tortured to death by the very creatures that I designed? Incidentally, as I mentioned, *Project Umbrella* interviewed me once. <surfs net on tablet> My English is so bad that I can't even find my own interview on the site. <laughs> Please see if you can!

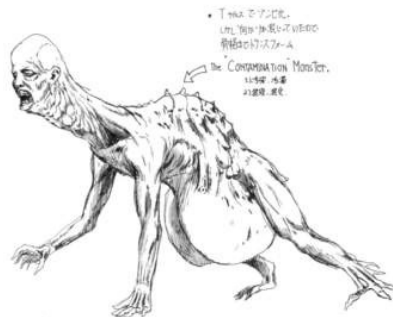


A Culdcept themed self portrait by Satoshi Nakai

Originally I had made arrangements with Paul Birch of *Project Umbrella* to reprint their interview with Satoshi Nakai, detailing his involvement with *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* and *RE: Zero*. Unfortunately there was not enough space. If you're curious to know about the two games' origins, unused bosses, and other cool secrets, please visit the URL below. In the meantime, enjoy a selection of artwork brought in on the day, and also supplied to *Project Umbrella*.

<http://projectumbrella.net/articles/Satoshi-Nakai-Interview-Project-Umbrella>





Future Plans

As we wind down for the day, Joseph brings up a conversation he had with Satoshi Nakai while I was interviewing Masayuki Suzuki about the background scrolling in *Shubibinman 3*. The conversation led to details about Mr Nakai's unrealised plans for a rather cool game...

JR: I had a small talk with Mr Nakai before, and asked an interesting question. I was talking about Yoneda-san, [620](#) and I said that whereas Yoneda-san only worked a few years in the game industry, Mr Nakai is still making illustrations for it. I asked why, and his answer is interesting...

JS: Please tell it again.

SN: For example, for normal illustrations... Well, "normal illustrations" is a very strange thing to say, but take this one for example. *<refers to some art>* I drew this picture, but it wasn't very satisfying. Let me explain. To draw well and become a better, more expressive artist, that's extremely enjoyable. But all these characters don't move. *<flips through images>* For example, we can animate this character like this. *<shows new frames>* This way, the character can move and is more interesting to create.

Suppose that I draw a normal illustration like this and later think, "The colour's all wrong! It shouldn't be red!" But even if I worry about it, surprisingly, the client doesn't really care. One time, I sent an illustration that was almost complete, but not quite, to an editorial department for checking. And they simply said thank you, as though the illustration was already finished. But I said, "No, wait! There are still stray pencil marks everywhere!" At that point I realised that even editors who have dealt with illustrations for a long time actually don't care too much about the artwork, and don't examine it carefully.

Whereas this one, if I draw something like this boss monster, the animation director will be enthusiastic about it. And we will compare and encourage each other's work and say, this is a great image, this is some great animation. And he will take my illustrations and animate them in ways I hadn't even thought of, surpassing my imagination. So I realised that working together to create something with other people is more enjoyable. But at the same time, I don't mean to say that I devalue illustrators who work alone.

JR: You also showed illustrations for a shooting game. Maybe John would like to see?

SN: I really want to make this into a game. Once you have a number of parts, you can create a battleship like this one.



JS: That's incredible!^{[621](#)}

JR: He does it only because he likes to do it.

SN: That's right. At first there was a company that showed interest, but they got into big trouble with a certain very large company in the Kansai region...

<SN and MS laugh knowingly>

MS: This topic is moving in a dangerous direction!

JS: Oh, are we not allowed to mention the name?

SN: No, it's something that everyone knows about, so it's okay. The company is *Hrrrrnnngghh*. Oh my! Excuse me. *<tenses up> Hrrrrnnngghh!*

<strong laughter all round>

JS: Anyone catch that? *<laughs>*^{[622](#)}

SN: But the company itself was not at fault. It was a personal matter involving a certain producer. As a result, the project imploded and I was laid off.

JS: I'm very sorry to hear that. Can I publish a picture of this unreleased 2D game?

SN: The battleship picture that I drew? I wouldn't have any problem with that at all. On the contrary, if foreign audiences saw it and thought, "Whoa, this is so cool! Let's make this!" I would be delighted.

I hate to complain, but the Japan of today has no use for people like me. It breaks my heart, but it seems all they want is Gundam and cute anime girls. I don't want to sound like an old man complaining about generational change, but I can't believe how standardised everything has become. But regardless, as long as I keep drawing, ideas keep bubbling up in my head. That's why I keep doing it.

JR: It's interesting because Nakai-san was talking about making an old-fashioned 2D shooting game, so it's somewhat linked to the discussion we had at Eighting,^{[623](#)} about how "shooting" is not shooting games anymore. So it's difficult to attract new people to the genre.



JS: Yes, the genre isn't popular anymore, unfortunately.

SN: Yes. There are too many bullets.

JS: You're avoiding more than you're shooting.

SN: Swaying, yes. Almost like boxing.

MS: And you just have to hold the fire button down the entire time.

JS: You might as well have it shoot automatically.

SN: Yeah, it's like that. But I'm not content just to imagine how things could be different. I have concrete ideas. At the same time, I'm just an artist, so I don't concern myself with commercial potential, how many copies to sell, things like that.

JS: Some people use crowdfunding.

SN: Yes, I know. There's Inafune-san's project, similar to Rockman. But I don't think I have the skill to do crowdfunding and manage the entire project.

JS: You need to hire a manager to organise stuff.

SN: Hmm... I don't have money to hire people! <laughs>

JS: Anyone have any final comments; any future plans?

MS: Currently I'm focusing on sharing my knowledge with our newer employees. Personally, I'd like to continue my military research, which has always been a passion, and maybe write a book or something. I'm currently collecting Japanese military manuals and other documents from the second World War. A lot of the old documents are falling apart, so I'm in the process of converting them to PDFs and donating the originals to museums. Some of the older ones are from over a century ago, including books written before the Russo-Japanese war.

JS: I'm glad you're documenting it. History is important.

MS: That's true! And I know you yourself are working hard to document the history of games!

SN: In the future, I'd like to make games for middle-aged geezers. <laughs> Gamers are getting older in the UK, right? Japanese gamers are getting old too! Let's all die with game controllers in our hands! I'm going to develop games for senior citizens!

Games sure come in a lot of different forms these days. We have PC games, browser-based games, games for home consoles, mobile and smartphones. Times change, and these things ebb and flow. I remember the Jaguar. That thing sure had a weird controller! I remember the Lynx. And I couldn't believe how expensive it was! The hardware comes and goes but the games stick around.

It's just like how "chiptune" music is still popular in this day and age. I'm sure all sorts of things will continue to change, but I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that digital games have already become as established as card games and board games. And that means I can still keep drawing my digital art! <♪ >

Wouldn't a shooting game for old folks be great? <♫> How about an Action-RPG for old people? I will draw the finest quality graphics for the discriminating - if faltering - eyes of

elderly gamers! And that's a promise! So how's that for a comment?

<everyone laughs>

JS: Awesome! It seems we're coming up to time. It's been a pleasure speaking with both of you.

SN: Honestly, I wanted to talk more. I keep thinking of things I should have mentioned. That happens a lot. <laughs> I wanted to talk about Valken some more!

Email follow-ups

Since conducting this interview there were announcements for updates/sequels to both Leynos⁶²⁴ and Langrisser⁶²⁵ - a rebirth for both series, if you will. Given the involvement of both interviewees, I sent some follow up questions on this.

JS: Mr Nakai, with Valken you shaped what became multiple titles. How do you feel about the recent revival? And Mr Suzuki, you laid the foundation for Leynos and therefore the series. Have you seen the update?

SN: Ah... I was aware of that, yes. I think it's been about two years since an acquaintance asked me if I was involved with it. ...I think I'm going to refrain from commenting, if you don't mind. ...2015 is this year, right...? PS4...?! Oh no!

MS: I'm in contact with the current team that's developing the Leynos remake. They've had a variety of questions and issues that they've wanted to discuss, and I've been responding to those.

JS: What about the Langrisser revival?

MS: I haven't heard anything in regards to the Langrisser remake. There's been no contact at all. As I don't know what they're doing with the series' mechanics, I honestly can't give any opinions on that. As for the characters, I can't help but feel they're a little lacking in individuality. But honestly, with the Langrisser series, it's always been easier to express that sort of thing in the villains than the heroes, so I'm looking forward to seeing the enemy characters. (At this point, I haven't seen any of them.)

And to be fair, we didn't put a lot of individualistic elements into the main characters of Langrisser I through III, so that it would be easy for anyone to project themselves into them. So at this point, I'm not too concerned about the characters' lack of personality.

I'm at home right now, but tomorrow I'll send you some of my notes about Langrisser's AI and scenario design from work. Please keep in mind that these aren't official documents. They're informal, intended for my own amusement. Also, they use a lot of military jargon. If there's anything you don't understand, please don't hesitate to ask. For example:

OMG = Operational Manoeuvre Group, the former Soviet armoured division that, as part of the Soviet strategy at the time, was deployed deep into enemy territory after their military was able to breach enemy lines.

Ney's Cavalry Assault = Largest cavalry-only assault in history, committed by the French army's Michel Ney against the British at Waterloo, during the Napoleonic Wars.

And so on. Furthermore, as these are just my notes written after the fact, there are errors. These are not materials created as part of the official development process. Rather than revealing the actual secrets of Langrisser, these documents are about how Suzuki was able to adapt his own personal interests and philosophies into Langrisser. While the focus is primarily on Langrisser, a few other games that Suzuki was involved with appear as well. Please think of them as describing the contents of Suzuki's brain, viewed through the lens of Langrisser.⁶²⁶

[Mr Suzuki gave permission for me to share these documents, totalling 5'000 Japanese characters. As of editing V2 these documents remain untranslated - but if anyone in the fan translation or Langrisser community wants to take on the task, they are welcome to the files.]

PC Engine Golem

With the intention of showcasing glorious artwork by as many artists as possible, I decided to ask Satoshi Nakai about the possibility of creating the cover for Volume 2. He replied positively, and the result was better than I could have hoped for. Here are some excerpts of emails I was sent during our discussion of the cover, in chronological order as received:

First, some news about my move. Last year I moved to Sapporo, where you also visited! I was born in Hokkaido, but I've spent 28 years in Tokyo, so it's as though I am going to experience life in a cold climate for very the first time. There were many reasons for the move. Above all, the main reason was that Tokyo is too hot! Since I'm from Hokkaido originally, I don't handle the heat well. Now that networking technology has advanced, I am able to work from anywhere. In the old days, we would hand over artwork on floppy and MO disks. This is the first winter since the move, but it's not bad at all. I'm looking forward to a summer with no air conditioner!

In view of the conditions that you gave via email, I have based my drawing on the concept of a "Turbo Graphics Golem". Or a "PC Engine Golem" if you prefer. However, in this early draft, the man in front isn't so interesting yet!

One other concept is "SCSI", the old type of computer connector. What we now call USB. I have used SCSI to embellish the front character, but I should be able to produce a better design. Also, if possible I'd like to design an 8-inch floppy disk for the background. The reason is because I was still using floppies when I did work for the PC Engine and Super Famicom! I used 8-inch floppies as part of my part-time work when I was around 19 years old, but the Super Famicom work I did at 22 was on 5-inch floppies. Since the concept of your book is "classic Japanese games", I'd like the artwork to incorporate as many references to that period as possible.

Here's its current status:

- I wasn't sure how to handle the background, so I tried to make it simple, as I would for a Japanese game book.
- I attached a PC Engine GT to the character's gun, but was that even sold in Europe? It may have been a Japan-only release. (It cost 44'800 yen in 1990! OMG!)

If you have any general feedback, I would be happy to hear it. If you have any requests, just let me know!

[See [book's opening pages](#) for rough cover drafts]

~Satoshi Nakai Selected Biography With "Commentary"~

Debuted in 1967: "Began living human existence. Actively involved in baby activities. Started drawing pictures on third or fourth year of human existence, and continued to do so for the next 30. At some point, appears to have succeeded in turning drawing pictures into an occupation."

Personal Mottos: "Me forever. Me over the GALAXY. My boss is a source of dioxin."[627](#)

Likes: "Alcohol, Tabaco, Coffee, Milk, Novels, Manga, Films, Appreciating Music, Fighting Moves, Formula 1, Hifumi's Ramen, Taishoken Ramen, Small Felines, Etc."

Dislikes: "Thoughtless People, Crowds, Traffic, Crowded Train Cars, Monsoons, Taxes, Most Politicians... I'm forcing myself to stop here because it's getting pretty long."

Selected Portfolio

Last Armageddon - PC-88, PC-9801, Sharp X1, Famicom, FM Towns, MSX, Sharp X68000, PCE-CD (1988)

Unusual JRPG where players control a party of demons in a post-apocalyptic world, fighting alien robots. Demons have traits (flying, swimming, etc.), while dungeons are first-person. This coupled with the bizarre sci-fi theme gives it a super freshness akin to the first *Phantasy Star*.

SN: "This was my entry into the (dark) world of videogames. I was such a game virgin that I didn't even know what genres like 'RPG' meant. At this point I had already acquired my 'monster design factory' function."

(*Juusou Kihei Reinosu*) / **Assault Suits Leynos** / **Target Earth** - Mega Drive (1990)

"For *Leynos*, a more experienced artist - *senpai* - drew the in-game pixel art. My responsibility was using it as a basis for redesigning and illustrating the robot for promotional material. I drew the package and manual art with Liquitex.[628](#) I think CG illustrations were still rare in this era."

¥ / **Gynoug** / **Wings of Wor** - Mega Drive (1990)

"As you're probably aware, the Japanese title is *Gynoug*. This is the game in which I first stepped into the quagmire of home console game development. I ended up drawing 90% of the game myself, which was pretty typical for those days. I was responsible for the characters, backgrounds, and *sekaikan* - almost all imagery."

Head Buster - Game Gear (1991)

"I did package and advertising artwork for this one."

(*Juusou Kihei Varuken*) / **Assault Suits Valken** / **Cybernator** - Super Famicom (1992)

"This is another game that I did pretty much by myself. I'm grateful to the thoughtful friend who drew, among other things, the background for the final stage. I was responsible for the mecha design, backgrounds, and *sekaikan* - almost all imagery. It was also my idea to destroy the floor and other objects by shooting them with the machine gun. I remember the coder being annoyed with me, saying, 'That's a pain to code!' Recently, my Leynos and Valken designs were released as plastic models. Another company also produced small figurines."

Sword Maniac (aka: X-Calibur 2097) - SFC (1994)

"This job was only doing the package illustration."

Front Mission: Gun Hazard - Super Famicom (Feb, 1996)

"An Omiya Soft game. I did everything from the concept design to the pixel graphics for the playable mechs, half the enemies, and about a quarter of the backgrounds? I was even able to participate in some of the world design. I remember being terrified that no matter how much I drew the project would never end."

Wrinkle River Story - Saturn (Mar, 1996)

"How do you even know about this?! Until I saw your email, I hadn't thought about this game for 20 years! And even after watching over 20 minutes of it on YouTube, I still don't have any idea what I did on it. Seriously! I'm sure the connection was that Nextech made the game, but did I actually have anything to do with it...?"

Virtua Fighter 2 - Mega Drive (1996)

"I guess this turned out to be quite the premium item in Japan. I have painful memories of banging out pixels while drenched with sweat from the hot summer weather. I handled Jacky, while my good friend did Jeffrey."

Velldeselba Senki: Tsubasa no Kunshou - PS1 (1997)

"You really know your stuff if you've heard of this one. <laughs> I remember it well! As I recall, one day I was given an order out of the blue to draw maps for this game. When I looked at the map images that had already been drawn for it, I couldn't believe it. They were like Famicom-level graphics!"⁶²⁹

Godzilla: Trading Battle - PlayStation 1 (1998)

"This was a similar card game that I worked on right after Culdcept, so it left a big impression on me. With permission from Toei to render their most beloved monsters and weapons in 'Nakai style', I drew nearly 80 cards. I strongly remember drawing them before the Hollywood *Gozilla* movie opened."

Lord of Monsters 1 & 2 - PlayStation 1 (1999)

"For Lord of Monsters 2, I was joined by my old Culdcept team-mate, Tomoharu Saitou. You can play this game on the PlayStation now."

Culdcept Expansion - PlayStation 1 (1999)

"I'd quit playing the Saturn version (1997) without ever successfully clearing a single board,

but ended up completely engrossed in the PlayStation version. It was such a good game it even won the Platinum award from Famitsu! I got to draw 14 new cards, but they didn't really fit with the old ones."

RE: -Code: Veronica- DC (2000) / RE: Zero GC (2002)

"*Code Veronica* was the *Biohazard* game for Dreamcast. I got to design the monsters and character costumes, among other things. As far as titles I'd worked on, this came out right after *Culdcept*, meaning two shimmering Platinum Awards in a row from Famitsu! I was happy."

Culdcept II - Dreamcast (2001)

"And this brings us up to 2001. This title put me in the same ring as some of the most influential artists in the business. They were fighting in a totally different weight class, but sparring with such heavyweights made me a better artist."

Astro Boy: Atom Heart no Himitsu GBA (2003)

"Wow, this game came out in 2003? That was 12 years ago...? No way! I mostly did backgrounds for this game, but I also drew Monar and Pluto, two of the bosses. The Moai statues in the background are a motif I've wanted to draw ever since I was a kid. Looking back on it now, I am especially happy with how the backgrounds in Stage 7 turned out."

Advance Guardian Heroes - GBA (2004)

"This is another one that I did the backgrounds for. But I didn't produce much art for this project."

Gunstar Super Heroes - GBA (2005)

"Did I work on this...?"[630](#)

Bangai-O Spirits - NDS (2008, right)

"I've been fortunate to enjoy a long relationship with Treasure. I drew most of the backgrounds and the user interface for this game. It wasn't a huge amount of work or anything, but when I look back on it now for the first time in a long time, it brings back happy memories. I was able to draw whatever I wanted for the backgrounds... That's one of the things I love about working for Treasure! I think I created a huge amount of levels for it too. You made the picture or level above out of the parts below, trying to make a big picture out of as few tiles as possible.[631](#) I really enjoy doing that kind of work."





T1 Core



BG OBJ EDIT

COPY

SELECT
RANGE.

OK

QUIT

13 X 12

Contra ReBirth - Wii (2009)

"For this game, I was in charge of backgrounds and the mid-boss Gomeramos King (**right**). That's the creepy heart-like villain that appears. Creepy things are my specialty."

Yuusha 30 (aka: Half-Minute Hero) - PSP (2009)

"I handled the illustrations for the demons in *Half-Minute Hero*, but didn't have anything to do with the game itself. I remember being surprised that the person handling the illustrations for the main characters was a young woman."

Magazine work

PC Engine Fan (front covers) - Tokuma Shoten (Oct 1990 ~ Jul 1991)

"This was my first magazine job. Akemi Takada⁶³² would draw the main image on a cel, and I would handle the background."



Mega Drive Fan (covers) - Tokuma Shoten (Feb 1991 ~ Dec 1994)

"I did this job for a long time, and had a lot of fun with it. By this time the range of games was diverse, and it was always difficult figuring out which game I should draw for the cover. It generally took about 3 or 4 days to do the whole thing." (**top, centre**)

Dengeki PC ENGINE - Media Works

"I drew illustrations for a project called *Hyper Wars*. [The illustrations] started on X68000, but shifted to Mac midway through. I was shocked at the change in image quality that resulted."⁶³³

/ The Coriolis Synchrony

SQ

/ An illustrated

Shogakukan Super Quest Book (circa 1996)

"Apparently Tomomi Kobayashi, the character designer and main illustrator for this book, wasn't very good at drawing mechanical things, so I got to draw the combat scenes and sci-fi machinery."

PC-FAF DOS/V SPECIAL Tobirae - Mainichi Communications (~1997)

"I drew the 'Amusement BOMB' corner, which was a frontispiece with a PC game motif that was in every issue. It gave me a rare opportunity to use my own characters in a project."

DTP World - Works Corporation (2000)

"They ran some of my work in the 'Masters of Digital Paint' corner. It really should have been in the 'Oddballs of Digital Paint' section... <cries>"

Culdcept Complete Illustration - Media Factory (2001)

ISBN: 4840103623

"All of the work I'd previously contributed to *Culdcept* ended up in this incredible art book. It was a great way to enjoy the work of all of my colleagues in a single volume. It meant a lot to

me in particular, as it was the first published collection of my art."

/ **Kamiyo Mokushiroku** - Enterbrain (2002)

"This was the first time I was able to contribute to a Tabletop RPG book. I got to do illustrations for the cover, back cover, frontispieces, and the enemy illustrations."

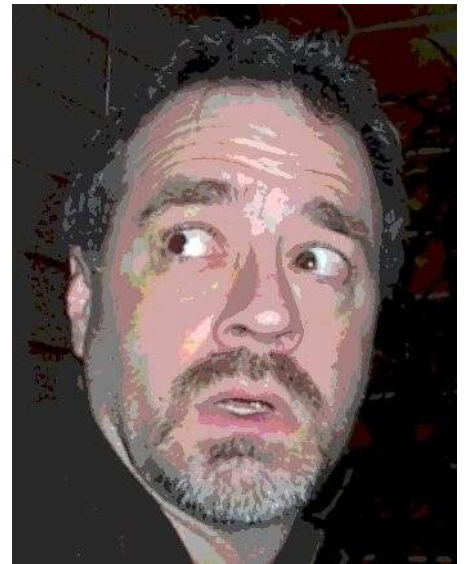
Metal Warriors



One of the main intentions of the *Untold History* book series was to solve mysteries. In Volume 1 this happened when interviewing the Rozner brothers alongside Keiji Inafune, documenting the origin of the mysterious *Mega Man* games for DOS. Although the book's title says "*Japanese Game Developers*", this is not a fixed rule. Anyone with a close or prominent connection to Japanese games qualifies: Joseph Redon as head of Japan's Game Preservation Society, Henk Rogers as former head of BPS, and so on. I certainly would *never* pass up the opportunity to interview Iranian-born Nasir Gebelli for the books, given that he programmed the first *Final Fantasy* for Square.



Dean Sharpe



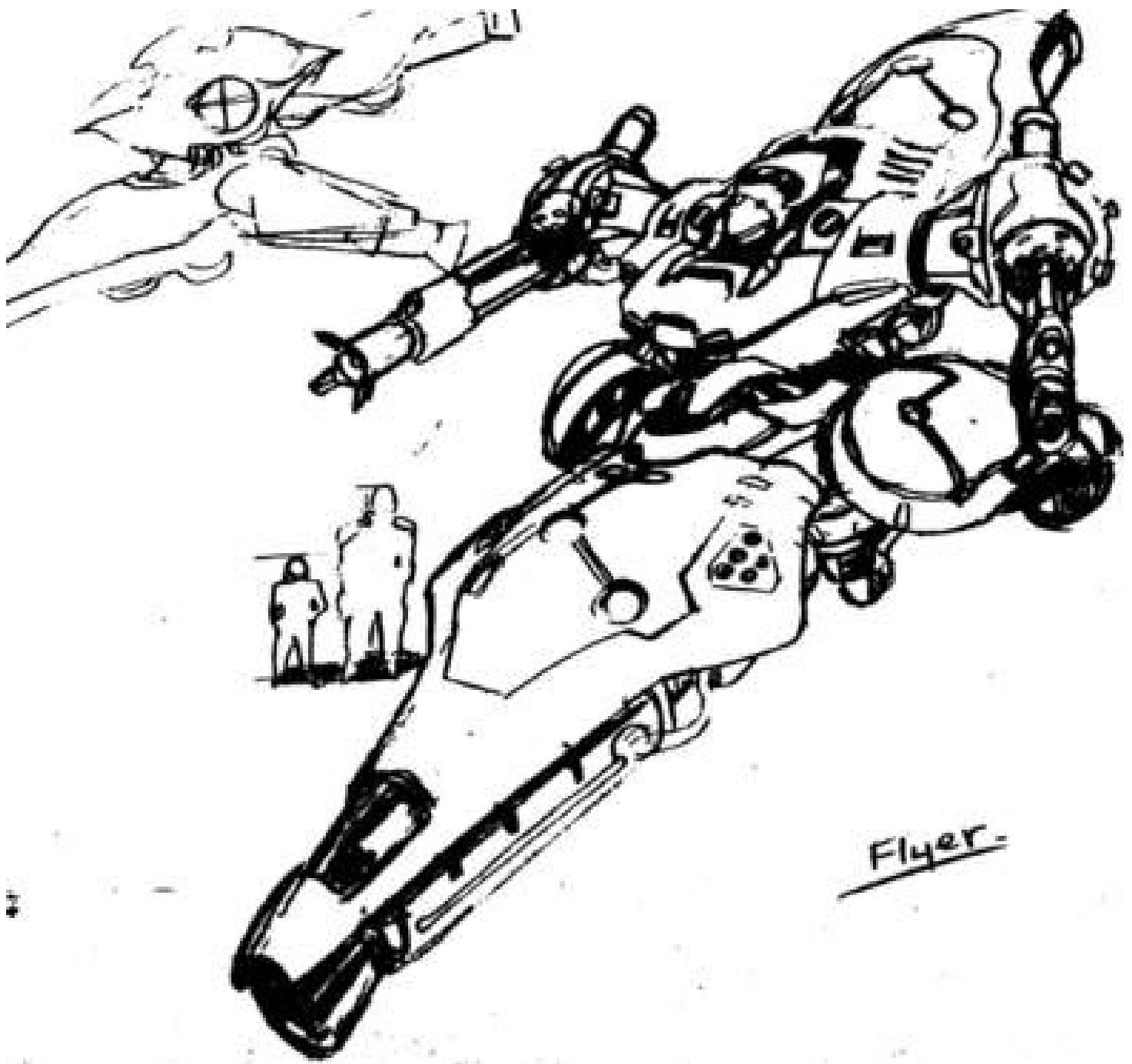
Mike Ebert

Mike Ebert and Dean Sharpe worked for renowned American company LucasArts; given

the curious connections between *Metal Warriors* and *Cybernator* (both published by Konami in America), and my interviews with two Masaya veterans, now seemed the perfect opportunity to document some *Untold History*. *Cybernator* was the localised title of *Assault Suits Valken*, developed by Masaya and published by Konami in 1993 on SNES. *Metal Warriors* was developed by a team from LucasArts and also published by Konami, in 1995. *Metal Warriors* was quite a departure from other LucasArts titles of the time, both stylistically and mechanically. It was grittier, with a distinct anime aesthetic, and strong blend of all-out action and environmental puzzle solving. Without question, *Metal Warriors* is awesome, as signified by it selling for over \$200 unboxed on eBay (since this is just for the cartridge, it's less likely collectors and probably just people who want to play it). Coming from an era when few knew or even paid attention to the difference between developers and publishers, many players assumed the games were directly connected in some way. In truth, they were from entirely different hemispheres, and those who made *Metal Warriors* drew influence from numerous sources.

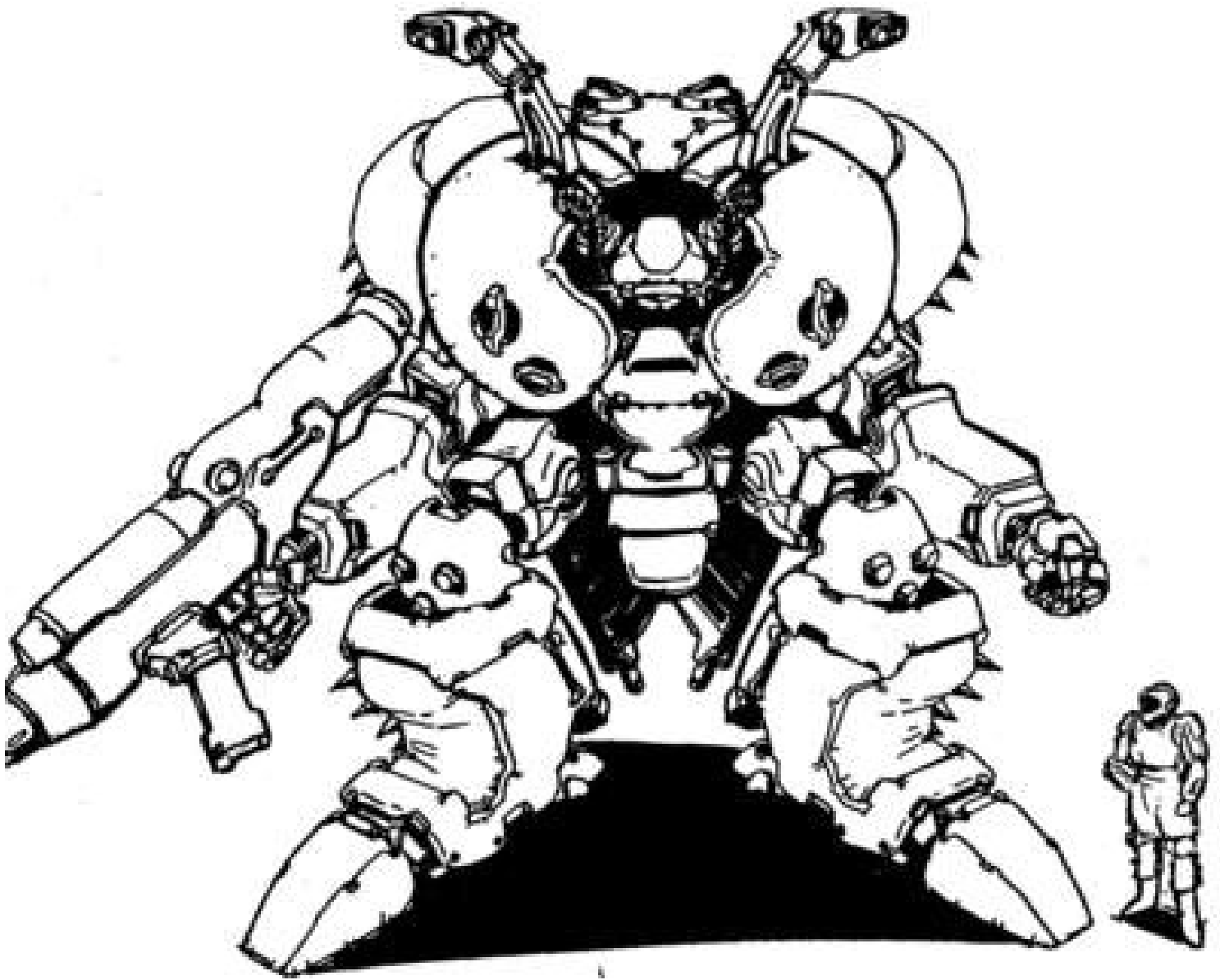
I first interviewed Mike Ebert for an article on *Zombies Ate My Neighbours* for Hardcore Gaming 101, where he revealed being strongly influenced by obscure arcade game *Kyros*. It's an excellent read. Sometime after this, around when LucasArts closed in 2013, I initiated contact again to discuss *Metal Warriors*, though this was put on hold due to the book. Now in the midst of the Masaya chapter, it was time to resume the investigation. I also contacted programmer Dean Sharpe, to hear more on the technical side of things. At the time of our emailing Dean mentioned moving his company out of the Ukraine, which had not been easy for him. There'd been unrest in the country in the months leading up to that point and - in sad irony - the day I received his answers (May 2015) there were news reports of wild fires burning dangerously close to Chernobyl.





JS: How did *Metal Warriors* come about? In a Gamasutra interview^{[634](#)} you said it was greenlit almost immediately by Kelly Flock after *Zombies Ate My Neighbours*.

ME: I'm amazed LucasArts let us do this game! I had been a big fan of Japanese mecha shows like *Gundam* and *VOTOMS*.^{[635](#)} I even published an old fan magazine called *ANIMAG*^{[636](#)} before I got into gaming. So the idea of doing a mecha game was always around in the back of my head. I was also a really big fan of *Blaster Master* on the NES. I particularly liked the way you could get in and out of your vehicle. So I knew I wanted to do something like that game. We also had Harrison Fong^{[637](#)} working at LucasArts. He's an amazing artist and had worked on the "*Mecha*" comic book for Dark Horse Comics.^{[638](#)} So we had a chance to get him to design all our mecha. It just came together very nicely.



JS: It was originally called Battle Droids, right?

ME: The name was also a surprise. We went through a lot of trouble to get the name "Battle Droids" from George Lucas - as it was an official *Star Wars* term. We actually got permission to use it, then Konami opted to use Metal Warriors instead. I really didn't like the name Metal Warriors - it sounds like a rock band.



JS: It used a modified version of the ZAMN engine, tweaked to allow for fast split-screen play, and was described as a smooth project with "less than 500 bugs when going through test". Is that low?

ME: That was a very low bug count for a game. I think as a result we had more time to tune the head to head mode. The game came together very fast. We had actually also tried split-screen tests on ZAMN, so we knew we could do it if we planned it out right. In some early split-screen tests for Metal Warriors we had enemy robots that spawned and fought along with you in the two-player mode. Frame rate issues made us cut those. It was really cool though to find yourself fighting the AI robots and the player at the same time.

DS: The core of the ZAMN engine was done by Toshi Morita⁶³⁹ before I even came on board at Lucas. His brilliant multi-tasking design allowed for each game task to take advantage of the fast zero page memory addressing on the SNES. The reason I mention this is not only did it make the engine damn fast, it also very much compartmentalised the code tasks. When something was broke, it was pretty easy to find the problem. When I came on board during ZAMN, my focus was more to streamline the build process and to organise the code into something that would hopefully make bug finding very clean. ZAMN still had a ton more bugs than Metal Warriors, but it was also a much bigger game.



JS: What other changes were made from ZAMN?

DS: The biggest things that needed to be added to the engine for Metal Warriors was split-screen and a more robust particle system. In general, I don't even remember if we had a particle system in ZAMN. Whereas, in Metal Warriors they were used extensively; it was ridiculously clean from the beginning of the development process. Once we got split-screen working, I think Mike and I had the first head to head version up in a few days.

The really crazy thing about how few bugs we had, is what was going on during the early parts of development. We decided to leave LucasArts early on, and worked out of my house for a few months before finding an office, then still had to move to the new office and get things rolling again. The entire time, we never really slipped off schedule. I remember when the first bug reports came in, I was like: "Really, that's it?" It was by far the easiest test process and the lowest number of bugs of anything I have worked on to date.

JS: There's a nice difference in control between the robots and the jetpack man who pops out, with fun puzzles requiring both. Some areas feel like you're sneaking into an ant farm. What was design like - everything drawn on sheets of paper?

ME: A lot of the "little man action" was inspired by *Blaster Master*. I knew I wanted to create the necessity to exit your robot and actually do important things as the little man. I'd like to say that we drew it all out on paper, but we didn't. Our tool pipeline was very fast, we could re-arrange tiles on the map, then build and test them out live within a few minutes. So most the gameplay was built by testing live builds of ideas that we had and modifying them.



JS: Mike mentioned having a fast tool pipeline. Do you want to comment on the technical side?

DS: From the beginning of my career I have always focused on making sure the artists and game designers could see what they were working on in the fastest possibly way. I remember early days at other companies where the art team might not see their changes until the "weekly build". I always thought that was a dumb way of doing things. Also, you have to keep in mind that Mike was and is one of the most technical artist/designers that I have ever worked with. He actually originally started wanting to be a programmer and only moved over to the art side later. With that, I was able to do things with the build process that probably wouldn't have worked with other art teams, especially at that time in the industry.

We also had the advantage of working with a guy named Dave Warhol⁶⁴⁰ who made custom hardware back then. They basically hacked into the SNES hardware which allowed us to do things other groups couldn't do. We had PC cards that connected directly to a SNES - not

using development kits - and it modified memory on the actual SNES in real-time. Once we had the ability to do that, it really opened things up for us.



JS: There's no HUD or score, and damage is conveyed through your colouration. It's a streamlined system with a clean look.

ME: This was an idea we had early on, and it did work sort of. There was a short period of time where we actually had a life bar. Looking back I think I would have liked that back, as it's just easier for people to understand.



JS: It has exquisitely detailed spritework and real-time damage to the environment, plus large cinematic cut-scenes. How difficult was all this?

ME: The cut-scenes were pretty cool for that time period. Harrison Fong did a lot of the art for those. I wish we'd had someone with better cinematic sense to implement the timing though, as some of them were too slow paced. I have a lot of old concept art from this game if you want any of it for the book. I've been saving it all these years!

The environmental stuff was pretty easy. There's a lot of really neat tricks that can be done with old tile-based cartridge systems. We would do a lot of swapping of tiles to create the damage terrain effects, and colour cycling for tricks like blinking lights. You could also remap the colour palette of any tile to make a tile appear completely different but still use the same memory. These were all tricks we'd learned on ZAMN and even back to old games like Maniac Mansion on NES.

DS: Nowadays artists need to be somewhat technical, or even VERY technical depending on what they are doing. But back then, telling an artist something other than just to hit a button was difficult. Also, early in my career we had done a lot of work with cross-platform development, even on the Atari 800, Commodore 64 and Apple II. While most groups would write code on the host machine, we were still programming on PCs and then downloading the code into custom IO cards that we built in-house. So after years of working like that, it seemed like a natural progression that artists should be able to see their work not only on the PC they were working on, but also in real-time on the consoles.



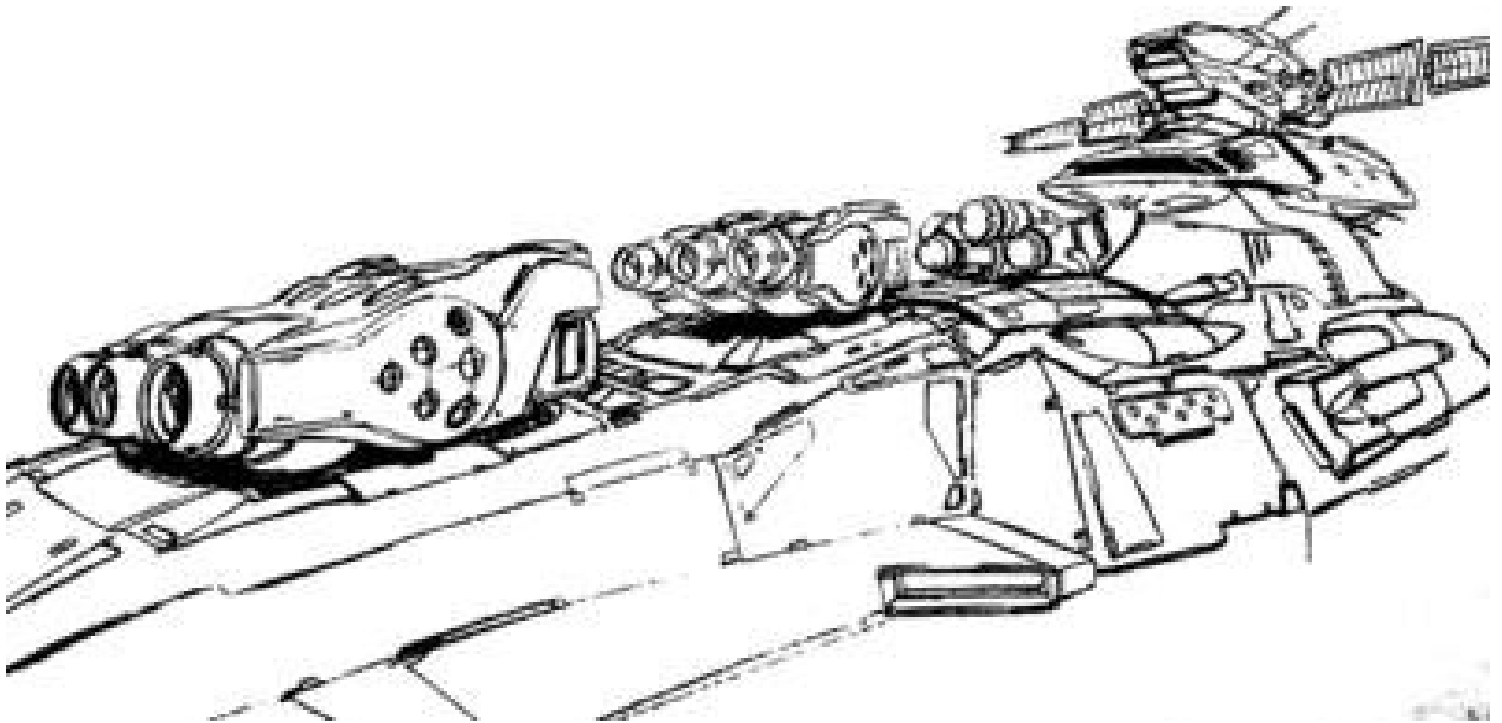
JS: Being published by Konami it's sometimes seen as a successor to Cybernator, by NCS. How do you feel about this? The ability to leave your robot puts it closer to Metal Mech⁶⁴¹ and Blaster Master.

ME: We were very aware of Cybernator and Blaster Master. I had played an early build of

Cybernator at a CES, and it was so cool - it was really different compared to the shipped game.⁶⁴² Then they shipped the game and I really didn't like it as much. Blaster Master definitely inspired the gameplay more, but we knew we had to have the controls feel as good as Cybernator, since they felt awesome. We spent a lot of time getting the controls right.

DS: I wasn't that familiar with Cybernator actually, and I don't really remember how much Mike was. For certain I looked at it quite a bit, but more for a player movement standpoint than a design angle. I have to admit, I copied the shells that came out of the machine gun, but that was about it. Actually, I ended up looking more at Super Mario World for player movement than I did Cybernator.

For me, the only real comparison was that they were both robot games. But then again, I didn't know the game that well.



JS: In 1996 there was a game, Front Mission: Gun Hazard, which is similar to the above. Is too much made of similarities between 2D mecha games?

ME: I've never actually seen Front Mission. Will look that up. It really never bothered me that sideways mecha games were similar. It's always been a niche market, so with the few games available, I'd rather see people build on what's been done before and just make the best game possible. We borrowed heavily on the controls from Cybernator, but we knew they had done about the best job possible, so why not leverage that work.

JS: It's been mentioned Nintendo was considering publishing Metal Warriors and requested changes.

ME: Metal Warriors was sort of a sad situation. We were actually slated to have Nintendo as the publisher on that game, and were making the changes requested by them. Like being able to name your character, a more improved UI, and a health bar. We also added the map for

Nintendo. Then when the PS1 came out all interest in cartridge games vanished, and that deal fell through. Nintendo canned all releases for that Christmas and we were dropped. The life bar never got finished and the game was quickly wrapped up and sold to Konami. They picked us up at the last second, but only made like 50'000 units. So the game was pretty hard to find.⁶⁴³

DS: The sad part is, the rumour was that Nintendo pulled out at the last minute when someone high up said it was too much like *Cybernator*...



JS: Are you happy with how the game turned out?

DS: That was so long ago, I don't remember at all. We did do quite a bit of work that Nintendo wanted for it to be first party, but I think most of that got left in once Nintendo pulled out. I don't remember having many thoughts of, "Damn, I wish we got that in," or even "Too bad

that didn't make it in the final game!" I remember busting my ass on the final boss, then years later wondering how many people ever even made it that far to see it.

ME: Overall I was really happy with the controls. Two-player was a blast. I felt like we got the robots pretty well balanced. A few of the later levels were pretty weak, and some of the long cutscenes bothered me. The lost feature that I really missed was the AI robots in head to head play, which I mentioned earlier.



JS: Was the 2P mode considered from the start? What about that zany basketball mode?

ME: We had this in from the start. Dean and I had a lot of pretty good head to head games while building *Metal Warriors*. It really didn't get old, and kept us pretty excited to be working on the game. The testers also found some nasty strategies that we'd never considered!

DS: I freaking loved the two-player mode. I still even like to play it today. Funny enough, in my years working in the Ukraine, I kept meaning to bring a SNES out there to have my guys at 4A see it.⁶⁴⁴ Now that we've moved to Malta, I plan on getting the SNES fired up and taking on some of our people. It will be interesting to see how well it still holds up. To this day, I still think that it was ahead of its time. I have to laugh somewhat, since people use ideas that we did 20 or so years ago and they act like it's something new.

JS: It was a SNES exclusive - was there talk of developing for Sega Genesis or other systems?

ME: I'll let Dean answer this one, as it's probably more in his territory. I really don't remember what happened to the Genesis version...

DS: Well, first off, I don't think it would be technically possible on the Genesis. At least not with me programming it. I used every SNES trick I knew to keep that game running at 60fps. At one time I spent around 2 weeks working on a maybe 20 line section of assembly that was

responsible for getting the specific character properties. In the end, I only shaved maybe 10 cycles off the routine. But it was called so many times during the game loop, it made a big difference. Later on, we really thought it was going to be a first party Nintendo game, so it became a moot point.

JS: What about the GBA port of *Metal Warriors*?

ME: I know Dean talked to Lucas about a GBA port...

DS: For the GBA version, I knew nothing until one of our animators, Leonard Robel, [645](#) contacted me and said he was doing a port. Initially I was interested, but as I spoke to him, he acted like it was his game and I completely backed out. Then I was really not happy with the fact he was trying to do this without me or Mike. I tried to get it going again after Big Ape closed down, [646](#) but wrestling the rights away from Lucas and Konami was just too difficult. I'm sure this is the reason whatever Leonard ended up doing never worked out.

JS: What about *ZAMN* on GBA?

DS: Funny thing, I actually started porting *ZAMN* to GBA back in 2004... I think. My thinking was if I had a finished game, I could work out a publishing deal. Never happened of course, but I always still have hopes of doing something with it someday.

Human Group



How do you summarise a legacy as complicated and diverse as that of Human Entertainment?

It was originally established as SoNaTa, based on the surnames of its co-founders, Misters Soki, Nakamura, and Takahashi (actually Su-So-Na-Ta, but company president Choshiro Suzuki suggested removing his "Su" to form *Sonata*). The precise date is uncertain; the old Human.co.jp website says it was established May 1983, whereas staff and other sources cite 1987. The latter is more likely, since Sonata was actually the result of a merger between two other software companies, TRY Co., Ltd. and Communicate, Inc. Details are scarce on Sonata's rebranding, but evidence points to 1989 as the year Human Entertainment officially came into existence. An interview with Hitoshi Akashi on the GDRI gives more details on the pre-history.



Mizzurna Falls (PS1)
Easternmind.tumblr

Once established it branched out, and for the next 10 years formed subsidiaries and pursued growth. In this time it produced long-running franchises, numerous unique one-shot classics, and raked in the kind of crazy money only possible during that era. Subsidiaries included BEC (Bandai Entertainment Company), established in 1990 as a joint venture with Bandai; and HuneX, started with NEC Home Electronics in 1992, focusing on budget software and *bishoujo*. Its most important subsidiary though has to be Human Creative School, intended to teach future generations of developers; the games which students produced as graduation projects could also be marketed, expanding the company portfolio. The Human brand itself splintered, forming sub-divisions,⁶⁴⁷ developing and publishing games, and later subcontracting third-party developers to expand its portfolio further, in preparation for public listing on the stock exchange.

Unfortunately a decade after forming, right at the turn of the millennium, the company known as Human was dead. The empire collapsed, fragmenting and spreading everywhere; former staff would form Nude Maker, 5pb., Hamster Corporation, Sandlot, Spike, S-NEO, Suzak, Vaill, and Grasshopper Manufacture. The histories of each of these developers is too varied and complicated to detail here, but browse their portfolios on MobyGames to see how

they've been involved with everything from continuing the legacy of Human, to working with Nintendo on key titles. Meanwhile IP rights for Human Entertainment's back catalogue went to companies like SunSoft and Capcom. Amidst this maelstrom of confusion are allegations of tax evasion, employee mistreatment, and the school being a cynical cash grab.

Players though are more likely to know Human for the games it produced, covering everything from the market's leading mainstream sports titles, to unique and genre-defying titles of great excellence. It's curious to think that the company behind the number one football series of the time, *Formation Soccer*, also created radical titles like *Clock Tower*, *Septentrion* (aka: *SOS*), *Dragon's Earth*, and *Twin Peaks* inspired *Mizzurna Falls*, in addition to traditional action games like *Bari-Arm* and *The Firemen*. Browse its games and I guarantee you will find items of great interest.

My first awareness of the Human brand was after watching a segment on a British TV show about games in the mid-1990s.⁶⁴⁸ That week's episode had a report from Japan, showing the inside of Human Creative School, notably with footage of *The Firemen* while under development. It showed the inside of classrooms, rows of computers, game debugging, and a mini-interview with a representative from the school. Along with other influences, this TV segment formed the foundation of my lifelong fascination with games. Sadly, despite trawling the internet, there doesn't seem to be archived footage or even a passing mention of this segment.

But that's what makes Human so fascinating. It's an enigma of disparate elements and half forgotten memories; of world setting precedents, academic firsts, and games which defy classification. With the right kind of eyes you can trace how it redefined the industry, and yet at the same time - hearing the words of those who were there - Human Entertainment was an entity fated to burn. It existed only in that special, golden era of Japanese videogames, where there was money everywhere, and it felt like the dream could last forever.

I'm pleased to present interviews with Ryoji Amano, Hifumi Kono, Masatoshi Mitori, Masaki Higuchi, and Taichi Ishizuka.







Sketch of Masato Masuda taken from <http://blog.livedoor.jp/ryosiji/>

~In memory of~

MASUDA, Masato

1 January 1966 ~ 29 March 2014⁶⁴⁹

Creator of the *Fire Pro Wrestling* series

"After graduating from his high school in Hokkaido, Masuda-kun enrolled at an electronics specialty school in Tokyo. While there, he was hired at our company TRY (the predecessor to Sonata, which was the predecessor to Human), after responding to a part-time employment posting. He was probably 18 at the time.

"I taught him how to program. He was smart and he loved games, so he was able to pick it up very quickly - he was able to start programming games after only 10 days of lessons. The company president, Suzuki-san, who was also from Hokkaido, took a real liking to Masuda-kun as well. After several months, Suzuki-san asked Masuda-kun if he would be willing to quit his trade school and join TRY as a full-time programmer. (I believe Suzuki-san explained the situation to Masuda-kun's mother in Hokkaido and got her consent first.) Masuda-kun agreed, and ended up being a programmer for Super Famicom titles like *Fire Pro Wrestling*.

"I was not able to find a photo of him. We didn't have digital cameras or smartphones in those days, so there weren't many opportunities to take photographs. I'm sure there must be

pictures of him from company trips, but I rarely participated in those trips (I generally stayed back at the office to work), so I don't have any mementos from them."

Youichi Soki, co-founder Human Entertainment

"The creator of Fire Pro Wrestling, Masato Masuda, has passed away. He was 48 years old, still young. I genuinely pray for his happiness in the next world. He was one of the greatest creators of video games and he was my direct teacher. Thank you for giving us our favorite Fire Pro Wrestling. You are the god of it."

- **Suda51, via Twitter**



AMANO, Ryoji

DOB: *secret* / Birthplace: *secret* / Blood Type: *secret*

1987~1992
HUMAN Company
Kichijoji, Musahino-shi, Tokyo

Famicom

Motocross Champion (29 Jan 1989)

Dai-San-Yakyu-Bu (8 Aug 1989)

PC Engine

Vasteel (1990)

Formation Soccer

Final Match Tennis

Super Famicom

Super Formation Soccer

Super Formation Soccer 2

F1 HUMAN Grand Prix

1993~present
A-MAX Company (own brand)
Seijo, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo

Super Famicom

BattleCross

Capcom's Soccer Shootout

J League Excite Stage '94

J League Excite Stage '95

J League Excite Stage '96

N64

Dynamite Soccer 64

PlayStation

Dynamite Soccer 98

Dynamite Soccer 2000

Dynamite Soccer 1500

Dynamite Soccer 2002

Dynamite Soccer 2004 Final

NDS (programming only)

ZOIDS Battle Coliseum

Youichi Soki /

Although I never interviewed Youichi Soki, I was forwarded an email with a detailed message on the late Masato Masuda, and an explanation on the company's name: *"This is Soki. I appreciate your hard work. I couldn't find a business card from Nakamura-san, so I'm not sure about his full name, or if Nakamura is written as , or as . **So-Na-Ta** should really be **Su-So-Na-Ta** (for Suzuki-Soki-Nakamura-Takahashi), but it was decided, as per company president Suzuki-san's suggestion, that the u in 'Su' be omitted and that the S be represented by the S in 'So'."*

Interview with Ryoji AMANO

25 September 2013, Tokyo / Duration: 1h 17m

Best known for his sports titles at Human Entertainment, Ryoji AMANO was introduced to me by *Pix'n Love* magazine, which had interviewed him previously. Although many, many publications have interviewed Mr Amano about his sports games, my interest was specifically in his recollections of background politics at a previous employer: Human Entertainment. With my upcoming interviews with Hifumi KOUNO, Masaki HIGUCHI, and Masatoshi MITORI, who had all started at Human Entertainment, it seemed ideal to have Mr Amano's input. In addition, he had been a lecturer when the Human Creative School first opened, teaching game design to students. Being one of the first, dedicated game design schools in the world, it was essential to document this.

We agreed to meet at the Shinjuku station and find a coffee shop. When I met him he was dressed casually, wearing one of the coolest Hawaiian shirts I'd ever seen. He exuded a carefree aura, like a fun-loving musician, highlighting the fact that games designers in Japan aren't necessarily as restricted as employees in other professions.

<outside, while walking>

JS: Did you travel far?

Ryoji Amano: My work now is two stations from this station. So it's very close.

JS: I'm living near to Shinjuku. I'm in Japan for 10 weeks interviewing developers.

RA: *<in English>* How many are you interviewing?

JS: About 50?⁶⁵⁰ **Unfortunately, this means I don't have any days off. Have you come directly from work?**

RA: *So desu, so desu. <in English>* Yes!

<discussion on which coffee shop to head to>

JS: Where do you work currently?

RA: The station nearest my work is *Yotsuya-Sanchome*.⁶⁵¹

JS: And the company?

RA: It's one part of a game, I'm working on. *<in English>* A browser game.

JS: I see. Florent Gorges gave me your email address.

RA: Yes, he's from *Pix 'n Love*.

Nico: *<with perfect French pronunciation>* Ah, Florent Gorges! He writes the Nintendo books!

JS: I met Florent to discuss my book; he gave your details.

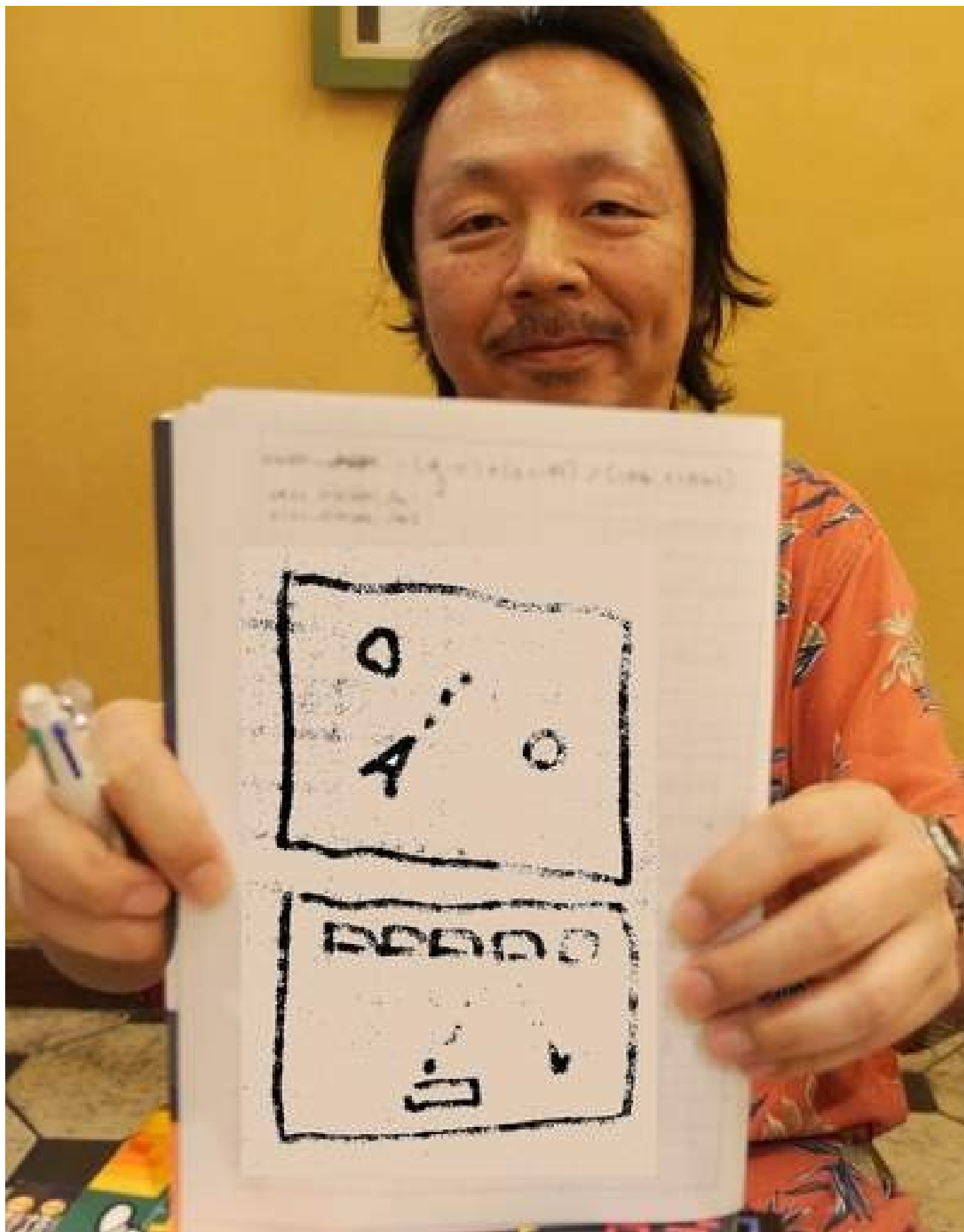
Nico: ...We went to the same university.

JS: Nico, let's take the photos outside; it's a great view.

<after photos we enter the coffee shop>

JS: Could you sign my two signature books?

RA: Sure. *<signs>*



JS: Can you recall the first videogame that you ever saw?

RA: I don't know the names, but I remember seeing a box, or console, in a bowling alley. It was in black and white - *Block Kuzushi*. It was about breaking lots of blocks. There was also a game involving a spaceship shooting things...

JS: Like *Space Invaders*?

RA: <draws sketch, says in English> This is a rock, and this is the ship.

JS: Oh, *Asteroids*! Yes, black and white, vector graphics.

RA: <pointing to asteroid> It moves very slowly, but without stopping.

JS: Right, and the big rocks break into smaller pieces.

RA: Right, right. <in English> Yes! <sketches *Breakout*> There were two games, in black and white. These were the first videogames I saw.

<author photographs sketches>



Vasteel (PCE)

JS: At what point did you feel you wanted to make games?

RA: Actually, it wasn't like I joined the industry because I wanted to work in games. At that time I was into music and I saw a job advert saying: "Sound programmer wanted." So I went to the company, only to ask what a sound programmer does. But then that suddenly turned into a job interview, and then I ended up being hired! <laughs> Then I ended up studying, or I started studying programming. And that's how I started programming.

JS: Was this *Vasteel*, ⁶⁵² when you worked on sound? I loved the jazziness of the music!

RA: I did some programming for some games, but then I said, "I joined the company to work as a sound programmer. So please put me to work as a sound programmer." And that's how I got assigned to Vasteel, or the sound side of Vasteel. It was the first PC Engine CD-ROM title from Human. It's a simulation game by Masato Masuda, who created Fire Pro Wrestling. I participated in its sound development.

JS: This was at Human Entertainment?

RA: Yes, that's right. At that point the name of the company was Sonata.⁶⁵³ It was the name of the company before it was changed to Human Co., Ltd. The name apparently came from the initials of Soki-san,⁶⁵⁴ Nakamura-san, and Takahashi-san,⁶⁵⁵ who were administrators at the time. *<in English>* Do you know the company Sonata? They made Ramen-Man.⁶⁵⁶

JS: Isn't that a Famicom adventure game?

RA: Yes. *<in English>* The white and red machine. *<Japanese>* So they were doing some subcontracting work, and then when the PC Engine started they made some pro-wrestling and soccer games. And then they developed the sense that they could do better and bigger things. So they changed their name to Human Entertainment.

JS: You mentioned the name Sonata was an acronym, of Misters Soki, Nakamura and Takahashi.

RA: Yes! Actually, I now work at the same place as Soki-san. I don't know where Nakamura-san and Takahashi-san went.

JS: It's nice to hear that you're still alongside one of the first people behind Human.

RA: *<laughs>* It wasn't like I've always worked with Soki-san. I started working with him again, for the first time in decades, only this year.

JS: Do you reminisce?

RA: We are not really sitting idle and being nostalgic about the past. *<laughs>* We're kept quit busy! *<laughs>*

JS: Before Sonata changed its name to Human, it was formed from two companies, TRY Limited and Communicate Incorporated. Have you heard of TRY?

RA: I think it was some company that the director of Human was managing.

JS: And Communicate Incorporated?

RA: I am not really sure.

JS: Ooh, a mystery!

RA: <English> TRY, I don't know where... <Japanese> I don't know that much about those companies, actually. I think the president of Human Entertainment, Choshiro Suzuki,^{[657](#)} was making something... Or at that time, they were making subsidiary companies, like TRY, or *Nice*,^{[658](#)} or Field.^{[659](#)} But I don't really know what they were doing with the companies, or what was done at the companies.^{[660](#)}

JS: **To clarify - you requested a sound engineering role, which is when they placed you on Vasteel?**

RA: Yes, that's right.

JS: **What was the first programming language you learned? Was it assembly?**

RA: It was assembly language, <English> 6502. <Japanese> I used assembly for the Famicom.

JS: **What kind of computers did you use?**

RA: At that time IBM computers were not around in Japan, so it was NEC's PC-9801. What we would call PCs, ordinary PCs, came about after Windows 95 came out in Japan. So development work was done on the PC-98.

JS: **Towards the end of the PC-98's life they started to integrate Windows. But eventually NEC abandoned the old architecture and Windows became the standard OS.**^{[661](#)}

RA: The Super Famicom was developed on using the PC-98, but when it came to the PlayStation 1 it was with PC DOS or IBM's computers.



Motocross Champion (FC)

JS: What were you doing directly prior to Vasteel? You mentioned general programming. Which games?

<Mr Amano writes down game names>

RA: So this was before Vasteel, and this was after Vasteel.

JS: Right... The PDF you sent me mentioned some old games. Motocross Champion⁶⁶² on Famicom, published by Konami. Also Meimon! Daisan Yakyuubu,⁶⁶³ a baseball game for the Famicom, published by Bandai.

RA: There are various [games industry] jobs I previously did that were not included on that

PDF, but I cannot mention them for confidentiality reasons.



Meimon! Daisan Yakyuubu (FC)

JS: I see. So Final Match Tennis was your first big project?

RA: Formation Soccer on the PC Engine sold relatively well. I more or less made the whole game. The scenes during the game, and the main program.

JS: I owned Super Formation Soccer - the 3D perspective made it more fun than other football games at the time.

RA: It was originally Formation Soccer, a soccer game on PC Engine with a 3D birds-eye perspective, which was converted to realistic 3D using the 3D functions of the Super

Famicom. It adopted a 3D feeling and became an explosive hit in Japan.⁶⁶⁴ Europe and other countries received this soccer game on the Super NES.

JS: I wanted to ask about the soccer games you worked on. Super Formation Soccer, which incorporated Mode 7, is one of my favourite soccer games. In my youth I played it a lot with my brother. Obviously you're a fan of soccer - can you describe the offside rule?⁶⁶⁵

RA: I don't think that rule is in there... There's no offside rule in Formation Soccer!

<everyone laughs>



Formation Soccer (PCE)

JS: I know - I just wondered if you could describe the rule. I'd have trouble describing it myself, and it's something of a joke in England: "Offside? What's offside?" Why do you

feel that so few soccer games incorporate the rule?

RA: If you have that offside rule, then it would disturb the pacing of the game. Like if you're really into the game, and playing it, and then you're suddenly told that you violated the offside rule, then you have to halt and suspend the game. So of course I tried to place the players in such a way that it won't violate that rule, or sometimes you'd see a situation where it sort of looks like offside, but I just wanted the player to continue on without worrying about that rule.



Super Formation Soccer (SFC)

JS: Sometimes you need to ignore reality to provide the best player experience.

RA: I would agree. But then I wonder about games nowadays, because they seem to go after the reality, or the authenticity. So if you learn that there's no offside rule in a particular game, you may wonder if the game is real *enough*.

JS: I'd still rather play Super Soccer than Winning 11⁶⁶⁶ or FIFA today. Modern titles, though more realistic, have layered so much complexity on, it's difficult to absorb yourself. I also prefer the amusing visuals of 2D. I should ask about Final Match Tennis, because a lot of people still feel it's one of the best tennis games...

RA: I was having a peaceful time after I went back to music on Vasteel, but it looked like the company was not doing so well financially, and I was asked to make a game. I wasn't too keen on developing a game, to be honest, but I had some knowledge of tennis. I played tennis myself, so I thought if I had to make something in a short period of time, it would have to be a tennis game. So pretty much I wrote the whole program on my own, I did the graphics on my own, and I just rushed through in three months. And that's how Final Match Tennis came about. So to me, it wasn't such a big project. That's just how the game was produced.
<English> A very small project!

JS: Yet it's still fondly remembered today.

RA: Although it was only a medium hit in Japan, it is a very popular tennis game overseas. It was selected as the "Game of The Month" in TILT, a games magazine in France, and it was also selected as the 3rd place winner in the "Best Games of 1991".⁶⁶⁷ By the way, the 1st place was Super Mario Bros. 3, while 2nd place was Super Mario World. Meanwhile famous games such as Populous and Sim City were entered below 4th place. Even now, users in Germany enjoy playing tournaments and awarding real trophies.⁶⁶⁸

JS: I'm surprised you say it was a medium hit in Japan. You received feedback on its sales outside of Japan?

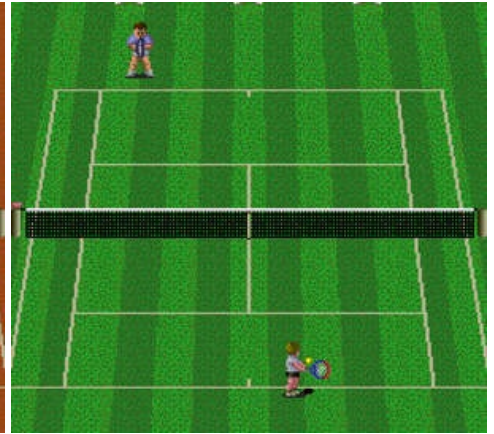
RA: I think it was in 2000-something, when I first came to know that it had sold so well outside of Japan. It was when I did an interview for this magazine. <points to stack of magazines> But I don't remember exactly when that interview was.

JS: When speaking with Japanese developers, most have no idea of the success of their games outside Japan. There's very little flow of information back to them, regarding how the games did. Why do you feel it was more popular overseas?

RA: Because it's fun to play.

JS: What I'm trying to get at is, Japanese players liked it, whereas Western fans loved it. You've had a lot of experience speaking with foreigners who especially liked your games. There's an ongoing debate on how Japanese developers can appeal more to players outside Japan. Do you have any views on this, on the supposed differences between Japan and the West - is there even a difference?

RA: To comment specifically on that particular game, it's made or designed in such a way that you can do something which is very realistic, very much like tennis.



JS: I suppose the question is mainly a philosophical one, on the differences between the preferences and tastes of players in Japan, Europe, and America.

RA: Maybe it's that in Japan you tend to be influenced more by what other people say. So for instance, if everyone else likes a game, or says that they like it, then you may come to like it. Or if everybody else says it's not a fun game, then you may end up thinking that it's not such a fun game. Whereas in places like Europe and the US, where tennis is more deeply part of the culture, and if you play that game in that context, then you might come to think of this game as the one and only type of game.

JS: Any message for fans of *Final Match Tennis*?

RA: I want to make the sequel to *Final Match Tennis* at some point. The players in that game have sort of stayed at that state, and if you look at what happened to the real tennis world, there's been history made from that point on. So there are those that are waiting to see the sequel to that game. But then again, if I were to make the sequel to *Final Match Tennis*, and turn that into a viable business, then it will probably be made into a game that is very different to the original one. Because I'd have to incorporate the look and feel, and the behaviour, of present day games. So if I were to make the sequel, it would have to wait until I retire or I'd have to make it without thinking about making money. Do it only to give something back to the fans.

JS: Let's talk about the Human Creative School. You were there when it first opened?

RA: It was a game development school that was managed by Human. I think that may have been the first in Japan - maybe first in the world - for a game school.⁶⁶⁹ I was also a lecturer there on the first year it was established.

JS: I'll now address you as *Amano-sensei*.⁶⁷⁰

RA: Please do not call me *sensei*. <laughs> It was only for a short period, and it felt more like being a part-time instructor. It was up until the middle of the first year when it opened.

JS: It opened and you were there for six months?

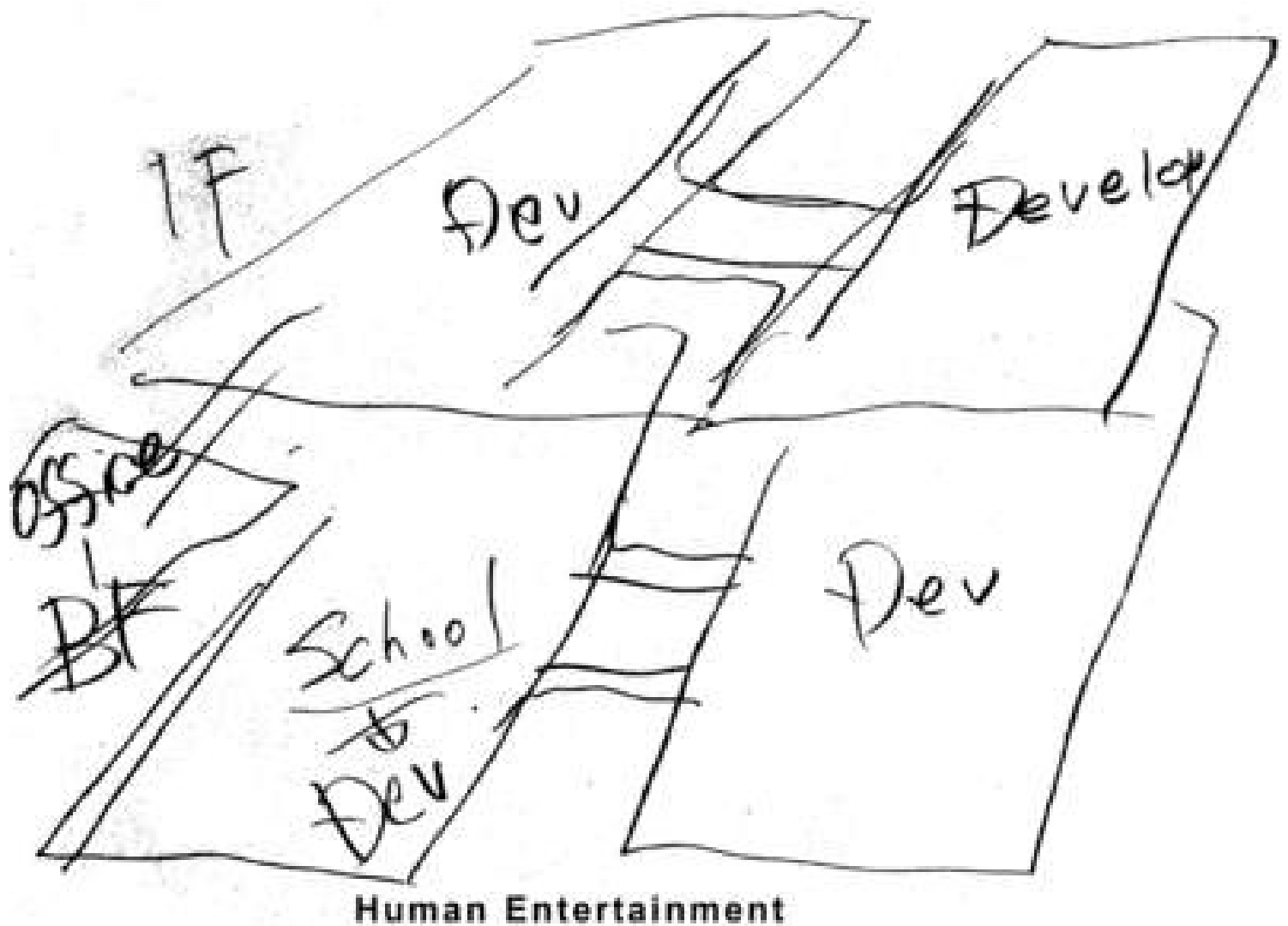
RA: Well, there was a room where the development work was done, and then there was a school right below that room. So I would be working on development and then I would come downstairs and I would teach. Then I would go back upstairs and work on development. But if I kept doing so, the development work didn't really work out so well. So they decided that they would hire proper teachers - which is why I was only there until halfway, or until a certain part of the first year.

JS: Could you draw a layout sketch of the Human Entertainment office, and also of the school itself?

RA: I don't remember so well, because it was a very long time ago. *<begins sketching>*

JS: I've been asking all of my interviews for layout sketches, because when I hear or read the recollections, I like to picture the office as if I were standing there at the time. It's like a mutually consensual hallucination between the interviewee, author, and readership. I ask myself: what do the 1980s smell like? Am I wearing the correct salaryman trousers? Few developers took photos of their work environment, so these sketches might be the only historical record of these locations.^{[671](#)}

RA: So this is the first floor, or the ground floor, and then this is in the basement below it.



JS: The school was literally underground.

RA: The development was done on the ground floor.

JS: Is this two buildings, side-by-side?⁶⁷²

RA: One building, one floor. <points> Then one, two, three, four floors. This part on the ground floor is the office. These two sections [left and right] are connected. It was connected via something like a corridor. So it was decided that teachers would be hired for the school, and the school either rented or bought another building, or space in another building. So they moved out of this basement eventually, and that space was returned to game development.

JS: So prior to the school, both the basement and ground floor was used for development. Then the basement was converted, and eventually the school moved elsewhere.

RA: Yes. I think that was how it was. Maybe, perhaps! <laughs> It was a long time ago, so... <English> Very, very long time ago!

JS: Because you were there before the school started... Who came up with the idea?

RA: It was the president's idea - Choshiro Suzuki.

JS: How did the decision come about?

RA: He was a one-man type manager, one person making all the decisions.

JS: I must know more. What was his motivation?

RA: I don't know what motivated him to make the school. But I don't think it had anything to do with his beliefs or some high minded ideals, or anything like that. He was only interested in making money, so he probably thought he would be able to make money off of a school.

JS: Now we're getting somewhere! Before we continue, something more to drink perhaps?

RA: I'm OK.

JS: Can you recall how much students were charged for attending the school?

RA: Ahh... I don't know. But I would guess that it must have been about the same as what you would have to pay to a vocational school.

JS: Which would be how much in Japan? I know about the UK and US education systems, but Japan is a mystery...

RA: I didn't go to a vocational school myself, so I personally don't know.

JS: Could you write down the kanji for Choshiro Suzuki?

RA: Sure. *<writes it out>* I wonder what Suzuki-san is doing these days...

JS: So do I! Excellent question. When last did you see him?

RA: When I left, or when I quit Human Entertainment. *<English>* 1992? Yes, 1992.

JS: I'm interviewing a couple of others from Human Entertainment, tomorrow. So they can perhaps fill in the blanks from after 1992.

RA: Ahh! *<laughs>*

JS: Can you recall that first day when you were told they would be opening a school?

RA: I would guess that it must have been around two or three months before they started the school.

JS: What I'm interested in, when they started the school, is they must have formulated some kind of curriculum. In order to teach students. As a lecturer, were you involved or witness to the initial plans? Were you handed guidelines?

RA: I was not that deeply involved in the school. I was at the time working on the actual forefront of the game development work. So it was more like them saying: "Somebody that is doing this as his day to day work is going to teach you." It was that kind of thing. So I only taught on occasion. I think I was given some kind of manual, or guideline, but I did not go through any kind of elaborate training as a teacher, or anything.

JS: When you taught the students... Did you discuss things like level design, control schemes, programming? What kind of content?

RA: Well at that time game development, or the creation of games, was not that common. So what was being taught was something very, very basic. Like how to make a picture, or how the sound comes out, or how the processing is handled on a timing cycle of once every 1/60th of a second. The students didn't know about timings, so I started out teaching about these things. So it was very primitive, compared to what must be taught in schools these days.

JS: Screen timings - when a television updates its screen?[673](#)

RA: Yes. *<English>* Ef-Pee-Es. (FPS)

JS: Frames per second. *<nods, makes notes>*

RA: Your program comes around every 1/60th of a second, so your game program comes up, or is called, 60 times per second, and that's how you make things move. It wasn't something that people immediately understood, so I would explain it.

JS: Would you like to comment on why you left Human Entertainment in 1992?

RA: There was some kind of... Like a difference in opinion. I can't really give you much detail.

JS: Can you recall working with a Masatoshi Mitori?

RA: Ah, Mitori-kun. I still see him sometimes, even now.

JS: He attended the Human Creative School.

RA: I know him, and I still see him from time to time, even now, but it's not like I worked with him on a job together. So I don't really know what he's been doing. Even though I get along quite well with him, and we were in the soccer club together.

JS: After leaving Human you formed A-MAX, which has been around for the last 20 years.

RA: Yes. Well it's been around for 20 years, but it's not quite like what you may think. Initially we worked on games, but now I'm the only one working and I do different bits and parts, here and there, with different projects.

JS: A-MAX developed the *J League Excite Stage* titles.^{[674](#)}

RA: Although it is not very well known overseas, it was the most popular soccer game in the Super Famicom market in Japan. It has sold 1'700'000 copies total.

JS: And later, with the N64 and PlayStation, A-MAX developed the *Dynamite Soccer* series.^{[675](#)}

RA: That was the first product from A-MAX company's own brand. It has sold 117'000 copies total.

JS: Did you have employees working under you at A-MAX, for that title?

RA: Yes, that's right. There were employees, but only about four or five people.

JS: Would you say you only needed a team of five people to produce a game for the Nintendo 64?

RA: Back when the N64 was around, when we made the games for N64, we didn't have enough dev kits, or machines we could use for development. So it was in a sort of weird situation, and it didn't make much sense to have so many people if there weren't enough machines to work on.

JS: With *Dynamite Soccer*, what were the differences when acquiring a license for permission to work on Nintendo and Sony hardware?

RA: At that time a company called Imagineer^{[676](#)} had an agreement, or signed an agreement with Nintendo, and we worked as the sub-contractor for Imagineer. It was Imagineer who let us use the tools.

JS: And A-MAX dealt directly with Sony for subsequent *Dynamite Soccer* games?

RA: Yes, that's right.

JS: How were Sony to work with?

RA: We signed the licensing agreement with Sony, but that was it. The rest was done with our own money, to develop.

JS: Is there any final message you want to give?

RA: I don't have anything in particular to say to the Japanese game industry, as a whole. But I

just want to mention that I'd like to make a game, something, sometime, for the fans of *Final Match Tennis*, or fans of soccer games, at some point.



One the latest games Ryoji Amano was involved with, *Zoids: Battle Colosseum* for NDS



KONO, Hifumi

DOB: 14 May 1969 / Birthplace: Niigata / Blood Type: A

Full biography on www.nudemaker.jp

Clock Tower - SFC (Sep 1995, unreleased in West): "My first original title, and one that paid homage to one of my favourite film directors, Dario Argento. People around me said that a game where the protagonist runs away from the enemy would not work. For the creation of character graphics, we photographed an actual person, imported it, and made it into CG, a technique that was in vogue at the time. The motion actress for Jennifer was a lady I worked with in the planning division. After explaining the concept of the title she did a wonderful job, including hanging from a projection above the entrance to the roof terrace, and stumbling in the hallway. Most of the motions in the game came from her acting."

Clock Tower 2 - PlayStation (Dec 1996, "Clock Tower" in West): "I was not too interested in working on a sequel, but being able to work on a new console with 3D polygons, I agreed. Soon after, an article introducing BioHazard was published. Because it was a horror title, and the graphics were so good, our slogan became "Outshine BioHazard!" The difficult part was choosing the platform. PlayStation and Saturn were locked in battle, and the N64 was on its way. Following the success of the SFC it was thought the N64 would change the balance of power. PlayStation was new, and there were uncertainties over its future. While PlayStation was leading Saturn in popularity, this was only seen as a preliminary result. Possibly because the release dates were so close, stores in the vicinity of our office had their racks laid out as if a rivalry existed between Clock Tower and Enemy Zero."

Nekozamurai - PS1 (Mar 1999): "The plot (a historical piece, the ghost of a cat speaking human language) comes from a passage in the novel 'Tengukaze' by Miyuki Miyabe. Results were far from a success; mainly I was inexperienced in project coordination. Despite the results, this is a title I am strongly attached to. The opening and ending theme music/movies are my favourite of all of the titles I've worked on. The Neko-Zamurai fanzine one of our fans sent has been kept close to my heart to this day. (I take care of all of the things fans send me for other titles too!)"



Mikagura Shojo Tanteidan - PS1 (1998): "This game's design was based on the search for a system that best approaches the mystery genre. It was difficult to target a specific group because while the graphics have the quintessential anime touch, the game itself is a gruesome mystery. But for me, that is the reason I like this title. One of the characters enjoys 'Kaichu-Jiruko', a sweet bean paste filled wafer, that can be dissolved in hot water to make a warm drink. I, too, enjoyed this drink as a student while I studied for entrance exams, listening to late night radio."

Zoku-Mikagura Shojo Tanteidan - PS1 (Oct 1999): "The sequel. The original followed the school of Ranpo Edogawa - slightly flavoured with pretentiousness - but this title made an effort at creating a Seishi Yokomizo-esque full-blown mystery piece. I was allowed to work with an assistant director, and she wrote the scenario for 'Iki Ningyou' (the Living Puppet). Dialogue she came up with was fresh and stimulating, because it was filled with great ideas that would never be written by a male assistant director. During an interview, I was asked if

Tokito Mikagura was a self-insertion character. If you're familiar with my games , you would easily say, 'No way!' My self-insertion is none other than Gonroku Hirata."

Steel Battalion - Xbox (Sep 2002): "Mr Shinji Mikami got in touch with me to make this title. I recall receiving a call from Mr Mikami when I got home, and being very nervous. When we entered production, our staff worked at Capcom for a joint development effort. There was a lot for us to learn. I feel that there will never be anything that comes close to Steel Battalion, in the sense that despite the general opinion that it is 'crazy', players enjoy it nonetheless."



Shin Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan - PC (Dec 2003): Canonical adult sequel, developed and published by Elf Corporation. (pictured left)

Steel Battalion: Line of Contact - Xbox (Feb 2004): "My first attempt at a network-based game. Infrastructure wise, it was about 5 years too early for me to release this game. There were a lot more players than we originally expected, with much higher levels of skill than we thought. If I were to join a mission, I would be killed instantly. I wonder which VTs are the most popular? My favourites are the Vitzh, Rapier, and the Yellow Jacket."

Adult Video King - PC (Jan 2006): Erotic adventure game by Elf. A young couple make adult videos to pay off debts - improve your filming skills and grow the fan base! (right)

Infinite Space - NDS (Jun 2009): "I had artists work on the character design while I wrote the scenario. The designs for these minor characters were better than I had imagined, so I decided to change the characters' personalities and their roles. Thomas had the initial impression of a bit part, but in the second 'season' he ends up winning a regular spot on the crew. There were some mechanical designers who were not named. I'd like to recognise them: **Kazuki Miyatake**, design for Lugovalos Empire ships / **Junji Okubo**, partial design for Elgava ships, design for Escondido, Zenito, Libertas ships and Spaceports / **Tetsuyarou Shinkaida**, design for Kalymnos ships / **Naohiro Washio**, design for Nova Nacio and Nacio ships / **Mitsuru Tokishiro**, design for Adis ships / **Goro Murata**, design for Enemonzo ships / **Kenji Teraoka**, partial design for Elgava ships / **Yasushi Yamaguchi**, design for Regeinland ships."



Senritsu no Stratus, PSP (Oct 2011): Sci-fi action game with a strong narrative, and mix of 3D isometric and 2D side-scrolling gameplay; switch between 3 characters and pilot giant mecha as you save humanity from aliens!

Smash and Bash - Mobile: "We were given the opportunity to develop this in the 3 months

after the English version of *Infinite Space*. I wanted to create a game where the player simply punches the enemy, but was worried that for a console game, this concept would be too simple. It is being distributed through 'Keitai Capcom'." www.capcom.co.jp/keitai/action/action69.html

Dolly the Dolphin - Android/IOS: "Help Dolly and Jenny to jump over obstacles by using jump and double jump!"

Nude Maker / Human Entertainment interviews

26 September & 11 November, Tokyo, Nude Maker office / Duration: 4h 21m & 1h 21m

This collection of interviews was most fortuitous. When running my Kickstarter campaign I was contacted by Mike Doran, a producer in the games industry. He put me in touch with several people in Japan, notably Naoko Mori, who works in PR - previously working for Suda51 and Shinji Mikami. The hope of Mike's was this could lead to interviews. However, what caught my attention the most was when Ms Mori revealed she was currently helping Nude Maker. Both Hifumi Kono and lead programmer Masaku Higuchi had been at Human Entertainment, making them priority candidates! As we arranged a meeting time, Mr Kono also contacted former Human colleague Masatoshi Mitori, for a grand reunion. As the three gentlemen sat on the couch in the Nude Maker waiting area, chatting, it hit me - these recollections were pure gold. As they reminded each other of topics, traded secrets, and reminisced about the good and the bad, they wove a narrative you could not find anywhere else. This truly is the perfect way to document a company's history; if only all historians had the luxury of roundtable conversations.

The day was broken into non-sequential segments. Individual interviews, a long group interview, and a dual focus split between Hifumi Kono's career (mainly Nude Maker), and the more general topic of Human Entertainment - specifically Human Creative School, which I'd previously discussed with Ryoji Amano.

There really was no easy or correct way to restructure this chapter during editing. A lot of the flavour comes from the interviewees chatting with each other and bringing up old memories, which often shifted us to unrelated topics. While some text was moved around, mainly to concentrate *Septentrion* discussion into its own section, I've deliberately gone against the cries of readers who wanted a more chronological structure. Tougher editing would have broken the framework within which answers were given. I was tempted to move all early *Steel Battalion* questions to the final section of the chapter, but that created contextual problems. The topics are not in any specific order, so by all means follow the section headings and jump around.

Usually I base the initials on First and Last names, but because the first names of Misters Higuchi and Mitori start with the same letter, I'm adopting the Japanese standard of Last and First, so everyone starts with a unique letter:

KH= Hifumi KONO
HM= Masaki HIGUCHI
MM= Masatoshi MITORI

Solo interview with Hifumi Kono

JS: What's the first game you remember seeing?

KONO Hifumi: Table Tennis, maybe? It was still in black and white. For the Cassette Vision.

JS: When did you get the urge to enter the industry?

KH: I liked games, but I didn't particularly want to enter the game industry. In my 4th year of university, when it came time to start looking for a job, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I thought about it for a while, and decided to try making games. While at university, I was on the archery team, and I also belonged to a strategy/wargaming club. While in this club, I created my own board game, and everyone liked it and played it frequently. Their reaction made me happy, so that's how I became interested in creating games for people to enjoy.

JS: This is new - please describe it!

KH: <laughs> Well, back then in Japan, there were a lot of yakuza-themed manga. The game was about all these yakuza clans from different manga getting into feuds, and sending hitmen against each other to take down the higher-ranking leaders. The goal is to become the strongest yakuza clan.

JS: Sounds like Ryu ga Gotoku. Do you still have it?

KH: It was over 20 years ago, so I don't have it anymore. However, I did sell it at the university campus festival, so some people might still have a copy. The name of the board game was Ishmael, for some reason. <laughs>

JS: Wow, so now a rare collector's item!

KH: <laughs> There were only about 100 copies made, so there must be even fewer today.

JS: I'll save discussion on Human Entertainment for later, when your colleagues arrive; for the moment I'll focus on Nude Maker. The Wikipedia page for Nude Maker lists Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan - was this by Nude Maker, or was it developed at Human Entertainment?

KH: I think titles such as Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan are listed as a reflection of my own gameography, rather than Nude Maker's. Those were created while I was still at Human, so those are Human titles. The first official Nude Maker game was Steel Battalion.

JS: An amazing way to start a company! It's had much coverage, so I'll try to ask questions not asked before.

KH: In that case, I'll try to give answers which have not been written about before.

JS: I heard you pitched it to Capcom by creating a fictional user manual for the Vertical Tank, for newbie pilots?

KH: <laughs> Unfortunately, that story isn't true. The original pitch document I showed to Mikami-san was only a single page, not a manual. I just described the core essence of the project, without any illustrations or drawings. Or to put it another way, if someone were to read about the core essence but still not understand it without pages and pages of drawings and additional detail, that person would never truly understand the point of the project. So I just described the essence of it in a single page. And the amazing thing about Mikami-san is that he understood it immediately from just that one page, and greenlighted the project.



Steel Battalion photo courtesy of The Strong, Rochester, New York www.museumofplay.org

JS: The controller went through several prototypes. You mentioned not having photos - but could you draw a sketch?

KH: At the time, I was working inside Capcom, so the documents were all stored on Capcom's computers, and unfortunately I was not able to take them with me. However, even

though there were prototypes, the overall design did not change drastically. In the beginning, I created a PowerPoint presentation that laid out the controller design in detail, and the controller was ultimately based on that file. I can draw it for you. I still remember it distinctly, so I can draw it easily from memory.

JS: When first hearing of it, there was concern the controller was so expensive, it would never leave Japan.

KH: <laughs> That's understandable. As far as the actual game was concerned, everyone was confident and supportive of my decisions, so I wasn't too worried. But on the business side, there were questions about whether or not to release it in Japan, and whether such a large controller would even succeed in the market. It became a political issue within Capcom, and the person who negotiated for me and argued on my behalf was Shinji Mikami-san, and later the producer, Atsushi Inaba-san.

To tell you the truth, during the development period, there were at least two occasions when the upper management requested us to consider including support for normal controllers.

JS: That defeats the purpose - *the game is the controller*.

KH: Yes, it would be meaningless. The "Tekki Project" started during the transitional period between the last days of the PS1 and the beginning of the PS2, when the market was stagnating. We were deeply concerned about the future evolution of games. We felt a sense of crisis, like we had to do something new. Mikami-san wanted to do something different, something that would send an appeal to the rest of the industry and urge everyone to try new things. I felt the same way, and when I proposed my project, it was a perfect fit with his goals.

At the time, I was extremely frustrated with the game industry as a whole. After Human closed down, I struggled for about six months as my project proposals were all rejected. This was while Nude Maker was still in the process of being established. I obtained money for living expenses by gambling. I played slots to win money for food. During this time, I would look at the upcoming lineup of new games, and they were all so boring. I felt this anger against the entire industry. You're all just making the same old shit. And then when Mikami-san called me on the phone, we instantly connected and understood each other, because we both felt the same kind of anger.



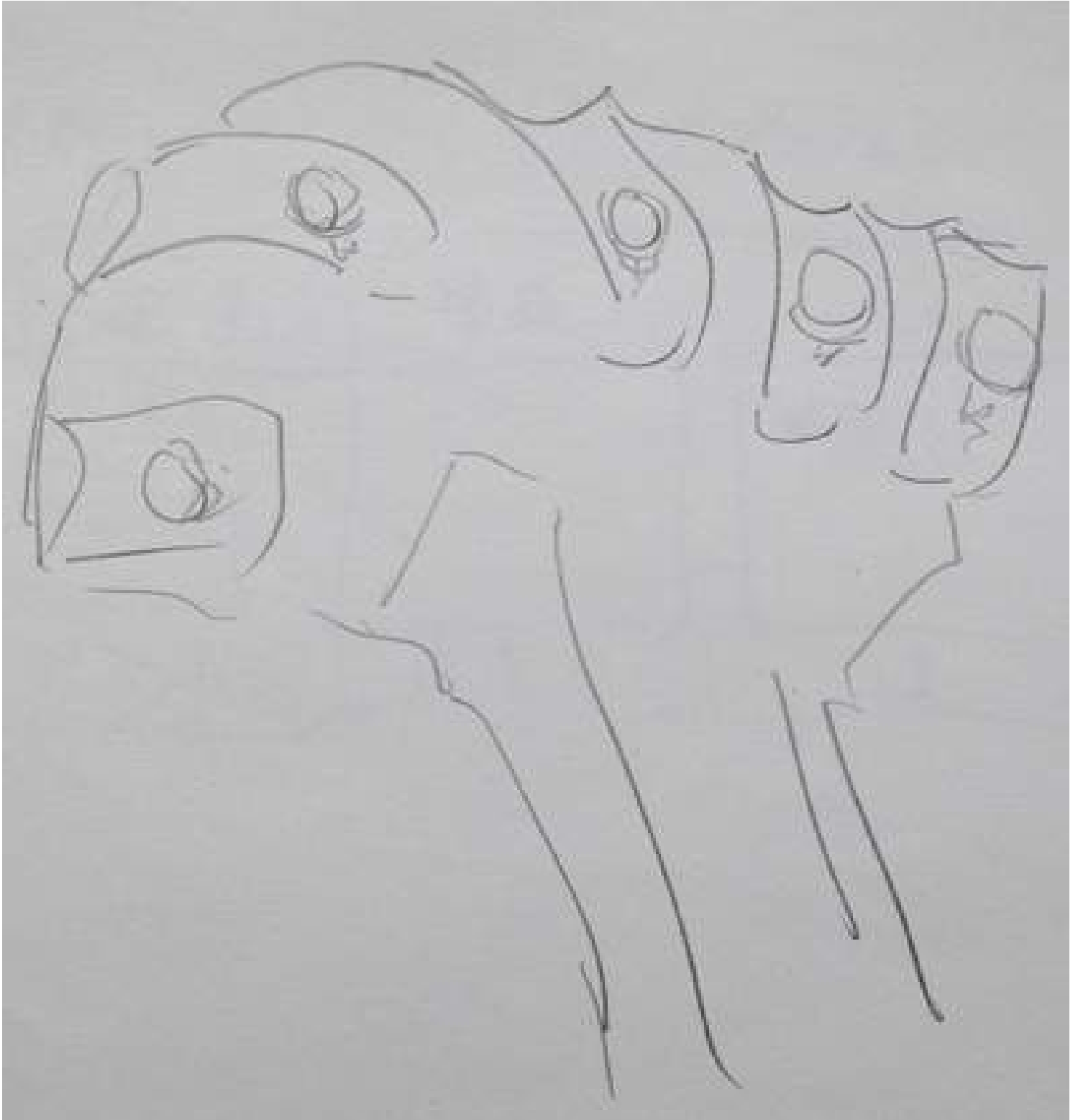
JS: Whoa! *<stunned pause>* I also wanted to ask about Microsoft. I'm not sure if you can comment, but a colleague mentioned a rumour that when Microsoft became involved they said, "You have unlimited budget. Make whatever you want." Is that correct?

KH: Hmm... I don't know, honestly. It's not that I can't comment, I simply don't know. I'm fairly certain Microsoft did provide funding assistance, although perhaps not the entire budget. Before Microsoft became involved, there was no way the Xbox could accept the input from all the buttons on the Steel Battalion controller. So they helped us make an input driver, and generously provided assistance.



JS: Had you considered making it for a different system, such as the PS2 or GameCube?

KH: When development started, I don't think the GameCube had come out yet. So the choice was only between the PlayStation 2 and the Xbox. At first we wanted to release it on the PlayStation 2, because that's where the larger market existed, particularly within Japan. But there were also technical considerations related to what our team could accomplish. We still weren't fully versed with the PlayStation 2 hardware on a technical level, so the graphics we created looked horrible. Because of this, we switched over to the Xbox.



JS: Is there anything you wished you'd included?

KH: One thing I wanted was a smooth shift lever, not a gear system. If you look at Japanese robot anime, there are these scenes where the pilot engages the vernier thrusters or the afterburner by pushing on the lever like this, gweeeeeee. *<moves hand, smooth motion>* I'm disappointed that we couldn't do that. In Steel Battalion, the lever goes ka-ka-ka-ka. *<stilted movement>*

There's also a manga called the *Five Star Stories*⁶⁷⁷ that features scenes in which a person controls a robot by communicating with a humanoid computer. I wanted to do something like that, make certain commands voice-activated. So you could say something like, "Search for hostiles!", while performing other actions with the controller. I wanted to do that.

Another thing was the setting. Rather than doing a wartime setting, I wanted to make the game about rescue robots, like the *Thunderbirds* series. So even though you might have occasional scenes about battling terrorists in an urban zone, the game would basically be about saving people buried under rubble by controlling a robot arm or manipulator to dig them out. But things became difficult when it came to the robot design, such as how to visually express the control over the manipulator, and contact with objects such as walls. So it was simpler to do a wartime setting. Of course, now there are touchscreen devices, so this idea finally seems feasible. I'd like to make something like that one day.

JS: The game we know was almost completely different.

KH: Yes, compared to the project in the initial planning stages. For example, we never made a prototype or anything, but I really wanted to make a lever like this, with a button for each finger. *<sketches lever>* But this would have been way too expensive, so it was cut at an early stage of development.

JS: It would have been quite fragile too.

KH: Yes, it wouldn't have been possible with the manufacturing methods back then. I did a lot of scratch building in my head, but I'm the type of person who hates scratch building after the team has already started working, so the design was already decided to be like this once the team was put in motion.

When the project was nearly complete, the durability of the controller became a significant concern. We were worried that the foot pedal would break if you step on it too hard. Mikami-san asked about it, and I think Inaba-san said that it seemed fine so far. Mikami-san became furious, and said "Do you think that's enough for a durability test? All of you, go test it now." So we lined up a bunch of the controllers in an empty room, and the whole staff, about 20 of us, stomped on the pedals over and over for two hours straight. When someone got tired, someone else would take their place and keep stomping.

JS: Did any of them break?

KH: No actually, they were all fine that day. When Mikami-san saw it with his own eyes, he was finally satisfied.

JS: Well-engineered equipment, those pedals were.

KH: Hmm... I guess so. During development, several of the foot pedals had broken. There were one or two that broke during debugging and test play. Mikami-san noticed this and became concerned. But luckily, none of them broke during the stomping test.

JS: After Line of Contact⁶⁷⁸ there's several years until Infinite Space. AV King was developed in this period.⁶⁷⁹ Did you do a lot of contractual work for Elf Corporation?

KH: You mean "hentai games"? Yes, we did work with Elf. I had just created a company, and since I had only worked as a creator before, I didn't know how to manage the business, and had a difficult time securing projects. Around this time, some people from Elf came all the way to Osaka to visit us and offer us work. Since they were so eager to work with us, I agreed.

JS: Do you mean from Osaka? Nude Maker is in Tokyo...

KH: At the time we were still at Capcom, which is in Osaka... I'm still not good at business and sales. <laughs>

JS: Did Nude Maker work on other adult games?

KH: The only games we worked on were Shin Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan and AV King. Only those two.⁶⁸⁰

JS: When fans of Nude Maker heard you made these other games, they naturally wanted to know more. Some people like to collect all games by a company.

KH: But they aren't going to play hentai games, are they?

<everyone laughs>

JS: Overseas fans still play them. This segues on to fan-translations - if a game is released on computer, players outside of Japan will import it, install it on their PC, then other fans will produce an English translation patch.

KH: I think that's wonderful. For example, if there was an official English version available for sale, then maybe it's not such a good thing, but as a creator, I'm extremely happy to hear that there are passionate fans who will take something that's normally unavailable to them and make the effort to translate it so they can play it.

JS: For a PC game it's easy, since you can replace the language files once installed.

KH: Well, strictly speaking, I suppose that's not authorised, but the entertainment industry

must always allow for a grey zone to exist, or else it's not interesting. Personally, I'm glad that there are fans willing to do that, and I think it's a good thing. These days, companies are becoming stricter about unauthorised modification of save games and game files.

JS: Speaking of things of an adult nature... I couldn't help but notice that above the sign showing Nude Maker on the 3rd floor, there's a mysterious sign that says "Madam Masae" on the 4th floor. What is that?

KH: *<laughs>* No relation.



JS: Do you know whose on the floor above you?

KH: Well, it's a lady, and "Madam Masae" is certainly a lovely, sexy name.

Nico: We can go up after.

<everyone laughs>

JS: Yeah, we'll go together and say we're photographers.[681](#)

<intense laughter all round>

JS: I want to discuss adult games, because it seems to me in America there's a hysteria at the moment, on if something is allegedly sexist, or too adult. Critics are on a witch hunt to tear people down. *<cites examples>*⁶⁸² There's a lot of unnecessary Western criticism about how you should not have attractive women in games.

KH: Why are people against the inclusion of attractive women in games?

JS: American critics say it's offensive. I'm from England and my cameraman is French. It's very *laissez-faire* in Europe - you see topless women in public adverts.

KH: The culture in Europe is certainly different [from that in America].

JS: In the US there's a perverse Puritanical undercurrent. Take George Kamitani's art - it's akin to the artwork of Botticelli, Titian, Goya, or Rubens! I love it, but Americans are all, "I'm offended! This is offensive! We can't have this in games because it's offensive! I'm getting triggered!" I have trouble understanding what they're babbling about.

KH: I don't know. I can't understand it. For example, if there are arguments against sensationalist and lascivious portrayals of women, that I can understand. But I can't understand a stance that is against the inclusion of attractive women. That is a form of discrimination in itself.

JS: One debate is about fantasy games, where you've got a warrior with muscles and a big axe, and a woman in a chainmail bikini. Like the fantasy artwork of Frank Frazetta.

KH: Like *Conan the Barbarian*.

JS: Right! American writers condemn that. It's any portrayal of beautiful women. Their argument is that... I don't know to be honest, I don't understand them. Why can't someone dress in the style of classic fantasy artwork? When did society become so repressed?

KH: I don't understand it either. All games are fantasy in a sense, and since it's fantasy, what's wrong with something that is a little aspirational or escapist? What's wrong with something that grants someone the fantasy of being a hero with beautiful women at your side? They might not look like your wife in real life, but so what?

JS: Games are a form of escapism, a kind of a wish fulfilment for ordinary people.

KH: There are always critics like that. You can't just tell them to shut up. It's best just to ignore them.

JS: My worry is that an unimportant vocal minority will make developers censor themselves by using fear.

KH: Recently, particularly in the last 3-5 years, there's been more emphasis on a worldwide

or market-focused stance. Honestly, with the big game companies, the producers suddenly have much greater power. Or the opinions of the sales and marketing division are prioritised. And if you listen to their opinions, they'll say that for the worldwide market, there's no point in making anything other than FPS games with over-the-top action. I am disgusted with the current state of the industry.

The difficult issue is that if you want to make a game with high-definition visuals for a worldwide release, you need a huge budget, and so you feel forced to play it safe to ensure that you can recoup your investment. In that case, if you want to make something that deals with sensitive subject matter, or something original, you have to look elsewhere.

Luckily, and this is something I'm very happy about, it's now possible to make apps and indie games with little or no budget. For this reason, lately I have become more interested in the app market.

For example, with one of our current projects, we received funding to make several games. The budget is low, but we can make whatever we want. It's a very appealing work arrangement. We can make whatever we think is fun.

JS: That's the important thing.

<Masatoshi Mitori arrives>



MITORI, Masatoshi

DOB: 19 January 1973 / Birthplace: Kumamoto-ken / Blood Type: O

~Masatoshi Mitori's Selected Portfolio~

"I also have a history with a number of publishers. I ask that you not consider this to be a full record of my achievements. I established an integrated planning company that produced content for mobile phones, and supported projects for other companies. I incorporated an individual trade name, and offered development consulting and production, as a 'Fireman'."

- **Septentrion / SOS** - SFC (1993)
- **Formation Soccer series** - mostly SFC era
- **Super Formation Soccer 2**

"I took over the role of series director from Ryoji Amano, my senior at the time, and handled the series up to the release of Hyper Formation Soccer on the PlayStation. We aimed for the game to have the most content and best multiplayer gameplay of any soccer game at the time. I'm happy that many still hold fond memories of the game today."

- **Tactics Formula** - Saturn (1997)
- **Animastar** - DC (2000)
- **New Roommania: Porori Seishun** - PS2 (2003)

"I joined the team midway as an assistant, but as a whole we lacked the technological know-how and were faced with a number of problems developing this title. We were forced to ship the game with graphical direction and loading issues, but I am proud of the game's scenario, which I was tasked with the supervision of."

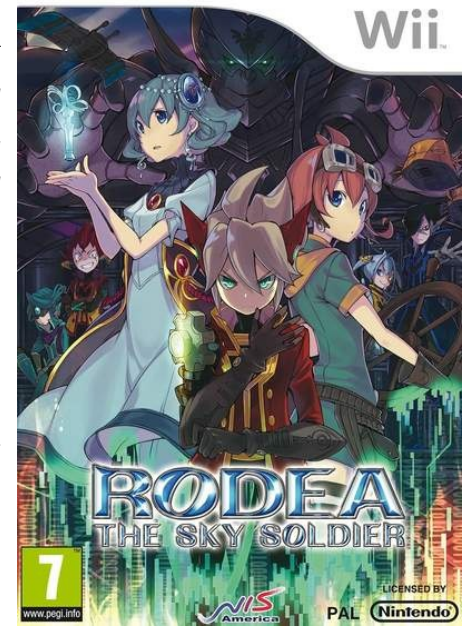
- **Whistle!** - multi (2003)
- **Kenran Butou Sai: The Mars Daybreak** - PS2 (2005)
- **Radiata Stories** - PS2 (2005)

"I was hired as a product producer by tri-Ace, the developer of this title. It pleases me that the features I had implemented, such as the time schedule system, functioned well. While the scenario received mixed reviews, this was the response I was aiming for at the time, so I accept the criticism."

- **Infinite Undiscovery** - X360 (2008)

"Square-Enix had me take over the role of product producer to give this game an extra layer of polish. Regrettably, I had little experience with numerous aspects of advanced game development at the time (e.g. pipelining). However, the members of tri-Ace were very enthusiastic about tackling the new frontier, allowing us to deliver a finished product."

- **Magna Carta 2** - X360 (2009)
- **Rodea the Sky Soldier** - multi (2015): "Having misread the market, the publisher's indecision regarding 3DS development proved to be a major problem, and was the reason so much time elapsed between the game's announcement and its release. After seeing the Wii



version to completion, I was happy for the opportunity to provide support on the WiiU and 3DS versions in secret."

- **Little Battlers series** (W release onwards)

Solo interview with Masatoshi Mitori

JS: Can you recall the first game you saw?

MITORI Masatoshi: The first videogame I saw? It was a table tennis game from Nintendo I think. Playing that at a friend's house was probably my first gaming experience.

JS: When did you feel you wanted to make games?

MM: I felt I wanted to join the game industry just before I actually did, at around age 18. Until then, I hadn't decided on anything. All I knew is that I generally wanted to create something, such as movies, for example.

JS: Was Human Entertainment your first job?

MM: Yes, that's right. I attended Human Creative School, and was a member of the school's second class. It was a one-year school, so I was a member of the school's second graduating class. In emails you mentioned *Septentrion*.⁶⁸³ I created that as a student, as part of a school project.

JS: A classic - fantastic concept! Tell me more.

MM: I was part of a team of course. I did the character design and created the pixel art. I joined the team as an artist, but ultimately I just created the pixel art directly, without drawing anything on paper. But we were still students, so our roles weren't really fixed. We discussed and collaborated on most aspects of the game. A person named Kimura-kun was officially credited as the original planner,⁶⁸⁴ but we all designed it together. We didn't have an official game design document, so the game just sort of grew organically.

JS: Was it inspired by *The Poseidon Adventure* film? I'm not sure of the Japanese name.

MM: The Japanese film title is the same. Kimura-san was inspired by *The Poseidon Adventure*, and the entire team watched the film together when we started development. We wanted to recreate it on the Super Famicom and make it as fun as possible. So that film had a massive influence. If *The Poseidon Adventure* hadn't existed, the initial game idea would not have been conceived.



JS: I'm impressed by the different characters and their multiple endings.⁶⁸⁵ What difficulties did you face?

MM: Well, today I have much more experience with game development, so I know how to draft charts and use various methods to organise the design. But like I said before, back then we worked collaboratively without any kind of game design document. We were running entirely on enthusiasm. We were able to create the game because it was for the Super Famicom. The methods we used back then would not be effective at all today.

JS: Mode 7 effects of the ship overturned were incredible.

MM: That was thanks to Kimura-san. He wrote an excellent 7-page proposal about using Mode 7 to recreate *The Poseidon Adventure*. His ideas were great. We narrowed it down to about five different effects or behaviours, and although ultimately the final game was completely different from his original proposal, his original core concepts were solid. Even though they were taken straight from *The Poseidon Adventure*. <laughs> But thanks to those solid concepts, we were able to deliver a complete game smoothly and without any major disagreements, even though we were just students.

<unknown voice in the background makes a joke about seeing an old picture of MM and other students, and how they were all dressed alike. No originality!>

JS: Did you know it was released in English as SOS?

MM: I didn't know it was called SOS.

KH: That was published by Ubisoft, wasn't it?^{[686](#)}

MM: I don't think it was published that late. It came out before I left Human Entertainment.

KH: It was something of a notable event. A Ubisoft representative came to Human Entertainment and played Septentrion. Every time his character died he would laugh out loud. His visit was how we all found out about the overseas release.^{[687](#)}

MM: At any rate, I was not involved at all in the localisation process for Septentrion. The publisher must have bought the license and then localised the game themselves. On the other hand, I did help create the PAL version of Super Formation Soccer.



JS: In your portfolio, this word is "fireman"? <points>

MM: Ah yes, *hikeshi*. That was my job title. It literally means "firefighter", but it's used in the sense of a "problem solver". I had been working on projects as a director, but for a while there was a downturn in the game industry, and finding work became difficult. During this time I didn't belong to any particular company, but when a game development project at some company ran into a problem, I was called in to finish up the project. This became my main source of work in my late 20s. It was an unusual type of job, but thanks to that experience, I

was able to gain a glimpse into the organization of many different projects, and learn about the office culture in a variety of companies. I wasn't exactly a project manager, although sometimes my job duties were the same as a project manager or a producer. Overall, my job was to assess the problems with a game project, and then reorganise the project in a different direction.

JS: When I saw *firefighter*, I didn't quite understand. I wondered if it was related to *The Firemen* at Human.^{[688](#)}

MM: *The Firemen* was also a student project originally, by students in the following year after me.^{[689](#)}

JS: Do you recall seeing it during development?

MM: Well, I wasn't exactly a mentor, but we would monitor student projects, as *sempai*. The student's name was Taichi, Taichi-kun, but I've forgotten his last name.^{[690](#)} Since I was a year older and had worked on *Septentrion*, I gave him advice about how to complete the student project.

The students also did debugging work for commercial titles. Human would hire students from the school for part-time debugging work, since they were right next door to the development team.



HIGUCHI, Masaki

DOB: April 1973 / Birthplace: *secret* / Blood Type: B

Dream Basketball: Dunk & Hoop - SFC (1994)
Fire Pro Joshi: All Star Dream Slam - SFC (1994)
WakuWaku Ski Wonder Spur - SFC (1995)
Clock Tower 2 - PS1 (1996)
Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan - PS1 (1998)
Zoku MST - PS1 (1999)
Steel Battalion - Xbox (2002)
SB: Line of Contact - Xbox (2004)
Infinite Space - NDS (2009)
Lollipop Chainsaw - multi (2012)

Human Group Interview - all together again

<audio file starts suddenly; overlapping chat in Japanese, some lost - anecdote on Mr Mitori attending parties and being good friends with an unknown Human colleague>

JS: Mr Higuchi, I've asked Mr Mitori and Mr Kono already - what was the first game you saw?

HIGUCHI Masaki: My first game? What was it? There were arcade games I used to play at the local candy store, from the early era of arcades. I don't remember the titles, because back then I wasn't really interested in what the games were called. I just played what was there. My parents saw me playing there, but since it wasn't a nice neighbourhood, they bought me a Famicom and told me to play games at home. *<laughs>* They bought a copy of Mario for me, and that's how I got hooked on videogames.

KH: My parents never bought me a Famicom...

JS: That was lucky, you ended up with a home system.

HM: Yes, I was lucky. But my friends also had a lot of game consoles, like the Super Cassette Vision.^{[691](#)}

KH: That's like me. My first game was the tennis game on the Cassette Vision.^{[692](#)}

HM: I used to play Boulder Dash, I think. The one where the jewels fall down. On the Cassette Vision. I was addicted to that one.

KH: If you owned a Cassette Vision, you were one of the rich kids. *<murmured agreement all around>* After the Famicom, home games became more mainstream.

JS: Could each of you describe when you joined Human.

MM: I'm not entirely sure of the dates, but I joined the Human school as a student in 1991, and became a full-time employee upon graduation.

KH: You joined in 1991?

MM: Yes, but as a student; I became an employee in 1992.

KH: I started wanting to join Human, or rather the videogame industry, just before I graduated from university. It was very sudden. I had been looking around at different jobs, and this was still during the economic bubble, so I received offers from a bank and also a major manufacturing company. But suddenly I started questioning myself, and suddenly changed my mind. I didn't know how to get a job in the industry, so I bought a game magazine, and sent my resume to addresses printed in advertisements in the magazine. I think

I sent my resume to three places. Koei, Telenet Japan, which was quite famous, and Human. I sent them at the same time, but Human was the only one that responded. This was back when Koei Tecmo was simply Koei.

JS: What drew you to these three?

KH: For Koei, it was clearly because I liked *Nobunaga no Yabou* and had played it extensively at university. For the other two, it was because I wanted to enter a company that was producing a variety of different games. I wanted to make original titles, so I wanted to join a company that was diversified, and not limiting itself to particular genres. When I looked at the adverts, Telenet Japan and Human seemed to have the greatest diversity of titles, so I chose them. I think I joined in 1993. *Human Grand Prix 2*⁶⁹³ came out in 1993, which was the same year I joined.

HM: Kono-san, you were 1993? I turned 20 in April 1993, so didn't you join a year earlier?

KH: Oh, so I'm 1992. I graduated from university, applied to Human, and was accepted.

<minor back-and-forth about dates>

HM: And I joined in April 1993. Before that I worked part-time at a company called Open System, an affiliate company of Human. The companies merged, or maybe Open System was absorbed, and that's how I joined.⁶⁹⁴

KH: You were making *Super Indy Champ*,⁶⁹⁵ weren't you?

HM: No, that wasn't me!

KH: You weren't involved with that?

HM: No, no that. I did *Dunk & Hoop*,⁶⁹⁶ the basketball game. *<laughs>*

JS: Could you gentlemen sketch the layout of Human?

KH: Mitori-san, why don't you draw the offices when we were in the Nanai building?

JS: How many offices did Human have?

KH: At first, the Human office was located in a building called the Nanai building, but we moved the year after I joined, and stayed there until Human shut down. So maybe Mitori-san will draw the Nanai building office, I'll draw the newer office, and then Higuchi-san will draw the programmer space.

MM: The Nanai building is hard to remember.

<all three look through the book of office sketches and notice the extremely detailed bird's eye

panorama of Capcom, drawn by Kouichi Yotsui>



KH: <to MM> Make sure you add lots of detail!

MM: Why are you asking other people for artistic talent?

KH: I'm not asking for talent, except for when you draw our offices at Human Entertainment. Look at this one from Capcom. <laughs> We're under a lot of pressure here, so you draw the old office.

MM: It's fine, he was part of Capcom's art staff!

KH: Give it perspective, so they can understand the layout.

JS: <intense laughter>

MM: To be precise, the school was in the same building as the development staff, in the Nanai Building in Kichijoji. The development staff used the basement floor, while the school was on the first floor.

KH: Really? I didn't know that.

JS: Do you remember Choshiro Suzuki?[697](#)

Everyone: Oh yes.

HM: He had a funny accent. We couldn't understand him sometimes.

KH: Most company presidents are like that. The Capcom president used to refer to the Japanese economic bubble as the economic "bulb". <laughs>

JS: I spoke with Ryoji Amano yesterday. He said Mr Suzuki... was a bit of a character.

KH: I don't remember talking to him very much.

HM: But he used to drop in a lot.

KH: I don't remember that. I wasn't interested. <laughs>

JS: Can you each describe your role at Human?

MM: As I mentioned earlier, I was the character designer on Septentrion. I created the pixel art.

KH: You were a graphics guy originally? Hmm!

MM: Yes I was. But I wasn't fully confident in my artistic ability, so I asked to be transferred to the planning department. I've been doing that ever since.

KH: You were a director in the later days, right? We didn't really have a director system in place, though.

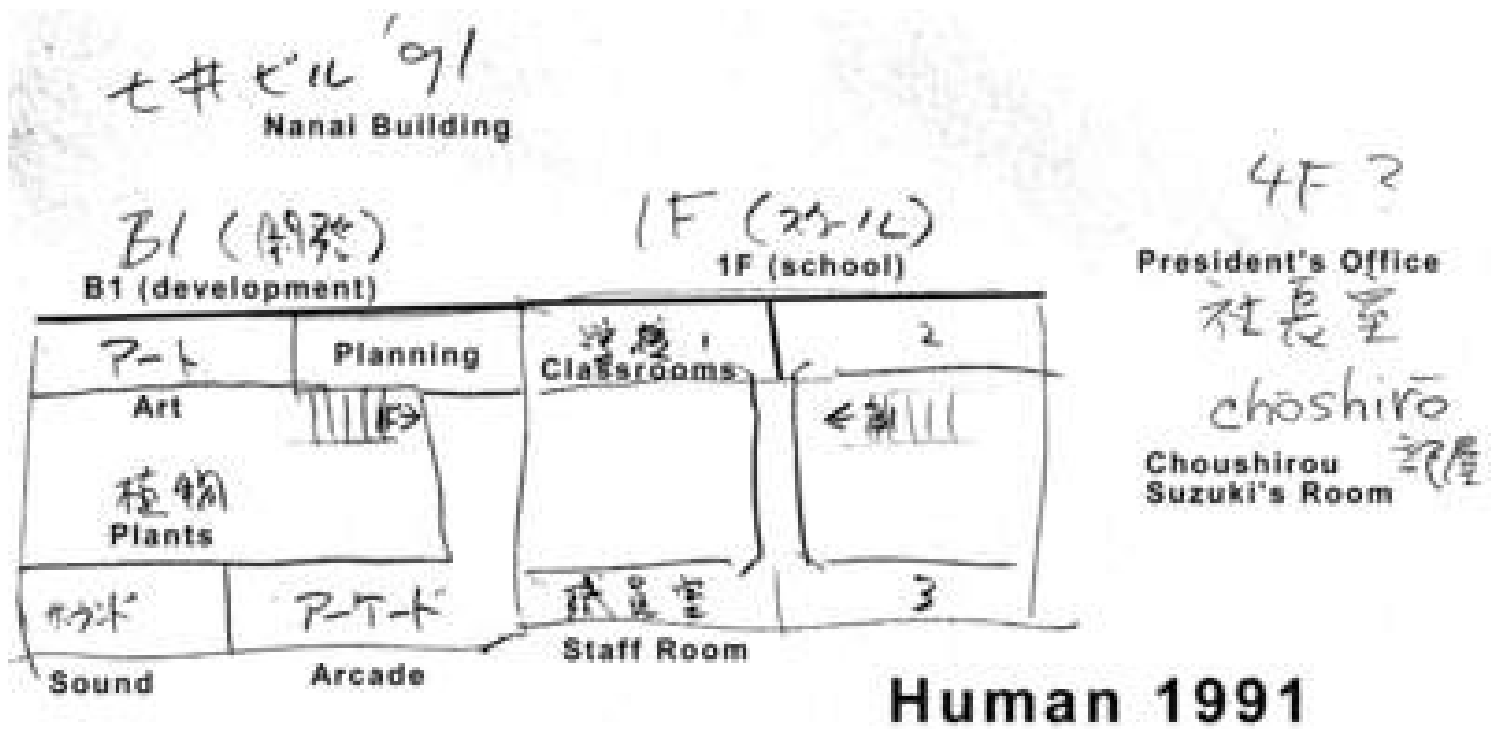
MM: That's right. When we started working on a soccer game, I asked if I could be the director, which basically meant I could go around and tell everyone my opinions. <laughs> Our organisation was very flexible back then. We didn't have a rigid hierarchy of game development. If you named yourself a director, you were a director.

KH: There were arguments, though. Mitori-san's soccer team was alright, but when we started introducing the role of director and creating a centralised, top-down authority, people argued against it. I think Suda-san pushed for the introduction of the director position more than anyone else. He had quite a bit of foresight.

Originally we had a council system, where everyone was supposed to be equal and decisions were made together. But it didn't work at all. We realised we needed a more top-down approach so that a creator's concepts could be realised quickly and clearly. With the council system, games would just become muddled and lose focus. Higuchi-san, didn't your team used to get into a lot of arguments?

HM: I don't remember us arguing all that much.

KH: Maybe it was just the graphics team. Let's not mention it then.



JS: Mr Higuchi, what was your role at Human?

HM: For the first year or so after being hired, I was a sub-programmer on about three titles, which gave me a good grounding for my career. After that, new systems such as the PlayStation and the Virtual Boy started appearing, and my boss told me I had to work on the Virtual Boy next. I was totally opposed to the decision, because I really wanted to work on something for the PlayStation. I told my boss that I refused to work on the Virtual Boy, and that I wanted to work on the PlayStation. I was half-expecting to get fired. But luckily, people were starting to talk about porting Clock Tower to the PlayStation, and ultimately it was decided to do a proper sequel. So my first major project was as the main programmer for Clock Tower 2.⁶⁹⁸ This was also the first time I worked with Kono-san.

JS: Did you do any programming for the VB?

HM: I only made some development tools. I didn't think the system was going to sell well. <laughs> My boss at the time was a huge Nintendo fan, so he kept pushing us towards the Virtual Boy. But I knew the PlayStation was much better.

JS: What language and tools did you use? Did you have a headset, or were images displayed on a PC?

HM: The development hardware was a device just like the consumer product, so you could test it in the same way as the real thing. I don't remember the details, but the programming language was assembly language. This was right around the time that Human was starting to transition from assembly to C. But I think assembly was more common at the time. C became the main language in the PlayStation era.

It was mostly PC-9801 computers in those days, but they were gradually being replaced

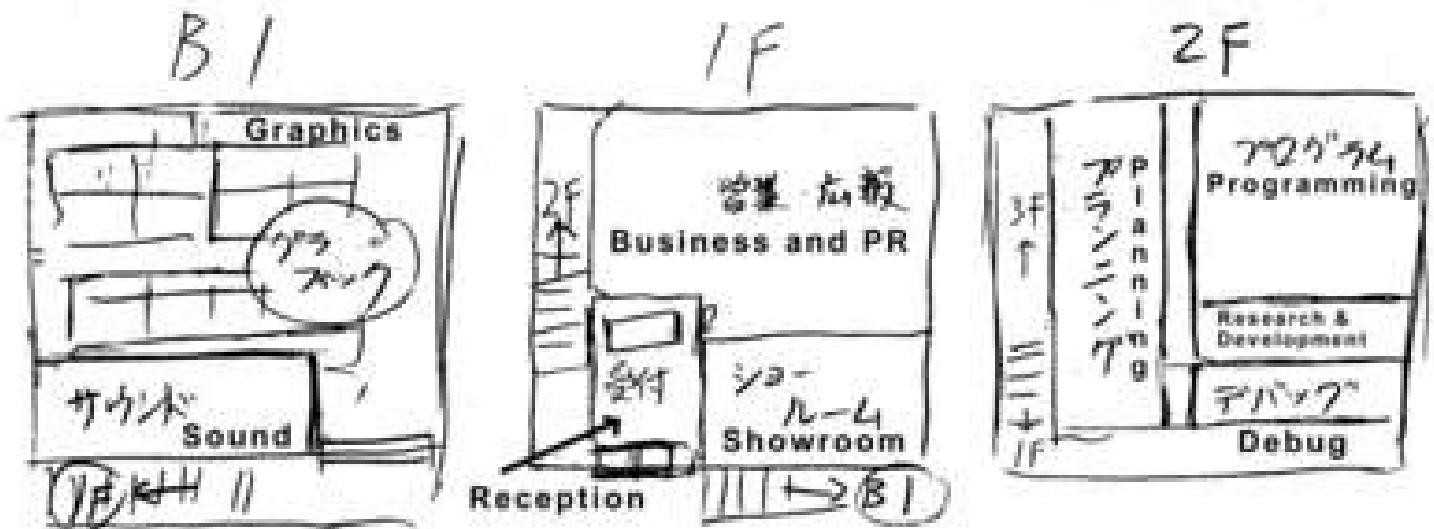
with DOS/V [IBM compatible] machines. I think it was mostly DOS/V by the time of the PlayStation. Meanwhile, the N64 team was using Silicon Graphics workstations which had blue cases.

JS: You use C++ today?

HM: Yes, or C#.

JS: Mr Mitori, what kind of computers did you use in 1991?

MM: PC-9801. Each student had their own. There were various other machines available to people in programming but, basically, there was one PC-9801 per person.



Human 1994

JS: What system or tools did you use for pixel art?

MM: At that time, I was using a PC-9801, and I just remembered, also a Sharp X68000. For the pixel art, I used an in-house tool on the X68000. I don't remember the name of the tool, though. I used a mouse.

JS: I noticed <recites portfolio> on the list you provided.

MM: That's unrelated to Human. I was mostly working on soccer games while I was at Human.

JS: Right, Formation Soccer. You worked with Mr Amano?

MM: I was more like his successor. We were both involved with the same project at some point, but he left after the first Super Formation Soccer for the Super Famicom. Amano-san was already at the company when I joined, so I learned much about the Super Formation Soccer project from him, but when it comes to soccer itself, I was the most knowledgeable, so

I joined the planning team to help figure out how to create better soccer games. That's how we worked together.

JS: Your first was the original for SFC, with Mode 7?

MM: Yes, Amano-san originally created the basic system using Mode 7. That was *Super Formation Soccer 1*.⁶⁹⁹ And then I took that and made a more complete version in a sense, which became *Super Formation Soccer 2*.

JS: Was it difficult balancing additions versus faithfulness to the original when working on a pre-existing series?

MM: For *Super Formation Soccer 2*, we didn't have much time, so we didn't alter the game system very much. We simply polished the soccer elements. For example, we updated the character data, and added a versus mode with better competitive play. Other elements which Amano-san and I had planned were added later in the series. So it [*SFS2*] was basically a more polished version of the first game with some improvements that fans had requested.

This was right at the time when the J-League was formed and Japan was experiencing a soccer boom. The UEFA European Football Championship was also held in 1992. So I wanted to help new fans learn about the sport. I used online services to gather data on different soccer players which wasn't available in Japanese sports magazines, and added that data to the game. This was one of the things that people really liked about *Super Formation Soccer 2*. I didn't have much development time, but I put a lot of effort into it personally.



WakuWaku Ski Wonder Spur (SFC)

JS: Mr Kono, did you make anything before Clock Tower?

KH: I did an F1 racing game. I was more or less the director. It was about six months after I joined. Since Human was producing so many titles at the time, they didn't have enough directors, and they asked for someone to volunteer as the director for this F1 racing game. So I raised my hand, and took the position. I also directed Human Grand Prix 2 and 3.

The reason I didn't put those in my biography is because Human Grand Prix 1 was really Amano-san's game. Essentially, I just made some updated versions, so ultimately they're all Amano-san's games. That's why I don't include them in my online biography. He was the one who created almost all of Human's sports games. Unfortunately I haven't met him, because we weren't at the company at the same time, but I have respect for him.

JS: Human Entertainment had several game projects running simultaneous?

KH: Yes, and each project had a very small team. Mitori-san, how many people were on Super Formation Soccer?

MM: Five.

KH: The exception was *Fire Pro Wrestling*, which had about 20 or 30 people. Other than that, most projects were handled by five-person teams, so Human had a number of different teams working simultaneously. *Clock Tower* had a seven-person team, as I recall.

JS: Why did *Fire Pro Wrestling* need so many staff?

MM: It was simply because the resource costs were high. The wrestling moves were constructed out of different graphics parts, and since there were so many different wrestlers and different moves, a large art team was required. So the project team was almost entirely composed of art staff.

JS: Mr Higuchi, can you list your titles? I looked online, but there's only a few credits, including *Lollipop Chainsaw*.⁷⁰⁰

HM: I'm in the *Lollipop Chainsaw* credits?! <laughs>

KH: They said they'd put in you in. I asked them only to exclude my name.

HM: So I'm in the credits. I didn't know that! <laughs>

The first game I worked on was *Dunk & Hoop*, a basketball game for the Super Famicom. After that was *WakuWaku Ski Wonder Spur*, for the Super Famicom.⁷⁰¹ The next one was *Joshi Pro*... something like that, I don't remember the exact title, but it was a female wrestling game, also for the Super Famicom.⁷⁰² The work I did up to this point was my apprenticeship period, in a sense. After that, I did *Clock Tower 2* for PlayStation, and then *Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan* and its sequel *Zoku Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan*. Shortly after that, Human closed down.

JS: You were surprised when I mentioned *Lollipop Chainsaw*. Was Nude Maker contracted by Grasshopper?

KH: It was simply because Grasshopper was involved in several large-scale projects at the time, and they needed more people. Meanwhile, we had a project with Konami coming up, but we had some free time until then. So we helped out Grasshopper a little. Most of the main members of Nude Maker, including Higuchi-san, went over to Grasshopper's studio to help out. Higuchi-san, how long were we there? Six months?

HM: Not quite six months, I think. Maybe four months?

KH: We contributed staff during the first four months of the *Lollipop Chainsaw* project, during the prototype phase.

Human Creative School



The former Human Creative School is now the Tokyo Musashino Evangelical Free Church. Inset, right: image from a promo video

JS: What are your recollections of Human Creative School? Initially, employees of Human taught students; later it hired teachers, separating the school from development.

MM: Some of the teachers were simply former Human developers who stopped working in game development. Although teachers were also coming in from outside the company, the principal was a former Human developer with game development experience.

HM: I didn't know some teachers were former developers.

MM: Koike-san taught some, didn't he?^{[703](#)}

HM: I don't remember anything in particular.

KH: Did they teach you a lot?

HM: I don't think they taught me anything. *<laughs>* Ultimately, you just have to learn it yourself somehow. They just provided the space and tools. Back in those days, we were all just a bunch of gamers, not developers. We spent most of our time just playing games rather than learning how to develop games. *<laughs>*

MM: We didn't use textbooks or a curriculum at all. We did everything ourselves, while consulting with the teachers.

Below: A series of screengrabs from various promotional videos the school produced. Don't those kids look happy?



JS: How would you evaluate what they taught you? Do you feel it was a good source of education?

MM: I don't feel that I can say anything of substance, because my perspective isn't neutral. I experienced culture shock upon entering school, and didn't attend many classes. I thought the other students were hopeless, to be honest. *Otaku* culture at the time was much worse than it is today. I couldn't relate to the other students at all. I experienced severe culture shock, and couldn't attend classes. I spent most of my time working at a part-time job. But my family were paying money for me to go to this school, so I felt I had to graduate at least. I did enough to pass the exams. Graphics work didn't require much programming knowledge, so I sort of fell into pixel art as a result, and that's how I ended up on the *Septentrion* school project. The principal basically agreed to let me graduate as long as I completed the project. <laughs>

That was my personal experience, but the first graduating class was different. The school was originally advertised as a place that allowed students to learn about game development directly from working developers, and for the first year it was actually structured like that as an experiment. Apparently it was not like a school at all. But when I entered in the second year, there was a sort of textbook filled with information that the senior game developers thought was relevant. So if you were the studious type, you could enter the school with zero programming knowledge, and in a year be able to do a big-time project. Several students were able to accomplish that. So I think the school did help bring students up to speed on game development in just a year, as long as you were willing to study hard.





Naoko Mori: How was *otaku* culture different back then?

MM: Well, today you have big companies like Sony actively involved in the creation and promotion of *otaku* culture. But back then, games were basically the lowest rung of the subculture ladder. There was a strong attitude that games were something only *otaku* played. At the same time, however, there was the Famicom boom, and quite a few adults were playing games as well, such as the sports games I worked on, and role-playing games like *Dragon Quest*. So games were being appreciated by a certain corner of society. Meanwhile, there were also computer games such as *eroge*, which was another, parallel culture of its own. So overall, games were seen as... How should I put it? Today, *otaku* culture is associated with Akihabara and *moe*, things like that, but 20 years ago, *otaku* were more likely to be associated with creepy and disgusting people. My class at the school was a concentrated collection of those kinds of people.

JS: Mr Higuchi, your thoughts as a programmer? Did you need lots of self study?

HM: Well, we did have textbooks and lectures of course, but I didn't understand anything when I first started. At the same time, some of my classmates could already do everything without listening to the teachers. So I learned the most by communicating with the more knowledgeable students and discussing the best way to make things. In that sense, the school was a great opportunity for me to spend time with and learn from talented people, and it's thanks to them that I was able to become a programmer.

KH: Today there are online communities and social networks you can join, but back then people didn't have the same opportunity to get together.

HM: Right, and there wasn't much info available, so even if you read technical books, you

wouldn't understand it. There wasn't anybody to ask about the specific details. There were the teachers of course, but I mostly relied on my friends. In the beginning, I had no idea how to make the game character move left or right in response to the controller. Once I understood that, everything else started to make sense, and for awhile I became obsessed, forgetting to sleep as I programmed all night. Before that, I couldn't program anything. I entered the school with just a vague dream of wanting to make videogames.

JS: Who now owns the rights to Human's games?

KH: I'm not sure about the sports games, but basically, when Human Entertainment closed down, Hamster acquired most of the rights.⁷⁰⁴ Spike took *Twilight Syndrome*, and *Clock Tower* is currently held evenly by SunSoft and Capcom.



HM: Apparently it's only SunSoft now. Capcom has entrusted everything to SunSoft.

KH: Really? It was all so complicated after the closure.

JS: I wanted to ask about *Clock Tower*. The first was never released outside Japan. Do you know it was fan-translated into English in 2001?

KH: The first one was never released? That's odd. But I'm impressed that there's a fan-translation. Do you use an emulator to play it?

JS: Unfortunately yes, the fan translation requires an emulator. The patch is legal, because it's just text, but emulation... The Aeon Genesis team spent 2 years on it.

KH: Wow! That's really impressive! It truly makes me happy to know that some people are willing to do all that to play it.

JS: XSeed works with fan-translators, but other companies won't talk with them. Given things like Virtual Console, it's surprising companies won't consider it.

KH: Yeah... like SunSoft... Maybe it's because they don't have any programmers.

HM: They'd have to dump the ROM, reverse-assemble it...

KH: That's a lot of work! And sometimes the old games were programmed in a very unusual way, depending on who wrote it. It would be nice to release them, though. As for myself, I talked to a certain publisher about doing a reboot or a re-release of *Clock Tower*, but they didn't agree to it, because horror games are difficult to market.⁷⁰⁵



Clock Tower (SFC) was inspired by the work of famed horror film director Dario Argento, notably Phenomena

JS: Horror games will always be popular; modern publishers are just afraid to release them. There's a horror game on PC, Amnesia, which sold very well.

KH: Oh yes, I've heard of it. There was also Alan Wake, and the Silent Hill series is still going. But if you make a proposal for a big-budget horror game on an HD console, no Japanese publisher will go for it. They might agree to a horror-flavoured FPS or action game, but not pure horror.

JS: I mention Amnesia because you can't fight the supernatural force hunting you...

KH: Oh, that's excellent!

JS: ...which is similar to Clock Tower, a game about avoiding rather than confronting the horror.

KH: Amnesia is on PC, you say? I'll go buy it later. <laughs> Is it on Steam?

JS: It should be on Steam. I know it's on GOG.

KH: Sounds very interesting. I'm definitely going to play it.

<JS asks interviewees to fill in profile form>

JS: Mr Mitori, did you travel far to come to the office today?

MM: It's not that far, I came from Shibuya, which is about a 30-minute train ride.

<MM mentions that the kanji for his family name is quite rare and often confused, so he prefers it in hiragana>

JS: I also brought a confectionary gift for you all today.

MM: Thank you!

KH: I already ate mine. *<laughs>*

JS: It's got a British "royal warrant of appointment", which means the royal family also likes it.

Everyone: Wow!

KH: It tastes like caramel.

MM: It's good. A little sweet.

KH: *<to self>* I want to make a horror game...

MM: I just looked it up, and it looks like Spike has the rights to Super Formation Soccer, but they haven't done anything with it. There hasn't been a good Super Formation Soccer game since I left Human.

KH: To make a soccer game, you need someone who really knows soccer.

MM: They stopped making them, and Konami swooped in and cornered the market for soccer games. Spike released another game in 2002 because of the World Cup held in Japan, but the game was terrible, and the brand died.

JS: My brother and I still play Super Formation Soccer, rather than FIFA or Pro Evo. Modern soccer games make things too complicated; earlier games are more intuitive.

MM: Many fans wanted another Super Formation Soccer game, but since I had left the company, no one knew how to make the games, so there was nothing they could do.

KH: The programmer really needs to know the sport in order to make the game. Amano-san did the programming originally, right?

MM: Amano-san wanted to do it in the first place. The same is true for the tennis game and the F1 game. If you don't like the project you're doing, you're just forcing yourself to do it. Amano-san's ideas about competitive game design, his ideology if you will, was one of the

pillars that supported Human's sports games, including the racing games. I only worked with him for about a year, but I learned quite a bit from him.

JS: Mr Mitori joined Human Entertainment in 1991; Mr Kono joined 1992; Mr Higuchi joined 1993. Mr Mitori left in 1994. When did you two gentlemen leave?

KH: We left at the same time, when Human went bankrupt.

HM: Wasn't it a little before that? Like a month earlier?

KH: At any rate, when we left about a month in advance, we all knew that Human Entertainment was going under.

JS: Sources on the bankruptcy vary between November 1999 and January 2000.

KH: Hmm... the bankruptcy was announced about a year in advance. We wondered why it took so long to happen. The company lingered on for a year, like a dying patient in an intensive-care unit. So my memory is fuzzy. In fact, people were starting to whisper about bankruptcy about three years before it actually happened.

HM: I never heard that!

KH: It's true. I heard about it a lot. Mitori-san, did you hear about it?

MM: Well, around the time they got caught for tax evasion...[706](#)<everyone laughs> ... they were stripped of many assets. That's what seemed to happen.



Clock Tower 2 (PS1)
Despite good sales, this could not turn the tide for Human

KH: I kept hearing about how bad things were from the accounting department, about three years before the closure. But back then, I didn't know about how to run a business. I knew the company was having trouble, but Clock Tower 2 sold very well, and I thought we had averted the crisis. But people were still talking about a possible closure. I thought, well, we're screwed then. If the company is still in trouble even after selling all these copies, then it really must be doomed.

<as the interpreter renders the above lengthy answer into English, KH and MM engage in a rapid conversation, but only the fragments below are audible>

MM: There was a soccer game for the PlayStation 1, but the staff were all new and inexperienced, and the project wasn't coming together at all.

KH: Was that the one with the interesting voiced commentary system?

MM: *[inaudible]*... but I had already quit, so they didn't know how to make soccer games anymore.^{[707](#)}

KH: Pro wrestling is the same way, you need someone who knows about it to make a game.

MM: *[inaudible]*

KH: *[inaudible]*... because they killed Twilight Syndrome.^{[708](#)}

<JS calls for short break>

JS: **Thank you for drawing the office layouts.**

HM: Your book is a very interesting idea, and very in-depth, so I'm looking forward to it.

JS: **There's a lot of fans of Human's games, but not much written about the company itself.**

KH: Many former Human employees are still very active in the industry.

JS: **I'd like to ask everyone: what is your strongest memory of your time at Human Entertainment?**

KH: Hmm... anger.

MM: Anger is the only word for it. I think I was one of the earliest game directors at Human. I had my own soccer development team, and even though I was still young, I felt that I was creating value for the company, and although it was prideful of me, I felt that the company was succeeding because of me.

KH: Which was true, actually.

MM: We sold huge numbers of copies, and the soccer games alone were released for the arcades, PC Engine, Super Famicom, and the PlayStation at the very end. We released a deep soccer game on multiple platforms during a time when Nintendo was still reigning supreme, and we did it with a tiny team. I was in charge of a very successful and profitable team. But despite that, I was still a relatively new employee, so my salary was low, there weren't many benefits or perks, and our development environment was shabby. We were making lots of money for the company, but we were being forced to work in poor conditions. Today, labour standards are taken much more seriously, but back then many companies expected programmers to work without holidays and without enough sleep. So I was working hard for the company, and meanwhile they were doing things like cheating on their taxes.

That was one of the decisive reasons that led me to leave the company. But I had done my best for them. I inherited Amano-san's soccer project, and committed myself to making the best soccer games in the world, while the company squandered their success. I was deeply disappointed in them.

JS: I haven't heard of the tax fraud before. Can you tell me more? Was this a result of Mr Suzuki?

MM: Yes, Choshiro Suzuki. There was also problem with nepotism, the family management of the company, but the upper management were basically lining their pockets with cash. Starting from the PC Engine era, Human made many games covering sports like pro wrestling, F1 racing, and soccer, and for a time they made a huge profit. A small team of three or four people could make game after game that would each sell 800'000 copies, for example. The company was filthy rich. They didn't want to pay all the taxes they owed, and the back taxes piled up for a few years until the tax investigators came visiting. Human then asked all the employees to write letters of appeal to the tax authorities, because Human had been profitable and was aiming to become a publicly traded company. The banks also got involved at this point.

So Human was in dire straits, and asked everyone to write letters of appeal for leniency regarding the outstanding debt. Words carried more weight if they came from people who had been in planning and directorial positions, like myself, Kono-san, and Suda-san, so some of the banks called us in to consult with us, and ask us about the real situation at Human. I attended some of these hearings, but by that point I had a very negative opinion of the company, and felt that the creative side had been betrayed by the managerial side. So I agreed to speak on the company's behalf, but I also said that I would leave the company at the end of my current project. I finished up my last project, a game for the PlayStation, and then quit. At the time, someone told me that if I quit, Human wouldn't be able to produce any more soccer games, and the company would go under. A few years later, that prediction came true.

Meanwhile, Suda-san and Kono-kun kept the company afloat with great games like Kono's horror games and *Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan*, but the company was going down no matter how many games they sold, just as I had experienced years before. The reasons for the company's downfall had been there all along. The upper management had been seduced by how easily the company grew in size and profit in the PC Engine era. There was also rampant nepotism. Relatives of the upper management were appointed to high-level positions, such as

the principal of the school. Ultimately, I think the company was unable to re-value itself appropriately and return to health.

JS: Shocking! I've seen similar situations, where a publisher pays staff very little but makes huge profits.^{[709](#)}

MM: I think almost all Japanese companies are like that.

KH: You might be right.

MM: This is true of the game industry today, but you have to create a contract that offers enough incentives for developers to come work for you. If you don't, you aren't paying your creatives what they're really worth. For example, one managerial approach is to give the creative staff a fixed, meagre salary, and basically turn them into geese that lay golden eggs for a handful of grain. People who think like that are still common in executive positions in Japan. It's a problem that's not just limited to the videogame industry. The advertising industry is the same, for example. It's a terrible custom.

KH: Companies need to support their employees when they're bringing in profit at least. I still remember when *Clock Tower 2* came out, and people were calling it an unprecedented hit. There were about 30 people on the team, and we collectively received a one-time bonus of ¥3'000'000, or in other words, ¥100'000 per person.^{[710](#)}

MM: They always did that. When Amano-san quit, they gave him a parting bonus as a way of saying thank you for his years of hard work. It was also ¥100'000.

KH: <laughs> They must've thought we'd be impressed.

MM: They thought we'd be happy with about ¥100'000.

KH: What a joke.

MM: Kono-san and Higuchi-san stayed with Human until the very end, but myself and some other people went to another company called AKI, which was actually started by a member of the first graduating class of the Human Creative School.^{[711](#)} For the first two years, we promised ourselves that we wouldn't become like Human Entertainment, but we realised how precarious game development is. You never know which company is going to go under next.

KH: Human was able to make so much money because they got into the industry in the early days. You can't make those kinds of profits anymore.

MM: Ultimately, we developed games for publishers who actually owned the rights, but our team of 10 or so was still receiving money that is unheard of in today's industry.

KH: Except when it comes to social games.

MM: Well, setting aside social games and *gacha* mechanics for the moment, with the state of the industry today, it's hard for people to grasp what things were like back then. There was so much money going around. At least enough for special government prosecutors to get involved when Human committed tax fraud.

KH: The tax fraud scandal was all over the news. I remember seeing the Human office building on TV.

MM: So everyone was surprised when we saw the news. We thought the game industry wasn't that important, and didn't realise the stupid amounts of money the game industry was generating. And young people who loved games kept joining the company anyway, despite the news. They were in for a rough ride.

JS: Did you want to comment on developer AKI?

MM: It was founded by one of the first students of the Human Creative School, and so a number of game designers from Human went over to work there.



Dragon's Earth (SFC)

JS: Mr Higuchi, you've been very quiet. What's your enduring memory of Human?

HM: I have many memories... <laughs>

KH: You have to tell him something that's okay to print in the book.

HM: <laughs> Right, something that can be printed. For me, I had good times and bad times at Human. At first, things were difficult, and the working conditions were less than ideal. But after I declared that I wanted to make games for the PlayStation, I was able to work on Clock Tower, and later Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan. So I was able to make the kinds of games I wanted to make, and have a good time. That's what I remember most.

JS: A question for all three of you: can you recall any unreleased games?

KH: Are you asking about our own projects? Or unreleased Human games?

JS: **Both, either, anything! Your words could become the only record in history on them.**

KH: As far as I know, there were two unreleased projects at Human. Human had a surprisingly small number of unreleased games, because they were willing to go ahead and publish games even if the result was terrible.

<everyone laughs>

KH: So the only ones I know about are Geo Catastrophe,^{[712](#)} and a Virtual Boy game that Koike-san was working on.

HM: Was that baseball game released?

KH: It was.

HM: It was?! <laughs>

MM: It was terrible.^{[713](#)}

KH: But for the Virtual Boy game, the reason it wasn't released was because, well, it was the Virtual Boy. The Virtual Boy system was a failure, and although someone created a game as an experiment, the company decided against releasing it. On the other hand, the cancellation of Geo Catastrophe was a bit of a shame.

HM: The graphics for Geo Catastrophe were amazing.

KH: They were good, a bit like Tactics Ogre.

JS: **Please describe both games!**

KH: Mitori-san can answer about Geo Catastrophe.

MM: No, I really don't know much about it.

KH: The Virtual Boy game was boring, a cheap Mario knockoff.

HM: Was it? Wasn't it a 3D game like Space Harrier?

KH: Oh that's right, sorry. It was a cheap Space Harrier knockoff.

HM: There was a sense of depth, in 3D, like Space Harrier.

KH: 3D? <with mock enthusiasm> "Space Parrier!"

<everyone laughs>

HM: Geo Catastrophe had an RPG flavour & military theme.

KH: At the time [mid-1990s], environmental pollution was a hot topic, so they made an RPG about the pollution of the Earth's environment.

HM: It was an RPG, but the map was quite unusual. It had an isometric view like Tactics Ogre, but with a really complex and interesting layout. It was very artistic.⁷¹⁴

KH: The pixel art looked good. They poured a lot of money into it.

HM: The pixel art was gorgeous. The fact that they cancelled it was unbelievable.

KH: But the gameplay never came together.

JS: What happened to the prototypes of the two games?

KH: They must have been thrown out.

HM: It must have been saved in some way though, right?

KH: Maybe, but they're surely gone by now. People worked on Geo Catastrophe for two years.

JS: How many staff?

MM: It was quite a few.

HM: I think a lot of graphics people were working on it. Some of Human's most talented people, too.

KH: There were at least 10 people. For a while it was Human's largest project after Fire Pro Wrestling.

MM: It may have been on the same scale as Fire Pro Wrestling. I think there were at least 20 people working on it. It was a very large project for the time.

KH: It was going to be a major title for Human.

JS: What system was this, Super Famicom?

KH: Yes, Super Famicom I think.

JS: With 20 staff over two years, that's 40 years' worth of work thrown away.

MM: <laughs> Yes, if you calculate it like that.

KH: I know why the game was cancelled! *<pounds table>* But I don't think I can discuss it here.

JS: Perhaps in the future?

KH: I can't discuss it, because it would be hurtful to a certain person.

MM: But maybe it's alright, if that person has a chance to tell their side of the story.

KH: Yes, the real reason might actually be different.

MM: But at the very least, he was engaging in favouritism among the game designers. He was saying this person is useful, while this other person is useless. *<laughs>*

KH: *<in English, to interpreter>* NO TRANSLATION!

MM: But that's what happened.

KH: If this comes up during another conversation, we can mention it, but if we say it now, we'll be pinpointing exactly who it is.

MM: But even though that might not be the actual cause of the cancellation, that's how the project was perceived as a whole.

KH: Basically, the problem was that the game design never solidified. The graphics were being created ahead of time, but the concept of what the game was actually going to be about was never settled. That's what it seemed like from the perspective of an outside observer. For the people who were actually involved with the project, the reality may have been different. Because of this, I think the people who were involved with the project probably have things they want to say about it, so I don't think it's appropriate to give only an outsider's perspective on it.

JS: Mr Higuchi, did you code for the unreleased VB game?

HM: No, as I said, I just created some tools in the beginning, and because I thought the Virtual Boy wasn't going to sell, I told my boss I wanted to work on the PlayStation. So I wasn't involved. *<laughs>*

KH: You deserted your post.

HM: Yes, I'm a deserter. *<laughs>*

JS: Did Human complete any Virtual Boy games, or did they only work on the unreleased one?

HM: That was probably the only one.

KH: It may have been a requirement imposed by Nintendo. To develop games for the Nintendo 64, Human also had to develop something for the Virtual Boy.

JS: Sneaky! Do any of you know about a Mega CD game called Bari-Arm?⁷¹⁵

KH: Now that's a title I haven't heard for a long time. I think Mitori-san knows the most about it.

MM: What was it again?

KH: A shooting game.

HM: I've played it.



Bari-Arm (MCD)

JS: It was by Human.

KH: That was the arcade team.

MM: Who worked on that?

KH: The short guy. Nezu-san.^{[716](#)}

HM: Are you sure about that?

KH: Human's arcade division was sort of independent from the rest of us, and they also did research and development. I think that team created Bari-Arm.

JS: Human is also credited on WonderSwan games.

KH: Those were all outsourced. I don't think we made any of those internally.

JS: It's difficult! Websites credit Human as developer of Bakusou Dekotora Densetsu,^{[717](#)} but without staff listings.

KH: I think they sold those without telling the in-house developers about them. We didn't know about those. For a time, Human was taking advice from consultants and trying to become a publicly traded company. To do that, they needed not only to increase profits, but also increase total revenue every year. So Human started buying the rights to cheap IPs and outsourcing cheap B-grade games to external studios in order to increase their total sales volume. The WonderSwan games are from that period.

JS: It's getting late, perhaps we should wrap up the Human Entertainment questions. Any final messages?

MM: I am very grateful that there are people overseas who are interested in Japanese game development companies. Japan did have a very vibrant game industry in the past, and as a Japanese game developer, it makes me very happy to learn that there are people taking an interest in these companies which don't even exist anymore, and featuring them in books and websites.

JS: Of course! Thank you for travelling here today.

MM: My pleasure.

HM: I've been a programmer for 20 years, and I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for Human. I learned a tremendous amount at the company, and I have many fond memories.
<laughs>

KH: Fond memories? Are you sure? <laughs>

MM: I'm the one in charge of hating the company. <laughs>

Naoko: If Human had not folded, do you think they would still be making games today?

KH: Human? Human had their first era with people like Mitori-san, and games like *Septentrion*. Their second era was myself and Suda-san, with games like *Twilight / Moonlight Syndrome* and *Clock Tower*. After us, there were Hosobuchi-kun⁷¹⁸ and Honma-kun,⁷¹⁹ with games like *Dekotora* and *Remote Control Dandy*.⁷²⁰ There was always somebody. So maybe they would still be around. Some people say that Spike is the successor of Human, but I absolutely refuse to accept that. There's no comparison between Human and that weak, hack company. Spike is like Human's leftover coffee grounds, bland and flavourless.



JS: I've got two signature books for you gentleman to sign.

HM: Sign it? It's not like we're celebrities or something!

KH: Just write your name normally, that's what I'm doing. It doesn't have to be a big flashy signature that everyone will notice. Leave the fancy signatures to guys like Nagoshi-san and Kojima-san, they've earned them.

MM: But look, everybody is signing the book with flourish!

KH: Yeah, the graphics people know how to draw something fancy.

<KH's mobile phone rings with a catchy chiptune I can't quite place>

MM: That's a nice ringtone!

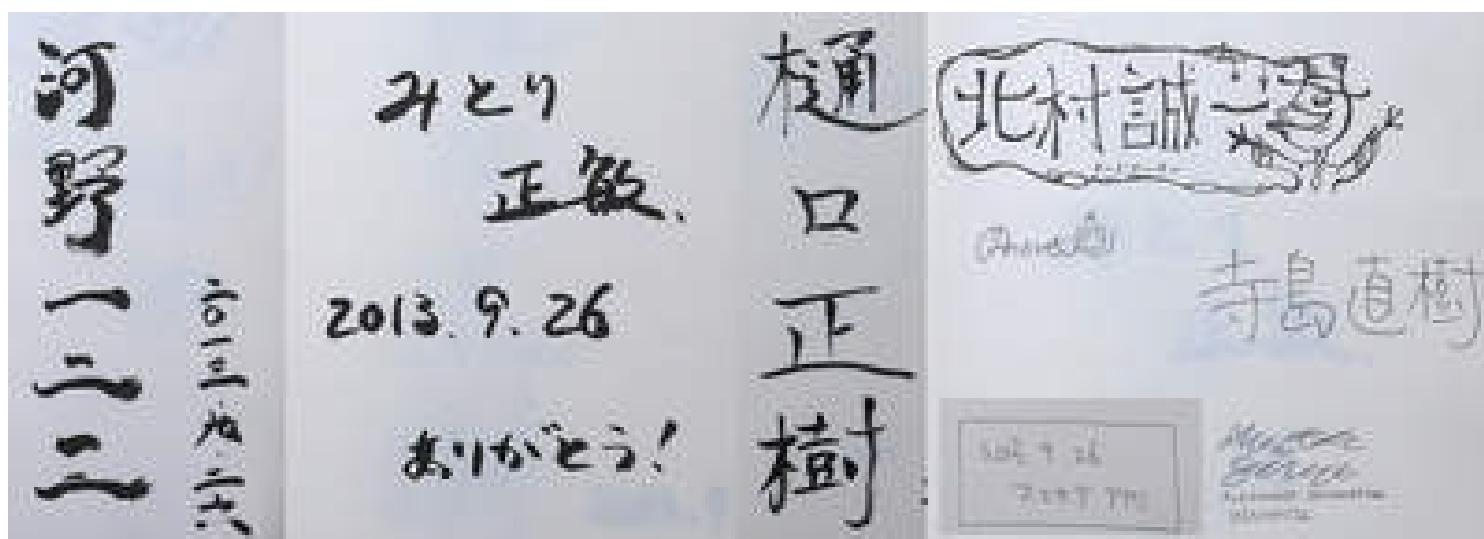
KH: It's nostalgic, isn't it? Here Mitori-san, you sign the book first.

MM: No no, you go.

KH: We'll go in order of seniority.

MM: But you're older than I am!

KH: But we joined the company in 1991, 1992, and 1993. So you're the first. Are you going to use a ballpoint pen? We have a calligraphy pen, too.



HM: The calligraphy pen makes it look cooler.

MM: Here, you use the good space for Nude Maker, I'll write mine over here.

KH: Should we sign it vertically or horizontally?

MM: Everybody's signing it horizontally.

HM: It doesn't really matter, does it?

KH: Let's do one vertically and one horizontally.

HM: Let's ask John.

JS: Sign it any way you like.

MM: The calligraphy pen is nice. Wow, your signature is beautiful!

KH: Looks pretty good, doesn't it?

MM: You should have this page all to yourself. <laughs>

JS: Please have a whole page each.

MM: No no, that's okay.

HM: But the layout of Kono-san's signature looks so good just like this.

MM: We've got to let it dry first.

HM: Now I'm under all this pressure!

MM: Kono-san's signature looks so fancy, it could be the doorplate on a yakuza mansion.
<laughs> Should we write the date, too?

KH: Here, like this.

MM: That's just numbers! You can't tell it's a date!

KH: Oops, 2013, I wrote the wrong date. Oh well. <laughs>

HM: You're a liar!

MM: You lied.

KH: I lied. <laughs>

<KH leaves for a smoke break>

MM: What should I do? Kono-san wrote his name vertically. OK, 2013, September 26. Thank you. All done.

JS: Of the games you worked on, is any one a favourite?

MM: For me, it has to be the soccer games, so my favourite is the version of Super Formation Soccer that was based on the 1994 World Cup held in the United States.

JS: And Mr Higuchi?

HM: At Human?

JS: Anything you've worked on.

HM: Among the games I've worked on, my favourite 2D game is the Mikagura series. I used every ounce of programming skill I had on those. For 3D games, my favourite is Tekki Taisen

personally. It's the one I worked hardest on.

JS: Mr Mitori, it doesn't have to be from Human.

MM: Outside of Human, since I was a "firefighter", my involvement with game projects was completely different. One of the most interesting projects was *Radiata Stories*,^{[721](#)} and also *New Roommania*.^{[722](#)} How should I explain? I wasn't working as a director, but I acted as an adviser on all aspects of the project. It was a large-scale project and involved a large number of people, so my job was to listen to everyone's goals, and figure out how to proceed. It was difficult at times, but also very satisfying when the project was completed. I think that because these projects were floundering, I was more passionate about them, and that's why I cherish them. It was very exciting.



JS: Thank you for your time, I appreciate it.

<everyone says parting words, MM leaves>

Naoko: This book is quite a big, lengthy project.

KH: With all this content, it's no wonder that the Kickstarter campaign was successful.

Naoko: John said he was going to be in Japan until mid-November, and he has interviews every day.

KH: It's going to be like an encyclopaedia!

Naoko: It must be so difficult. He's not sure if he can take even one day off a week.

KH: It's amazing.

Naoko: It must also take time to edit all the material.

KH: It must be difficult to organise everything.

JS: Yes, interviews every single day.

KH: It's unavoidable, given all that you're covering.

JS: I want to document things never documented before.

KH: I'd really like a Japanese edition.

JS: So would I!

Naoko: Maybe the NHK could make a TV special out of it.

KH: Like the *Project X* show.

Naoko: Exactly. They should interview John!

KH: They could just follow him around on his interviews. That would be fascinating. Why don't you talk to that person we met yesterday?

Naoko: Oh yes, I'll tell them. And then we can have John do another interview with you.

KH: Yeah, we'll do it here, and I'll try to give intelligent-sounding answers. I'll memorise some random English phrases to sound smart. <laughs>

Naoko: <English> They could follow you when you're having interviews, it would be interesting just to listen to what you're asking about. It could be possible to make a TV show or something like that, based on what you do. And then I think a lot of the audience would probably be very interested. We had a meeting with a lady who used to produce TV documentaries, things like that. Maybe I should contact her.

JS: Give her a call, please. I'm here until 15 November.^{[723](#)}

KH: So that's plenty of time to make an hour-long program.

Naoko: <Japanese> This would be a very interesting subject. But we'd need John to come back here again for us. <laughs>

KH: We can't do that, it'll seem staged! <laughs>

<parting words, HM leaves>

Solo follow-up with Hifumi Kono

JS: Mr Kono, you've worked with Mr Higuchi since you met him at Human?

KH: That's right. We first met on *Clock Tower 2*. One of the major challenges at that time was the long load times, and the solution was to read data in the background and reduce the seek time as much as possible. Higuchi-san achieved this himself, and I realised what a talented programmer he was.

JS: I read on the *Nude Maker* website you keep all items sent in by fans, including a *Neko Zamurai* fanzine?⁷²⁴

KH: Oh yes, I have it at home. But I think it's still in a cardboard box from when I moved. I don't receive all that much, maybe one item per title, if that. I keep everything, because it's not that much. <laughs>



<https://vndb.org/>

JS: Earlier we discussed *Shin Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan*, one of two adult titles. How

does it differ from Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan and Zoku Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan?

KH: Well, first I'd better explain why we decided to do that project. Human closed down, and the rights to the Mikagura series ended up in the hands of another company. This other company then approached Elf without my knowledge, and together they agreed to produce an adult title in the Mikagura series. Meanwhile, Elf said that if they were going to create this game, they wanted to do it right, and they wanted to have the original creator on board. So they came to me.

Since the decision to make an adult title had already been decided, I thought it would be better to join the project and make it a good game myself, rather than entrust the work to some unknown person who might make something weird. As far as I'm concerned, Shin Mikagura Shoujo Tanteidan is a legitimate sequel to the first two titles. That was my intention when I created it. Just because it's an adult game doesn't mean it's all erotic content. I made sure it had a proper mystery story and actual deductive elements, so it's an official sequel to the original games... Of course, some of the fans were very angry regardless.

JS: They were unhappy with the addition of erotic content?

KH: Yes. I can understand where they're coming from, but it couldn't be helped.



JS: How did you feel, a creation of yours was to be given adult content?

KH: Well, ultimately the company that owned the rights had already gone to Elf and worked out an agreement to produce the game, so the only remaining question was who would develop it. Everything else was already decided. So I was somewhat conflicted about it, but since the alternative was to let them make a game with a half-hearted mystery story, or no mystery at all, I decided that it was my responsibility to make the game myself.

To tell you the truth, the company that acquired the rights to the Mikagura series was very

a sloppy company which only cared about making money. I knew they would outsource the development to some cheap, talentless studio, so I wanted to stop that from happening.

Back then, the fans thought I had sold the rights to an erotic game company because I was out of money. They didn't know I did not own the rights in the first place. They thought I had sold out, and I was criticised severely. It seemed pointless to go around and try to explain the actual situation to everyone, so I decided to work on the game personally, and that helped me overcome any feelings of guilt about the situation. I didn't want to make excuses for myself.

JS: You protected the quality of the series. The second game, Zoku Mikagura, included a character called Gonroku Hirata, which you described as a self-insertion...?⁷²⁵

KH: <laughs> That name brings me back. Do you have *eroguro nonsense* overseas? It's a kind of cult genre. What do you call it in English? The literature of the bizarre? It's similar to that. The deliberate enjoyment of poor taste. Like the films of Herschell Gordon Lewis, for example.⁷²⁶

JS: You said the assistant director for the *Iki-ningyou* (Living Puppet) chapter of Zoku Mikagura was a woman, and, "The filler dialog she came up with was fresh and stimulating, filled with great ideas that would never be written by a male assistant director." Could you elaborate?

KH: It's difficult to explain. She was able to write in detail about things that most men only vaguely understand, such as fashion and makeup. Her dialogue was very realistic and natural, in a way that I never could have written.

JS: That's interesting. There's been much debate in the West, on the fact there's more men than women in the industry. Obviously, with your example, by having women in the team you achieve greater diversity of content.

KH: Men and women are different. I feel that there are few women who are well-suited to programming. Women are better at work that requires sensitivity and emotion, so I think it would be interesting if more women took on graphics jobs. But as for programmers... Since women have physiological changes that occur every month, when they don't feel as well, they might have disadvantages when doing intricate, precise work.

Even now, at Nude Maker, women like Mori-san do all of the outward-facing coordination and telephone communication. They do a much better job at that than a man would. They have much more vitality.

JS: Another difficulty is if they want children; in the games industry the hours are long, especially during crunch times.

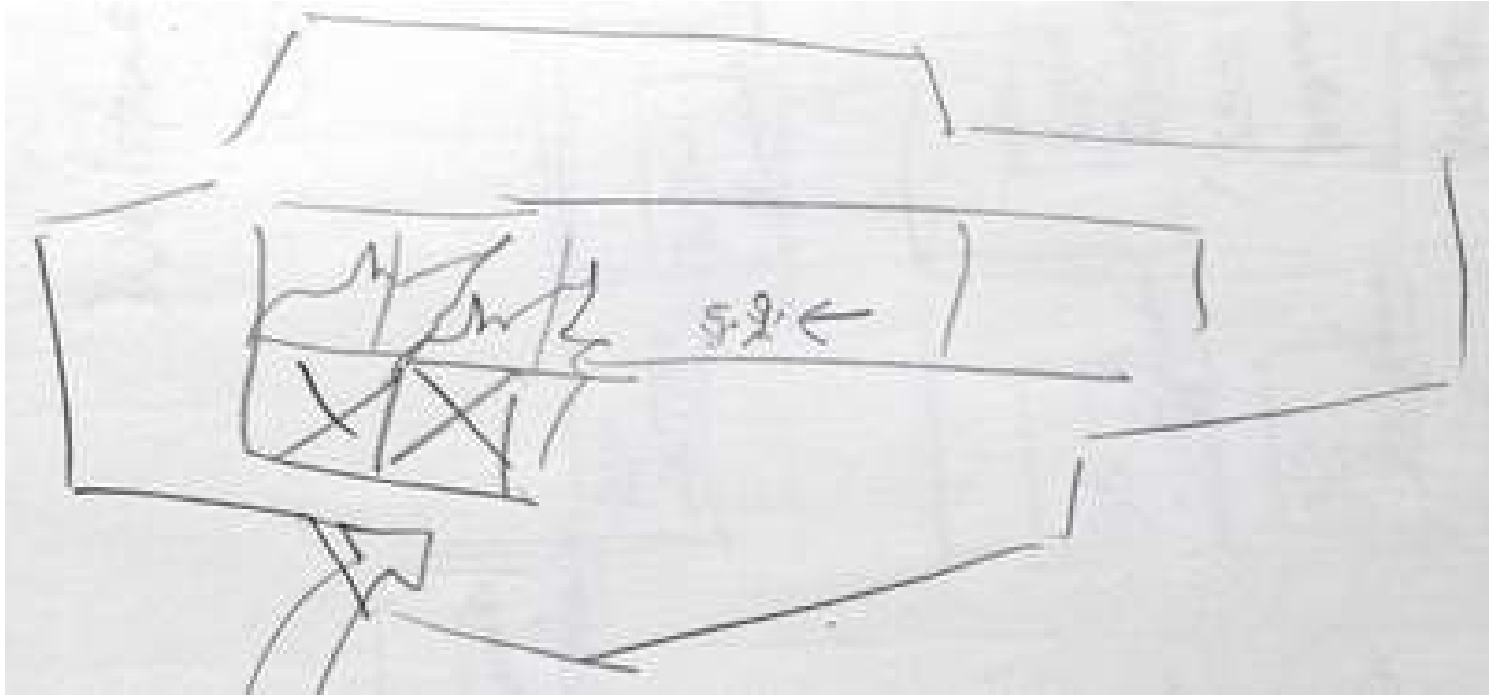
KH: You're right. We have female staff, and we want them to be able to take as much time off as they need around the time of childbirth, and come back to work when they're back to full health.

JS: Very forward thinking. Moving on, Infinite Space was epic. In interviews you said you were inspired by old PC games involving space travel, but never gave names...

KH: In terms of recent games, Eve Online was an inspiration. And also Star Luster, which was incredible.

JS: Star Luster by Namco.^{[727](#)}

KH: Yes! It was in 3D, and it featured all kinds of science fiction gadgets, such as photon torpedoes and warp drives. It was great.



Sketch by Hifumi Kono, showing his original idea of having players send their crew to put out ship fires

JS: I liked Infinite Space because of its freedom. Some games are too restrictive. I was surprised though, moving between stars you could only travel along a preset line.

KH: To be honest, we didn't have enough budget or staff, so we weren't able to let the player move freely among the stars. There were many, many other features we wanted to include in Infinite Space, but unfortunately we couldn't include everything. We wanted more player freedom, but it was impossible with our limited team. The story was also too long.

JS: You also considered adding a giant wheel peripheral?^{[728](#)}

KH: Oh yes, that was among the first ideas. Some time ago, I had a drink with an acquaintance who works at Microsoft, and he told me that people at Microsoft wanted me to work with them on a space opera project, and someone had said to bring me in to create a starship controller like a ship's wheel. That was probably just the alcohol talking, though. <laughs>

At first, we were thinking to have modules that would catch fire like this, <sketches> when the ship takes damage. So the player has to specify them and activate damage control, which would then extinguish the fire. Recently, there's a game that does something like this.

It's a little frustrating that they beat us to it.

JS: *Faster Than Light* is as you described. If an area is on fire you can make people run to put it out. Or you can open an airlock to depressurise the room and put the fire out.

KH: Ooh! I wish I could have done that! That may be the game I saw before. That's probably it. I remember seeing an internet article introducing the game. I saw it and thought, <in English> "God damn it!" <laughs>

JS: Will we see an *Infinite Space 2*? The ending left some unanswered question.

KH: Regarding the last scene of *Infinite Space*, we thought we had depicted enough to enable players to deduce everything that happened next. We weren't intending to leave it on a cliffhanger and then continue from that exact point in a sequel. Rather, we thought we had included enough details leading up to the end so that players could enjoy figuring out what happened after that. I do want to make a sequel, but even if we do, the sequel would take place on a different timeline or in a different universe. I probably would not write a direct continuation of the first game. Another reason for the ending was that [17 words redacted on request].





Senritsu no Stratus (PSP)

JS: Senritsu no Stratus on PSP. Might this come West?

KH: The original concept was geared for the Japanese market. We had an in-depth discussion with the Konami producer, Mukaitoge-san. The idea of a worldwide release was tempting, but at the same time, we were beginning to realise that casually attempting to go worldwide could end in failure. So rather than just haphazardly aiming at the global market, we decided to focus on the Japanese market first and foremost. So I don't foresee an overseas release for this game.

JS: Japan tends to make the best games when devs stay true to their own vision, creating something they want to, rather than trying to appeal to groups outside Japan.

KH: I think it took Japanese publishers a number of years to come to that realisation. Before that, they were investing huge amounts of money to make so-called "worldwide" games for the HD consoles, and they failed miserably. The end result was a lot of wasted time. If we try to make something that would deliberately appeal to anime fans in America, for example, the result doesn't feel quite right. In that sense, developers in various countries should make games according to their own convictions, and if it's accepted abroad as a result, all the better. That's the stance we should be taking, from today's perspective.

JS: At least the PSP is region-free. When I visit Akihabara I'll pick up Senritsu. Sadly Nintendo region locked the 3DS. What do you think of region locking?

KH: I think there should be regulations against pirate copies, but for the online or digital

world, and computer games, things are more interesting when there are fewer limitations. The market should be chaotic to a degree. Not everything needs to be nice and polished. There should be a mixture of the brilliant and mediocre. So these strict limitations should be removed to allow more freedom.

JS: Something unusual. I prefer weird or niche games.

KH: Those kinds of games are becoming very scarce. That's why the world of smartphone and tablet apps, the PSN, XBLA, and the indie scene are so interesting.

JS: Have you heard of crowdfunding?

KH: I think crowdfunding is wonderful, not just Kickstarter. It's excellent that there are other ways of securing a development budget besides the old model of receiving money from a publisher. One concern I have is that if there are too many projects that fail to meet expectations, the whole system might collapse. I hope that does not happen.

What's interesting is that previously, only entities that already had a significant amount of money could invest in projects. But now, regular people who don't have a lot of money are able to contribute to help establish a business. It's possible to gather money on Kickstarter, or produce a social game with microtransactions. Gathering money a little bit at a time from regular people results in something very powerful, and enables a concrete business to exist. It's great to witness the will of the people in action.

JS: Recently, Hiroshi Yamauchi of Nintendo passed away. Did you want to comment on this event?

KH: I really wanted to meet him in person while he was still alive. I truly mean that. My opinion of Nintendo as a hardware maker and game publisher is flat. I don't love them, I don't hate them. But they have my utmost respect. And Yamauchi-san, who was the first person to establish it all, was an incredible person. So I truly wanted to meet him while he was still alive.

JS: Is there any final message you have?

KH: I'd like to say something about Human Entertainment, about what Human was to me. Human is often referred to as a leading-edge company, or a company that produced some genuinely unique games. But the truth is that the company had no official intention of doing that. The upper management never encouraged us to create unique games. As Mitori-san, myself, and Suda-san all experienced, there wasn't much teamwork or friendship at the company. Some of us just had an individualistic drive to create a particular work, convinced management to accept it, and went ahead with our own idiosyncratic projects. That's how Human ended up publishing such a diverse array of unique games. It wasn't due to the will of the company, but rather the will of the various individuals within the company. That's what makes Human so fascinating.

JS: I'll make sure the world hears your message, and that of Mr Mitori and Mr Higuchi.

Thank you.

KH: I enjoyed our time together. Thank you.

JS: I didn't want to say it earlier, in case you thought it weird, but *Steel Battalion* is a favourite. I had a caravan for holidaying - I put it and a portable TV inside, and built a cockpit out of cardboard for pure immersion.

KH: <laughs> That's a great setup! It was great to have the chance to talk with someone who enjoyed it so much.

JS: I don't think we'll ever see anything quite like it again.

KH: Probably not. Maybe if we received some money from Microsoft again.

JS: I was disappointed with *Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor* on the X360 - it didn't use a giant controller.^{[729](#)}

KH: Frankly, I hate that title.

JS: I don't think anybody liked it!

[37 words off the record, then parting words]

Second interview with Hifumi Kono

This second interview took place 11 November, a few days before I was to leave Japan. Thanks to the work of Naoko Mori, two TV producers filmed second interviews with Toru Hidaka and Hifumi Kono, and a fresh interview with someone. It was part of an hour-long documentary on crowdfunding, with a segment dedicated to my book and to Hifumi Kono's later NightCry Kickstarter. The documentary was designed to coincide with the NightCry launch, and aired in 2014.

Some segments from this second interview, which could be neatly removed and inserted into earlier answers, have been moved. The rest is presented as is, though it covers a lot of similar ground, or elaborates on topics discussed previously. Most of the questions here were worded in a way to appeal to the cameras filming us, presenting Western journalism to a Japanese audience. Mr Kono later told me, outside of the interview, these were some of the toughest questions he'd ever been asked and was impressed by their depth.

JS: With Clock Tower, some said it couldn't work running from enemies. With Steel Battalion, they said the controller was too much. You were in charge of games where others had doubts - how do you overcome this and stay focused?

KH: It would be cool of me to say that I simply followed my convictions without wavering, but that wouldn't be true. I have doubts of my own. But, when I write a game proposal I simulate the total game in my head in detail, to the point where I can mentally play and see it unfold in my mind. When the game in my head is fun, I know that the real game will also be fun, as long as I follow the design in my head. That gives me the inner confidence to proceed.

When I was making Steel Battalion, the one thing that really pleased the Capcom staff was how smoothly the development went from the initial proposal to the finished product. In most cases, there is a lot more trial and error, but I was able to deliver a successful game without making significant changes to the original design. The people at Capcom were very happy about that.



JS: I've heard there was an incident during development... Involving a hotel in America...

KH: *<angrily>* What are you talking about? Are you trying to insinuate that I flooded a hotel room? That's outrageous! *<laughs>*

JS: That's the one! *<laughs>*

TV Producer: Did that really happen?

KH: It did. <laughs> I apologised a hundred times. It was mortifying. I kept saying "Sorry, sorry" to the hotel staff. The interpreter who accompanied me laughed at me and said they'd never seen anything like it.

JS: That's the difficulty flying around the world. It was jet lag, right? And working in a sound booth without windows?

KH: You seem to know all the details! Japanese hotels have unit baths with a hole built in, so that the water never goes above a certain level. But the American hotel didn't work like that, and the water overflowed the tub and soaked right through the carpet. They moved me to a different room after that. <laughs>

I shouldn't have left the water running without being there, but I wanted to take a long soak in the bath.

TV Producer: The water came up to the level of the sink, didn't it? Baths don't usually let the water rise so high.

KH: Yes. It's unbelievable.

JS: You passed out. That's dangerous in the bath; it's safer you weren't in there. Strange that the US tub did not have an outlet; UK tubs have an overflow grille.

KH: I apologised a ridiculous number of times. "Sorry, sorry." I didn't have the vocabulary to say anything else. At least I got practice apologising in English. <laughs>

JS: You've said Clock Tower 2 and Enemy Zero were perceived as competing games by retail stores, due to the release dates. Did the Japanese media think the same thing?

KH: I don't think they were compared that way in the media very much, but because of the way that shops sold games, and since both games were in the horror genre and released around the same time, there may have been a perception of it being Enemy Zero on the Saturn versus Clock Tower on the PlayStation. But I don't think the games were actually treated as rivals.

JS: Enemy Zero was by Kenji Eno. Did you ever meet him?

KH: Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to meet him before he passed away. His death was a tragedy. I certainly knew of him, though, and saw him a lot in the magazines and other media. It's a shame. The industry doesn't have the same vitality without people like him.

JS: I'm having memorial pages throughout. <lists a few>

KH: You could say I'm lucky, because aside from the people you mentioned, I can't think of anyone I've worked with who has passed away. The industry is still young; I hope we still have

time before many others pass away.

JS: With the Clock Tower series, the first two were yours.⁷³⁰ How did it feel seeing it handled by others?

KH: Hmm... Honestly, I don't like the games I didn't create myself. Ghost Head still had the right kind of concept, but the concept for Clock Tower 3 was totally different, so I think it's more enjoyable to play Clock Tower 3 if you consider it as a completely separate work, and not a Clock Tower game.⁷³¹ I won't play it, though. <laughs>

JS: Did you hear the rumour Capcom's Haunting Ground started as a Clock Tower sequel?⁷³²

KH: I wonder if that's what they planned. I was probably back in Tokyo finishing up with Capcom at the time. Demento certainly feels like a Clock Tower game. In fact, I think that Demento is closer in spirit to the Clock Tower series than Clock Tower 3 was.

JS: Your copy of Clock Tower here, was that given to you by Human, or did you have to buy it?⁷³³

KH: I bought it with my employee discount. People making games are rarely given a copy. But we had an employee discount to buy games within the company, and that contributed to the total sales of each game. So most of us were happy to buy our own copies. I think most developers probably buy copies of their own games, but don't play them. You have to play your game many times over during the debugging and test play phase, so by the end of the project, you've lost interest in it.

I actually played Clock Tower recently. <laughs> My girlfriend wanted to play, so we played through it together.

JS: Sweet. Did you consider support for Nintendo's mouse?

KH: The problem was that the mouse peripheral had a low install base. Optional mouse support would have been good, but making the mouse required to play the game would have created difficulties from a business perspective. Another thing is that the original Clock Tower was quite an experimental project that did not have a large budget or development staff. So we didn't have the extra resources to include mouse support. We also had to cut the map down significantly for the Super Famicom version.

JS: Speaking of experimental - I liked how running depleted energy, meaning you had to do so sparingly.

KH: One of the fundamental concepts of the project was not simply to add a horror theme to the game design, but rather to apply horror films to the game system itself. In horror films, it would be strange to see the heroine running indefinitely. At some point, she'll run out of breath and be unable to run, and you feel a sense of crisis as she risks becoming trapped. So

the game mechanics came about by trying to make the game seem real.

JS: We spoke about devs taking over something you made. It happened again with Steel Battalion on X360.

KH: We didn't receive any offers at all. But I can understand why Capcom didn't contact us. Development is difficult when it comes to the HD consoles. Capcom has been very good to us. On the other hand, common sense dictates that if a creator produces a title, and then another person creates a derivative work without permission or consultation, the original creator will not be happy. I must admit I do feel that way, regardless of whether the content is good or bad. The sequel to Steel Battalion was apparently being developed in secret, and about one week before they announced it at a game show, the producer came to Nude Maker and told me. So they did at least come and explain the situation, and I'm thankful for that.

For Clock Tower 3, Mikami-san actually approached me and asked me if I wanted to help direct the new Clock Tower that Capcom was making. I was busy creating Steel Battalion at the time, but Mikami-san asked me about Clock Tower out of courtesy. He asked me if I wanted to help out with the game, but I told him that I couldn't just "help out" by taking a small role in the development, so I had to decline.

JS: A hot topic is Japanese developers trying to appeal to the West. You stuck to your own vision and found popularity outside Japan, and gained many fans.

KH: I have a lot of overseas fans? I wasn't aware of that. Over the past 5 or 10 years, the idea of targeting the worldwide market started gaining traction, but now attitudes are changing. I can't criticise the developers and publishers for what they did. If you want to sell more games, it's natural to want to create something that will be popular with overseas players. This is what the Japanese game industry has been attempting for the past few years, and through that we discovered that it's difficult for Japanese developers to deliberately align themselves with Western tastes. As a result, the thinking has changed, and instead of trying to make our games more Western, now we are trying to be ourselves and produce work that is uniquely Japanese. But we only came to that conclusion because some Japanese developers and publishers first challenged themselves to make Western-style games. When we saw the results of those attempts, we changed our minds, myself included. So in a sense, it's a natural reaction to the movements of the last few years.

JS: Japan VS the West - the West is not one country!

KH: Yes, for example Europe, it's actually a collection of diverse cultures. If you look at the Amazon sales figures for Infinite Space, it's completely different in Germany, Spain, and the UK. Japanese people have a tendency to talk about "overseas" or "the West" as a single, monolithic place, basically everything outside of Asia. But it's actually quite diverse. At the same time, I think it's a formidable challenge to get a tangible feel of how each country's culture is different, and understand those differences.

Another problem with Japanese developers trying to align their work to this monolithic idea of "the West" is that, when you break it down further, it simply becomes a question of

how far to align your work with the users or the market, both Western and Japanese. It's simply the question of how much to adapt your work to the market, regardless of whether it's the domestic market or the overseas market. If you ignore that question altogether, and just create what you think is fun, you will find at least some measure of success. This was the case for me with *Clock Tower* and *Steel Battalion*. So sticking to your own ideas in the face of market expectations can result in good games.

On the other hand, when thinking in terms of being successful as a business, you may struggle if you don't take the market into account. In my case, *Clock Tower* sold fairly well, but the sales of my games since then have not been great. The difficulty is in striking that balance between the business side and the creative side. So I think the problem is less about Japan adapting itself to the West, and more about how creators should approach the market.

JS: You say sales were not great. But if you hadn't made interesting games, I wouldn't be here interviewing you.

KH: <laughs> I suppose that's true.

JS: You mentioned Amazon. Do you read its reviews? Do you follow the foreign press and Metacritic?

KH: I've been checking Metacritic since *Steel Battalion*. I also read the review comments on Amazon sites. I can't understand everything, but I try to read them.

JS: Metacritic is dangerous. Some publishers only pay a bonus to devs if their game gets above a specific meta-score. Obsidian lost its bonus for *Fallout 3: New Vegas* because it scored 84, not 85+.

KH: But 84 is a high score! Ultimately, each review that constitutes a vote on Metacritic is merely one writer's opinion. I agree that it's dangerous to think that the Metacritic score means everything.

JS: For my book, I'll send a copy with a cover by Japanese artist Hitoshi Yoneda. He did cover art for Sega and Falcom. There are 250 copies being produced. I wanted to show you these drafts - I need to choose one.

KH: Wow! 250 copies is not very much, so it's going to be a premium item. My first impression is this one. <points> This one on the bottom is out. I'd say this one on the top-right or this one on the bottom-left.

JS: But generally speaking you like the rough illustrations?

KH: Yes, they look great.

JS: I love the art. I showed backers, and some complained the female form offended them. One professor of game history said, "I was going to show my students your book, but


there's no way with those covers, absolutely no way!"

KH: I wonder how someone who cannot accept these is even able to talk about the history of games.

JS: People were shrieking, "*I regret funding your book if you're having a cover like this!*" I didn't understand it. This is art, *<shows art>* and these are other works by Hitoshi Yoneda. His art is beautiful; the use of colours, this figure in the air. I thought his four options were excellent.

KH: She's covered up in the picture. I don't see the problem. I think it's fine. How do people who object to this presume to talk about games? People that can't accept this kind of art are not qualified to talk about entertainment.

JS: Society is oversensitive. Violence in games goes up, but you have an attractive woman shown and people lose their minds. It's just a vocal minority ruining it for the rest.

KH: Can you not just tell them to  off?

JS: Yes! Like Oscar Wilde said, spectators of creativity are to be silent. If you're going to create anything of worth, stick to your vision. Would you be happy with these covers?

KH: Perfectly fine. Those kinds of people don't understand. They must not be able to go to museums, either.

JS: Exactly, this is what I say all the time.

KH: The cover is no problem. I'm looking forward to it. This one is good. *<points>* This one, or this one.

Naoko Mori: I like the visuals on this one.

KH: That one? Um... The balance is too orthodox.

Naoko: Is that the correct English term? *<laughs>*



JS: It's nearly 17:00. Is there anything you'd like to add?

KH: Business-wise and sales-wise, it's a tough time for the industry, but personally, I'm going to continue creating games that I want to create for as long as I can, and those are the only games I'm going to make. I hope the fans will continue to support me. And by support, I mean "give me money". <laughs> No, no, that's a joke. But I hope I have your support.

Then again, there are options like Kickstarter, as well as normal types of funds; now it's possible to raise money in different ways other than the traditional publisher model. Maybe creators will rise to the forefront again, and their work will be appreciated by fans. I think that's a new possibility in this era. Thanks to the world of mobile apps, the inflated budgets can come down, allowing the creation of unique experiences. These are fun and interesting times, and I am looking forward to what's next.

JS: Is Kickstarter something you've considered?

KH: Yes, it's a very intriguing prospect. But I am not good at the kind of self-promotion you have to do to be successful on Kickstarter, like making a pitch video. But I'd like to try it sometime.

JS: Get a good video editor and they'll make it look magical. If the idea is good, it will get people's attention.

KH: <laughs> I suppose so. But I'd be embarrassed to talk to the camera while walking

through a meadow or something. I've seen a video like that. I couldn't do that.

Naoko: With a Japanese journalist, it's like publicity for the game, but the Western journalist is about journalism, so they talk about the game from that perspective.

JS: **You're giving too much credit to Western games journalists. Most I refuse even to consider as colleagues.**

KH: Another thing is that many people decide on the story of an interview ahead of time. That happens overseas, too. This interview wasn't like that, so I could speak freely. Some interviewers have a set conclusion already decided, so they keep asking questions to try to lead the interview subject to that conclusion. But you were not like that.

JS: **The aim of the book is to collect... *Everything!***

KH: *<in English>* Thank you. See you again.



Nude Maker, from left: Ayumu Miura, Naoki Terashima, Masaki Higuchi, Alexander Symington, Seiichi Kitamura, Yuki Mori, Ayami Suesada. **Inset:** Karin Kunori. **Front:** Hifumi Kono

Project Scissors - NightCry

This Kickstarter project has an all star development team. It's being co-created by Takashi Shimizu, director of *Ju-On 1 & 2* and *The Grudge*. Creature design by Masahiro Ito, monster designer for the *Silent Hill* series. The art director is Kiyoshi Arai, concept artist for *Final Fantasy 12 & 14*. The audio producer is Nobuko Toda, composer on the *Metal Gear Solid* series, while the composer is Michiru Yamane, composer on the *Castlevania* series and *Suikoden 3 & 4*.





<http://www.night-cry.com/>

KH: This is the game I've been dying to make. I created a horror game called *Clock Tower* during the Super Famicom era. It might have been the first of its kind, but the combination of unique gameplay where you are only able to run or hide from enemies and the point-and-click interface was well received by game fans. I've really wanted to make another game like that. I met Joseph, our producer, when trying to figure how to go about doing that.⁷³⁴ When I talked about what I wanted to work on, he said let's do it. Point and click games offer the opportunity for deep, dramatic expression, which is why I felt we needed to partner with someone with a great sense of visual direction. Being able to work with the person responsible for making J-Horror a global phenomenon is a big adventure for us.





ISHIZUKA, Taichi

DOB: 15 July 1973 / Birthplace: Chiba, Japan / Blood Type: O

The Firemen, SNES (1994)

Mizzurna Falls, PS1 (1998)

Air Ranger: Rescue Helicopter, PS2 (2001)

Air Ranger 2: Rescue Helicopter, PS2 (2002)

Hard Luck / Fire Heroes, PS2 (2004)

Interview with Taichi ISHIZUKA

Via email

I first considered tracking Mr Ishizuka down after Mr Mitori mentioned him regarding the The Firemen. It had been a favourite in the *Retro Gamer* office and, as mentioned in the intro, I recalled it from a TV spot on Japanese game design schools. I tracked him via Facebook, where he mentioned Human Creative School and gave a link to his mountaineering blog. From there I found the Canadian company he worked for, and was put in touch. We exchanged emails regarding The Firemen. What I didn't realise at this time was that he was also behind Mizzurna Falls, since MobyGames has no listing for it at all. Also by Human Entertainment, it had fascinated me for years - a *Twin Peaks* style PS1 adventure trapped behind an extremely high language barrier. When writing the Human Entertainment intro I revisited a friend's tumblr, Eastern Mind, which had a detailed write up on Mizzurna. To my surprise it mentioned Taichi Ishizuka! It was imperative to document the game's history, and I immediately acquainted myself with a detailed, full playthrough on YouTube, featuring an English voice-over of all Japanese text by video creator ResidentEevee.

More questions followed and, now, I can safely say this enormous chapter is the definitive history on Human Entertainment, containing a memorial for the late creator of Fire Pro Wrestling, in addition to interviews with the creators behind almost all of Human's more interesting games, plus lecturers and students of Human Creative School.

JS: What was the first game you saw?

TI: I think it was Space Invaders, when I was 8 or 9. Also, there was the "Cassette Vision" in my house. This was my first home console, as I recall. When I was 10 my father presented Nintendo's Famicom to me and my old brother.

JS: When did you become interested in making games?

TI: I think I was interested in making videogames from when I was 12 or 13 years old.

JS: How did you discover Human Creative School?

TI: I don't remember all the details, because it was over 20 years ago, but... When I was a high school student I wanted to be a movie director, and I was supposed to enter the movie business. But ultimately I did not, because the Japanese film industry was finding it pretty difficult at that time.⁷³⁵ I was also interested in making videogames, so I changed my mind.

I am embarrassed to say that my first attempt at entering the videogame business world was unsuccessfully applying to be a game planner for Squaresoft. I found a job or wanted advert in a Japanese games magazine, and I applied by submitting an original game design plan. I was only 18 years old and this plan was my first attempt at writing such documents - it was only two pages long!

JS: What happened next?

TI: Actually, I did not receive any answer from Squaresoft - my plan was too immature. This is because, at that time, I did not know anything about writing planning documents. After this, I realised I would need to learn how to make videogames through some kind of formal study.

I found a brochure about Human Creative School in a games magazine called *Famicon Tsushin*, or *Famitsu*. I think it was the only school where you could learn how to make videogames at that time.

JS: What was it like attending class?

TI: I took what was called the "Multi Media Course" - it was only for one year. This course instructed you on what videogames are and the business around them. For example, how to make a game, and what types of jobs or roles are needed to make that game. Also, I learnt some skills, including simple programming, design, animation, and so on. The curriculum could be described as "wide and shallow", but it was good for me.

JS: The Firemen was your graduation project, correct?

TI: Yes, it was a student graduation project. One or two titles were chosen every year by Human Creative School and Human Entertainment, from the planning documents which were made by the students. These titles underwent changes to develop them and then sell them, all while being supported by Human.

A title's developers were also chosen from the students themselves. In my year, two titles were chosen; I forgot the name of the other one, but it was some kind of shooter.^{[736](#)}

I was designated as a planner. Also, three programmers and three graphic designers were chosen for my team, but there was no way only the seven of us could make a game, that's for sure. So some producers also supported us. Sound and music was developed by other members of Human.

JS: How did you come up with the idea for The Firemen? Was it inspired by films such as *Backdraft* (1991)?

TI: Yes, It was inspired by the film *Backdraft*, for sure. But another film, *The Towering Inferno*,^{[737](#)} made even more of an impression on my ideas. Also, there was a fire station near Human Creative School. I often passed in front of this station when I was a student, and I would think to myself that the firefighters' equipment was so cool.

My most important job was planning the game, and explaining to my fellow team members what I would like to be made, and what the goal was. Also, I created the scenario and all the maps and other gimmicks.



JS: The game has a lot of content: a wide diversity of fire enemies, falling through holes, an intelligent sidekick, smashing windows and vases with your water jet, radio dialogue, etc. Was it difficult to include all this?

TI: I do not think it was easy, but myself and my team had many ideas for such gimmicks. The game was built around one concept: all the enemies were fire, and things would happen based on fire situations that take place in buildings.

The most difficult thing was creating different types of fire enemies. I made the game's setting the future, like in the year 2010, which helped because I could then include new ideas such as robots and "water bombs".^{[738](#)}

JS: There are always two characters on-screen, Pete and Danny. Did you consider making the game for 2 players?

TI: To begin with, my plan for this game was to make it only for 1 player. An automatic character, Danny, helps the player, and this concept felt unique at the time.^{[739](#)}

We did try to make it for 2 players when the game was almost finished, but there were some difficulties and we did not have enough time to figure them out, so we gave up on making any changes.

JS: Did anything else have to be left out?

TI: I remember one thing, and this was a unique and very important idea. I really wanted to include a "**fire hose**", and one of our programmers spent much time creating a "**hose system**". The hose system used hose length and hydrant points, which would have given a limitation to players. If we could have implemented this system, the game would have been more exciting. The reason why we gave up on it was mainly because of the CPU spec, or the limited processing power of the Super Famicom.

One other thing we left out was making it for 2 players, as I mentioned before.

JS: Did you place any secrets in the game?

TI: I totally do not remember such a thing. Maybe we put something in the game to make debugging easier?

JS: Did you know The Firemen was released in Europe, in English, French and German?

TI: I knew it was released in Europe, but I am not sure which countries were included. I know it was released in France because I saw the box in a Paris store, in the 1990s when I was travelling.

JS: I once saw a British TV program, featuring Human Creative School. Do you ever recall a TV crew at the school?

TI: Unfortunately, I totally don't remember any British TV crew in 1994...

JS: Did you see The Firemen 2: Pete & Danny? (1995)

TI: I was not involved in the development of the sequel, The Firemen 2, and I've never even played it... I had the chance to make this title, but I decided to leave Human after The Firemen (#1), because I was young and wanted to travel the world on my own.

After this I spent about 18 months travelling and visited the UK, France, USA, Canada, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and China. I learnt many things from this trip, and these experiences made me who I am.

JS: What was life like at Human Entertainment?

TI: I used to work as a contract employee for Human, so I did not get to see and hear about things deep inside the company; it's possible the company maybe had problems on the management side. Human used to have many talented creators, but they could not keep them at the company for very long.



JS: Do you know anything about *Geo Catastrophe*?^{[740](#)}

TI: I saw the game, but I didn't play it. I remember thinking that it was a unique game and had an interesting story.

JS: I wanted to ask about *Mizzurna Falls*. I discovered it through Bruno de Figueiredo's Tumblr page, Eastern Mind.^{[741](#)} Although never released in the West, it's an important precedent since it predates *Shenmue* in having a fully 3D open world with day/night cycle.^{[742](#)} Plus, it resembles *Twin Peaks*, much like *Deadly Premonition*.

TI: I am very surprised that you are so familiar with Japanese games history! Yes, *Mizzurna Falls* is also my title. I was the director, planner and scenario writer. In fact, this title is one of the most impressive and memorable games in my career. I got some ideas from *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*, which are both my favourites by director David Lynch.^{[743](#)}

As you mention, the game had an originality to it, a unique design - and it was released before *Shenmue*, which used the same concept of a big open world with an ongoing timeline. Myself and my team were proud of these things which we created, making use of such concepts before *Shenmue*.

JS: How did it start?

TI: After my travels around the world I started work as a contract employee with Human. I worked in a team called "Sun Studio". This team's members were all contract employees to Human, and we were developing *Mizzurna Falls* as a project.

JS: Where did you get the idea for it?

TI: I was always thinking about making an open-world game such as *Mizzurna Falls*. First off, my initial idea was kind of an adventure game, like a mystery film: *"10 people in addition to the player's character are invited to an old mansion, and a murder takes place. The player must then detect the murderer from the 9 other guests within 24 hours. All the characters move around the house in real time. The player can examine, use, or take anything available in the house."*⁷⁴⁴ Later on I changed this initial idea from a large house to an entire town.

JS: How many staff did you have?

TI: *Mizzurna Falls* was developed by contract employees at Sun Studio, which I mentioned previously. I was a director, planner and story writer. My team at Sun Studio had four programmers and three graphic designers. Music, sounds, and other audio were produced by three staff from Human Entertainment. The in-game movies were outsourced. I don't remember how long we spent on the development, but it was about 12 months.



JS: The rich story replicates life in "small town America". Did your team visit the USA for research?

TI: No, my team did not visit the USA. I travelled across the USA from Los Angeles to New York, also visiting Canada, over a period of 3 months after finishing *The Firemen*. It was kind of a road trip - I mostly travelled by Greyhound Bus. It was like a road movie!

When I was a teenager I was keen on American films and I was also super keen on American music, such as the blues, rock, and country. For a long time I had a longing to visit the USA. I visited many small towns on that trip, and the journey inspired many things in *Mizzurna Falls*. Also, as I said, I was inspired by the TV series *Twin Peaks* and the film *Blue Velvet*, when creating the town. The town map of *Mizzurna Falls* and the layout of all the houses was done by me.

In addition, I provided many samples of American houses to our graphic designer. Yutaka Kambe⁷⁴⁵ was our chief designer and he had a good understanding of my requests. He was a

very talented designer, and helped create the town of Mizzurna Falls.

JS: The game can be difficult. Players can easily miss important events. Please describe the game's planning - it must have been difficult to organise.

TI: First thing, I wrote the story from the start to the true ending, very roughly, and then I made a main timeline which was for the true ending.

The next step, I made a timeline for all the characters, very roughly. There are over 20 characters in the game and they all have their own schedule taking place over 7 days.

Third step, I created and aligned each event for each character on the main timeline. This part of the job was very tough! Some of the events were like "multi events", which could go in different ways - but players could choose either and still see the true ending.

I feel that we should have spent more time on balancing the game's difficulty. This game *is* very difficult for players. I had an idea for a "notebook". All in-game events which players had experienced would be automatically written in this notebook, and on multiple playthroughs you could figure out and choose which were the important or "true events" which would lead to the true ending. So players would use this notebook when starting a new game. This notebook would basically be like the player's game log. Unfortunately, we had no time to develop this system...[746](#)



JS: Was it difficult squeezing so many details in on PS1?[747](#)

TI: Yes, it was very difficult! This game's concept and system exceeded the PS1's power. As a

consequence, we had to leave a lot of bugs and unreasonable things in the game. We had the choice to make the game with 2D graphics, but I chose 3D polygons because I wanted players to experience driving a car in the field! Naoki Sonoda⁷⁴⁸ was chief programmer, and he was instrumental in helping to create the complex world of Mizzurna Falls.

JS: What would you have changed if you had more time or resources? Did anything have to be cut?

TI: There were too many things which I wanted to put in the game. One thing was the notebook, which I mentioned before. Also I wanted to include a "money system". In the final version players can take all the food and gasoline for free in the game. But if there was a money system, players would need to think carefully about how to use their money. The other thing is, we could then have implemented ways for players to find or get more money out in the field.

JS: How did you feel when Shenmue came out? Have you seen Red Seeds Profile / Deadly Premonition? It also reminds me of Mizzurna Falls.

TI: I have not seen Red Seeds Profile, and I've also not actually played Shenmue. So I didn't particularly feel anything about it. Many people have told me that Shenmue seems very similar to Mizzurna Falls, but I honestly have no idea if Shenmue was inspired by Mizzurna Falls or not. I am proud of what myself and my team created with Mizzurna Falls - it was a great idea for a game world.

JS: When did you leave Human?

TI: The team leader for Mizzurna Falls was Naoki Sonoda. He was one of the best partners I've worked with in my 8 year career in the industry. Also, he is a very talented programmer. After this project we decided to leave Human and start our own business with most of the Sun Studio members. We started a company called "Garden" in 2000. Naoki Sonoda was the president and I was one of the directors of the company. Our first game was Air Ranger: Rescue Helicopter for PS2, which was sold by ASK.⁷⁴⁹

JS: That's where you developed Fire Heroes, or Hard Luck, on PS2. It's sort of the big brother to The Firemen.

TI: Actually, the development for Fire Heroes had many problems. This game was one of the reasons why I left the industry. I can't go into the details of the problems, but I was definitely not satisfied with Fire Heroes. I think everybody who developed Fire Heroes had this same feeling of dissatisfaction too.

JS: How did you become a mountain guide in Canada?

TI: Why did I decide to leave the games industry? That's a little bit complicated, and it was also a big decision in my life, that's for sure.

I was purely a games creator. Most creators often need to go against the management side of a company, because a great game is not always the best sales product. My only longing was to make great games using new ideas - that's why I started my own business. I used to think that if I was on the management side of things, I would be able to make games using only my ideas, but I was wrong... As you know, a person who works on the management side also needs to think about costs and sales. I tried to work as a creator *and* co-owner at Garden, and I worked very hard for 4 years.

JS: I can understand that, it's not easy doing both.

TI: Mountaineering was my favourite hobby during my 20s. When I was working as a game developer I spent most of my vacations on backpacking trips in the Japanese mountains. When I was 25 or 26 years old, I met one guy and this meeting changed my life. His name is Noriyoshi Kato, a well-known outdoor writer and pioneer of Japanese backpacking.^{[750](#)} It was an inspiring experience and from him I learnt many things, especially how to open my senses and immerse myself in the wilderness.

In the beginning of my career, I chose to become a games developer because I wanted to convey a message to people and thought games were the best media for this. After working in the industry for 8 years I realised it was very difficult, and I was able to change my career to one involving nature and the outdoors. I could still convey a message and inform people through working as a nature guide. So I left the games industry and moved to Canada in 2004, when I was 31 years old. I have already spent almost 11 years as a nature guide. This means my career in the nature business is longer than my career in the games business.

JS: Do you have any other messages?

TI: I still have some feelings to work in games, a little bit, but that's life. Some people think I wasted my 8 years in games because the nature business is totally the opposite from that world - going from always being inside to being outside. But I work as a guide, a web designer, with marketing, and I published my own guidebook in Canada. So I was able to use lots of skills which I learnt during my career in games.

Also, my company started a Japanese hiking tour, where we bring Canadian people to the Japanese mountains.^{[751](#)} That was one of my dreams when I moved here. I am very happy living the Canadian life now. I still chase the dreams which I had as a teenager, before I wanted to be a game creator.





MIZZURNA FALLS

Released December 1998, the same year as *Metal Gear Solid* and *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, this groundbreaking PS1 adventure deserves similar recognition as its peers. Years before open-world games like *Shenmue*, *Omikron: The Nomad Soul*, and *Deadly Premonition* left audiences in awe, this rough gem was setting the precedents others would follow. When you compare how small its team and budget were to *Shenmue*'s bloated \$47 million and over 100 staff, it's all the more impressive.

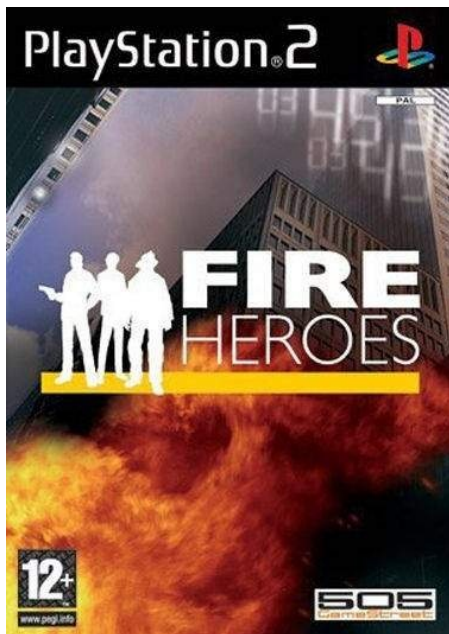
Set in the small American town of *Mizzurna Falls*, the game takes place over 7 days, with a day/night cycle, and every character having their own routine. With a strong *Twin Peaks* atmosphere, and a dash of John Hughes teen dram thrown in, players must discover the whereabouts of a missing friend. There are two endings, one sad the other true, and failure to be present at specific one-time only events will usually railroad you into the sad ending. Make no mistake - it is extremely difficult, but its scope and ambition is also quite stunning.

Every character has their own backstory woven into the whole, with diner robberies, bear hunts, and a dark secret in the town's history to experience. Players can explore the entire town via car, though it requires regular topping up of petrol; a cell phone also provides instant communication with various characters. It cannot be overstated: this is a painstakingly detailed simulacrum of a living, functioning town. Street lights dangle in the wind, some doors need to be knocked on before entering, a diverse menu of food items can be bought at the diner, and NPCs will drive personal vehicles around town by day, stopping to unwind at the Wolf Bar at night.

For anyone unable to play *Mizzurna Falls*, the next best thing are the 19 videos by YouTube user ResidentEevee, where every line of text is spoken aloud in English. It might even be better than playing, since she uses a guide in later videos, meaning no detail is missed. For maximum effect, download to a USB drive and watch them on a PS3. Not only can you easily fast-forward through the driving sections, but holding the controller it almost feels like playing the PS1 original. Almost.

youtube.com/channel/UCMMfmLDJ1hEgPpYz6xvLOZA/videos





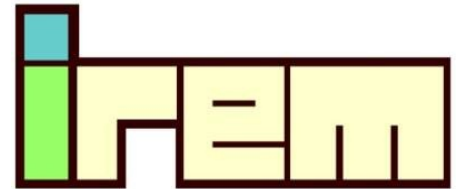
One of the true overlooked gems of the PS2 era, this is a grown-up successor to *The Firemen* - it even features the hose system previously left out. With a stronger focus on narrative, players are offered three selectable characters (fireman, cop, architect), for three diverse scenarios. Each floor of the skyscraper is meticulously detailed, and it all takes place over five tension filled real-time hours. The graphics have a crisp shaded look, and the level of interactivity is impressive (kick down doors, use an axe to cut through obstacles, improvise fire hoses as rescue ropes). There's a complex character interaction tree, an RPG-style levelling system, and a mission based structure to the game's chapters. The 505 Game Street localisation was low budget, but that doesn't detract from what is a surprisingly excellent title.



Granzella

Nanao → Irem → Eizo → Nazca → Irem → Granzella

By virtue of its flagship series *R-Type*, forever will Irem be regarded highly in the history of videogames; Irem developed several landmark games, but the saga of humanity's fight against the alien Bydo is probably the best known. To fully understand Irem and its legacy though, you need to know there were two distinct periods in the company's history, splitting sometime in the mid-1990s. In fact, each could be seen as its own entity, as if there were two games companies called Irem. This history is complicated, and it's difficult to find first-hand sources; the current official website only documents company history as far back as 1997, not the "old Irem" prior to this.



Irem was founded in 1974 under the name International Playing Machine (IPM); it's based in Hakusan, which is a remote location for game development, being near the north coast of Honshuu island, considerably far from both Tokyo and the Kansai cities of Kyoto and Osaka. In 1979 IPM became IREM. The 1980 manual for *UniWar S* (aka: *Capsule Invader* / *Gingateikoku No Gyakushuu*) reveals the acronym as "International Rental Electronics Machines". At some point in the mid-1980s this changed to "Innovations in Recreational Electronic Media", though there isn't as clean-cut a source as to when it happened (an Irem America Corp. catalogue circa 1990 lists the new acronym).



EIZO

Sometime in 1994 Irem began to decline, and here it gets tricky, because no employee has ever really talked about the details. It didn't quite close down, but rather it seemingly stopped making games. For whatever reason, a large number of staff left Irem to form Nazca Corporation - either officially, or moonlighting for the new company. Since the staff still used pseudonyms, actually working out who made what and where is cause for speculation.

Online outlets such as Wikipedia and MobyGames present contradictory information without primary sources. The key event is that a company called **Nanao** restarted Irem - either the dormant Irem Corporation itself, or by starting a new company named Irem Software Engineering which then absorbed the old Irem Corp. All citable evidence shows that 1997 was the rebirth year; Irem's website states April 1997 as its foundation, and MobyGames lists only two Irem games in 1994, and only one after this until 1998, where normal development appears to resume. What no one ever discusses though, is Irem's parent company Nanao, also known as Eizo...

The Nanao/Eizo history is just as complex, but to abridge the official (www.eizoglobal.com) history: Founded 1968 as Hakui Electric Corporation, making black &

white TVs. 1973 changed named to Nanao. 1978 started manufacturing table-top arcade monitors, including those used in Space Invaders. **1980 acquired Irem Corporation.** 1985 started selling PC monitors in Europe under brand name Eizo. 1996 the company Nanao discontinued using the brand name Nanao in Japan and North America, adopting the brand name Eizo as its worldwide brand, with new logo (apparently though the company itself was still named Nanao). Things get a bit weird in 1999, as according to the company website: "Nanao Corporation and Eizo Corporation merged and assumed the company's present name of Eizo Nanao Corporation." In 2013 it changed the company name again, from Eizo Nanao Corporation to EIZO Corporation. Throughout this history Irem was little more than a footnote; however, the discontinuation of the brand name Nanao in 1996 coincides with Irem's temporary hiatus, implying some kind of correlation and behind-the-scenes shenanigans.

The best of Irem's post-1997 games should be well known: several R-Type updates, the Disaster Report series, Steambot Chronicles, and a few choice Japan-only import titles, like Sakurazaka Shouboutai (a fire-fighting adventure, which they published). Unfortunately Irem ended a second time with the Tohoku earthquake in 2011. From this point on its games were cancelled, websites shut down, and titles pulled from download services like PSN. In April 2011 the videogame section of Irem dissolved and the company moved to slot machines and pachinko, while staff such as Kazuma Kujo left to form Granzella.

NAZCA
CORPORATION

Granzella is a direct descendant of Irem, in much the same way Nazca was before it. To understand Granzella, one must understand the history of Irem and Nazca, and the company which owned Irem. My interviews with Kazuma Kujo and Mayumi Nishimura help fill in some of the blank areas of these backstories. Given the significance of Irem's place in history, I hope these interviews lay the foundation for other writers to dig deeper and uncover more. Look into Nanao's acquisition of Irem, the temporary existence of Nazca before being absorbed by SNK, the selling off of Irem's publishing arm (apparently to a company called Apies), and so on. There is a lot left undocumented and in need of research...



On 24 December 2014 Granzella posted a press release announcing acquisition of the rights to Zettai Zetsumei Toshi, resulting in the trilogy being republished on PSN for PS3 and PSP (although available previously, Irem took them down). Granzella also announced plans for Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 4

Summer Memories to be announced late 2015.



NISHIMURA, Mayumi

DOB: 20 May / Birthplace: Ishikawa-ken / Blood Type: O

Interview with Mayumi NISHIMURA

18 September 2013, Tokyo

Duration: 1h 03m

This was a totally surprise interview. It was the evening before the 2013 Tokyo Game Show, and I'd arranged to interview Kazuma Kujo, of *Metal Slug*, *Disaster Report*,⁷⁵² and *Steambot Chronicles*⁷⁵³ fame. I'd interviewed him before, via email, but only about his role on Nazca's *Metal Slug*. Given Mr Kujo's location in Kanazawa, it would been impossible for me to travel to meet him; instead he suggested he meet me in Tokyo, when travelling to TGS. An ingenious plan!

Space in a very sophisticated business lounge was booked so we could talk at leisure. Upon arriving I was greeted by Mr Kujo's colleague, Mayumi Nishimura. She explained he would arrive a little late, apologised, and suggested that I and my team partake of the refreshments within the lounge. Never one to waste an opportunity, I suggested that I interview Ms Nishimura during this time. I had not planned any questions, but given her career at Irem there would certainly be interesting stories.

Ms Nishimura seemed uncomfortable being interviewed, and was keen to stress that she was not involved in development. Regardless though, she proved an extremely valuable source of information on the complicated history of Irem, and the many companies either affiliated with or spun-off from Irem.

As of 2015, the Granzella website lists Ms Nishimura as Board Director under the management listing.

JS: What was the first game you saw? Do you play games?

Mayumi Nishimura: I guess *Space Invaders*, *Pacman*, *<laughs>* and *Super Mario* on the Famicom. *<laughs>* It was around those types of games. I don't play games that much on a daily basis, but when I was at Irem I did enjoy playing *Bumpy Trot*, and also *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi*. So I liked Irem's games.

At Granzella we haven't published any games yet, but we do have some content on the PlayStation Home service, so I play those. In terms of games made by other companies I also play *Professor Layton*, *<laughs>* plus *Puzzles & Dragons*.⁷⁵⁴ But I'm a light user!

JS: My first game was *Pacman* in arcades.

MN: Ahh! *<laughs - nods in acknowledgement>*

JS: Should we go over the questions I pre-sent Mr Kujo, to get a feel for what I'm looking for?

MN: Yes, if you could read all of the questions to me before hand, that would be appreciated.

JS: *<hands paper to interpreter - speaks to interviewee>* Think of these not as questions, but topics which could lead to interesting stories.

MN: Sure thing. *<laughs>* Just one request from myself, you don't have to put everything that I say down on paper, you can just pick up the things that interest you, or may interest others, *<laughs>* but I would really like to be just some additional information to what Kujo-san provides.

<several minutes as interpreter runs through list of previously emailed questions - the last question is on the future of Japanese games>

MN: I think in terms of the current position of Japan, and the future position in the gaming industry, that question should be answered by Kujo-san.

JS: No problem. How would you describe your role at Granzella Entertainment?

MN: It's been three years since we established Granzella, and we started out as a very small company. So I am in charge of all the indirect operations, such as accounting, general affairs, human resources, public relations, and user support. Rather than the amount of work, it's more that I am in charge of many different things.

JS: Tell us where you were prior to Granzella.

MN: Irem Software Engineering. *<laughs>* I worked with Kujo-san. At Irem I did not do accounting, but I was in a similar role where I did PR, and I was the leader of the female staff at Irem. The female staff handled user support, provided assistance for sales, assistance for development, and also worked on the online website that handled products. So I was the leader of that.

JS: I recall a very detailed webpage for Zettai Zetsumei Toshi.⁷⁵⁵ You would have been in charge of that website?

MN: I was not in charge of that specific webpage.

JS: You mentioned being in charge of the female staff at Irem. Could you elaborate - were the staff segregated between male and female roles?⁷⁵⁶

MN: My phrasing was a bit off. Irem was actually divided into a development team, and an indirect operations team. There were some women working in the development team, and there were some men working in the indirect operations team. I'm not sure if this is true globally, but in Japan there are people on a career track, and people who are more in an office admin position, or who are in a fixed role position. I was the leader of the indirect operations team, or in other words the fixed role staff. The people in the fixed role positions tend to be women, so that's why I said I was the leader of the "female staff". But there were no strict rules based on gender.

JS: I'm not witness to that style of office management - we play it loose and wild in British journalism. Could you elaborate on this "fixed role" position?

MN: <laughs> Well, first of all the salary is different. Also the permissions or the authority is different. It's a bit difficult to explain. People on a career track will make decisions and do work based on whatever the company's current objectives are. Whereas people doing the clerical or office administration work have a fixed set of job duties.

JS: Which year did you start working at Irem? How long were you there?

MN: Actually, when I joined, I did not join Irem, but I joined the parent company Nanao. I believe the name has now changed to Eizo.⁷⁵⁷ I was placed in the amusement department, and they handled arcade games. This was when *R-Type* and *invader type games*⁷⁵⁸ were coming out. So I didn't join to work on games, it was rather that I joined a company called Nanao, which happened to be located where I live.

JS: Could you describe your role at Nanao/Eizo?

MN: Actually, first of all, Nanao and Eizo are the same company. It's just that Nanao changed names to Eizo this year, so that's why I mentioned the name Eizo. I was first placed in the amusement department of Nanao, and this is a bit hard to explain, but Nanao's amusement department worked with Irem in Osaka. <laughs>

So I didn't actually switch companies, it's just that Irem backed out of the gaming business for a while, and then they went back in as Irem Software Engineering. But I was always in the amusement department. It was just that the company changed shapes, as I worked there.⁷⁵⁹



Steambot Chronicles (PS2)
Follow the quest, dig for fossils, busk, do whatever you like!

JS: Irem backed out of games in the mid-1990s, when Nazca formed. Can you tell me more?

MN: Yes, I believe Irem Software Engineering was established in 1997. So I believe that Irem backed out of the gaming business around two years before that.

JS: When I interviewed Mr Kujo, [760](#) he said when Irem stopped producing games the staff who wanted to continue with games formed Nazca Corp.

MN: Yes, the staff members at Irem at that time went to various companies.

JS: Do you know why Irem backed out of games?

MN: Ahh... No, I don't know.

JS: It's one of those little mysteries I'm curious about.

MN: <laughs>

JS: When Irem backed out of games, what was your situation at the company?

MN: I stayed.[761](#)

JS: In America and Europe there's a lot of Bumpy Trot fans. What did you like about it?

MN: Well, I like the *sekaikan*,[762](#) and I also like the music. I also like that you don't feel like you are being rushed. <laughs> You can do what you want freely, and it doesn't really push you to go on.

JS: Exactly. In English we say it's a sandbox game. I like that you mentioned *sekaikan*. I've read a lot recently![763](#) Did you see the ending?

MN: Yes, I did.

JS: Did you choose the good path, or the evil path?[764](#)

MN: <intense laughter> The normal path - the good ending! <laughs> Maybe I think Kujo-san created the bad ending, so you should hear his story later.

JS: I will!

<we take a short break - Mr Kujo phones Ms Nishimura>

JS: Is everything OK?

MN: Yes, he's heading our way.

JS: What time will he arrive?

MN: He just called to say that he arrived, and I think by train it usually takes around 30 minutes. But I'm not sure how crowded it is. So I can't say for sure.

JS: While I'm interviewing Mr Kujo, perhaps you could be photographed by Nico?

MN: Yes, that's OK.

JS: Could you draw a sketch of the Irem offices?

MN: I'm sorry, but because I've already left Irem I can't draw picture of it. <laughs>

JS: That's OK. Previously you mentioned Zettai Zetsumei Toshi - of the three released, did you play them all? Which was your favourite?

MN: Actually, I've never been able to clear number one, <laughs> and I've completed two, and also three, but in terms of the first, I gave up and never completed it. But of the whole series, the original was also the one that left the biggest impression on me. It was quite shocking to have - for example - the train collapsing, and also the ground crumbling from

underneath you. It was very shocking.

JS: One question I wanted to ask relates to a debate in Western media, discussing the role of women in games. You were a co-founder of Granzella, which is a significant role. Do you feel videogames are a male dominated industry - is it difficult?

MN: I don't really feel any difficulties because I'm a woman.



Disaster Report (PS2)

JS: It seems there are more men involved in games than women. Why do you feel this could be?

MN: I'm not exactly sure why. I think it may be the ability to come up with ideas? I think there are quite a number of women working as graphic designers. But in terms of producers and directors, I believe that there are more men, and it may have to do with leadership, but I'm not sure. In terms of graphic designers, at the companies I've worked at there seems to be many women. But I'm not really sure for other companies.

JS: Could you describe the process of founding Granzella?

MN: So before establishing Granzella, Irem shrank its gaming business and I think Kujo-san will talk more about that later, but Irem said that they were not going to make anymore games, they would only be making *pachinko* games. So since the people at Irem could not make games anymore, some people gathered together to create their own company. At the beginning we only had a few people - we only started out with seven staff. We were starting from scratch, so we didn't really know what was going to happen. We knew what we wanted to do, but we didn't know what the future held. So we were hopeful, but we were also worried about the future. Up until then we were working in a big company, but after establishing Granzella we were starting from scratch, so we had to hire employees, and lay out the rules, and do everything from scratch. That was rather difficult.

JS: I can imagine. Did it also give you a greater sense of freedom? You are your own bosses, so you can now make your own rules.

MN: Yes, exactly as you say. Up until then we would have things that we would want to make, but the company would say, for example, you need to make it by when, by a certain date. But by creating our own company we could really focus on what we thought was interesting, and we didn't have any restrictions. We could make the rules ourselves, including the rules for pay raises and also promotions. We could also determine the internal rules by ourselves, and that was really different from what we were doing before. So I think we did gain freedom.

JS: Were there any specific internal rules from Irem you were keen to change? If you're happy to say so, of course!

<everyone laughs>

MN: I'm not sure if this should go in an article, but we used to have an April Fool event that we would do every year on April 1st. *<laughs>* We used to have a lot of auditions, that were required for April Fools day. But we no longer have to do those. So I think the auditions were something that was good to do away with.



From <http://community.us.playstation.com> - by user **bkbv**

Ganzella website: "At the bath house there is mixed bathing? Even socialising naked is a common practice among the people of Edo."

JS: The April Fool jokes by Irem are *legendary*!⁷⁶⁵ [Note: Ms Nishimura was uncomfortable elaborating on this subject further.] ... Granzella's website has a lot of amusing manga comics.⁷⁶⁶ Can you comment on the English site, or its catering to a Western audience?

MN: In terms of the website, I am not involved. In the Japanese version there is something called "Zukkoke Nichi" where the staff members at Granzella update it everyday.⁷⁶⁷ Sometimes I contribute to that, but I'm not involved in anything else, <laughs> including the *yonkoma* manga.⁷⁶⁸

In terms of the working relationship with the West, do you know PlayStation Home? It's a virtual space connected with PlayStation 3. We provide spaces on that service, not only in Japan but also in North America and Europe and Asia. We started distributing content to those areas since September 2011. We have many users in those areas, so that's why we try to make sure that our English website is well maintained. Because a lot of people look at our website.

JS: When I checked there was a new area. A public bathhouse in the traditional Japanese style?

MN: Ah, yes. I believe what you saw is the Oedo Lounge, and that's actually not new. It's been around for a while, but we recently added to that a *sentō* - a Japanese public bathhouse - and we thought that users worldwide, not just in Japan but everywhere, would enjoy that. We tried to create a space with a *sekaikan* which evoked Edo.

JS: You're joining Mr Kujo for the Tokyo Game Show. Do you have anything interesting to announce?

MN: This time we just came to view the show.

JS: Aside from spaces for Home, does Granzella have any plans to create traditional games?

MN: We're making one right now. I'm sorry, but we can't release any details on that, but we are working on one. So if you could look forward to that.

<laughs> Maybe you can ask Kujo-san about that later, when he arrives.

<perfectly on cue, Mr Kujo arrives at the business lounge and we switch over>

Part of a yonkoma dated 2015/08/11, showing Rokujo-san, the alter ego of Granzella's Kujo-san



Irem's Glorious April Fools

It's unfortunate Ms Nishimura didn't want to discuss Irem's annual jokes - hopefully future interviewers will be able to get some anecdotes.

The web pages have long since been closed, but Wikipedia features a list with URL hyperlinks to archived pages. It's worth spending a few minutes perusing, and contemplating how such a once jovial developer now no longer exists. Some of these are incredibly elaborate, and would have taken a long time to prepare - the Exidna console for example has pages detailing fictional software (such as *Bambi Trock*), bizarre peripherals, and a list of tech specs.

- 2000: R-Type Force Sweets
- 2001: Dokidoki Suikoden Dating Sim
- 2002: Zettai Zetsumei Toshi Crowbars (extra colours)
- 2003: "Real Life" R-9 Unit
- 2004: Irem Burger
- 2005: Next generation console "Exidna"
- 2006: Investigations into the UMA of Hakusan Lake
- 2007: Opening of IREM Gakuen
- 2008: IREM Zoo





KUJO, Kazuma

DOB: *secret* / Birthplace: Osaka / Blood Type: AB

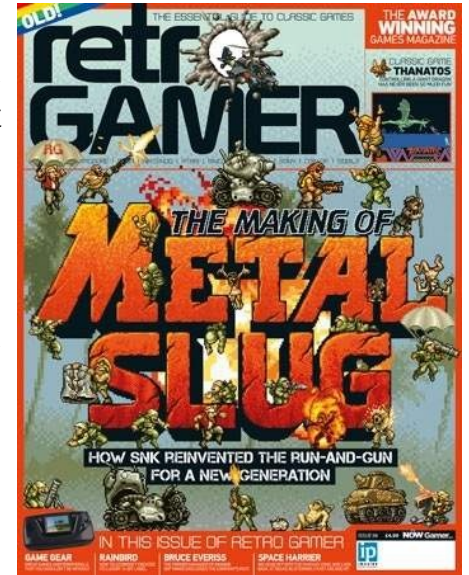
Selected Portfolio

R-Type II (ARC, 1989)
Shisenshou: Match-Mania (GB, 1990)
Air Duel (ARC, 1990, "Tsumi-Nag")
Superior Soldiers (ARC, 1993, "Oni-Nag")
Kaitei Daisensou (ARC, 1993)
Metal Slug (ARC, 1996)
R-Type Delta (PS1, 1998)
Disaster Report (PS2, 2002)
R-Type Final (PS2, 2003)
Steambot Chronicles (PS2, 2005)
Raw Danger! (PS2, 2006)
Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 3 (PSP, 2009)
Steambot Chronicles 2 (unreleased)
Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 4 (unreleased)

Interview with Kazuma KUJO

18 September 2013, Tokyo / Duration: 1h 57m

Interviewing Kazuma Kujo was a lot of fun - although we spoke through an interpreter, he answered some questions in English and had a playful demeanour throughout. As I had done for most interviews, a selection of key questions had been pre-sent. Reading previous interviews shows that Mr Kujo knows how to hook his target audience and keep interviewers awake. Due to being extensively interviewed on his role(s) in the *R-Type* series, I decided to avoid questions related to those titles. The same with *Metal Slug*, given my previous extensive interview in *Retro Gamer* magazine #98. Read it here: retrogamer.net/retro_games90/the-making-of-metal-slug/



What's fascinating is the range that he covers; he was part of both sides of Irem's history, was there at the formation of Nazca, and today is a leading figure at a fresh Japanese start-up. He's run the gamut from intense action-focused arcade shooters, to laid-back sandbox games with a focus on story and emotion. Whatever the role, it's clear he has his own unique style and has a lot of fun doing it.

As for the sunglasses shown in every photo... Kazuma Kujo always wears shades - because when you're cool, the sun shines on you 24 hours a day.

JS: We can work from these questions I emailed.

Kazuma Kujo: <laughs> The questions are very detailed. It seems like you know a lot about me already!

JS: I do my best! There's a lot of topics to cover.

<we discuss the best time for Nico to take photos>

JS: Can you recall the first time you saw a videogame?

KK: My first videogame was an arcade game - it was a game in a "game centre". It was an *invader* game. <English> Do you know *invader* games? <Japanese> When I first saw it, I thought that it looked really cool, new and digital - it had a fresh feeling to it. I also thought that it was pretty expensive to play just once.⁷⁶⁹

JS: My first game was Pacman.

KK: Oh yes! <laughs - nods>

JS: What did you study - was it always your intention to make games?

KK: <English> At university I studied mathematics. <Japanese> I didn't study about games at

all when in school, rather I learned about game development after I joined Irem.

JS: Did you have an interest in programming?

KK: Ahh! I was a little interested, but I was more interested in planning and direction, things like that. So although I studied mathematics at school, when I joined the company I wanted to be involved in planning and direction. That was what the department I was placed in also reflected. I only started studying programming after I turned 28.



JS: Was your first role at Irem as a tester on R-Type II?⁷⁷⁰(left)

KK: Being a tester on R-Type II, that was something I did while I was working as a planner. The head of the business division was looking for someone who was really bad at shooting games, and he came to the department for planners, and he asked, "Who is the worst at shooting games?" <laughs> They said it was me, so that's how I got involved in testing for R-Type II.

JS: Testing requires playing over and over - did you become *really* good at it?

KK: I actually played it for 30 minutes, and then they told me that I was *too* bad at doing it, so I was actually taken off of that role. <English - jokingly> So bad - I am the worst player at shooting games.

<everyone laughs>

JS: Even so, you showed great ability creating Kaitei Daisensou⁷⁷¹ and R-Type Final.

KK: <laughs> Thank you very much.

JS: What was your first role as planner?

KK: <laughs> The first thing I was involved in, as a planner, was Shisenshou.⁷⁷² It was a puzzle game and I was involved in making the puzzles. (left)



JS: At Irem, did you have any nicknames?

KK: I think for several games I am credited under my nickname. For Kaitei Daisensou, definitely. At that time, the vast majority of Japanese companies did not allow you to put your real name in the credits, so I believe my nickname is on several titles. Certainly for Kaitei Daisensou because I was the director. But I think I'm also in the credits for some other games as planner.

JS: Can you share this nickname?

KK: <English> Maybe... Hmm! <writes on paper>

JS: <reads Japanese> Oh, oni...?⁷⁷³

KK: Yes, maybe! <laughs>

JS: I've gone through Irem's credits,⁷⁷⁴ and I've noticed nicknames like Tsumi-Nag...

KK: <recognition> Ah! Yes, yes!

JS: ...Kire-Nag, Tobi_Nag...⁷⁷⁵

KK: <shocked - English> Yes, these are **my** names! They're about me.

JS: Yours? <Montgomery Burns> Excellent.

KK: <English> Oh yeah. All of them are my nicknames.

JS: How did you choose these nicknames?

KK: I don't remember the details, but I think that I was always quite angry when I was in my 20s. I was frustrated about my shortcomings as a game developer, and also about things that didn't go as I wanted them to. So I think that's why in my 20s I had nicknames like *Oni*, or *Kire*,⁷⁷⁶ or *Tsumi*, because I was angry.⁷⁷⁷

JS: I know that *oni* is demon. But the others...

KK: <English> *Oni* is an ogre, or demon. *Kire* means anger, or it can mean snapping. *Tsumi* means sin, or wrongdoings. So that was when I was in my 20s.

JS: <looks at web print-out> So you worked on *Air Duel*?⁷⁷⁸

KK: <surprise> Oh, yes! I was involved...

JS: This is exciting. Because nicknames were used it's difficult to know who was responsible. When you mentioned you were director on *Metal Slug*,⁷⁷⁹ that was a huge discovery!

KK: Actually, for *Metal Slug*, I was not the director. I was chief planner, or system planner. But in *Kaitei Daisensou* I was the director.

JS: Let's discuss *Kaitei Daisensou*. I thought it might have been inspired by *Spoon*,⁷⁸⁰ but in our previous interview you gave an unexpected explanation.

KK: <laughs> Is it the one where I was in a park and I heard a water fountain?

JS: So *desu ne!* (You know it!)

<everyone laughs>

KK: So at that time I needed to come up with a plan for a new game, but I could not come up with a good idea for many weeks - maybe around two months. I would go to work, but from morning until late afternoon I would tell my boss that I'm going to go out of the office. And I would take a walk to a nearby park everyday, and I would look at the bushes, and I would look at the middle-aged women playing tennis, and I would sleep on the benches in the park. <laughs> At that time I heard a water fountain and I thought, maybe it would be good to have a game that has water. Then after seeing that I went back to my office, and as I was walking back, I saw some highways, and I thought maybe it would be nice to have a game where a submarine-tank would be going around the city. So I told my boss about my idea, and he said to go with it. So basically the idea came when I was outside of the office and going to the park everyday. I am here now thanks to my generous boss, <English> though I was a bad employee for leaving the office.

<everyone laughs>



Kaitei Daisensou (ARC)

JS: And it resulted in a great game!

KK: I think that was a very good aspect of Irem back then, because they were forgiving about those things.

JS: You need a flexible environment to be creative.

KK: <Japanese> That's right. <English> I think so.

JS: Unlike a traditional space shooter, objects are affected by gravity and resistance to water; depth charges fall slowly. Seems tricky to get right.

KK: Indeed. I felt like having the setting as underneath the water, and thinking about what would happen inside the water itself, was really new. I felt that way during the planning stages, and I also thought that way during the development stage. I would talk with the people working on the visuals on - for example - what a missile would look like when it's launched and what would happen to the water, to the flow. I think having the submarines and having the underwater setting brought a lot of newness to shooting games.⁷⁸¹ I felt that way throughout the entire development process. It was really hard to come up with the idea of using submarines, by looking at water fountains, but after I came up with the idea of a submarine a lot of other ideas came up. So yes, a lot of others came about. I remember that when I made it, I made it so that both your weapon and also the enemy's are restricted by the surface of the water.⁷⁸²

JS: It was also funny. My favourite moment is Level 2, where you can make a herd of animals fall in the water.⁷⁸³

KK: <laughs> Yes! <mimes falling in water with hands>

JS: The bosses were cool, like the rock-man who...

KK: <interrupts, laughs> Oh yes! <mimes climbing, in the same way the boss does> In terms of that boss, who climbs up, I wanted to make that stage different from all the other stages! It's a vertical stage, even though the game is a horizontal scrolling game. We came up with the idea of an underwater temple, kind of as a joke, but everyone took that joke seriously and we ended up incorporating it. Actually, out of the 6 stages, it was developed to become the 5th stage. In other words it was one of the last stages that we developed. But everyone in development thought it was a really fun and unusual stage, and so we decided to push it towards the front. So that's why it ended up being in one of the earlier stages. I think it was stage 3, or something like that?⁷⁸⁴



Kaitei Daisensou (ARC)

JS: That was an arcade game, but you've also worked on consoles. Which do you prefer, what are the differences?

KK: Originally when I joined the game company, I wanted to make games for home use. But I was placed in the arcade department. So in my 20s I was involved in making arcade games, like Kaitei Daisensou and Metal Slug, but in my 30s I became involved in making console games. And in terms of which do I prefer, I prefer console games just because that was what I originally wanted to do.

JS: You fulfilled your dream!... I've got a tricky question. Irem stopped producing games around 1994. They started again around 1997. Staff went to work on different projects at different companies. This is how Nazca...

KK: *<nodding throughout question; on hearing Nazca immediate recognition; English> Yes!*

JS: Please describe how Nazca started.

KK: When Irem announced that they were backing out of the gaming business, there were more than 100 people or staff involved in various game developments. Those people went to companies like Konami, and Hudson, and also Atlus. So very big companies. What we did was, there were about 10 or 15 of us, and a company called SNK gave us some funding, and we established a company called Nazca. I was one of the founding members, although I quit Nazca after about two years.

JS: And went back to Irem?

KK: *<English> Yes. <Japanese> Yes, when Irem returned to gaming. But to be more precise, I was at Nazca for two years, and then after that I spent one year doing freelance work, and at that time, Irem announced that they were going back into the gaming business, and they asked me if I could come back to their company. So I did.*

JS: Do you know why Irem pulled away, and then later restarted game development?

KK: When Irem went back into the gaming business, I was an outsider at that time. So this is only something that I heard from others. But it seems like among the people who stayed at Irem, there were people who really wanted to go back into the game industry.

When the decision was made to return, the people in management had changed dramatically from those who were in management when the decision was made to back off from games. So I don't exactly know the details, but I think it was something like they wanted to give the people who wanted to go back into the gaming business another chance.

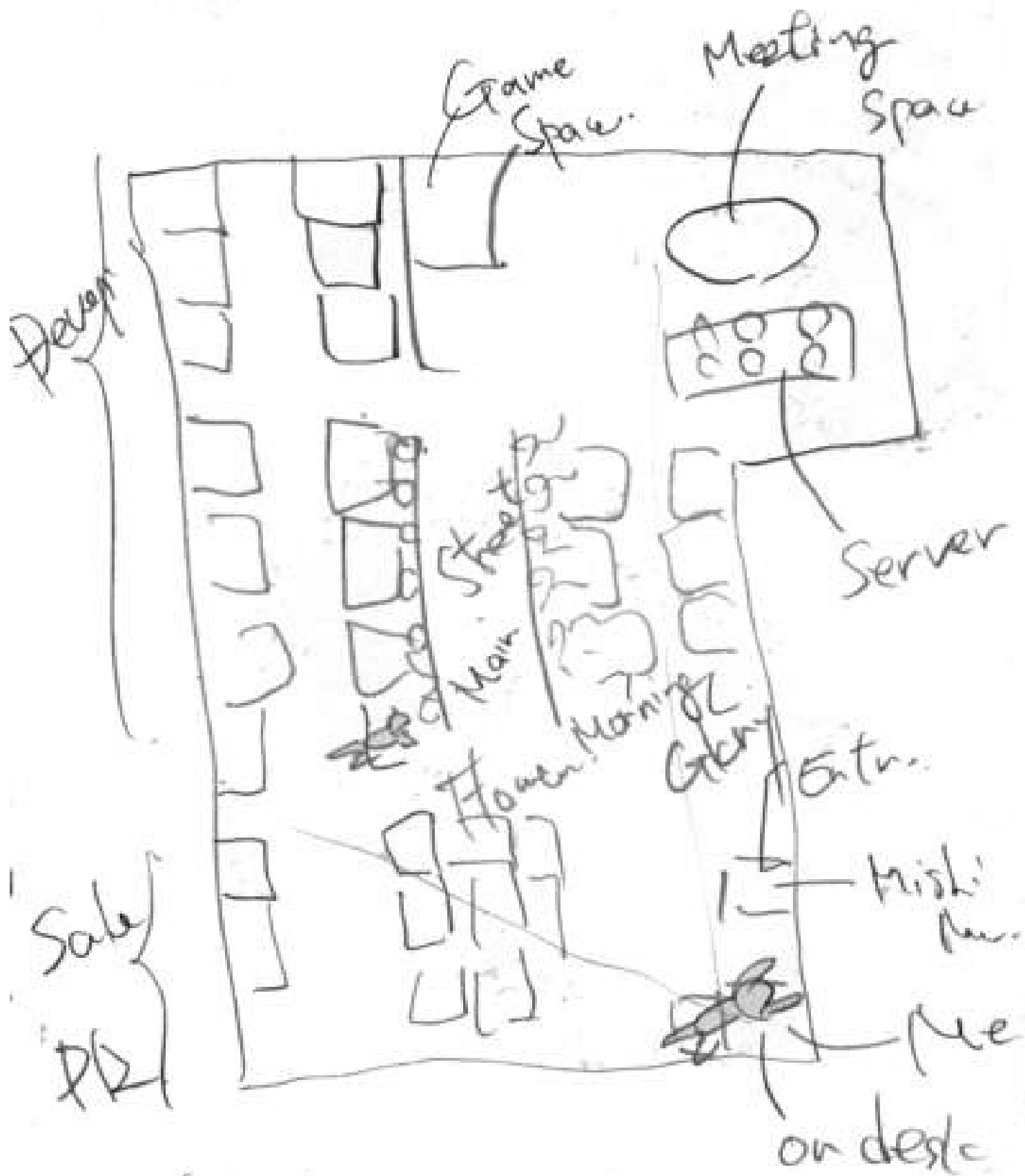
JS: Fascinating. Should we take a break? You must be tired having travelled from Kanazawa.

KK: I'm OK, but if it's better to take a break then we can.

JS: While we take a break, could you draw a layout sketch of Irem? So readers can imagine what it was like inside.

KK: I think I can...

<KK flips through sketchbook of maps, admiring various drawings and chatting with MN - begins sketching>



Idelm 2010

Nico: When would you like the other photos taken?

JS: Good question. Mr Kujo, are you happy to be photographed? You can leave your sunglasses on.⁷⁸⁵

KK: Right now?

JS: Sure, allow me to hand you over to Nico.

<KK returns and we discuss the office sketch>

KK: This is the Irem office. *<writes in upper right>* This was for meetings.

MN: *<confirms>* The meeting space.

KK: And then here we had computer servers. *<writes in centre of image>* Here we have Main Street!

MN: *<laughs>*

KK: *<to the side>* We had flowers along here, Morning Glory flowers.

<MN and KK confirm something softly>

KK: *<pointing to left side>* Here we have the desks of development staff.

JS: Having flowers sounds relaxing.

KK: Yes, indeed. Initially we had some greenery because the office looked really bare. After one of the Tokyo Game Shows, we had some artificial Morning Glory flowers left over, *<referring to MN>* and she decorated the office with them. *<smiles>*

<pointing around the map> So we have the entrance here, the development staff here, and then the promotion staff and sales staff here. And I was here, *<sketches self reclining by desk>* and she was here. *<writes MN's name>* I sat here and would overlook the office like this. *<reclines in seat, as if surveying the land>* I would have two chairs here, and I would sleep like this. And a different staff member was sleeping here, *<sketches staff near Main Street - English>* under the desk on the floor.

<everyone laughs>

JS: This would be during crunch times?⁷⁸⁶

KK: Right, right, yes.

JS: Without photos of office environments, sketches like this are fascinating.

Nico: Please excuse me. *<gets ready to leave>* John, let's meet tomorrow, Shinjuku, for the Tokyo Game Show.

<everyone says goodbye>

JS: When we spoke about *Metal Slug* I was surprised that originally player characters were not humans but tanks.⁷⁸⁷ That makes it closer to *Kaitei Daisensou*. So Marco and Tarma were only added after location testing?

KK: *<laughs>* Yes, at first the tanks were to be the main characters in the game. But we realised that tanks were very different from submarines, in that they were difficult to manipulate. We found that out when looking at the players during location testing. But the management, and also many of the staff members, wanted to keep the tank as a main character in the game. However, I felt like it was too difficult to have the tank as the main characters, so I proposed that we should have soldiers be the main characters, and we had quite a bit of debate on that.



Metal Slug (ARC)

JS: Wow! So the tank's cheeky personality, its jump and duck animations, was a remnant

from this earlier design.

KK: The director of the company at that time saw us debating, and he said fine, just make them soldiers already. So the boss did not like me for pushing that idea, <laughs> but in the end we had soldiers like Marco and Tarma as the main characters.⁷⁸⁸

JS: You defined the entire series - those characters appear in almost every subsequent title.⁷⁸⁹

KK: I was actually only involved in the first Metal Slug, and the reputation of the first game inside the company was not very good.⁷⁹⁰ So I never thought that it would have sequels, like Metal Slug 2 or Metal Slug 3.

JS: I'm shocked! It has a big hardcore fan following today!

KK: <laughs> Thank you very much for saying so. <English> I think so.

JS: Some of your best known games were on PS2, like Zettai Zetsumei Toshi and Bumpy Trot. Both contained a strong sense of freedom or player choice - more so than other games of the time.⁷⁹¹

KK: Actually the way I made Zettai Zetsumei Toshi and the way I made Bumpy Trot are very different. In terms of Zettai Zetsumei Toshi, I did not intend to provide users a lot of freedom - my focus was on having the players go through an actual city. So the focus was not on freedom, it wasn't on allowing players to do what they wanted to do. It was more on allowing them to say "no" to what they don't want to do. So in terms of Zettai Zetsumei Toshi, I wasn't really focusing on freedom.

Meanwhile for Bumpy Trot, while I was making it, I kept on adding things that I would like to do. You can buy stocks in the game, and that was something that I came up with during development, and I incorporated those ideas as they came up. And I wanted to provide a sense or feeling that the player was travelling with his girlfriend across a continent. At that time I did not want to restrict users, I did not want to create a game where the main character was speaking against the player's intentions. I feel that games should be different from novels or comics or movies, in that players can reflect their intentions or wills.

But when you create a game that has a lot of freedom, or that has a lot of choices, that means there are going to be a lot of aspects that players will never experience. And a lot of aspects that will go to waste. <laughs> So other companies, and other creators, don't really like doing that. But I was working under the idea that it was Irem's job to create such a game.



Steambot Chronicles (PS2)

JS: In Zettai 2 you could choose not to save people; in the student scenario you could let one of the bullies fall to their death. I thought, "Wow! Not many games would allow that." And in Bumpy Trot you could choose the bad path, which Ms Nishimura said was your idea.

KK: *<nods throughout, sometimes laughing, recognising each description>* Yes, yes. I designed the main and the bad ending. *<laughs>*

The main characters in Zettai Zetsumei Toshi are not heroes, they are normal people. And they are normal people who may be angry, or may have some grudges, or may have some weaknesses. They may be people who might think of taking revenge on people who bullied them. I think there are people who may try to seek revenge during natural disasters, or opportunities like natural disasters. That's the basis of the story that I created in Zettai Zetsumei Toshi. The development staff were quite surprised when they looked at that.

In terms of Bumpy Trot, there was the path to becoming the leader of an evil organisation, and I wanted to create that kind of divergence in the story [that is, a major player decision that changes the outcome of the game]. Becoming the leader of an evil organisation was one of the endings that I had envisioned from the very beginning. It was really - I thought - one of the fun aspects of the game. It was also motivation for us developers, and it was really fun creating that story. I think that the "evil ending" is more cool, and I also like how the ending starts from a prison.⁷⁹²

JS: I remember a part in Bumpy Trot involving... As it's called in Japanese, a *menbou*!⁷⁹³

<author and interviewee laugh in recognition>

JS: How did this come about?

KK: You mean the using of a cotton bud to clean someone else's ear?

JS: Indeed!

KK: <jokingly> Ahh. I think it's every man's dream.

<everyone laughs>

KK: I'm often told by female staff members, that's something a middle schooler would think.

<everyone laughs>

KK: But I wanted to do that.

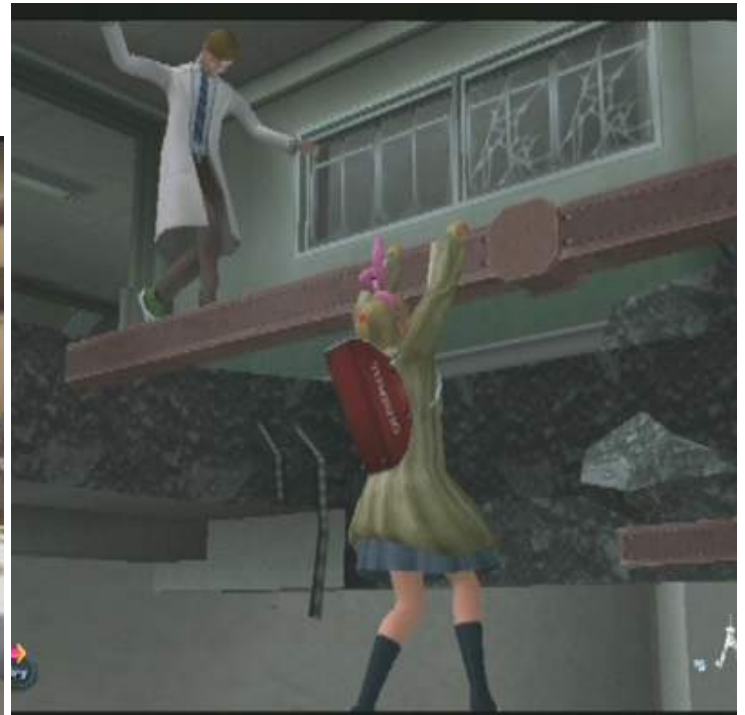
JS: It was not easy reaching that scene, you had to work for it. [794](#)



KK: <laughs> I don't think that all players will get to the cotton bud part. I think it's something that they rather come across by chance. And those are the things that we really found joy in developing. <laughs>

MN: I didn't know about it! <laughs>

KK: But making something that most players will never get to, really shows the level of freedom that we have. Because you're really surprised when you find it, and you're surprised that the *sekaikan*, the game world, is so detailed.⁷⁹⁵ It's something that the player doesn't expect the game to have or contain. That's something which we really enjoy making. So there were a lot of things which the development staff didn't know, and would discover for the first time when they were checking for bugs.



Raw Danger! (PS2)

JS: Are there any secrets no player has discovered yet?

MN: <look of recognition, laughs>

KK: Well... I actually did put in some elements which I thought that no-one would find, but I was surprised to see that some players have found them, and they've written about them on the internet. I wish that those people could help me in the development.

JS: If you could go back, would you change anything?

KK: Well, in terms of *Bumpy Trot*, I think relatively speaking I incorporated everything that I could think of. So I don't really feel like I left anything out of the game. In the meanwhile, for *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi*, I always feel like I left something out. For that series, no matter how many times I make it, I always feel like I've left something out. So compared to that, there's

nothing for Bumpy Trot, except for that I might want to make it again based on a completely different story.

JS: I was sad to hear the fourth Zettai game was cancelled. I read that you received 500 letters from fans, and went through all of them. Did you keep any?

KK: In terms of the 500 letters, they were from users, and they were actually emails, not physical letters. <referring to MN> And she read them all, and showed some to me, so I read some of the emails. This was when we were at Irem, so of course we couldn't take emails with us when we left. So we don't have them now. But we still receive messages from fans, about it.

JS: It wasn't long after the cancellation when Irem pulled out of game development,⁷⁹⁶ and you formed Granzella.

KK: When Irem announced that it was moving out of or shrinking its game business, I had been making console games for about 10 years, and I had felt some success, and I also had some things that I still wanted to do. So I invited some members in Irem to create a company with me, and the purpose of the company was to sell games that we thought should go out into the world. That's how we established Granzella. One of the purposes of establishing the company was to create a natural disaster game. At Irem I felt that... I realised that in games you can express whatever you come up with, and that's what I felt through Zettai Zetsumei Toshi, and also through Bumpy Trot. In games you can express anything that you can think of, and so I wanted Granzella to become a company that would demonstrate the potential of games as a creative medium.

JS: Excellently said. As a creative medium games are unique - they allow direct interaction, unlike say manga.

KK: Yes, yes. I feel the same way.

JS: Speaking of manga, you've previously mentioned being influenced by...

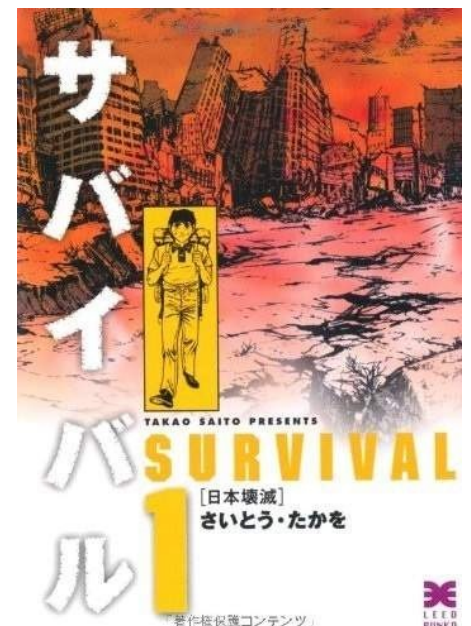
<shows Survival manga by Takao Saito>⁷⁹⁷

KK: <surprised laughter> Survival! Yes, it's my favourite!

JS: I immediately bought a copy, because it was part of the inspiration for Zettai. Would you recommend anything else - readers like know what developers enjoy.⁷⁹⁸

KK: Survival is really good, but when you say recommend, do you mean only comics? There's the film *Japan Sinks*.⁷⁹⁹

JS: Yes - the film is based on the novel *Nihon Chinbotsu*.



KK: Yes, yes. I was really influenced by that [for Zettai Zetsumei Toshi].

JS: Should we take a break?

<brief chat about time left>

KK: If our answers are insufficient, then you can always send us an email, and we can supplement information.



JS: Thank you! I skipped some questions. Are there any here which interested you?

KK: I think one thing would be about Granzella, what I'm doing now. Right now I'm making games for PlayStation Vita, and PlayStation 3, and PlayStation 4. For the PS3 it's going to come out either next year, or maybe next-next year.^{[800](#)} Then for PS4 it's going to come out next-next year, while for Vita it's going to come out by the end of this year.^{[801](#)} <laughs> But development is a bit delayed.

JS: Has it been announced or is it top secret?

MN: <nervous laughter>

KK: <referring to MN> No, I think she's worried about how much I'm going to talk. Because I'm not supposed to talk about it yet!

<everyone laughs - whispered chat between KK and MN>

KK: I think the announcement will come out in a couple of months from now.

JS: I look forward to it.

KK: Thank you.

JS: Now I have a reason to buy a PS4.

KK: You can wait until next-next year. But, yes, you might want to buy one at that time.

<everyone laughs>

JS: What makes a console sell is the exclusives. There was debate regarding Microsoft's Xbox One policies, which they reversed suddenly.

KK: In terms of the Xbox One, I think it's really appealing. Right now we've only entered the PlayStation format, but we are interested.

JS: Everything changes with each hardware generation.

KK: In terms of game machines changing generations, in every maybe 5 or 6 or 7 years, it is something where the company has to newly invest. But I personally think that it is a good thing that game machines change generations, and although we have to ask customers to invest as well, I think it is a good thing to refresh the industry and introduce some new aspects. I also think that it triggers new ideas. I think that it's kind of like a festival, or perhaps kind of like the Olympics, where everyone can talk about the same topic.

JS: And of course it's been announced that Japan has won the Olympic bid for 2020.^{[802](#)} Congratulations.

<everyone laughs>

KK: Thank you!

JS: There's a lot of debate on the future of games, especially for Japan. There's more development for phones these days.

KK: I think that Japan still has a lot to provide in terms of games. Especially in terms of its wide range of titles. We have games like *Biohazard* and *Metal Gear Solid*, but we also have games that are for *otaku*, or mobile games. I think that Japan will still serve an important role as a supplier of games. I think it can convey the potential that games have, by showing the diverse range which it still produces. Although as a game developing nation Japan has been caught up with, or maybe even surpassed, by some other countries, in terms of the impact it may have, I think that Japan still has a lot of things to provide, and I think we need to do these things and show the wider potential of games.

JS: Japan still makes the best games. A colleague wrote an article on Japanese games this generation.^{[803](#)} I wrote my own list, which was more than I could play in my lifetime!

KK: Thank you - we will work hard!

JS: **Keep me posted on your projects. I could ask questions all evening; your recollections are fascinating.**

KK: We're sorry we had to keep you until late.

JS: **Please don't worry. It was my pleasure.**

KK: I'm also very honoured that you did a lot of research on me, and you were able to come up with so many details. I remembered things that I had forgotten, and it was really nostalgic for me. I feel like I have the strength to move forward tomorrow.

JS: *Ganbatte kudasai...* **Oh! Before I forget, I'm collecting everyone's signatures.**

KK: Anywhere?

JS: **Please, take a full, fresh page.**

KK: *<looks through book>* So, do I just sign here?

JS: **Sign, sketch, whatever you like! Also Ms Nishimura as well, please.**

MN: *<laughs>* Really?

KK: Why are there two signature books? *<signs the second book>*



JS: One for myself, the other for my business associate.

<KK and MN chat amongst themselves>

MN: Could you put your signature below mine, Kujo-san?

KK: Wouldn't that mean I'm more important than you?

MN: No, it would mean I'm more important than you. *<laughs>*

KK: We went to an elementary school one time, to talk about life as a game creator. You know, like how firemen and gardeners will visit schools to talk about their jobs. So we went as game creators. And after the presentation all the elementary school children came to me and asked for my signature. But I said that actually she's the better game developer, *<referring to MN>* and all the kids went to her.

MN: The kids all went, "Wow!" Even though it wasn't true.

<everyone laughs>

Zettai Zetsumei Toshi revived!

Stop the presses! Since returning home from Japan there have been several announcements from Granzella, including the re-acquisition of the *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* franchise, the reinstatement of the games on PSN, and a new release on the horizon - there's also been several interviews (Google for them, there's plenty!).⁸⁰⁴ At the time of editing in September 2015, the latest news was that further announcements would be made in November. By the time you read this, the news will have broken. Here's hoping it's a release of the cancelled fourth instalment (pictured below). Keep visiting the Granzella site for news:

www.granzella.co.jp







Is Kujo actually Nagura?

After returning to the UK an unrelated third-party who I interviewed claimed to know Mr Kujo, stating that his real surname was in fact Nagura. This matches the fact that four of Mr Kujo's nicknames on old arcade titles ended in "NAG" and, coincidentally, the President/CEO of Granzella, Takeshi Nagura, also shares this surname. However, I have **not** corroborated this information with Kazuma Kujo or anyone else at Granzella.

Future Japan

Debunking the Downfall Myth

The enduring thought for almost every interviewee has been: ***What is the future of the Japanese games industry?*** At the time, November 2013, we were on the cusp of a new hardware generation and the Western media continued its negative coverage of the Japanese industry. Some critics claim it's fallen behind the West, that it can't compete, that it's somehow lost its way. They cite all manner of reasons, from greater profitability in mobile, to the fact the X360 brought seasoned Western PC developers to the console fold. For the last decade I have continuously rejected all of it: there has never been anything wrong with Japan - Japanese games are still incredible. *Valkyria Chronicles* encouraged me to buy a PS3, and has yet to be bettered artistically or mechanically.

The "***Downfall Myth***" first started around the release of the X360, before the PS3 release. An anonymous source within Electronic Arts explained how the shift in media coverage was a deliberate propaganda tactic by Microsoft, a "guerrilla marketing push", for the X360. Microsoft even went as far as producing a "brochure" for developers to follow, and it ties in with the "EA plant" debacle that leaked. As was explained: *"As Microsoft's first console had done badly, the plan was to undermine the Japanese competition by having an army of marketers pretending to be people on forums. The main goal being to disseminate that Japanese games were dead and buried, as well as move the emphasis of press articles away from functionality and more on to narrative. The latter was to help pacify skilled and capable parts of the gaming press and empower publisher PR. This explains various memes around that time about Japanese games; the press focus on narrative is something we've seen adopted across the board since 2006."* I investigated these allegations, with some interesting commentary for Volume 3 (including a Microsoft Japan interview).

The saddest thing is that Japanese developers themselves have started to become indoctrinated by the *Downfall Myth*. Famous faces like Keiji Inafune and Yoshiki Okamoto propagated it, and others followed. The important point is that for this past hardware generation, regardless of the West's bleating, I have had one hell of a great time playing Japanese games. I've yet to buy into the newer generation because I still have an enormous back catalogue, many from Japan. My evidence does not correlate with the *Downfall Myth*.

There have been a few voices of sanity this last generation. Dave Halverson, never one to follow the *status quo*, put *Muramasa* on the cover of Play magazine (Sep 2009), allowing Dai Kohama and Nick des Barres to produce an 18 page feature with lengthy Vanillaware interview, which directly inspired this book. Alongside Nick, Eric Patterson and Casey Loe produced *Warning a Huge Podcast*, promoting the awesomeness of Japanese games. And finally, Christian Nutt wrote the seminal *Considering Japan* for Gamasutra, which I often referenced in interviews. Christian stated, *"A lot of people have taken to suggesting that Japanese games can't cut it because the Japanese industry is creatively bankrupt. I would think that argument would refute itself, but it won't, because people are looking in the wrong places."* He makes many excellent points, dissects actual failings, and delivers the *coup de gras* that Japan *has* produced gems, *you just weren't looking*. Eleven are listed and he finishes

with, "*The good games are out there. I didn't have to stop at 11. I could have listed many, many more - each good in its own way.*" This inspired me, and from there I wrote my own list, consisting of 108 games, which I also discussed with interviewees.

Adjacent are 108 Japanese games which I find unique, enjoyable, defining, or in some way interesting. They are limited to PS3, X360, Wii, PSP, NDS, and PC. It was easy to compile; for fairness, series such as Yakuza were lumped into a single entry. Some games are updates of last-gen titles (Culdcept), sequels (Armored Core), or technically primitive (Battle of Tiles). A lot were hated by critics, but I don't care; Bullet Witch was cheap fun, and the kind of mid-tier game we don't see anymore, the El Viento of its day. Operation Darkness was so good I bought an X360. The Wii meanwhile, perhaps surprisingly, has an *extremely* high concentration of Japanese excellence. My hope is that you read this list and are irritated because I've left out your favourite Japanese game. This will signify that I was correct, because even with 108 titles, it didn't include everything. So please, hate it, debate it, add another 50 entries to it. **From this last generation alone, there are more games than any of you will be able to play in your lifetime.** Where is this alleged *downfall* now? The only real danger for Japan, which I addressed in my introduction, is the rise of "morality vigilantes" who wish to silence and censor creativity across the board.

After perusing this list there is a collection of interviews which provide fascinating anecdotes of the past, while detailing plans for the future. These include three interviews which discuss the fostering of new IP at Agatsuma; the wildly ambitious plans of Mindware, both in terms of a 10'000 pixel screen resolution and a ranking client for indie games; a Capcom veteran's involvement with Mighty No. 9 and other high profile releases; and finally the possibilities of Unreal Engine. Japan never fell from grace, the West simply stopped paying attention - **but no longer!**



Ace Attorney series

Ace Combat 6

Afrika

Akiba's Trip

Another Code: R - AJILM

Aquanaut's Holiday: Hidden Memories

Armored Core 4 / For Answer / V

Asura's Wrath

Bangai-O HD: Missile Fury

Battle of Tiles EX

Bayonetta

Binary Domain

Blue Dragon

Boku no Natsuyasumi 3

Bullet Witch

Captain Rainbow
Child of Eden
Chindouchuu!! Pole no Daibouken
Culdcept Saga
Cyber Troopers Virtual-On Force
Dead or Alive Xtreme 2
Dead Rising
Deadly Premonition
Deathsmiles 1 / 2
Deception IV: Blood Ties
Demon's Souls / Dark Souls
Disgaea 3 / 4
Dragon's Crown
Earth Defense Force 2025
Echochrome I / II
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron
EX-Troopers / Lost Planet
Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn
Folklore
Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins of the Moon
Freshly-Picked Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland
Gal-Gun
Half-Minute Hero
Hard Corps: Uprising
Holy Invasion of Privacy, Badman! (trilogy)
Idolmaster 2
Inazuma Eleven
Katamari Forever
Kengo Zero / Legend of the 9
Kenka Bancho: Badass Rumble
Kirby's Epic Yarn
La Mulana
Last Guy, The
Last Story, The
Legend of Heroes: Trails in the Sky, The
Little King's Story
Loco Roco 1 / 2 / MC
Lost in Shadow
Lost Odyssey
MaBoShi's Arcade
MadWorld
Metal Gear Ac!d 1 / 2
Metal Gear Solid 4 / GZ / V:TPP
Monster Hunter series

Muramasa: The Demon Blade
Nanashi no Game
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm
Natsuiro High School: Seishun Hakusho
Nier
Nin2-Jump
Ninja Blade
Ninja Gaiden series (esp. the "Japanese hamburger" talk)
No More Heroes 1 / 2
Oneechanbara series
Onore no Shinzuru Michi wo Yuke
Operation Darkness
Opoona
Otomedius / Otomedius Gorgeous
Pac-Man C.E. / Galaga Legions (reboots by Namco)
Pandora's Tower
Patapon 1 / 2 / 3
Patchwork Heroes
Pokémon updates
Project Sylpheed
Radiant Historia
Rain
Retro Game Challenge 1 / 2
Rumble Roses ■■■
Ryu Ga Gotoku: KENZAN!
R-Type Tactics / Operation Bitter Chocolate
Sakura Wars: So Long My Love
Senko no Ronde / DUO
Sin and Punishment: Star Successor
Siren Blood Curse
Solatorobo: Red the Hunter
Sonic Colors / Generations / Black Knight etc.
Steins;Gate
Super Chain Crusher Horizon
Super Mario Galaxy 1 / 2
Tales of... whatever (RPG series)
Tatsunoko vs. Capcom: Ultimate All Stars
Tenchu Z
Tokyo Jungle
Trash Panic
Valkyria Chronicles
Vanquish
Wario Land: Shake It!
Way of the Samurai 3 / 4

World Ends With You, The
Xenoblade Chronicles
Yakuza 3 / 4 / 5 / Dead Souls
Ys Seven / Oath in Felghana
Zegapain XOR / NOT

Valkyria Chronicles was one of the highlights of the last generation - no Western country would make this





MATSUMURA, Rica

DOB: 9 February, Cretaceous / Birthplace: Tokyo / Blood Type: AB

(For the record, the DOB was Ms Matsumura's idea!)

Interview with Rica MATSUMURA

19 September & 08 November, 2013, Tokyo (TGS & Asakusabashi) / Duration: 48 minutes

I actually interviewed Rica Matsumura on two separate occasions: first at the Tokyo Game Show in September, where Nico took photographs, and then later in November, at the Agatsuma Entertainment offices. The two interviews have been edited and re-ordered to improve flow - a running theme is my trying to find the names of several Mac games. I threw these questions in at odd intervals, and left them as such.

In the first meeting I also interviewed Yasuo Nakajima; he would also receive a follow-up interview at the second meeting, with the addition of Toshinobu Kondo. Their interviews are in subsequent chapters. All three worked together in relation to games published by Agatsuma Entertainment.

What's especially interesting about Ms Matsumura is that her game development background began with the Apple Macintosh in the US. Afterwards, having majored in genetics, she became a scientist involved with cancer research. However, this career as a scientist could not continue because experiments took up a lot of time during the day and night, leaving her unable to spend time with her husband and three children. Thus began the shift from science to the videogame industry.

Initially she joined Metro3D, unfortunately it filed for bankruptcy and Ms Matsumura started her own company, followed by joining Agatsuma Entertainment. While there, as a result of raising her children, she wanted to create something for younger players, and so came up with ideas for the Anpanman and Let's Draw! series. In addition, Ms Matsumura works on coordinating business between publishers and developers, including mergers and acquisitions. Since Agatsuma handles Western sold brands such as Code of Princess and Umihara Kawase, duties also include acting as localisation producer and director on those products. This led to an interest in the differences in development between regional cultures. As such, through her own company, Ms Matsumura started work on the Nyan-Jelly project for iOS.

JS: You've been in the industry for several years.

RM: Yes, I was involved with Operation Darkness, Ubisoft's Petz series, plus some mergers and acquisitions stuff. Sometimes my name is written as "Rika" instead of "Rica". <spells it> I have been in the game coordination business for a while.

I'm a general manager at Agatsuma Entertainment, and I usually handle agency business, and coordinating developers and publishers worldwide. I'm dealing with all the foreign affairs stuff. <laughs>

JS: What did you do prior to Agatsuma?

RM: I worked for my own company, and before that I was doing the same thing for a publisher called Metro3D.^{[805](#)}

JS: When do you recall first seeing a videogame?

RM: You mean in my life? Actually I started with arcade games, like Space Invaders, and I really loved it. Then I started to go to the game centres and started to play Star Wars, Galaga, <laughs>, Galaxian, and that kind of stuff. Then I moved to the US, so I started to play Q*Bert. I really loved Q*Bert and then also the... Ah, I forgot the name. It's got kind of a beer setting...

JS: Tapper?

RM: Yes, yes! Tapper. I loved playing that. Then afterwards I came back to Japan, and then I started my career as a cancer researcher, <laughs> because I majored in genetics! But the thing is, the work was too time consuming. So I decided to quit.

JS: Have you seen the "games" by Cancer Research?⁸⁰⁶ Ordinary people can help analyse data.

RM: I think this is one of the greatest things to do. Researchers need money in order to do their research, which means they need attention from people. To get attention, these are great things to have. Other researchers for other symptoms need to do the same, I believe. Like the ice-bucket challenge featured on social media.

JS: Describe how you started creating games.

RM: Previously while I was at university, I found myself having fun with creating games. So I sometimes coded games using Pascal⁸⁰⁷ and FORTRAN,⁸⁰⁸ which is a very old language! <laughs> Then I sold these at the nearby stores.

JS: Can you describe these games?

RM: No, it's... <laughs> I shouldn't mention it!

JS: Was this for PC-88?

RM: No, Mac. My games were for Apple Macintosh - but they are old and buggy games. So I shouldn't name them! <laughs> I'm too ashamed! <intense laughter>

JS: I'll scour the net. <laughs>

RM: No, no, no - **no!** Anyway, I decided to enter the games industry. First of all I wanted to become a game designer, or game director or producer. I applied to a game company called Metro3D - they wanted to establish a new Japanese subsidiary in Tokyo. Since I can speak English they said, "Oh well, maybe in the future you will be our game designer. But right now, would you please do the foreign affairs stuff?" So I told them, if it's going to be a promise to become a designer, then I'm going to do it. <laughs> But then a while later I was still doing the foreign affairs.



<laughs>

JS: That's a shame. They never let you develop?

RM: No, so I decided to open up my own company, where I started to do localisation and agency business. That way I'd be able to do all the localisation for regional releases or director's stuff. Basically I'd handle a little bit of the producer's side and the director's side. <laughs> Which would make me happy. Then my boss - at Agatsuma - wanted me to join as someone who could handle foreign affairs. But at the same time he allows me to make new concepts.

JS: Excellent. So you can pitch ideas?

RM: Yes. Then, what I've done with Agatsuma, was starting to create the concepts for the Anpanman games.⁸⁰⁹ Then also the Let's Draw game for DS.⁸¹⁰ For that I did all the concept stuff. It's been sold in Europe and the US also.

JS: Did you ever meet Anpanman creator Takashi Yanase; was he involved with Agatsuma's games?

RM: No, I have never met him. He is like a god to the creators of Anpanman related goods. But he was not involved.

JS: You mentioned working on concepts for Anpanman games?

RM: Yes, I've outlined the Anpanman games with concepts.

JS: About your Mac days, these games were not in Japan?

RM: No, no, no! Sold in the US, around the Bay Area, around Berkeley California.

JS: More men than women are in programming. Most women work in the art and music side. With you enjoying programming I wanted to ask...

RM: ...<laughs> But it's the old and ancient days!

JS: Nothing wrong with classic games. Did you use your real name on the Mac games?

RM: Yes, my maiden name. So my last name is different now.

JS: I'll go through all the Mac records...

RM: ...No! No! <laughs>

JS: ...for a programmer named Rica.

RM: No! You should not do that! *<laughs>*

JS: It shouldn't take long!

RM: *You should not do that! <laughs>*

JS: There's a large Mac community out there.

RM: *<intense laughter>* Don't do that!

<everyone laughs>

JS: There's a lot of debate in the West regarding women in the industry, and the challenges they face. Is it difficult as a woman in videogames?

RM: As a foreign affairs person I sometimes have a tough time dealing with a male dominated industry. Some people say, "Well, you're not a man, so do you have any decision making power?" *<laughs>* And then I say, "That's discrimination." But the thing is, they keep telling me that. So I really feel uncomfortable with it. But usually, because of my position at the company, they say, "Well, you have the power, so it's going to be OK." And then sometimes they add, "Well, if you are Japanese, it's pretty rare - weird - to have a Japanese lady in that position."

So I usually reply, "No, because we're all doing the same thing, so it's going to be fine." I mean, it doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman. So I explain that.

Usually I'm working 24 hours, 365 days a year, due to the time differences between regions. Sometimes I'll have a developer in China, and the publisher is in Europe and the US. So sometimes, *<laughs>* you never get any rest! For example, the worst case was getting 7 hours of sleep.

JS: Hm-mm. *<nods>*

RM: That's per week! *<laughs>*

JS: How do you survive - that's one hour a night!

RM: Yes! So people started to say, "Well, it's not dependant on whether you're male or female. You work hard, so it's going to be OK." So I really feel comfortable with that, right now.

JS: Your hard work earned respect. Why do you feel the industry attracts more men to development?

RM: Because in Japan, especially, usually girls go into literature or those kinds of artistic majors at university. Not for maths or scientific majors. Those are not common. Also, Japanese parents, most of the men say that science is for men, and literature and the arts are for girls. So usually they don't major in sciences. So it must be tough for those people, from such a young start...

JS: There's an expectation for...

RM: ... Yes, for what kind of career you will have. Most of the parents say, you should do this, you should grow up like this. Japanese parents are still doing that, so that's the biggest challenge.

JS: As someone who lived in America and Japan, what kind of industry differences have you seen?

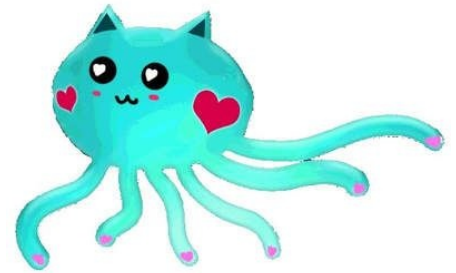
RM: Well, I used to work with Metro3D, where the parent company is in the US. I worked with them for a couple of years, so I know a bit about that. What happened was, the owner of Metro3D⁸¹¹ said that women are less effective than men. So within Metro3D the female staff... <laughs> We said, "Well, we should not take that into consideration. We have to work like men and make it great - so we can show the power of women to these guys." But sometimes, a woman will have a problem with her kids. Like the kids will have a fever, or whatever. Usually the husband can't take care of them, so she has to take a day or two off, and that makes a bad case for her. I mean, not a bad case, but it kind of says that a woman is less effective compared to a man.

JS: It's difficult to be a working mother?

RM: Yes.

JS: Especially with crunch times.

RM: Yes, crunch times, for quality assurance and localisation stuff - periods of compressed time.



JS: You organised the Operation Darkness⁸¹² translation. It was localised by Atlus, yet the Japanese release has Japanese and English. Why?

RM: Success Corporation wanted to have a game which had a bit of a taste of American or Western culture in it, so they wanted to have the Japanese, and at the same time the English text. Also at the same time, they were thinking about self-publishing it. <laughs> So they like to do the translation, or the localisation, alongside development.

JS: How did you get involved?

RM: I know a couple of people from Success - the producer and then the director. And they assigned me to help them.

JS: Was this Ken Ogura?⁸¹³

RM: No, my contact was a different person.

JS: What did you think of the project?

RM: It was pretty fair.

JS: It had vampires and werewolves during WWII!

RM: Yes, an original setting. Everybody loved the setting, so everybody was thinking it will get to number one in Japan! They were aiming for number one, everyone working so hard to get there.



JS: I'm disappointed reviewers criticised it. Operation Darkness was why I bought a 360.⁸¹⁴ It was amazing; one of the best strategy games.

RM: Yes, but I think they didn't have great marketing for it. That could be the reason why. At the same time, it's kind of not Westernised enough. I mean the graphics and stuff. <laughs> So that's the reason why I think it didn't do that well.

JS: Graphics - you mean the anime styling?

RM: Yes, that kind of style. Recently, it's becoming clearer the difference between Western culture and Japanese culture. I was mentioning back then, it should be a little more Westernised. Otherwise it's not going to be as well accepted. <laughs>

JS: Many in the West prefer a Japanese art style. For example Code of Princess⁸¹⁵ looks amazing!

RM: Yes, but that's different, right? Because a war game should have some kind of *really*

Westernised style to it. For example Halo, or compared to similar titles. It's *really* Westernised, right? But for Operation Darkness it's not so Westernised, so it's kind of half-Japanese and half-Western, plus a fantasy setting as well. So it's kind of: "Where are you going with it?" <laughs>

The translation was done text to text, we didn't see it alongside the screens at all.

JS: Describe the start of Code of Princess at Studio Saizensen.⁸¹⁶ **How involved was Agatsuma? There were some important people in the team.**⁸¹⁷ **RM:** Originally the Code of Princess project was to create figurines. So, the marketing person for the figurines was at a company. While there, at this figurine company, one of the game development team's members met the marketing person. They exchanged some ideas to create a game specifically for the figurines. After that they wanted to find a publisher. One of the members of our parent company is a great *sake-friend* of the figurine company's CEO, and introduced them to us. That is how we started to develop the game. What a coincidence!

JS: How did Kinu Nishimura join the team? For a long time she was at Capcom. Did Agatsuma influence the design of her characters?⁸¹⁸

RM: There was no influence on any of the characters. Those are her original creations.

JS: It seems Nico has finished with photos. Should we pause our talk, and interview Mr Nakajima?

RM: Sure, I'm here until 2 o'clock.

JS: Great, so I can still ask about the Apple games.

RM: No! <laughs> No, no!

JS: I'll just have to look it up.

RM: <laughs> No thanks!

<everyone laughs>

The next interview segment took place at the Agatsuma Entertainment offices in Asakusabashi, on 08 November 2013.

<standing outside while Nico photos Mr Kondo>





JS: Tell me about Agatsuma; what's it working on?

RM: We're publishing the Anpanman games. <laughs> But it's not going outside of Japan, so it's pretty sad. However, for Umihara Kawase it should be released in Europe also.⁸¹⁹

JS: If I owned a 3DS I'd import the new Umihara Kawase from the US. What do you think of the fact that previously with the NDS you could play any country's games on any system? Now the 3DS is...

RM: ...Yes, there is a regional restriction. I think it's not a good idea, because everybody would like to play games from everywhere. So I don't like it when a company does those restrictions - I would like to buy Nintendo of America download content while in Japan! Those kinds of regional restrictions should disappear. I would like them not to have any regional restrictions.

JS: You're in Japan with a Japanese 3DS and you want to buy downloadable titles off the US store?

RM: Yes. But the thing is, I can't buy them. So I had to buy an American 3DS. It makes it pretty tough and involves a lot of work. I needed to ask my friend, <laughs> "Hey! Send it over!" <laughs> And then they'd send me the 3DS.

Because I would like to know what the trend is for each region's games, so we can create games which are acceptable to overseas fans.

JS: Nintendo's restrictions make it difficult, as a publisher, to understand games in other countries?

RM: Yes. Everything is becoming more global, so I would like games to be global as well. Like for PC games, you're able to buy titles from everywhere. Right? But for consoles you can't do that. Which is pretty sad.

JS: The PS3 is region free, and the Vita - sort of.

RM: Yes, yes. So those are OK, but for Nintendo it's pretty much all restricted.

JS: It's detrimental to publishers trying to develop an understanding of foreign markets. It forces you to buy different regions of 3DS, to compete globally.

RM: Yes. Needing to have three 3DS at the same time seems like nonsense to me! <laughs>

JS: Expensive!

RM: Yes, expensive. You have to buy them one-by-one, and then you have to buy the "money cards". And it's tough to buy them - every single time I need to ask somebody to send one

over! *<laughs>* It's really time consuming, and I really hate that. So I would like to have one 3DS, and then be able to buy games from anywhere, especially downloadable games. It's much easier.

Sometimes I'll buy a UK game, and then mistakenly put it in my American 3DS. It doesn't work! Then I go, "Aaagh!" *<audible frustration>* It's broken! *<laughs>* Then I go like this. *<jokingly makes gesture to throw a 3DS>* [820](#)

JS: Do you still program?

RM: No!

JS: When last did you write a line of code?

RM: My last line of code... 1990-something? *<laughs>* For a game... *<debates years with self>* For a game it was 1987. Then for regular coding... When I was a scientist, a lab worker, I programmed the stuff related to graph data, you just input numbers for the tables. That kind of data related stuff I did until 1991. That's the last one.

After a while I had my children, so I quit my career as a scientist. While raising children, I remembered I had fun with games, so I said, "Why don't I join the game industry?" *<laughs>* That's when I started my career in videogames.

JS: And you'd like to develop games again?

RM: Yes. *<nods>* I'd like to continue on to it.

JS: Do you show your ideas to your children? How do they feel about their mom in games?

RM: Yes, I show the ideas to my children and their friends. If the game is targeted to those ages we'll get responses easily. I also show the ideas to my friends who are mainly ***not*** in the games industry, to get feedback. None of my family likes me as a "working mom" unfortunately... They claim they won't get enough attention from me. However, one of my children became a planner for a famous character-based game series; one of them became a consultant for smartphones; and the last one will become cancer researcher after her graduation from college.

JS: A planner on a game series? Which series?

RM: I'll conduct an interview with him for you!

JS: Do you want to name those Apple games now?

RM: Naah! *<laughs>*

<photos finished, we go back inside - I interview Mr Kondo, then return to Ms Matsumura>

JS: Do you have a final message?

RM: What kind of message?

JS: Perhaps that list of Apple games.

RM: <laughs>

JS: I have a sincere interest because people ask about the lack of women in programming. There was Carol Shaw at Atari, some others, but comparatively few overall. Don't be embarrassed.

RM: No, because mine are so... I don't know, it's so... <laughs> The games are like for kindergarten. I just don't want to touch it - it's my *dark history*. They sold a little, but that's about it.



JS: When was the first one on sale?

RM: The first one was on sale in 1985, I think? Then after that somehow... It's pretty weird, but me and my friends, we started to program in Pascal and then afterwards in C. But with Pascal, some people liked to use it all the time. <laughs> So even though it looks weird, we were programming the games in Pascal. So it's weird. Because we had C back then, but we didn't use C. Rather we used Pascal to have these little, odd kind of movements.

JS: Did Pascal allow things you could not do in C?

RM: Hm-mm. <nods> Sometimes, because we were bad programmers... You must understand, we didn't major in computer science, we majored in... For example, genetics for myself, and then for other people biology, <laughs> and those kinds of subjects. So we weren't specialised. <laughs> None of us majored in computer science. We were programming something weird, so sometimes it wouldn't ring a bell when it should ring a bell. But after a couple of seconds, <laughs> it just started ringing like that! But people liked those strange things. <laughs>

Like now if it was released, it's just going to be called buggy. <laughs> A game full of bugs! The thing is, back then people were kinder, so they accepted it. <laughs> Then they'd say, "Oh! It's strange, but it's really cute."

<laughs> But right now, if I released the same thing, everybody would say it's a bug filled game and I shouldn't release it.

JS: Did you debug yourself, or did a friend play it?

RM: Yes, that kind of set-up. We, the three of us, programmed the game itself, and then what happened was other friends started to play and then started to find the bugs.

JS: A joint endeavour, yourself and two friends?

RM: Uh-huh. *<nods>* I'd prefer to keep them anonymous. Because I don't have any of their addresses or contact information.

JS: Was everyone designated specific roles?

RM: No, everybody was doing it. "Oh, this sounds fun! So let's implement this." So sometimes I did the music; sometimes everybody did everything, what they liked to do. So the code got stranger and stranger! *<laughs>* The bugs were getting more and more sometimes.

JS: Did your group have a name?

RM: *<hesitant pause>*... No. We took the same computer class. That's the reason why we were on the same track. So everybody writes down what this line should be, and so those kinds of things are pretty clear. The three of us understand: "Oh! This one is doing this, so maybe adding this could be a great feature." Taking the same class was a great thing to do.

JS: How many games did you work on?

RM: Maybe seven, somewhere around there?

JS: Did you work on games which were unfinished?

RM: Two games, I think? So a total of nine. Seven released and then two... *<laughs>*

JS: Were they manufactured in a factory?

RM: No, no, we just duplicated them ourselves. Small batches. It was still floppy disks, in the olden days. So we just copy, *<mimes with her hands - laughs>*, and copy at our collage's Mac room.

JS: Did you photocopy a cover for each?

RM: Yes, photocopied.

JS: Did anyone draw cover art?

RM: No, nothing. Our university had a gate, called Sather Gate, and we put Sather Gate on, and then there was also a Sather Tower - also called The Campanile. That's about it. Those are at University of California, Berkeley.^{[821](#)}

JS: How many copies did you sell?

RM: *<pause>* ... I had a chance to discuss the games with one of my friends recently, who is a mutual friend of mine and the group. Even she does not know where the other members are - and there's no source code left either. She remembered the number of sales as being... The



total of all seven titles' sales was about a couple of thousand. Each sold only a few hundred. So over a couple of thousand, I think. Which is pretty good, because we didn't do any advertising. We just asked the Apple store - well not *the* Apple store, but the store selling Apple software. We asked them to put our titles here and there, and they put some posters close by, and people bought it. We were pretty happy. <laughs> My friend said my memory made the *dark history* of our games seem *golden*.

JS: It's something to be proud of!

RM: No, a bug filled game is pretty bad. Full of bugs. So like, <makes sounds> "TING!" Then there's no sounds for a while, then it's "ting - WHOOOMPH!" <moves head back - laughs> That kind of stuff.

JS: But you can't argue with a few thousand sales.

RM: Yes, but... Some of them were for young people. Like one of them, it's just a... It's not that cute, but these fish are swimming, and then you start to learn how to count. Those are easy kinds of games to make, so we didn't mistype any of the code. So it moves fine. <laughs> A kind of educational game.

Then some of them are shooters, but from the right to left and left to right - there's just a stickman pointing a gun, and then the gun shoots. Maybe it seems like *Code of Princess*, in that there are three layers. So players can move between the three layers, then make the gun fire.

Don't mention the number of sales! <laughs> That should be kept secret.

JS: 2'000 is good; some people don't sell a 100.

RM: Yes, but that's for seven of them.

JS: It's still good. Peter Molyneux's first game, *Entrepreneur*, only sold two copies.⁸²² You guys did better than Molyneux!

RM: <laughs> No. At the very beginning we only sold to our classmates. <laughs> And the classmates, there was only a handful of them. Back then computer science was pretty popular, so one class has about a couple of hundred people. So we started to sell some, and then because they have friends, if the title is interesting it starts to get advertised by itself. That's the reason why it sold. [It spread through word of mouth.] So it's only within a small community; it sold pretty good.

JS: Awesome. These two games which weren't released, what genres were they?

RM: We were trying to create an RPG kind of style. But because we put too many dialogue trees in... Like, if you say this, you have to go up. If you don't say this, then *da-da-da-da*... <mimes the flow of dialogue> So there were too many trees. Like a branching story. And then finally we didn't know where to go! <laughs> Actually, all the stories were messed up. So if going all the way up, that's one story. But if you go branching, branching, branching, then

what is this story? So many confusing elements. So we decided just to...

JS: Is there a floppy disk somewhere?

RM: One of the guys who handled all the money stuff was taking care of it. But I don't know what he did with the disks. I don't know what happened.

JS: You could go on Facebook, find him, demand to know: "Where is my source code?!"

RM: *<laughs>* No. Once I tried to do that with Facebook, LinkedIn, and then also Twitter. But I couldn't find him. So, I dunno.

JS: Has Agatsuma any unreleased games?

RM: *<cautious pause>* Yes... *<laughs>*

JS: How many unreleased games have you seen?

RM: Including those from Agatsuma, three. The first games industry business I was involved with was at Metro3D's subsidiary here in Japan. They wanted to release a game here, an original title. What happened was, we started to do the localisation, but the SDK had been changing. So even though the programmer was trying to do debugging, there were so many bugs, due to the change of SDK. So we decided not to release it. *Dark Angel*, I think?⁸²³ For PS2. This was actually released in the US, and then sold... I think it sold like 40k or something?

The second game was... Before I joined Agatsuma I was self-employed, and I was trying to help people with releasing games. Almost the same thing happened. The localisation failed so a game went unreleased. I forgot the title. But it was for the GBA. Something to do with animals, I forgot the name.⁸²⁴



JS: The third game (with Agatsuma) is under NDA?

RM: It was not completed... Hmm, I think my boss is gonna get mad! So! *<laughs>*

JS: What is Agatsuma doing next?

RM: We are trying to - as Nakajima-san mentioned - we are trying to create new IP. For

myself I'm trying to create Nyan-Jelly!⁸²⁵ <laughs - points to jellyfish cat> We are trying to grow characters or IP for Agatsuma, for example my company Pine Village is working on the Nyan-Jelly series. It's not only Umihara Kawase, but other properties - we are planning to grow them. In terms of platforms, we are working on multi-platform projects. So it should be easy for users to play our titles! I would also like to license out Nyan-Jelly, if someone is interested. If there is a chance, please contact me!

JS: Is this a cross between a cat and a squid?



RM: Actually, not a squid, it's more like a jellyfish. That's the reason why I call it Nyan-Jelly. <laughs> Then I'm intending to use it with iOS. But this is just my personal stuff, so...

JS: What is the "cat in a glass" image from?

RM: During our first brainstorm meeting for the second Nyan-Jelly, one of the planners saw the original Nyan-Jelly, and she said, "I want to **eat** this character! It is so cute!" So, we started to brainstorm with, "What could be cute food?" We came up with ice-cream fudges! So, that particular "Nyan-Jelly" is in a glass. <pointing to print-outs> The jellyfish-like one is by Pine Village, and the glass one is by Tachyon.

JS: Awesome. Do you mean Tachyon Works?⁸²⁶

RM: Yes, Tachyon Works. The company is famous for fishing titles and shooting titles.

JS: Yes! They're involved with Ketsui and Bullet Storm!⁸²⁷ **Good luck with the project.**

RM: But this is a personal project. For the projects I'm working with, it's games like Let's Draw Simple!, which is an educational title for children, how to draw. That's going to come to iOS next year.⁸²⁸ You will be able to play with your drawings. Not only kids, but also adults will be able to have fun after they draw something. You can draw your loved one's name on the game's "sun page" and put that name in the Landscape Garden - showing that since your loved one is like your sun, the landscape becomes brighter, and so on.

JS: Tell me about Nyan-Jelly.

RM: I'm doing the concept work. So the programming and the graphics are done by someone else. This will be released soon. It's only a running game, but I think you'll like Nyan-Jelly. At some point we will be releasing another Nyan-Jelly. This will be more like Flappy Bird.

JS: Your company is Pine Village, but you also work for Agatsuma Entertainment?

RM: Yes, my company is Pine Village, as I am not allowed to do my own creation at

Agatsuma. I'm using my own company to do my own creations. There are so many great titles, but Agatsuma won't allow me to work as an agent, so I use my company to do the agency projects.

JS: Agatsuma allows employees to have their own side projects unrelated to the company?

RM: Hm-mm. <nods> Agatsuma's COO Mr Ohno allowed me to do so.

JS: Nice. Some companies make you sign a contract where you can't do anything outside.

RM: Yes, it's because my boss does not trust iOS.



JS: But there's so many sales on iOS. Nyan-Jelly could be the next Angry Birds.⁸²⁹

RM: Yes, I'd like to be the next Angry Birds. But for the first release of Nyan-Jelly, it's not that creative. It's just a mimic of some other title. But for the sequel, it should be a new invention, I hope.

JS: Nyan-Jelly is being handled by different contractors, right?

RM: While connecting between companies, we found interesting differences between Japanese and Western developers. One of the differences is Japanese developers are more like artists, where Western developers are more like carpenters.

Japanese developers draw a concept sheet, but if they find something more interesting than

the original concept during development, despite the original concept the developers will follow their latest interest. These changes make the schedule vary. In addition, a person in the team who is more influential decides on what the most interesting aspect is. If the person leaves the team, the team might become unstable, because usually the final picture of the game is **only** in that person's mind and not on a document. As a result games sometimes become totally different from the original concept.

JS: Westerners are like *carpenters*?

RM: The developers draw concept sheets, of course, and also have game design documents to follow precisely, so the original concept doesn't disappear from the game. They add interesting features to the games but keep their schedule most of the time. Both developmental methods are great, but different.

So, we decided to start an interesting experiment with Nyan-Jelly. The series as a concept is to show people the differences between development cultures in different countries. For example, when given the same idea and rough sketch, what will the outcome of the project be? You might find these differences interesting.

JS: So different developers have the same starting point, but a different outcome?

RM: The idea of project Nyan-Jelly came from my agency work. I find there are big differences between different groups' ways of developing games and ways of thinking. Hence the experiment. I asked myself, what if I gave developers:

- 1) The same concept
- 2) The same original graphics
- 3) The same development fee

And then request they create an App? Due to the budget we cannot ask for development of a full game. The outcome is the Nyan-Jelly series on iOS. Right now a German developed version of Nyan-Jelly is on the App Store.⁸³⁰ Nyan-Jelly: Get & Float, by Tachyon, is available for both Android and iOS. **(centre)** I will also be working with a Belgium developer, and then possibly an Australian developer. You can feel the differences between the developers' projects!⁸³¹

JS: It looks cute, but *jellyfish sting*!

RM: Yes! <laughs> That's true. But Moshi Monsters would sting too - some part of them.

JS: Moshi Monsters?

RM: *Moshi* is a famous monster character in the UK, right?

JS: I've never heard of it.

RM: For the kids it's pretty famous. In the UK.

JS: OK. I'm obviously out of touch with...

RM: ...the kids stuff, right?



JS: When I get home I'll Google it, edit this interview, and it'll totally seem like I knew.[832](#)

RM: Yes, so slightly weird but adorable characters are acceptable. That's the reason why I created *Nyan-Jelly*. It sounds like lingerie, so that the...

JS: Lingerie!? <laughs>

RM: Yes, it could be. I dunno, maybe men might just type it in and then they'll be like, "What's this?" and then just download it.[833](#)

<everyone laughs>

JS: I wish you the best of luck.

RM: Oh, by the way, if you try to release your book in Japanese, maybe I could ask around? Shall I?

JS: Yes please! Once I have the English version finished, I would love it if a Japanese publisher contacted me!

RM: OK then!

[Author: despite spending days looking through Macintosh fansites, I was not able to find which games Rica Matsumura worked on. If you think you know, please contact me.]

An interview within an interview

By Rica Matsumura, with her eldest son

/ MATSUMURA, Kazki

Note from the book's author: This short but sweet interview was done via email by Rica Matsumura after I expressed interest that one of her children was in game development. I never provided any questions - it was sent to me as a bonus surprise. It's interesting because it examines the discussion of working mothers in the industry from the perspective of the progeny, who in turn also went on to develop games. Plus, it provides us with a *story within a story*!



RM: Please disclose your name.

KM: I am Kazki Matsumura, first born son of Rica Matsumura.

RM: What is the first game you played?

KM: I started playing Super Mario Bros. for the Famicom when I was one year old.

RM: What do you think about your mother working - when you were a child and now.

KM: She is really great, being a housewife at the same time as working full-time. I never felt empty because of her work. Whenever she had spare time she talked with us, and sometimes told us strange stories she created. This satisfied feeling I have is the same from my childhood until now. I started to work in the games industry two years ago - and now, as an adult, I've begun to feel I need to start helping my mother.

RM: What do you think about your mother being in the game industry?

KM: It is great in many ways. As a localisation producer/director, she maintains the budget and other requirements, but the sales are great. As a creator, she keeps her small budget but still releases titles. Being a great mother to us, her children, she used her knowledge as a mother and created concepts and apps. All of her creations are welcomed by children worldwide, such as Let's Draw Simple!.⁸³⁴ However, she needs some help with action from myself! (!?) Thus, I like the outcome of "*Project Nyan-Jelly*".

RM: Why did you join the game industry?

KM: I cannot forget how wonderful the games I played were. So, when I became an adult, I wanted to be a creator to give those wonderful games and experiences to others!

RM: Which games have you worked on?

KM: [REDACTED]

RM: What is your dream?

KM: I am addicted to action-based VS games. So, I would like to create something like *Street Fighter*, which everyone in the world who loves such VS games will become addicted to. Then, *if* this game becomes one of the world's official *tournament games*, it will have *pro players*. This is my ultimate dream!



Author's Note: This interview was originally slightly longer, and briefly mentioned some of Kazuki Matsumura's work. However, his boss insisted all mention of the games and company be removed, despite his being credited on them, since the work is apparently "confidential". All I can say is that the company is in the top 10 listing for Japan, and that he works in the arcade division as a planner.



X
NAKAJIMA, Yasuo

DOB: 13 May 1972 / Birthplace: Tokyo / Blood Type: O

Interview with Yasuo NAKAJIMA

19 September & 08 November, 2013, Tokyo (TGS & Asakusabashi) / Duration: 1h 15m

Rica Matsumura offered to introduce me to Yasuo Nakajima when we met at the 2013 Tokyo Game Show. His MobyGames profile was brief, limiting the number of pre-written questions I had; one eye-catching credit was the famous visual novel *Kamaitachi no Yoru*. As a result many questions were conceived on the fly. Given the brevity of our time there would be a follow-up interview at the Agatsuma office, where the really juicy secrets came out - **including info on an unreleased PS1 real-time strategy game co-funded by Nintendo!** The two interviews have been edited to enable dovetailing.

JS: Please describe your role at Agatsuma.

YN: Right now I'm a producer. Mainly I oversee development being carried out by external studios.

JS: Agatsuma published *Code of Princess* and *Umihara Kawase*, games well regarded by otaku in the West. You're developing a cool reputation.

YN: Ah, thank you. It's obviously something we try to do intentionally, but it also involves a bit of luck, such as having the opportunity to work with Studio Saizensen. I'll continue doing my best to bring out games that will satisfy the players.

JS: Studio Saizensen has a lot of former Treasure members. Is that what attracted you?

YN: I'm a longtime fan of Kondo-san's work. He's the president of Studio Saizensen. They brought us a project proposal which looked interesting, so we started working together.

JS: Tell me about *Sayonara Umihara Kawase*.

YN: Kondo-san is doing the character design and other planning for the new game, just like he did for the original.

JS: Will it be coming to the West? I had to import the original from Japan for my Super Famicom.

YN: Aaaaaah... well, I guess I can go ahead and say it. We're actually making an announcement on the day after tomorrow. I shouldn't tell you just yet, but the news will be public by the time your book comes out, so it's okay.

JS: I think people in the West will enjoy it.

YN: I hope so! It's a very difficult game, though...

JS: It's a challenge, but it's worth persevering.

YN: There aren't as many people like that anymore, who will persevere through a challenging game.

JS: Sadly no. What was the first game you saw?

YN: What was it? The very first one was... at the arcades? Or was it on a console? I remember an electronic tabletop game, like *Pong*. It had about six different games built in.^{[835](#)} But the first game that really got me hooked has to be *Xevious*.

JS: Did you always want to be in games?

YN: Of course! Originally I started as a programmer, about 20 years ago. I worked at Chunsoft, do you know them?

JS: Of course! *Dorake ne?* (*Dragon Quest*, right?)

YN: Well, I worked on a text adventure called *Kamaitachi no Yoru*.^{[836](#)} I did the programming. I also did the Game Boy version of *Fushigi no Dungeon: Fuurai no Shiren*, a roguelike.^{[837](#)}

JS: I know both of those. *Kamaitachi no Yoru* was one of the earliest sound novels; a professional writer was hired for the script.

YN: It was my first game project, so I didn't really know what I was doing! I just did what the bosses told me to do.

JS: At Chunsoft, do you remember a gentleman named Manabu Yamana?^{[838](#)}

YN: Oh yes, I know Yamana-san.

JS: I interviewed him; he coded *Otogirisou*.

YN: We only worked together briefly, so Yamana-san probably doesn't remember me anymore. We haven't been in contact. But he also helped create the *Dragon Quest* series.

JS: What was your first computer?

YN: The first one I bought was a NEC PC-9801, and also a Sharp X68000. For gamers, these were the two machines you had to own.

JS: Kondo-san started on a Sharp X1, the predecessor to the X68000.

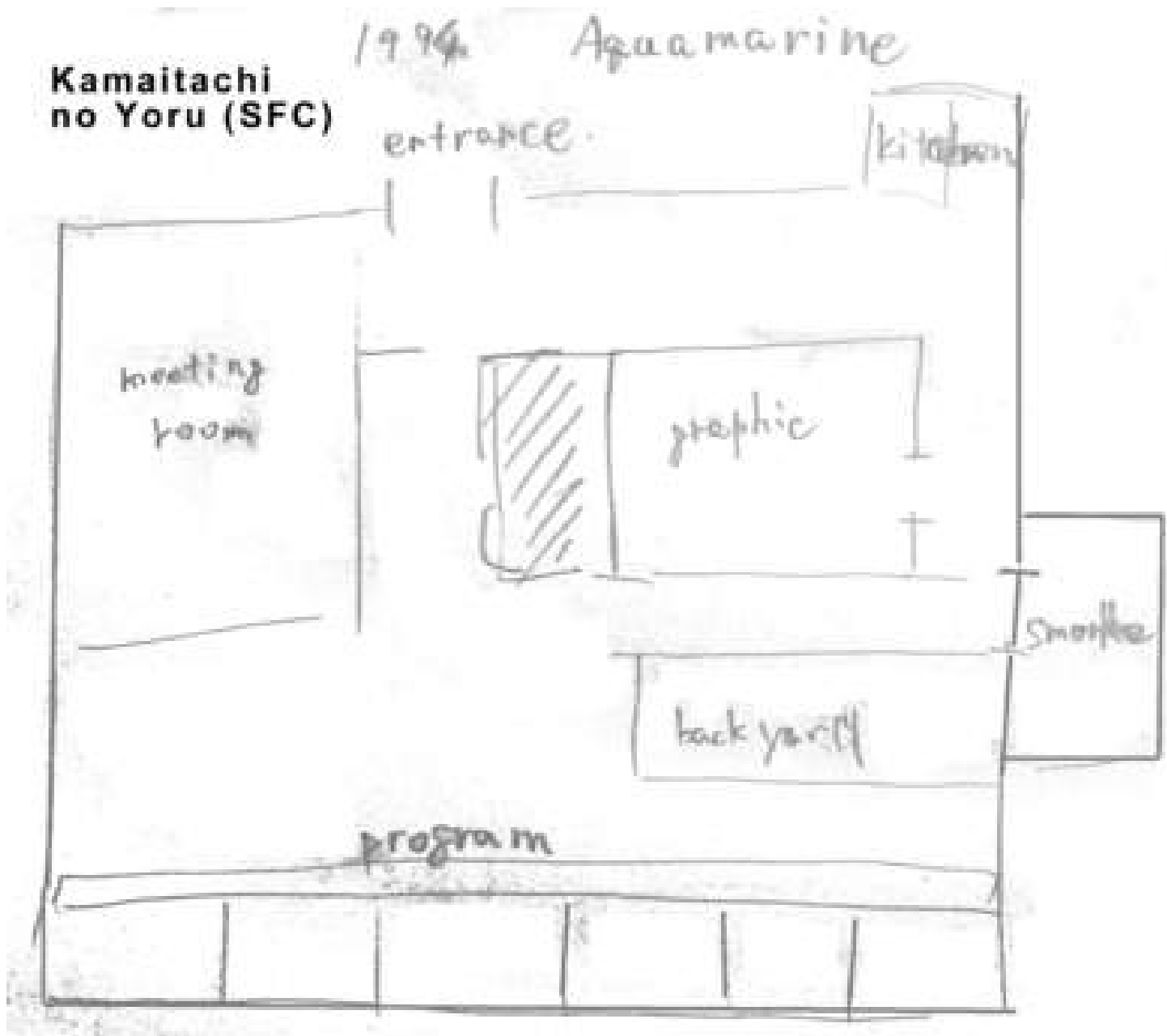
YN: I wanted one of those back then, but I couldn't afford one! <laughs> Most people [in the Japanese game industry] in their 40s today probably had one of these computers at some point. People who originally started with programming probably got a computer earlier.

JS: The X68000 was hardcore, lots of shmups.

YN: That's right! <laughs>

JS: Did you teach yourself programming using these computers?

YN: I did a little programming beforehand, but I learned most of what I know after I started working for Aquamarine.⁸³⁹ First of all, console games used to be programmed in assembler, or machine language. BASIC just isn't enough. The real game development was done in assembler. And we'd also write dev tools on Unix using C language.



JS: Mr Yamana drew the dev environment for the Famicom. They had an FC, HP9000, integrated circuit emulator, and PC-9801 for graphics.

YN: Oh yes, we had the same type of system for Famicom development. By the time of the Super Famicom, we used Sony NEWS Unix workstations.⁸⁴⁰ But this is a pretty obscure topic. <laughs> For the Famicom, we used the same system as Yamana-san, with an HP and ICE.

JS: Describe Sony's NEWS setup. What did it look like, a computer you typed at? Were there cables hooked into a Super Famicom?

YN: It had a fairly modern, sleek design. It looked cool. But it cost around 30'000'000 yen!

JS: Mr Yamana said the FC set-up cost 60'000'000. It seems prices improved for the SFC.

YN: That's what I heard. It was quite expensive.

JS: Can you sketch the office of Kamaitachi?

YN: Although I was doing work for Chunsoft, I was working at a different company office. *<sketches>* It was like this, I recall. We had this separate room for taking a smoke break. *<laughs>* And there was a partition here... This was the meeting room, this was the graphic section I think. The programming team was here. And there was a storage area here. The entrance... And there was a kitchenette for making tea and coffee. I'll write the name of the office. What year was this? I was there until around 1998, but you wanted the layout from the time of Kamaitachi no Yoru, right? The name of the company was Aquamarine. The company folded, though. It's gone now.

JS: Kamaitachi was 25 November 1994. I ask everyone for layouts. One described a "hamachi" room: they were locked inside until finished coding. ⁸⁴¹

YN: *<laughs>* We had something similar to that, a space people used when they were really busy. Where was it? The entrance to the graphic section was here... So we had our own "hamachi" room here behind a partition. When things got really busy, I didn't go home for two months. *<laughs>*

JS: You know Hydlide by T&E? This was their office.

YN: Oh! So there's the "hamachi" room! *<laughs>* Ooh, and they had a bath. That's nice. It looks like a pretty compact office. But why did they call that room the "hamachi" room? A *hamachi* is a big fish. Maybe it had some other special meaning or pronunciation. Nagashima-san worked as a programmer at T&E Soft in their later years. Do you know Cu-On-Pa? ⁸⁴² It was a puzzle game for the Super Famicom. Well, after that, he worked as the main programmer on Red Alarm by T&E Soft, for the Virtual Boy.

JS: I wanted to interview someone who'd worked on Red Alarm. What was the name?

YN: Nagashima-san. He's a freelancer now. I'll go get his contact information.

<YN leaves room, returns with business card>

YN: Here's a copy. So he worked at T&E Soft, and when they closed, he joined Hasegawa-san's company Digital Kids, ⁸⁴³ which was later bought by Ubisoft. And then this year, he quit

Ubisoft and went freelance.

JS: Excellent. Thank you very much.

YN: But he's living in Osaka now. So you'd have to go all the way to Osaka to meet him.^{[844](#)}

<chat about contacting Nagashima>

JS: Any interesting anecdotes from working on Kamaitachi no Yoru?

YN: Well, it was a sound novel, a genre that started with Otogirisou and then continued with Kamaitachi no Yoru. Otogirisou was programmed by Yamana-san alone. But Kamaitachi no Yoru featured more advanced visuals, and the Chunsoft staff proposed various ideas which drastically changed the game. So it was very enlightening for me, to see the creativity that emerged from the development team. For example, the decision to present the characters as silhouettes.



JS: Yes, the blue shadows. (above)

YN: Before that, the game was simply backgrounds and text, but by adding the silhouettes, or shadows... The game's visuals improved significantly. You may have already met the person who came up with the idea for the silhouettes. He's working freelance now, but his name is Kazuya Asano.^{[845](#)} He also worked on *Fuurai no Shiren*, as well as the earlier game in the *Fushigi no Dungeon* series, *Torneko no Daibouken*.^{[846](#)} He was the planner for that. But now he's freelance. He was also involved in all of the *Dragon Quest* games up to *Dragon Quest V*. So it was very instructive for me to observe the creative process of game planners like Asano-san.

JS: When did you work on *Fushigi no Dungeon*?

YN: Well, *Fushigi no Dungeon* was released in 1996, so maybe it was 1994? Or possibly 1993.

JS: And you were the...?

YN: Sub-programmer.

JS: Every time you enter a dungeon it's randomly generated. Was this difficult to program for GB?

YN: The Super Famicom version, which was the original *Fuurai no Shiren*, was also being developed in parallel.^{[847](#)} So we made the Game Boy version by modifying the source code from the Super Famicom version. The difficult part was how the Game Boy's hardware limitations prevented us from being able to do many things. But as you said, I programmed the random map generation and the item placement.



JS: Because of the differences in hardware, did you have to rebalance the game so it was still fair?

YN: Yes. The basics are the same as the Super Famicom version, but first of all, the Game Boy has less memory, so we had to make the maps smaller, and we also had to remove the "fog of war", or in other words the range over which enemy movement is invisible. On the Super Famicom version, you can't see any enemies beyond the main character's visibility range, but on the Game Boy version, there is no fog of war. So we re-balanced the game to compensate for that.

JS: How do you feel about the GB version? (top)

YN: As a successor to *Rogue* and *Nethack*, I feel the game has very well-polished systems that still hold up well today.

JS: Right, it's a *roguelike*. I think Shinjuku Station is a roguelike! It changes every time I go in!⁸⁴⁸

YN: <laughs> It's a dungeon! You get lost. Shibuya is the same way.

<everyone laughs>

JS: At Chunsoft did you see anything related to the Satellaview, the add-on for Super Famicom?

YN: Ah, I was not involved with the Satellaview project. But Chunsoft definitely worked on it.

JS: I ask because Chunsoft was involved. Was *Fuurai no Shiren* your last game at Chunsoft?

YN: After that, my work with Chunsoft ended, and I started working on an unreleased title for five years; after *Kamaitachi no Yoru* and *Fuurai no Shiren* at Chunsoft, I worked for about five years on an unreleased project that never saw the light of day. It never had an official title, but it was going to be an early RTS for the PlayStation.

Actually, even while I was working on *Kamaitachi no Yoru*, it was through a subsidiary company that handled programming work for Chunsoft, called Aquamarine. It was just down the road from the Chunsoft office, though.

Originally, the Chunsoft president Nakamura-san founded a new company, separate from Chunsoft, in order to foster new talent.

JS: Tell me about this unreleased game.

YN: The title was never decided. The CEO kept everything in his head,⁸⁴⁹ so we didn't have an official title. Basically, it was going to be a science-fiction RTS for the PlayStation, the PS1. But the money situation was unusual. Development was being funded by a company called Marigul Management,⁸⁵⁰ which was a joint venture by Nintendo and Recruit Co.⁸⁵¹

Nowadays there are crowdfunding options like Kickstarter, but back then they were like angel investors for game developers. Only a few titles were ever released, such as *Pikachu Genki Dechuu*.⁸⁵² The one where you speak using a microphone. A communication game. Another game they released was *Custom Robo*.

JS: Tell me more about Marigul Management itself.

YN: It was a game financing company established as a joint venture between Nintendo, who had a 40% stake, and Recruit Co., Ltd, who owned the remaining 60%. Its purpose was to acquire capital from investors and use it to finance the games that developers wanted to make, and also provide publishing support in regards to things like management, publicity, and marketing.

At a time when original titles were on the decline due to rising development costs, Marigul Management were espousing creator-focused practices that allowed developers to

concentrate on making games, and own the intellectual property.

JS: Marigul funded all these games?

YN: Yes, but ultimately only a few games were actually released and sold. They were very generous with money, and told us, don't worry, just keep working on it until the game is good. <laughs> So we kept working on it, lost our way so to speak, and ultimately had to close down. <laughs>

The game itself was quite ambitious, with around 3'000 units fighting each other in real-time, on the PlayStation 1! It may seem commonplace today, but in those days, on that hardware, people were impressed by the programming skill it took to present that many units on-screen, and that's why we received funding.

JS: Marigul gave money to Aquamarine to develop games for PlayStation? Did Nintendo know their money was funding software for rival hardware?

YN: I believe Nintendo's objective was expanding software support for the N64, which was their platform at the time. But Marigul Management was seeing an industry-wide decline in new consumer titles, so they were looking beyond platform boundaries and investing in PlayStation titles as well. The PlayStation games *Culdcept*,^{[853](#)} *Enen Angel*,^{[854](#)} and *Kerokero Z*^{[855](#)} all ended up being released [as a result].



Marigul

JS: What was your role on this RTS?

YN: Well, I was mostly in charge of the programming, although technically the main programmer was the company CEO. So I was responsible for the graphics routines, the game engine, and also various things like data structures and management. Meanwhile, the character controls and important core elements were handled by Masa-san, the CEO.

JS: What was the CEO's name?

YN: I think it was Masayoshi Saitoh. Or maybe it was Masayuki.^{[856](#)} He was a good boss, but I have no idea what he's doing now. I don't think he's in the game industry anymore. I asked the Chunsoft president Nakamura-san about him, but nobody knew where he went. After Aquamarine was shut down, he went to ArtePiazza for a while, and then he disappeared after that. ArtePiazza did some of the *Dragon Quest* remakes. I wonder what they're doing now.

JS: Fascinating. At the time this was being made, everyone was excited about *Dragon Force*, which had 200 characters onscreen - 3'000 is incredible.

YN: Yes, there was *Dragon Force*. But their 200 characters only appeared during battle scenes. Our game would have been just like a modern RTS, with everything on a single map. Do you

know the game Total Annihilation?⁸⁵⁷ It was similar to that, with a similar science-fiction setting. So we were working on a game like that prior to Total Annihilation, but unfortunately we weren't able to complete it.

JS: Could you draw a sketch of the screen?

YN: I don't know if I can recall what the screen looked like, it's been so long. But it was like an RTS, with an overhead view. I'm not an artist so I can't draw it accurately, but essentially it was just like a modern RTS, the genre that was established with Warcraft.

JS: Incredible... What did you do after that?

YN: The next company I worked for was very minor. <laughs> After Chunsoft, I joined a company called MTO. They're mostly known for their cute pet simulators on the Nintendo DS. So I worked on games designed for children and also young girls.

JS: Are you referring to the *otome* genre?⁸⁵⁸

YN: No, these are for a younger audience. Games about fashion, cooking, things like that.

JS: When did you join Agatsuma?

YN: It was 10 years ago, in 2004.

JS: Do you miss the days of programming and being really hands-on, creating games?

YN: It's been about 15 years since I've done any of that, any programming. The reason why the unreleased project failed was because of a lack of planning and project management.

JS: So the concept for the RTS wasn't solidified?

YN: That's right. So back then, I was just a programmer, but I realised that game creation requires vision and a firm concept. That's why I became a director, and more recently, a producer on titles such as Code of Princess and Sayonara Umihara Kawase.



Sayonara Umihara Kawase (Vita)

JS: Can you give us a hint as to your next project?

YN: What shall we make? <laughs> Well, everyone at the office is talking about the possibility of Code of Princess 2, maybe on more powerful hardware like the new home consoles.

JS: Any chance of Code of Princess or Umihara Kawase coming platforms other than 3DS?

YN: Umihara Kawase really belongs to Kondo-san, so I can't speak for him, but for Code of Princess, it's a definite possibility. Maybe on the PS4, or the Vita. I'd like to see that happen. These two titles in particular are like remakes, following in the style of earlier highly-regarded games, but in the future, I would like to make something more original. So if someone asks me to do a remake of an old arcade game or something, I'd probably say no. But I am open to any genre, so it could be an RPG, a strategy game, or something else entirely. I don't know if it will be something under Agatsuma, but I would like to create a new, original IP.

JS: You mentioned the PS4. We're heading into a new generation - where is Japan heading?

YN: Japanese games have evolved along their own path, and have diverged quite a bit from the mainstream in the West. In terms of technology, Japan has definitely fallen behind. Other people have probably been telling you the same thing. One thing, which is not just limited to

Japan, is how the game rules are all becoming the same thing over and over. Meanwhile, other areas such as indie games are becoming quite active, so we would like to take up the challenge in that kind of space, and discover new ways to have fun.

JS: Everyone compares Japan to "the West". But the West is [...] and more. You're comparing Japan to the combined output of 10 or more countries.

YN: Well, I don't really have an answer to that, but I can say Japan has no intention of shutting itself out from the rest of the world. In what ways do you think Japan differs from the rest of the world?

JS: I think Japan produces some of the best games in the world.

YN: So what you're saying is that we shouldn't be so negative about ourselves? *<laughs>* But at a fundamental level, Japan's approach to game development has fallen behind. But for games, the important thing is ultimately whether it's fun and surprising to play. From the perspective of the individual player, Western games are providing all the novelty and stimulation, like indie games. Japan occasionally produces something like that, but globally, there's been a shift. Japan places a lot of emphasis on the business side, on profitability, so you can't take risks and do something adventurous.

JS: I think you give overseas games too much credit. For example, Call of Duty is endless sequels because it's easy money for Activision.

YN: You're absolutely right. I'd like to take up the challenge, do something daring. But I don't think we can beat Activision. *<laughs>*

JS: Do you need to beat Activision? A lot of people don't like their games; I don't like Call of Duty.

YN: *<laughs>* Yes, well, winning or losing is not as important as whether or not the game surprises and delights the players. That's what I would like to do. And obviously, at the same time, I want to reach as many players as possible.

JS: I wish you luck, and thank you very much. *<Japanese> This has been an enjoyable interview.*

YN: Sorry to end it on a depressing note! What have other creators said about Japan and the West?

JS: A lot! Keiji Inafune said he wants Japan to be the dominant country again.

YN: That's bold, that sounds like Inafune-san.

JS: Yamana-san said that he's a manager now, and he misses the days of small teams.

YN: Ahhh... I can understand that.

JS: I'll have to look in my signature book to remind myself. I've done so many interviews.

YN: Oh, that's right! You told me you wanted my signature, so I have to practice. <flipping through signature book> Oh, that's a beautiful signature by Higuchi-san.

JS: Devs say although they may work on mobile games, people still play, and they still create.

YN: Yes, we all want to keep creating. Thank you, I feel more confident now. I wonder what the readers of this book will think?

JS: They'll be excited. There's lots of stories on unreleased games, and previously unknown facts.

YN: I'd love to have a Japanese edition.

JS: But I'd have to find a publisher.

YN: Ah, a publisher... <to Rica Matsumura> Why don't you do it? <laughs>

JS: Oh, thank you very much!

RM: You would really like to do it? I'll ask around.

JS: I would love to see my book in Japanese, what an honour! I'd be happy to discuss it.

YN: I would look forward to that.

JS: Please look forward to the English version.

YN: Yeah, I guess that must come first. There are many English-speaking readers interested in games. The concept for the book is really interesting.

JS: Do you know Hitoshi Yoneda? He did covers for Sega and Falcom. He's doing a limited cover.

YN: Oooh. Wow. So, did I answer all of your questions?

JS: Can you email a list of games you worked on?

YN: I can send you a list, but I haven't made very many games. <laughs> But I'll email you.

So is that the end of the interview? Whew! I was nervous! You are interviewing so many famous game creators, it makes me wonder why you are interviewing someone minor like me.

Code of Princess (3DS)



KONDO, Toshinobu

DOB: 14 September 1969 / Birthplace: Ehime-ken / Blood Type: A

Interview with Toshinobu KONDO

08 November, Tokyo, Agatsuma Office / Duration: 1h 03m

After my brief interview with Rica Matsumura and Yasuo Nakajima at the 2013 Tokyo Game Show, we agreed to have longer, follow up interviews at the Agatsuma office in Tokyo. For that day Ms Matsumura also arranged an additional interview with Toshinobu Kondo, character designer for Umihara Kawase. This was a fantastic opportunity, since not only did he create the iconic and eponymous Umihara,^{[859](#)} but he was also one of the founding members of Fill-in-Café.

The name probably won't be recognised by many; none of the company's in-house games were published abroad, and while they are credited on some well known conversions (like Gain Ground), it was usually versions specific to Japan. For hardcore importers, however, Fill-in-Café was a source of several acclaimed titles: the Mad Stalker and Asuka 120% series, Lennus II for the SFC, and of course Panzer Bandit, the fantastic PS1 brawler which borrowed from Treasure's Guardian Heroes. This Treasure connection is unsurprising, given that Fill-in-Café members Kanta Watanabe and Masatoshi Imaizumi were both involved with the company at various points. Long time Fill-in-Café fan Joseph Garner interviewed them and the interviews should be online by now.^{[860](#)}

Although Toshinobu Kondo didn't work on Fill-in-Café's later titles, he was the perfect person to explain the company's founding, clarify a few anomalous dates, and discuss the creation of both Umihara Kawase and Code of Princess. He also helped define Fujitsu's FM Towns computer!

JS: I'm looking forward to discussing Studio Saizensen, and your early days at Fill-in-Café.

Toshinobu Kondo: I'll do my best; I've worked on many, many titles. <laughs>

JS: Can you recall the first game you saw?

TK: It must have been either Space Invaders, or Table Tennis. I played them at an arcade. Well, not an arcade exactly, because they didn't even have arcades yet back then. Arcade cabinets were set up in small coffee shops and other places.

JS: When did you feel you wanted to make games?

TK: I first felt that I wanted to make videogames when I was in my 2nd or 3rd year of junior high school. I sort of fell into it. This was right around the time of the 8-bit home computer boom, and once I bought a computer, about the only thing it was good for was making games, so that's what I did. The first one I actually owned was a Sharp X1.

JS: Great computer! For games on both the PC-88 and X1, usually the X1 had better graphics.

TK: Yes, that's right! <laughs>

JS: Did you teach yourself programming on the X1?

TK: Yes. Computer magazines and reference books were the only source of information back then, so I taught myself programming from those. The magazines published the source code of games by amateur programmers, so I would type them into the computer and play them.

JS: Did you create any games that were published?

TK: No, I was still a student at the time, so I didn't sell anything.

JS: Did your career begin with Fill-in-Café?

TK: Actually, I first started out in 1989 at System Sacom,^{[861](#)} a computer game developer, after graduating high school. I worked there for about six months to a year. While there, I worked as a graphic artist on the games *Providence* and *Valna*,^{[862](#)} both RPGs for the PC-8801. After that, I drew some of the system icons used in the graphical operating system of the Fujitsu FM Towns computer. However, at the same time, my friend and I developed a 3D shooting game called *Metal Sight* for the Sharp X68000 computer at home in our spare time. **(above)** It was similar to Sega's *Space Harrier*. Once *Metal Sight* was completed, I quit my day job. System Sacom agreed to publish the game for us, and *Metal Sight* was a success. After that, we started the company Fill-in-Café.



<http://gyusyabu.ddo.jp>

JS: The archived Fill-in-Café website says *Metal Sight* was out in 1988?^{[863](#)} This seems wrong...^{[864](#)}

<some back and forth regarding timeline>

JS: The website also says Fill-in-Café started as "Team Cross Wonder" in 1987, but that's too early.

TK: Yes, you're right. We founded Team Cross Wonder in late 1989 while I was still working at System Sacom, and then *Metal Sight* was released at the end of the year. Fill-in-Café was later, as it took a year or two to actually set up an official company, so maybe 1991?

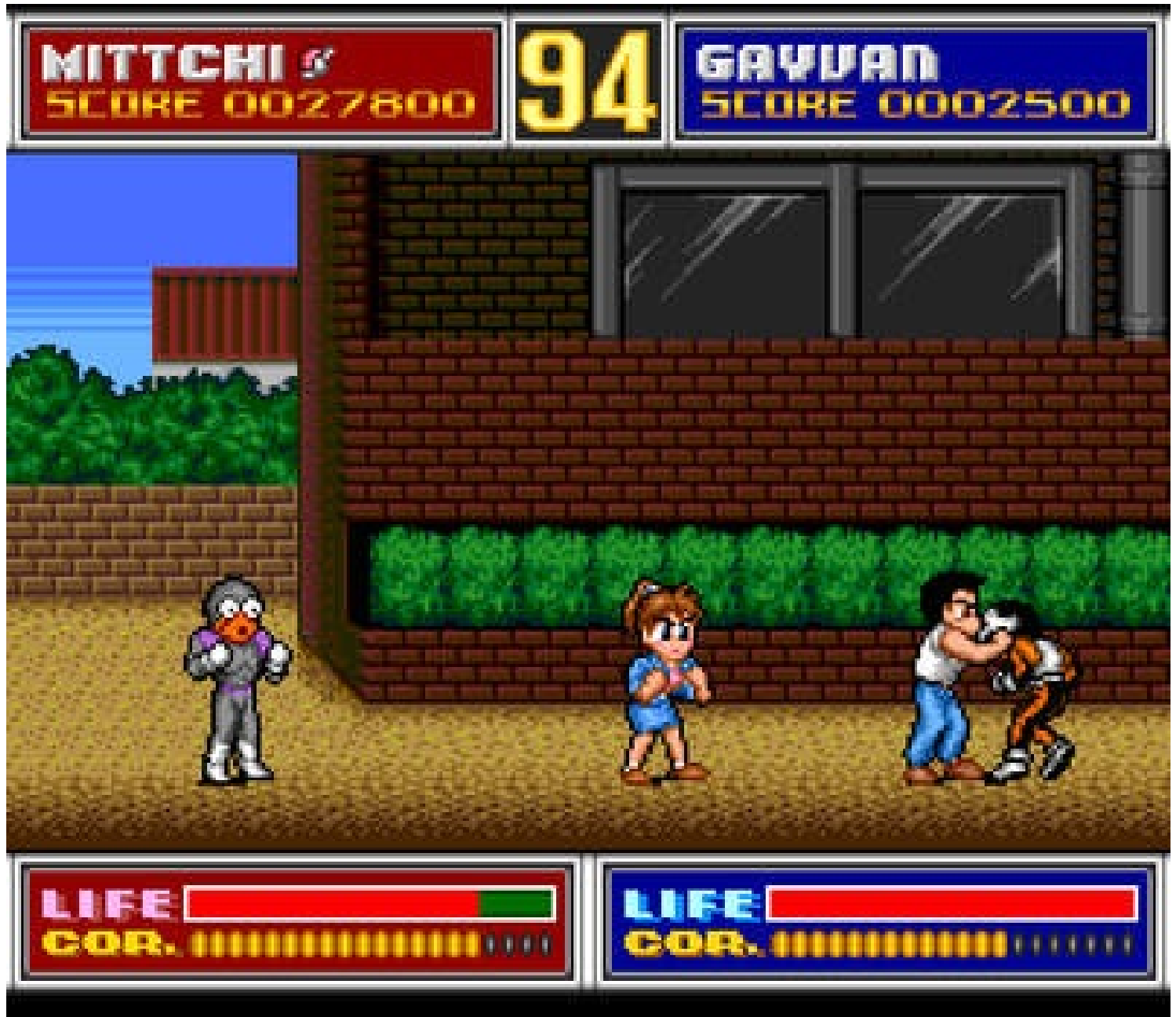
Team Cross Wonder consisted of myself and a programmer named Takumi Amano.^{[865](#)} It wasn't an official company or anything, we were simply an informal team. Amano was the one who later founded Fill-in-Café as a proper company, thanks to the success of *Metal Sight*.

Originally I went to Tokyo to fulfil my dream of becoming a *mangaka*, so I didn't join Fill-in-Café. I became a *mangaka*, while still doing freelance graphic work for System Sacom and Fill-in-Café. I never actually joined Fill-in-Café as an employee; since Amano and I had

worked together previously as Team Cross Wonder, I continued to work with him as a freelancer for Fill-in-Café, while primarily focusing on my manga.

JS: How long did you freelance for Fill-in-Café?

TK: Basically for the entire life of the company. Fill-in-Café went bankrupt in 1998, so I did work for them on various occasions up until then. The most work I did for them was for a Japan-only PC Engine game called *Galaxy Keiji Gayvan*.⁸⁶⁶ I did a lot of graphics and concept work for that title. Another was a PC Engine RPG called *Ruin: Kami no Isan*.⁸⁶⁷ I assisted with things like the graphics, concept, and scenario for that game.



JS: Did you work on *Mad Stalker*⁸⁶⁸ for Fill-in-Café?

TK: I had a small role as an advisor.

JS: In terms of graphics or gameplay?

TK: It was a little of both, but in an informal capacity. Starting back in my Team Cross Wonder days, I played *Street Fighter II* with a group of other gamers. I bought the *Street Fighter II* arcade cabinet and installed it in my home, so every weekend, everyone would get together at my place and play *Street Fighter II*. Some of the people in our little *Street Fighter II* club also joined the game industry and ended up at various different companies, working on games such as *Mad Stalker*, *Asuka 120%*, and *Guardian Heroes*. So we would get together and "talk shop" as we played games, giving each other advice.



Mad Stalker (X68000) - notice along the bottom, Kaneda's bike from the Akira manga/anime

JS: Mad Stalker, which came out in 1994, seems influenced by Genocide and Genocide 2.^{[869](#)}

TK: That's correct. I belong to the "*Gundam* generation", and the people who created Mad Stalker were also about the same age, maybe a little younger, and they naturally liked robots, too. So there was a constant desire to create games featuring robots. Around this time, Genocide came out, and that inspired us. It wasn't a matter of wanting to copy Genocide itself. Instead, it was a desire to create our own robot game, just as the creators of Genocide had done.

JS: Did you work on Panzer Bandit for the PlayStation in 1997?

TK: Just a little. <waves hand to dismiss>

JS: You're best known for the character design of Umihara Kawase. How did it come about?

TK: I was a freelancer, so while helping Fill-in-Café, I was also doing work for people at System Sacom, and some of those people at System Sacom left for other companies such as TNN.^{[870](#)} Because of that connection, TNN approached me with their game Umihara Kawase, and asked me to do the character design. They had already created a small, in-game version of the character as a 32x32 pixel sprite, so they asked me to visually develop the Umihara character and add more detail. So I took that and applied my manga experience to design a character that would appeal to young people at that time.



JS: How much freedom were you given? Were you responsible for little details, like her backpack and bungee cord, or various fish-related enemies?



Umihara Kawase Shun (PS1)

TK: *Umihara Kawase* was a two-step project, with the original *Umihara Kawase* on the Super Famicom, and then *Umihara Kawase Shun* on the PlayStation. The Super Famicom version was all pixel art, limited to 16x16 or 32x32 sprites. Because of this, there was already some pre-existing pixel art created by the programmer, Sakai-san,^{[871](#)} and my contribution was limited.

However, for the sequel, the PlayStation was more powerful and offered more simultaneous colours and a higher resolution, and TNN was not equipped to suddenly make that jump to the next higher level of graphics. So for *Umihara Kawase Shun*, I was involved with the artwork design from the very beginning.



ラバーリング・アクションゲーム

海腹川背

うみはらかわせ

JS: Umihara Kawase was never released outside of Japan until recently, so overseas players would import copies from Japan. What do you think?

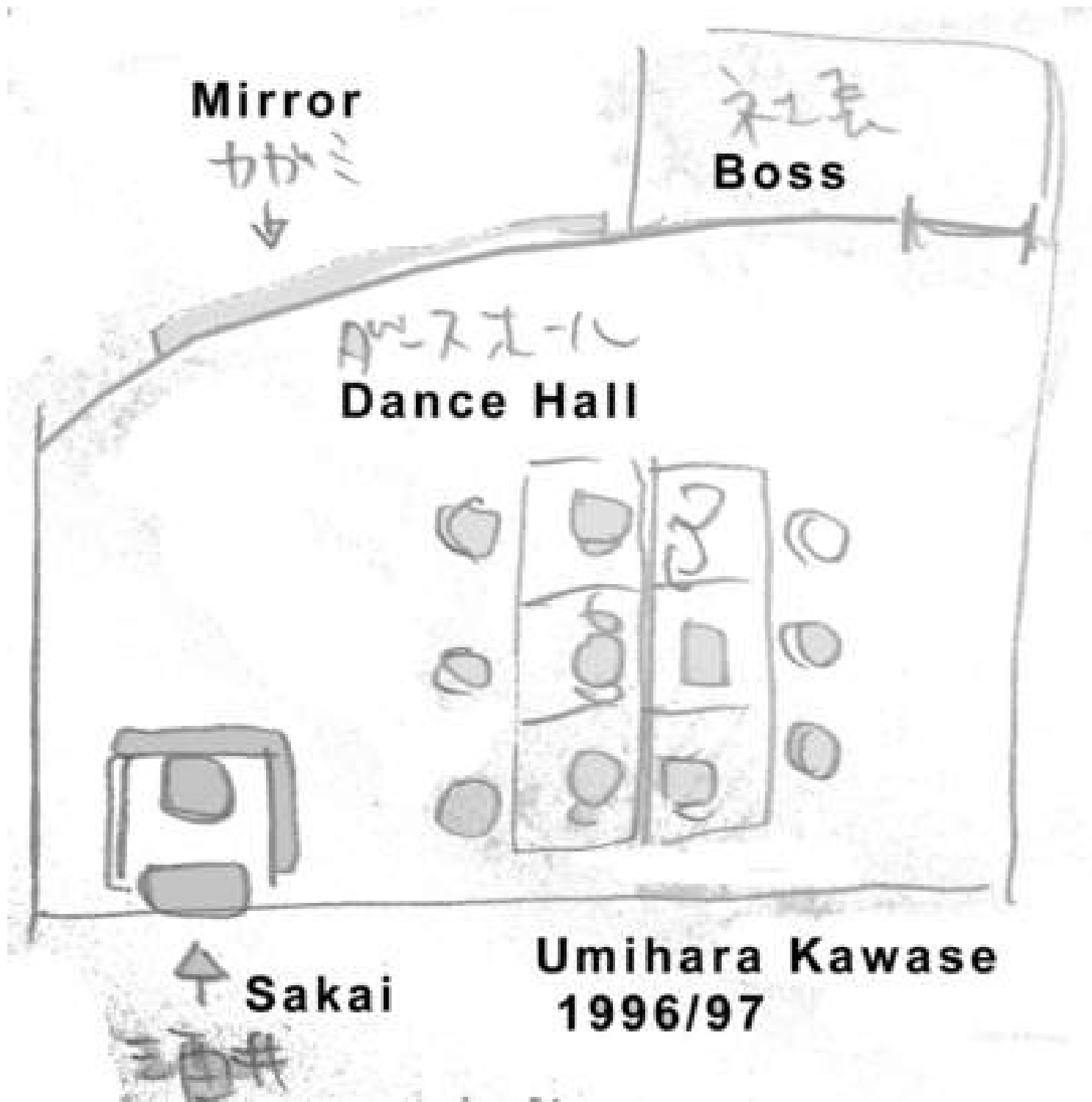
TK: Well, I've always worked on the creative side of the industry, whereas decisions about releasing internationally were handled by the business side, the publishers. It was never up to me.

JS: Umihara Kawase Shun came out 1997, and in September 1997 you established Studio Saizensen?

TK: Yes. Umihara Kawase Shun came first, and its success was part of the reason that Studio Saizensen was established. I released an Umihara Kawase Shun doujinshi⁸⁷² at Comiket, and it sold extremely well. I used the money from that to form a company.

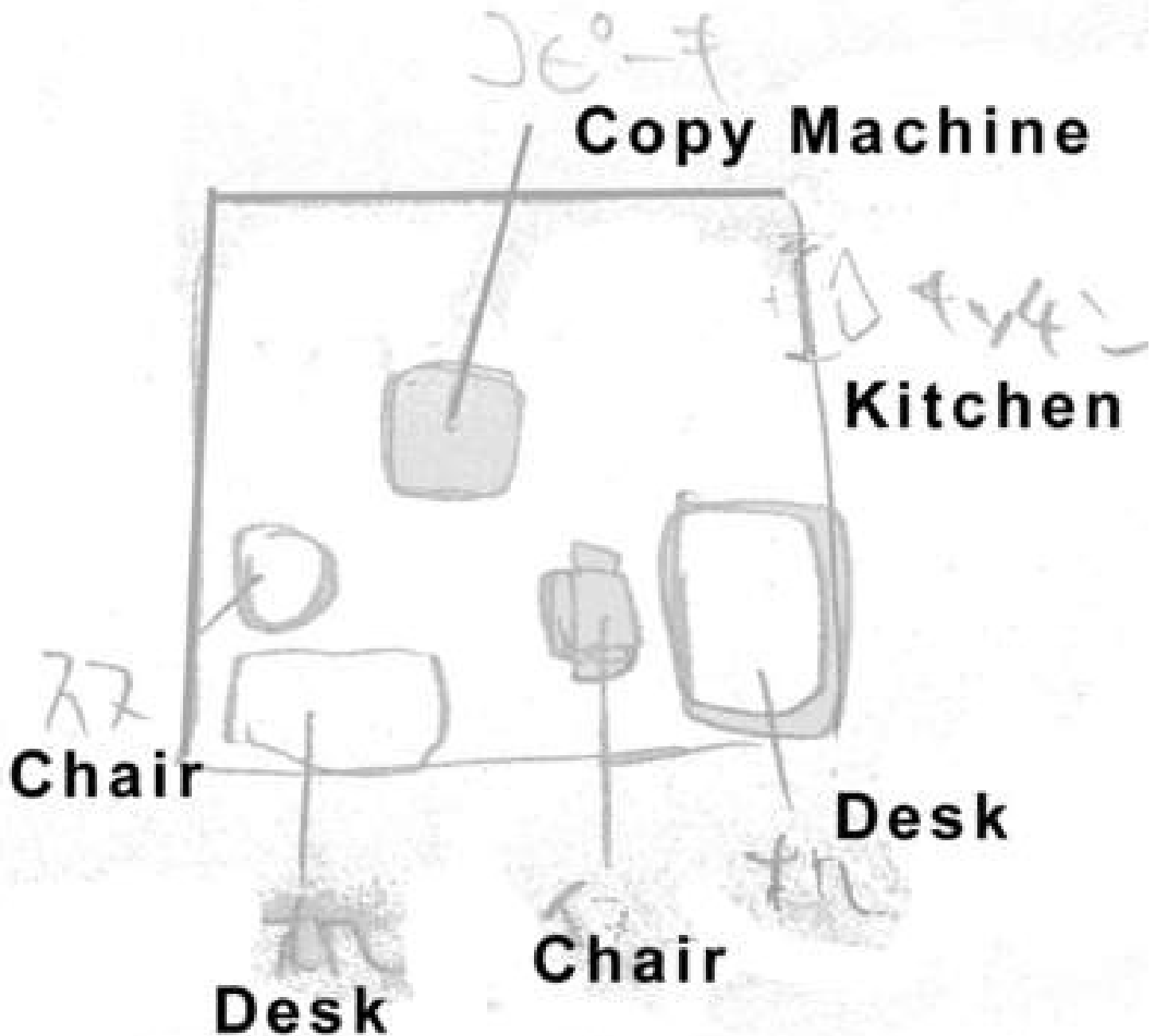
JS: The Umihara character is over 20 years old and continues with the recent 3DS release. How do you feel having created such an enduring character?

TK: My first job for Umihara Kawase was to draw a poster. Up until then, such posters were usually created by a graphic artist at the game company, or conversely, a professional illustrator not involved in the videogame industry, such as a *mangaka*. In my case, I originally started out at a game company, and had always loved games, but was also making a living drawing manga. So back then, I was one of only a handful of artists who straddled both worlds, and really understood game characters. I knew which elements make for a good game character, and I also knew which artistic elements, like *moe*,⁸⁷³ appealed to *otaku* and manga fans. So Umihara Kawase was the first promotional game poster drawn by someone familiar with both of these worlds. The poster was very well-received, and established a character who was simultaneously a game character as well as a visual, *otaku*-oriented character, and I think that's the reason why the Umihara character continues to be popular.



JS: Could you draw the office for Umi-hara Kawase?

House (Kondo)



TK: Hmm... I don't remember the layout at the time of the first game. I could draw the office layout from the time of Umihara Kawase Shun. On the right side of the page is a drawing of

my home where I did freelance work. On the left side is the TNN office around 1996 or 1997. It was originally a dance hall or something, so there was a huge mirror along one wall. Regular staff worked with their desks together here, while the programmer Sakai-san had a little cubicle off to the side.

JS: Do you want to say anything to Western fans?

TK: Umihara Kawase is a character who was born from the world of Japanese games, manga, and anime, so it's an unexpected joy to hear that there are people overseas who love it enough to import materials to their own country and enjoy the character we've created.

JS: Let's discuss Code of Princess. How did it start?



TK: I met many people by being part of Team Cross Wonder, and also by hosting Street Fighter II parties at my home, and many of those people are still active in the game industry.

And then there's Kinu-san, Kinu Nishimura,^{[874](#)} who did the artwork for *Street Fighter II*, and is now the artist for *Code of Princess*. I've been making games for a long time, but I'd never had the opportunity to work with Kinu-san. I deeply admire her work, especially since I used to play *Street Fighter II* featuring her artwork every week with my friends.

Code of Princess was originally a figurine project, and I happened to meet the people developing the figurine concept. I heard that Kinu-san wanted to make the project into a game, so I jumped at the chance to join. We deliberately chose 2D artwork over polygons, so in that sense, it's different from a regular 3DS action game.



Code of Princess (3DS)

JS: And you managed to assemble many of the staff who formerly worked at Treasure!

TK: I knew them from the *Street Fighter II* club when we would meet up every week, so it was easy to reach out to them.

JS: Have you been following the reaction in the West regarding *Code of Princess*?

TK: I've heard that there's been some positive reactions, but I'm never sure if it's just lip service. I always like to hear a honest opinion.

JS: It's fantastic - reminiscent of *Guardian Heroes*. *Code of Princess* received positive feedback from Western media, with the exception of Polygon, who gave it a surprisingly low score.^{[875](#)}

TK: I really can't comment without knowing their specific criticisms, but Kinu-san's character designs were divisive even in Japan.⁸⁷⁶ *Code of Princess* has a peculiar *sekaikan* when it comes to the character design. So maybe Polygon didn't like that aspect of the game?

JS: Do you want to make any final comment, about Studio Saizensen or your future plans?

TK: I've been making games for about 25 years, but only a handful of them have been localised for the rest of the world. So I'm really excited about my current work with Agatsuma Entertainment and the opportunity to help create games that will be played around the world. I hope everyone will be able to enjoy the games I create.





ICHIKAWA, Mikito

AKA: Micky G. Albert

DOB: 6 March 1971 / Birthplace: Tokyo / Blood Type: A

M.N.M Software

For games on Japanese computers it's extremely difficult finding reliable dates, so the data is presented as the GDRI presented it - alphabetical order, grouped by system. These computer titles will have been released between 1987 and 1993, the duration of M.N.M Software. At the top are console titles where dates were easy to verify. As Mr Ichikawa explained to the GDRI and in my interview, he was not directly involved in all the games, and in many instances his company was primarily responsible for providing technical background support, for example sound drivers.

The Return of Ishtar MSX2 (1988, sound driver)
Shinobi Game Gear (1991, sound driver)
Magical Shot X68000 (1991)
Star Mobile X68000 (1991, original development)
Star Mobile PCE-CD (1992, original development)
Shinobi II: The Silent Fury Game Gear (1992, sound driver)
Streets of Rage Game Gear & SMS (1992/93, snd drv)
Batman Returns Game Gear & SMS (1992, snd drv)
A Ressha de Ikou MD Mega Drive (1992, porting)
Streets of Rage 2 Mega Drive (1993, planning)
Streets of Rage 2 Game Gear & SMS (1993, snd drv)
Slap Fight MD Mega Drive (1993)

X1

Algarna (producer only)
Bomb Bee/Cutie Q (**unreleased**)

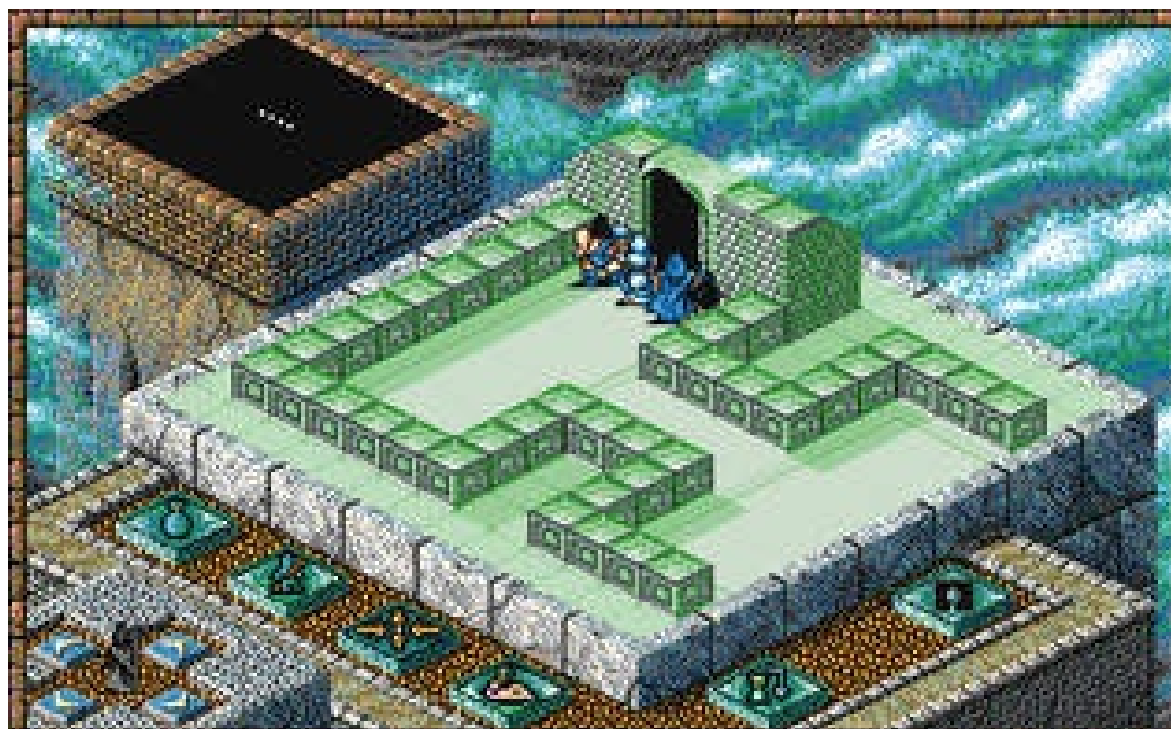
The Curse of Mars

"I did almost all the game design and programming for The Curse of Mars - it was my first produced game."

Darkstorm (sound driver)
Issural (sound driver)
Slimyer

PC-98

Gage
Gage ++ (**unreleased**)
Puzznic
Seraph: Sefil Afrei no Kioku (**unreleased**)



Gold 49

Food 89

Keys 0

Floor 2

Name	H.P.	M.P.	Class	Lv
Pasokoni	23/23	19/19	Leader	3
Effet	32/32	0/0	Fighter	4
Thiers	28/28	0/0	Warrior	4
Deere	19/19	28/28	Mon	4

Name	H.P.	M.P.	Class	Lv



Gold 59

Food 171

Keys 0

Floor 1

Name	H.P.	M.P.	Class	Lv
Pasokoni	14/15	14/14	Leader	2
Effet	22/22	0/0	Fighter	3

Name	H.P.	M.P.	Class	Lv



Gage (PC-98)

X68000

Algarna (producer only)

Alternative-3 (**unreleased**)

Faldia (**unreleased**)

FSS: Tigunasu no Bouken

Lifraim (producer only)

Noah

Pipyan

Pixel-kun⁸⁷⁷

Pixel-kun Ver. 2.0

Program (**unrel.**)

Puzznic

Shufflepuck Cafe

Slimyer

Star Mobile

Star Trader (producer only)

Star Wars: Attack on the Death Star (patent precedent)

Thrice

Traum (**unreleased**)

Vessel

Yume Dokei (**unreleased**)

Mindware

After Mr Ichikawa became severely ill around 1993, M.N.M Software closed down. Later, around 1995, once fully convalesced, he opened Mindware.

MaBoShi: The Three Shape Arcade, WiiWare (2008)

Moyasu Puzzle: Flametail / Trailblaze: Puzzle Incinerator, DSiWare (2010)

Chain Crusher, X360 XBLIG (2011)

Super Chain Crusher Horizon, Windows (2014)

Moero!! Pro Yakyuu Home Run Kyouso SP, And/iOS (2015)

Space Invader IBM, Windows (**unreleased**)



Interview with Mikito ICHIKAWA / Aka: Micky Albert

23 October, 2013, Tokyo / Duration: 3h 20m

The plan for interviewing Mikito Ichikawa, also known as Micky G. Albert, was arranged long in advance. Since Mr Albert could speak English it was no problem discussing the details over Facebook; furthermore, having already been extensively interviewed by the GDRI there was a good foundation to work from.

Although you might not immediately recognise the name, Mr Albert has had a profound influence on the games industry - notably preventing Sega from patent trolling the concept of changeable camera angles in 3D games. As a child prodigy he started early, leaving his mark on the industry as early as 14. His later companies were involved in a long list of Japan exclusive computer titles, popular games on Master System, Game Gear and Mega Drive, MaBoShi for Wii, Super Chain Crusher Horizon on PC (the longest hori-shmup in existence), not to mention pinball tables and NDA-protected development tools used by big developers. Truly, he is one of the unseen hands shaping the industry.

As taken from **GDRI**: "*Mindware () was originally established in 1987 as MNM Software (MNM). When founder/president Mikito Ichikawa (; aka Micky G. Albert) became ill in 1993, the company was temporarily shut down. It reopened with its current name in 1995. In addition to developing videogames, Mindware also leases and develops pinball machines.*"

For further reading I highly recommend the following two GDRI pages:
http://gdri.smspover.org/wiki/index.php/Interview:Mikito_Ichikawa
<http://gdri.smspover.org/wiki/index.php/Mindware>

On the day, we met at a train station and walked to a coffee shop in a quiet part of town; en route we discussed topics for the interview. As we stepped inside we casually chatted about Mr Albert's excellent command of English. In fact we switched between interpreted Japanese and direct English throughout the interview, too much to make a note of it. We'd not even taken our seats and already the conversation turned interesting...

<recording device starts suddenly, mid-sentence>

Mikito Ichikawa: *<inaudible; something about Tokyo>* ...but when I was in Chicago, there weren't any other Japanese people. So I had to figure out everything by myself, and that's how I picked up some English. I was able to speak a little after about two weeks. After a few days, you stop converting everything from Japanese, and start thinking in English, start to feel the flow of conversation. After about two weeks, for example, you start to pick up on all the conversations going on around you. At first it just sounds like noise, so you ignore it, but then you start to understand it, and then your brain starts to hurt from trying to listen to everything.
<laughs>

JS: Why were you in Chicago?

MI: For pinball.

JS: I wanted to discuss your pinball work! But first, what was the first game you ever saw?

MI: The first game I ever saw was Space Invaders. This was during the "Invader boom" in Japan, and I didn't really understand what everyone was talking about. This was when I was in the first grade of elementary school. My mother was what you might call a *kyoiku mama*, obsessed with educating her kids, so going to an arcade was out of the question. But when I asked her what an "Invader game" was, she took me out to show me, to answer my questions. That's the kind of person she was. So we went to see, and even though everyone loved Space Invaders, I really liked Asteroids. So even from the beginning, I was attracted to the unusual, more eccentric games.

JS: When did you feel you wanted to create games?

MI: It was in the 4th grade of elementary school, so around 1981. Back then, there were the 8-bit computers, but I didn't start using computers because I wanted to make games. I was more interested in aerodynamics, like the air resistance on Formula 1 race cars and aeroplanes. At first I wanted to do these aerodynamics calculations, but then I saw Namco's Dig Dug, and thought that it was an incredible idea. So my interests gradually shifted over to videogames. The Famicom, or Nintendo Entertainment System, had not come out yet, so if you created a game yourself, all the other elementary school kids would play it. On the other hand, the other kids did not understand anything about aerodynamics calculations, since we were still in elementary school. So my schoolmates showed more interest in games, and making games gradually became more fun and interesting to me.

JS: What was your first computer?

MI: <laughs> It was a Sharp MZ-80. Or rather, a *dead copy* PCB of an MZ-80. Back in those days, they used to sell unauthorised, cloned circuit boards without any parts attached. We called them "dead copies" in Japanese. You would buy the clone board and various parts, mount the chips yourself, and build your own computer that way. I didn't have enough money [to buy an official Sharp MZ-80], so that's how I got started.^{[878](#)}

JS: Wow, so like a self-built computer?

MI: Yes. My next machine was an MZ-700, which I bought using money won through a programming contest. Mostly they were puzzlers, but some had an action component.

JS: Did you read *Oh!MZ* magazine?^{[879](#)}

MI: Yes. *Oh!MZ* magazine changed its name to *Oh!X*.

JS: When the X68000 came out.

MI: *Oh!X* ceased publication for a while, but then restarted. Did you know that? When they

restarted, they only published five more issues at unscheduled intervals. I wrote some pinball articles for them.

JS: Your love of pinball went hand-in-hand with games. So were your games printed as type-in listings?

MI: No, I submitted a game to a contest run by a local computer shop, and when I won, they sold my game on cassette tapes at the shop.

JS: Did you keep a copy of every game?

MI: No.

JS: They must be rare. Can you remember their names?

MI: No, I've completely forgotten! Back then, I was making one or two games a week, up until 8th grade of middle school. I think I probably made around 150 games at that time, so I can't remember them at all!

JS: Wow! You could make a compilation disk: Micky Albert, The Early Years. Were these in BASIC or assembly?

MI: Well, I built my first MZ computer from a kit, right? Actually, I modified it. I raised the clock speed from 2 MHz to 6 MHz. But if you do that, BASIC stops working. This was near the end of 5th grade in elementary school. I nearly cried. The computer itself was running, but BASIC wouldn't work. From then on, I started programming in machine language. So when I was in 5th grade of elementary school, I was programming directly in machine language. Assemblers were expensive back then, especially for an elementary school kid, and I wasn't able to buy one. Normally, without an assembler, you'd have to hand-assemble your programs, but this was tedious, so after awhile I started using machine code directly.

JS: But if you increased the speed, wouldn't your games be built for 6 MHz, and not run on other people's machines?

MI: I changed the CPU from Z80 to Z80B. There were a great many side effects. <laughs>



JS: So a program given to a friend wouldn't work properly?

MI: That's right, and because of this I had to go back and make a 2 MHz version. Basically, when launching the program, I'd make the computer do various meaningless calculations, and measure how long it takes for the calculations to complete. Through that, the program could determine whether it was running on my 6 MHz machine, or everyone else's 2 MHz machine. Hence, I could design the program to support both machines automatically. This was when I was still in 5th grade, and so there weren't any books explaining how to do things, or how to do hardware modifications. I had to figure it out all by myself, and I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge because of that.

JS: I used the same technique when programming in high school! *<laughs>* What did you study at university?

MI: *<laughs>* Actually, I didn't go to university. I only graduated high school, and with the lowest grades ever recorded in the history of my high school. Starting from around the autumn in 8th grade, when I was still in middle school, I started working part-time at Nihon Falcom.

JS: I wouldn't worry about it; I never went either! My friend, who was an editor, he got me started as a writer.

MI: At first, I decided not to go to high school. I wanted to get a job as a programmer. But I

got some useful knowledge in junior high, and everyone around told me to go to high school, so ultimately I went to high school. Meanwhile, I also got a job at Dempa Shimbunsha,⁸⁸⁰ in my first year of high school. It wasn't a part-time job, they arranged the contract so that I could work and also go to school. It was very unusual for a Japanese company.

JS: You mentioned Dempa in the GDRI interview.⁸⁸¹ I had no idea you worked at Falcom too. Tell me more.

MI: I worked on Xanadu a little, and also a game that was never released, but... <laughs> it makes me feel nostalgic. It was going to be a PC-6001mkII version of Dragon Slayer, but it was never released. Xanadu was released for the NEC PC-8801, Sharp X1, Fujitsu FM-7, and NEC PC-9801.

JS: Did you work with Yoshio Kiya?

MI: Yes. He was the first professional programmer I ever met - I was really impressed. I was extremely lucky, in that the first professional programmer I met was Yoshio Kiya, and next professional I met was Mr Fujioka.⁸⁸² After meeting them, it was hard to be impressed when meeting someone new, even someone who was supposedly amazing. Compared to Kiya-san and Fujioka-san, they usually weren't that impressive. <shows phone photo> This was taken a few weeks ago at CEATEC,⁸⁸³ with Mr Fujioka. He translated Xevious for the Sharp X1.

The first American programmer I met and had technical discussions with was Larry DeMar. Do you know him? He is the programmer of Defender and Robotron: 2084. Eugene Jarvis was the game designer and also the graphic designer, while Larry was the programmer, on the technology side. Larry was also a good pinball programmer. He did The Addams Family, High Speed, Banzai Run, The Twilight Zone, Black Knight, FunHouse...

JS: It's unfair designers get all the credit; programmers like DeMar, especially in the old days, defined the technology.

MI: Yes, it's very important. Larry DeMar was crucial. Eugene Jarvis certainly designed the game Defender, but after he stopped working with Larry DeMar, his games were less successful. Then there's the pinball designer Steve Ritchie.⁸⁸⁴ He created High Speed, which is one of the most important pinball games in history. Steve Ritchie was also successful when he was working with Larry DeMar, but after he stopped working with Larry, he wasn't as successful anymore. The pinball designer Pat Lawlor⁸⁸⁵ had the same experience. When he worked with Larry DeMar, he was successful, but after he and Larry DeMar parted ways, his work was terrible. So Larry DeMar was a programmer, but he was also a partner, or an equal, with the game designers he worked with, and contributed many game ideas. Many Americans are all about "me, me, me", and want to put themselves in front, but Larry DeMar was unusual in that he was content to remain in the background, and I think that helped him harmonise with the people he worked with. I don't think it was a coincidence that all these people struggled to find success after they stopped working with Larry.

JS: Didn't Steve Ritchie make the Terminator 2 and Star Trek: TNG pinball games?⁸⁸⁶

MI: Firepower, Black Knight, and High Speed in particular are very famous tables of his.

JS: So Larry DeMar allowed them to succeed by working alongside them.

MI: Exactly. That's why I think he deserves more credit.

JS: Let's recap: you had a contract with Dempa during your first year of high school, but worked at Falcom before that. So you were at Falcom in junior high school?

MI: Yes.

JS: Whoa... How old were you?

MI: I worked there starting in the autumn when I was in 8th grade, so around 14 years old I think?

JS: How old were you with Dempa?

MI: Around 16.

JS: You were just a kid! You did level design at Falcom?

MI: Yes, for Xanadu.

JS: So there's a bit of you in Xanadu.

MI: Just a little bit! <laughs>

JS: So how did you get the job?

MI: I just went there directly. When I was 14 years old, I lived near Falcom, about 20-30 minutes by bicycle. I was living in Tokyo, in Fuchu, while the Falcom building was in Tachikawa, to the west. But my high school was in Sakurajosui, to the east. So Falcom and my high school were in opposite directions from my home. Once I started high school, it was unfeasible to go all the way to Falcom after school, and that's why I got a job at Dempa instead.

JS: <shows previous Falcom office sketch> Is this layout correct? There was a shop, and then a meeting place, and then the president's office here?

MI: Hmm... do you know the time period when this is from?

JS: This was around 1988, I think.

MI: Ah, well then it might be correct, but I was there years before that.

JS: Could you draw a sketch?

MI: I'll try, but I don't know if I can remember the details.

<sketches office>

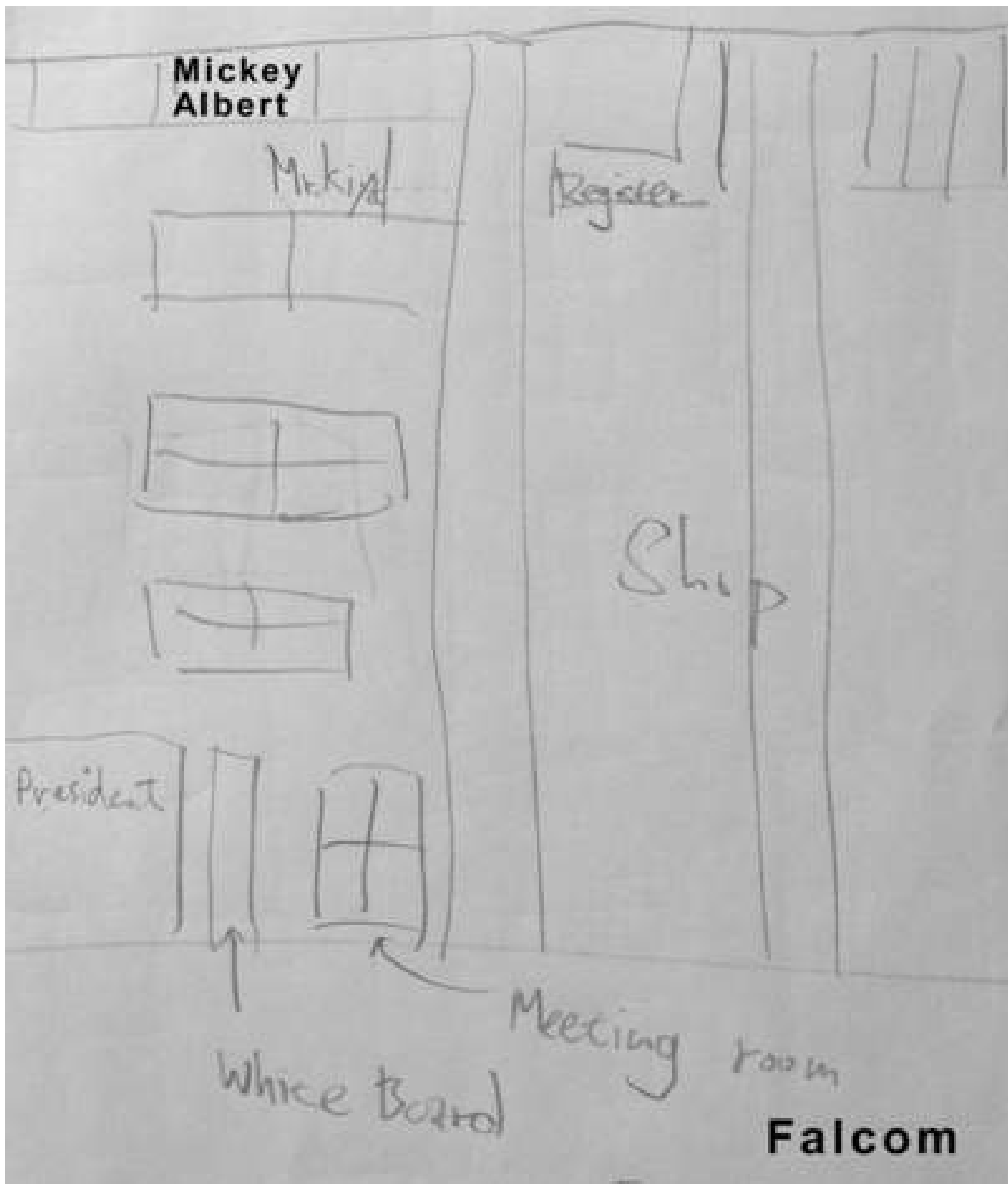
MI: The president's office was here... And the register here... I believe it was like this. This is the store counter, this is the shop area, and there were stairs here.

JS: Where did you sit?

MI: Usually I was in this area. *<points upper left>*

JS: Did you enjoy playing Falcom games?

MI: *<laughs>* Honestly, I didn't enjoy Falcom games very much. I would be excited whenever a new genre appeared, but when a game came out that was basically the same as before but with different art, I grew bored very quickly.



JS: What kind of new genres did you like?

MI: For example, when I was at Falcom, there were almost no role-playing games, RPGs, in Japan yet. This was just as role-playing games were emerging. So at first it was very exciting,

but a short time later, once the genre was established and given a label, many games of the same type appeared, and it just wasn't as interesting anymore.

JS: Your company MNM⁸⁸⁷ was founded in 1987. How old were you - how long after Dempa was this?

MI: It was actually while I was still working at Dempa. I founded MNM Software in 1987, which was during my second year of high school (11th grade), but I stayed at Dempa until the end of my third and last year of high school (12th grade).

JS: So you were about 17?

MI: Well, I was born in March, and with the way the school year in Japan is organised, that means I had just turned 16.

JS: You didn't work at Dempa long before founding MNM.

MI: Yes, but the games I did which were published by Dempa are actually credited to MNM Software. It was a very rare arrangement. Over the course of game development, my contract with Dempa was changed from working as an individual to working as an organisation.

JS: Your own company at 16 - impressive!

MI: That's why I didn't have time to go to university. Because of the job I had, going to school was no longer satisfying, and my grades were terrible. <laughs> When it comes to English, the lessons in middle school were good, but the high school English lessons were useless. Later, my friend teased me about how I never attended English class.

JS: I get the feeling you're a fan of Namco. You mentioned Dig Dug, and your company was planning multiple conversions of Namco's Cutie Q.⁸⁸⁸

MI: Yes. I thought that Cutie Q was excellent, and Namco's most interesting game. When I analysed the Cutie Q program, I was amazed. This program, from 1979, is like an entire operating system all by itself. It's extremely efficient, genius-level code. So I wanted to create a home conversion of it [for the Sharp X1]. But by this time it was 1987, the Sega Mega Drive was about to appear, and graphics were becoming more advanced. I wanted to do it, so I created a planning document, but Mr Fujioka just took one look at it and said something like, "You come up with the funniest ideas." He didn't realise that I was seriously proposing this project, and thought I was joking.

Around this time, I was reverse-engineering the programs of arcade games. The reason for this was because I was working while also attending school. Meanwhile, other people were programming from morning to night. So obviously they were more skilled than I was at first. I needed to work hard to catch up to them, but since I also had school, they were able to work more than I could. I realised I wouldn't be able to catch up to them at my current pace. That's why I started reverse-engineering arcade games, in order to acquire knowledge of a

higher level of programming compared to the computer games of the time. I thought that by doing that, I could learn enough to beat other programmers in a short amount of time. That's how I ended up analysing games like Bomb Bee and Cutie Q.⁸⁸⁹

JS: How far along did you get in converting it?

MI: Bomb Bee, or Cutie Q, was almost complete.

JS: What happened to the data?

MI: I just played it myself, and now it's gone. Later, I planned to make Cutie Q, not Bomb Bee, for the PC-9801. I even negotiated with Namco, and the deal was nearly complete. But one day Namco called and said Cutie Q would be in the Namco Museum series for PlayStation, so they couldn't license it to me. The project was cancelled again! Ultimately, I just played this version by myself and with a few friends. <laughs> This was around 1996 or 1997, so 10 years after I first tried to port the game. Once again, the project didn't work out. <laughs>

JS: Every time, something stopped you.

MI: I would like to show Bomb Bee and Cutie Q to people who have never played it. First there was Breakout, and it was copied many times. It was called *block kuzushi*, or the block-breaking genre. There were many, many clones. But Namco was the only company to mix in their own original ideas and create something different. Namco was at its peak in the early 1980s, but I'd like to show people the overwhelming originality and elegance of their early game design. You can look at Namco's early work and realise that their later success was guaranteed.

For example, when Space Invaders was popular, Namco was the only company who didn't create a Space Invaders clone. All of the other game companies, including Nintendo, copied Space Invaders. But Namco brought us Galaxian, which was quite different.



JS: Seraph: Sefil Afrei no Kioku was not widely released.⁸⁹⁰ Your company MNM made it,

right?

MI: It wasn't unreleased. It did come out, for the PC-9801. Someone came to my company and asked us to let him make it. So we paid him money to do it, but he hardly made any progress, and I became quite angry with him. But later, this person approached Brother to publish the game.⁸⁹¹ At this time I had fallen to my illness, and they apparently pitched the game to Brother as M.N.M Software's final release. But if the game had been released properly by M.N.M Software, my name would have been listed at the end as the producer, like always. But that didn't happen in this case. I didn't have a chance to supervise it, and I've hardly played any of it. When my company releases a game, I've usually played it more than anyone else. But that didn't happen for this game.

JS: So it wasn't actually an M.N.M game, meaning you wouldn't have a copy...

MI: We were on good terms with Brother. But the person and his company who created this game ran away from us in a sense. They paid us back half of the money we had given them for development. Later, they contacted Brother for publishing. By that time, I was already hospitalised, so they probably thought I was going to die. But unfortunately for them, I didn't.
<laughs>

When this person first came to my company about making Seraph, I honestly had doubts about whether he could do it. But I wanted to give him a chance...

Broderbund, the famous company, was the first that gave me a contract after Dempa Shimbun. But I was still under 20 years of age at the time, and according to Japanese law, a contract with someone under the age of 20 can be rendered invalid. So from their perspective, I could have taken the money and run. At this time, the president of Broderbund Japan told me that he trusted me, but I would need to meet with the president of the Broderbund parent company in America. So I met with the Broderbund president. Unlike Japan, there was a lot more money going around in America, and he had seen young people in their teens and early 20s doing stupid, irrational things after receiving a fairly large amount of money for funding. He told me I must not become one of those people; he allowed the contract and gave me a chance.

This was unusual for Japan, and I think it still is unusual compared to Europe and the United States, but this person came to me about Seraph, and I wanted to give him a chance too. I told him to do his best, even if that meant missing a deadline or two. But for whatever reason, he didn't live up to his end of the deal. If he had done his best and still failed, I could have accepted it. Problems just happen sometimes. I have had my own share of problems in my career. But not doing your best, that's a different matter. Maybe I was just too optimistic.

JS: Let's discuss your philosophies on originality. You've said that today everyone just copies everyone else.

MI: Yes, but there's one point where people tend to misunderstand me. I don't think it's always a bad thing. If the game design evolves, that's a good thing. The other thing is that when a new genre is created and sells well, that means there are many fans of that genre. So creating something to meet the demand of the fans of a particular genre is not a bad thing. Conversely,

you wouldn't want to create a ton of eccentric games that nobody enjoys. I just think that there are too many lazy clones. That's the problem. Just because nobody sues you over it doesn't mean it's okay. There's a lack of sensitivity, or respect, in that sense. Another thing is that being a game creator requires you to be a fan of games on some level. But if that's all you are, just a fan, you will end up rehashing the games you like, and adding to the pile of clones. When someone is a big fan of a particular game, they will naturally try to recreate that type of game, you see? But that's the problem. There's too much of that going on.

JS: Eloquently put!

MI: Did you go to Dempa's offices in Osaka?

JS: In Osaka? No.

MI: Mr Fujioka is still working at Dempa.

JS: I only visited one company in Osaka - someone formerly of Zainsoft.

MI: If you have time in your schedule to visit Dempa Shimbun, I think it would be worthwhile. Mr Fujioka was the first person to port games like Xevious and Namco's Mappy from the arcades. As the first person to do a home conversion of Xevious, he's really historically significant. I can easily contact him by telephone if you want.

JS: Thank you! Unfortunately between now and when I leave, I've only got three spare days.

MI: Until when will you be in Japan?

JS: Until 15 November.

MI: Oh, so you'll be here until November 15th? Mr Fujioka lives in Osaka, but he comes to Tokyo about once a month. If you like, I can ask him about his schedule for you. Even if you just want to ask him some questions over the phone, that's possible to do. You should really do it, for the historical value. To put it bluntly, it's more important, even if you have to cut something like Zainsoft. For Xevious in particular, he was the first person that successfully convinced Namco to license their games out to another company. It's historically important. Mr Fujioka also knows about the dawn of computer games, like what happened to the people who earned lots of money from computer games while they were still teenagers, but then failed later on, or left the game industry. I think it's important to record those stories for the sake of history. Stories about other weird people like me. <laughs> My career was apparently very unusual.

JS: What's his first name? <notes it down>

MI: Tadashi. Tadashi Fujioka. Also known as Naniwa-san.

JS: You're also known as Micky Albert.

MI: Ah yes, that was the name I used in America. I don't have any other nicknames.

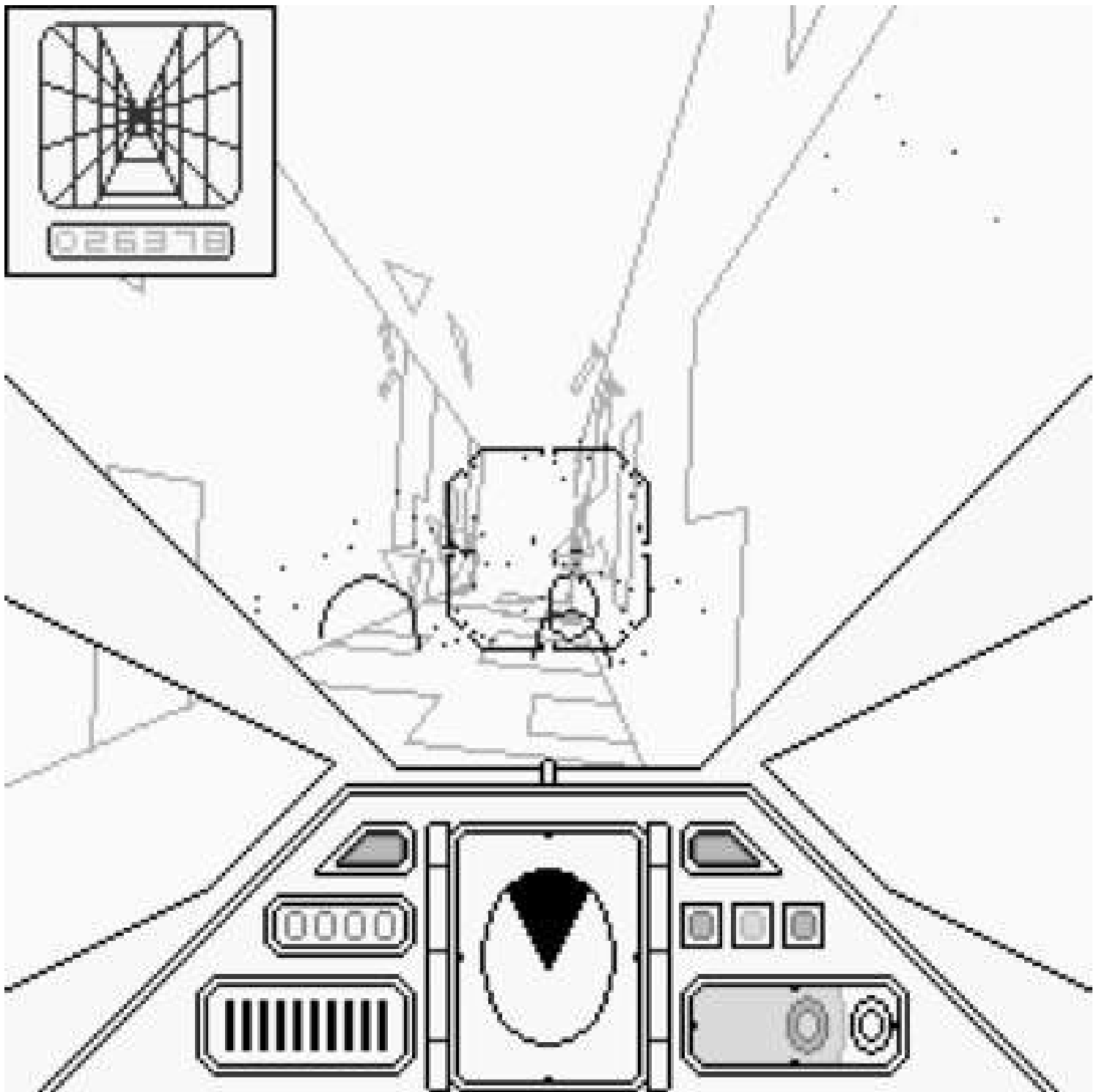
JS: I'm interested in nicknames because it makes tracking developers down more difficult.

MI: As far as Naniwa-san, this was because Dempa Shimbun was originally based in Tokyo. But he was originally from Osaka, and he could never shake his Osaka accent. So that's why we called him Naniwa-sama, because he was the guy from Osaka.⁸⁹² He didn't create the nickname, the name stuck to him later on. So it's not quite the same thing as a pen name. He doesn't actually address himself as Naniwa-san. So it's a nickname created by the people around him, not a pen name that he created himself.

JS: How do you feel about patents? Sega and Konami take out plenty, so you can't use basic ideas anymore.

MI: Well, Konami is fond of the court system. And even while they claim that other companies are using their patented technology, they do things like making a copy of Nintendo's *Animal Crossing*! <laughs> They made a terrible clone of *Animal Crossing*!⁸⁹³ So that's an area where the morals are skewed. We're becoming a society where the most cunning people are rewarded more than the most hard-working people. The West is becoming the same way, especially in the USA. I don't think that's going to lead ultimately to a world in which everyone is happy.

A great many game companies originally had ties to the underworld at some point. Namco was a respectable company, though. I myself was dragged into a patent dispute about "viewpoint change". My company released a game called *Star Wars: Attack on the Death Star*,⁸⁹⁴ and this was the first game in Japan to include a viewpoint change feature. Sega acquired a patent on viewpoint change, but it was invalidated in a dispute filed by Nintendo and Sony. Sega was originally granted the patent, and they used it to issue injunctions against the sale of certain Nintendo games. But Nintendo counter-argued that Sega's patent was invalid. My company's game was the first instance of the technology, so I cooperated with Nintendo, and testified that the Sega patent was bogus.⁸⁹⁵



Star Wars: Attack on the Death Star for X68000. Due to monochrome printing we inverted the image for clarity. Thanks to this little gem, Sega was prevented from monopolising manual viewpoint change. A scary thought...

JS: Good man! Unethical people must be put in their place.

MI: I want you to put this in the book. I never received any compensation from Nintendo, nor any apologies from Sega. Had I not cooperated, Sega could have successfully prevented Nintendo from releasing some of their games, and written their own version of videogame history. When this is how originality is treated, how are original games supposed to get made? The Japanese industry is not producing original games anymore, and the rest of the world is laughing at us. It's because of situations like this happening in the background.

JS: What year was this patent lawsuit?

MI: The patent dispute was in 1997 or 1998. I still have a number of court documents at home.

JS: Your Star Wars set a precedent for viewpoint change.

MI: Actually I had another game that featured viewpoint change. It was a billiards game called Magical Shot. But I didn't apply for a patent. I started making Star Wars near the end of my last year of high school, while I started Magical Shot shortly after graduating high school. I didn't think it a patentable idea. For example, sports broadcasts usually show different viewpoints, right? Like during replays. If I were the person who originally introduced viewpoint change in sports replays and TV broadcasts, I might have filed for a patent, but I wasn't the first person to come up with the idea. If everybody starts patenting everything, the world will be much more difficult to live in.

JS: Let's discuss pinball and your involvement with it.

MI: The general assumption is that people who witnessed the dawn of videogames in the early 1980s also played pinball, and became interested in pinball that way, but that's not true in my case. I became seriously ill for a time, and had to leave the game industry, until my return in 1994. At this time, games started being released on CDs for the PlayStation and Saturn, and it became much more difficult for a small company to make games with only a few people. But we didn't want to give up. So we decided to make videogames with a *tate*, or vertical, display orientation. We'd be limiting our fans that way, but we knew some people would be excited by it. We only needed a small number of customers, so we decided to make games that would foster a small but passionate following. We had discussions about what kinds of games would be suited to a *tate* orientation, and realised that pinball was a good candidate. That's how we started with pinball.

However, if we were going to make pinball games, we needed to make *great* pinball games. But to do that, we needed to gain a deep understanding of how real pinball machines work. For example, just after I recovered from my illness, I only weighed 42kg (93 lbs). At one point, I only weighed 36kg (79 lbs). Originally, I decided not to work, and just focus on rehabilitation. So I had the opportunity to hang out in the arcades from morning till night. *<laughs>* I just played pinball for hours, and I realised how interesting it was. You know how pinball works, of course? The ball falls downward because of gravity, and you use both hands to control the ball, keep it from falling as long as you can, and create your own path through the game. But, like life itself, the game ends at some point. And you can shake the pinball table, tilt it if you want. But if you do that too much, you are punished. It's just like real life, you see? You use whatever means you can, but there are consequences.

Meanwhile, around this time in 1994-1995, graphics advanced greatly, and many games started going in a more violent direction, with content that's unsuitable for children. In contrast, pinball doesn't contain the same kind of violent imagery; if the ball drops in pinball, it's always the fault of the player. I think that games originally are, or should be, meant to enrich the mind of the player, and make the player a better person. And I think pinball does that. As a result, pinball became more than just a job to me, and I became very passionate

about it.

Another thing is the name of my company, Mindware, which refers to my desire to make games you can devote your entire mind and spirit to. I felt that pinball expresses these ideals, and has a high affinity with my philosophy. So pinball became one of my greatest passions.

JS: I read you were diagnosed with collagen disease.

MI: I became very ill twice in my life. The one time was collagen disease. The doctor said I had around a year and a half left. This was just over 20 years ago. I wrote about my illness for the GDRI - it's worth reading their interview, I also wrote about my work with Yuzo Koshiro.

The cause was stress, basically. Collagen disease is classified as a serious illness, and the cause is not always apparent. It's similar to cancer in that respect. But stress is often a component. I started working from a very young age, and that took a heavy toll on my body. I would regularly go for three or four days without sleeping.⁸⁹⁶ With the way I was living, I could have contracted any number of illnesses. Nothing would have surprised me. <laughs>

JS: Take it easy. When we talked on Facebook it was 3am in Japan - you said you hadn't slept in two days!

MI: <laughs> You're right, you're right. There's always something to do, though. In this line of work, you can basically wrap up game development whenever you want, but if you want to keep improving something, you can work on it forever. I hate coming face-to-face with my own limitations. When I was in elementary school, I was making two games a week! I haven't even created half of the things I want to make. That's why I push myself as far as my stamina allows. Having experienced a situation where I thought I was really going to die, many times when I'm creating something, I think that this could be my last work. If I go home now, I could be hit by a car or something. You know the Oculus Rift, the head-mounted display? One of the co-founders died suddenly in a traffic accident.⁸⁹⁷ That was a big shock. But that happens in real life. So I try to do as much as I possibly can.

Most people don't go through the experience of being told that they could die soon at the age of 22. Because of that experience... How should I put it? You accept the reality that your own life will end one day. And when that day comes, I want my life to end with "Thank you". When you strip away all the words we say to each other, at the end of our lives, the only words that matter are "Thank you", and "I'm sorry". I realised I wanted my life to end with "Thank you". So I try to make the best games I can, so that people will say that. And that's why I don't get enough sleep. <laughs>

JS: A beautiful answer. Speaking of life, I discovered Mr Morita of Morita Shogi passed away two years ago, but people only discovered it recently.⁸⁹⁸ Had you ever met him?

MI: Only two or three times. I got a big shock from the news. When I was a junior high school student, I analysed his game Alphas. It is some of the most technical code I've seen in Z80 assembly. He was a genius. He also programmed AI for chess and *igo* - he was very famous for his AI programming.

JS: I'll have a memorial page for Mr Morita.

MI: After I recovered from my illness, when I was becoming involved with pinball, I was researching design principles. Unlike videogames, you can't just portray whatever you want in pinball. Because there's a real, physical counterpart. And this relates to my game MaBoShi's Arcade, which we'll discuss later, but after my illness I was researching how to create games that are purely interesting in terms of design, without relying on fancy visuals. I was trying to answer the question of what makes games interesting in the first place.

Around this time, Morita-san was featured in a book or something, in a section where various people nominated the top 3 games of the year. Most people simply listed the best selling or most popular games, but Morita-san's listing was:

- 1) *Minesweeper*
- 2) None
- 3) None

It was really surprising. This was around the time that Windows 95 came out, and I think Minesweeper was included as part of it. But Morita-san had nominated it before it was widely known. I didn't know of Minesweeper at the time, and I thought "Hmm, what kind of game is this?" And when I tried it, I realised the creator of Minesweeper was a genius.

Most people contributing to a magazine feature like that would have tailored their answers to fit in with everyone else. Japanese people tend to do that. I'm not like that at all, and that's why I've had such a struggle in my career, but seeing what Morita-san wrote gave me the confidence to stick to my convictions.

A long time ago, Morita-san created a game called Alphos. [It was a revised edition of Xevious], so I reverse engineered it. The vice-president and I were amazed by the technical level of the programming.⁸⁹⁹ I doubt anyone today could create something like it from scratch. It's very high-level stuff. In that sense, he was an incredible person. Unfortunately people only seem to talk about his work with shogi, or Japanese chess, but on a purely technical level, he was a highly gifted software engineer, with the ability to perceive the essence or structure of things.⁹⁰⁰

JS: Earlier you mentioned *tate* pinball games. Would players put their TV on its side, like some shooting games?

MI: Yes, exactly. It may seem a little crazy, but... Back then, computer game piracy, or in other words copying among users, was a major problem. But people who were passionate about certain games would pay money. And the people that go as far as turning their display sideways... Those are the passionate ones. It didn't make sense to market our games to people who weren't willing to pay money for them. They might play pirate copies of our games and like our work, but that's basically equivalent to shoplifting. So we thought long and hard about this issue, and that's the solution we came up with.⁹⁰¹

At the same time, however, sometimes we would get complaints from players saying that when they turned their display sideways, smoke started coming out and the display was ruined. <laughs> Oops!

These ideas we had back then can still be seen in games such as Super Chain Crusher

Horizon, with its ultra-wide screen.⁹⁰² Obviously not everyone will be interested. But there's no such thing as a game which appeals to everyone. In that case, all we need to do is make games that sell just enough to keep us happy and in business. The problem is that since there are so many games these days, how can you stand out? Thinking along those lines leads to games like Super Chain Crusher Horizon. The difficult part is coming up with the next idea.



JS: Describe Super Chain Crusher Horizon. (top & bottom)

MI: On 25 September 2012 Mindware released it - the largest screen resolution in the history of games. It's a 3'200 x 800 "super widescreen" shooter! The two-player mode is also revolutionary, and it's loaded with game modes. I put it through Steam Greenlight.

JS: I read about devs having difficulty getting approval.⁹⁰³

MI: Yes. <winces>

JS: It reminds me of the original Darius with three screens.⁹⁰⁴

MI: Yes... But in Darius, there is no meaning to the three screens other than it having a strong visual impact. Apart from when you're fighting a boss, you might as well just stick to the rightmost screen.

You will easily understand Super Chain Crusher Horizon's game mechanics when you play it. The 3'200 x 800 resolution is not simply a gimmick. Please try it on Steam. It's a mono shot game: the player can shoot only one bullet on screen and the enemy never shoots bullets. There are only two shooters where the enemy never fires a bullet⁹⁰⁵ - Moon Cresta and Super Chain Crusher Horizon.

Plus, it has a login-type score ranking system! I'm trying to open an API of my ranking system for indie game makers. <shows printouts> Please read about it.⁹⁰⁶

JS: Gamers Universe looks interesting.⁹⁰⁷ This is by you? It allows games to have online leaderboards and...

MI: Yes. Yes! And now I'm developing achievements for it, and online activation. One of big problem for indie game developers is the lack of DRM. So I'm working on it! Why is Steam still so strong in the online game download market? One of big reasons is that **only** Steam has online leaderboards, achievements, activation, and so on for the PC download market.

I'm not developing an online sales website. The goal of Gamers Universe is to contain all the features of Steam, but without the online sales aspect. So every developer can use Gamers Universe but at a lower price.

JS: Clever! A framework for leaderboards, achievements, friends, and so on... But for any indie game sold on PC.

MI: I think the best future is a sales directory containing *all* developers, and someone will have a link to the indie developers website. So it will like Steam or GOG or Desura, but when players click "buy this game", it jumps to the developer's webpage.

JS: I'll be sure to document this.

MI: Yes please! Please spread the word of it. And if your friends like trance music, they will love *Super Chain Crusher*. The music is by *Logic Bomb*, the king of trance!

JS: To get in the zone! There was also *Chain Crusher* on Xbox Indie Games.^{[908](#)} What do you think of XBLIG?

MI: Honestly, the sales were low. However, we had another reason for creating it. While developing for the Wii U, the development hardware would change from time to time as Nintendo revised the hardware specs. When the specs changed, we would have to return the old hardware, and then wait for them to send the revised hardware. But we wouldn't receive the new hardware immediately, and we'd be stuck with nothing to do. So we decided to start working on something else. We had enough time to make a small game, so that's how we created *Chain Crusher*.

JS: When did you get Wii U development kits?^{[909](#)}

MI: We created *Chain Crusher* long before the Wii U release. This was during the prototype phase of the Wii U, before the system or any games had been released. Obviously, we weren't allowed to talk about the Wii U back then. We were working on a game which ultimately went unreleased, and also software related to the Wii U itself, such as APIs and the SDK.



JS: You created the Software Development Kit?!

MI: Yes, but only part of it. It's top secret. *<laughs>* Pioneer and Toshiba are clients of my company. I was developing DVD recorder firmware for Toshiba and Pioneer.

Most game development companies do not have API development skills and firmware development skills. But my company has game development skills, and API and firmware development skills.

JS: Everyone who develops for Wii U is using your tools?

MI: Yes, they end up using them automatically. *<laughs>* Back then, several people asked me about it, but I couldn't tell them! It damaged some professional relationships. The system didn't even have the name "Wii U" yet.

JS: Super Chain Crusher Horizon is on Steam. Is it difficult for Japanese developers to work with Steam?

MI: Yes, it's fairly difficult. The biggest barrier is Japanese companies have to conduct all business in English. Veteran companies can do it, and Super Chain Crusher Horizon has an English version, but... Those who work at Japanese games companies are usually not the outgoing types who like to talk with everyone. Most are quiet and introverted. Because most people are like that, and because everything must be conducted in English, it's doubly difficult.

Do you know Desura? It's a downloadable game publisher, like Steam. Desura is easier than Steam, in that anyone can publish a game easily, but it's all in English. Only a handful of Japanese companies have released games on it. We have put a game on Desura, and we have recommended it to other Japanese developers, but nobody does it because of the language barrier.

JS: Have you used GOG.com?

MI: I know of it. I submitted Super Chain Crusher Horizon to them, but they turned it down.

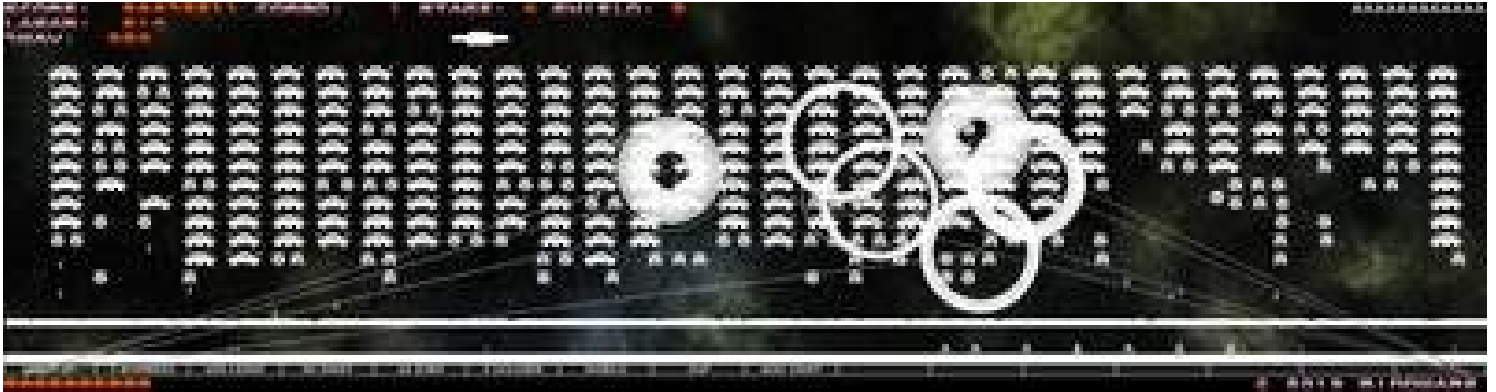
JS: Surprising! I prefer GOG since I can't be bothered with Steam's DRM and client.^{[910](#)} With GOG the game just runs.

MI: It's a difficult issue. With the way that GOG does things, pirate copies proliferate more easily. Steam seems like a more secure business. It's a problem without an easy answer. At the same time, Steam also manages online leaderboards and provides features such as achievements. So it provides a lot of additional functionality, whereas GOG just acts as a sales agent. In that sense, Steam provides additional benefits, and have invested heavily in their infrastructure. On the other hand, sometimes I'll send them a properly written email, and won't receive a reply for three months. They act like an empire looking down on everyone else. So I still have many concerns about Steam.

<author orders more coffees>

MI: I'd like to show you some screenshots of my next game in development. Please keep this

a secret for the time being. <shows screens> My next game: Space Invaders IBM! It's multiplayer. The player with the mouse uses ICBM missiles like in the arcade game Missile Command. <excitedly> In addition, all keyboard buttons are assigned as a weapon - so you can push any button to kill the enemy! And this game has an even higher resolution!



JS: This looks bloody fantastic! (above)

MI: It's playable at 1'024 x 768. If the available resolution is small, the play field will be of a smaller size. But if you have four monitors, the game field will be ***much*** wider! Oooh! I've played it using four monitors, at a resolution of 2'560 x 1'440 each, so a total resolution of 10'240 x 1'440 pixels! <intense laughter>



MaBoShi (Wii)

JS: Whoa... Nothing like that has ever been done before.

MI: The last few years in the industry, the "surprises" have declined day by day. Games need to have surprises. *<changing subject>* Have you played MaBoShi on WiiWare? *Games Master* magazine in the UK said: "Tetris? Dub-tris more like. There's a new puzzle king in town!"

JS: Yes! Describe MaBoShi,⁹¹¹ from prototype to release.

MI: MaBoShi comes from the Japanese words *maru* (circle), *bo* (bar), and *shikaku* (square). So *maru-bo-shikaku* is shortened to *ma-bo-shi*, or MaBoShi.⁹¹² We weren't really thinking whether or not to commercialise a prototype.

Ever since the PS1, games have been growing larger in scale, and graphics have improved greatly, but the actual gameplay hasn't changed much. I predicted people would grow tired of those games. The visuals on the outside keep changing, but if that's all that changes, eventually people will become bored no matter how good the visuals are. Right now there are a lot of games about fighting terrorists. What comes next? There's going to be a

limit somewhere. So the next step is to innovate games from the inside out. This is the only way small studios have a chance of succeeding against [big budget projects].

JS: Can you elaborate on the circle part of the game?

MI: I wanted to create a game so simple and elegant that if you tried to simplify it any further, it wouldn't be a game anymore - reduce it to the absolute essentials. This led me to thinking about circles and squares. The player character is a circle, and the game field is a circle. Squares are the same way. If you can render squares, you can make a game. So we created the circle game and the square game first, and showed Nintendo the square game. Nintendo said it was interesting, but not enough for it to sell on its own. The game needed to have a larger scale. So we told them that we also had a circle game, and then we added the bar game to end up with MaBoShi.

JS: And balancing? Were you modifying as you went along?

MI: One person programmed the circle game by himself, and then I programmed the bar and square games. I think people who have experienced making games alone or to share with friends will not find it difficult. I wasn't particularly concerned about it being a retail game, or being published by Nintendo. Obviously, Nintendo also tested the game and provided feedback, telling us that certain parts are too difficult, for example, and we made appropriate adjustments. The ending is a little more difficult, to give players a sense of accomplishment. The basic flow is to have the game get gradually more difficult, then easy for while, then gradually more difficult, then easy again.

<we break to take photos outside, then return>

JS: Before the interview you mentioned flying to America for pinball - was it 30 times in a year?

MI: Yes, that's correct. I'd go to Chicago for one day, then come back to work the next day. So it would be like a full, continuous 48-hour day with daylight, whereas everybody else around me has a normal life. I'd be the only one stuck in daylight for such a huge period of time. And I can't sleep at all on an aeroplane. This was around 1998. Ultimately, the jet lag took a toll on my health. Human beings are supposed to get some sleep. *<laughs>* No one knows that better than me. My problem is that I can't stick to a proper sleep schedule.

JS: This was physical tables, not videogame pinball?

MI: Now it's actual pinball. Earlier I talked about how we planned to create pinball videogames. That was around 1997. However, in 1998, my company had a significant change of direction. It was a big dream of mine to create real pinball tables. In 1998, we started leasing pinball tables to arcades. One day, I went to Chicago with a mechanic who worked at my company, and we visited a pinball designer at his home in Chicago. This was John Popadiuk,⁹¹³ designer of Theatre of Magic, Tales of the Arabian Nights, Star Wars Episode I,

and more.

My mechanic looked at some of the pinball tables and said, "I could make something like this." From that moment, I lost all interest in pinball videogames. I became excited at the thought of being the first Japanese person to create a real pinball table. I had to do it. So I forgot about videogames, and shifted my company over to real pinball, even changing our domain name to pinball.co.jp. And then I overworked myself and collapsed! <laughs>

The mechanic was a former tank service technician in the Japan Self-Defense Forces. He used to repair tanks. But to become a soldier, you have to undergo training that robs you of the ability to think for yourself. When his girlfriend broke up with him, he started overeating and drinking heavily. He was unable to control himself, and ultimately suffered a stroke aged 26. He was the one who said we should create real pinball tables, but then he left the company. It was a big surprise.

JS: What happened to the mechanic after that?

MI: He's doing better now. Luckily, his mother was a nurse, and when the stroke came, he collapsed right in front of her. When you have a stroke, you need to get immediate care or you could die. So he was lucky. He wouldn't have survived in other circumstances. Normally people get strokes in their 50s or later, not at 26.

JS: That's a warning to everyone - make the most of life.



~In memory of~

KAWAKAMI, Tomoko

25 April 1970 ~ 9 June 2011 (41)

Voice actress with an enormous anime/film portfolio, and also numerous videogame roles, especially in famous visual novels. Notable games include: *Ape Escape*, *Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil*, *Magical Drop F*, *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*, *Sonic Wings Assault*, *SSB: Brawl*, *Tales of Destiny 2*. Perhaps the most significant for readers of this book are her roles as May Lee in *King of Fighters*, Reana in *Radiant Silvergun*, and Aika in *Skies of Arcadia*.





~In memory of~

NAKAMURA, Hidetoshi

12 July 1954 ~ 24 December 2014 (60)

A voice actor who passed away recently, his voice work in TV goes back to the 1970s. From 2010 he also dubbed several Bruce Willis roles. Although his videogame portfolio is small, he did a lot of work for the Super Robot Wars series, in addition to the roles of Delin Hong in Shenmue II and Messina in JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All Star Battle. His most prominent recurring game role was as Seth in the King of Fighters series (below).





OHARA, Shinsaku

DOB: *secret* / Birthplace: *secret* / Blood Type: *secret*

Selected Portfolio

Dino Crisis 2 (2000)
Resident Evil: Gaiden (2001)
Devil May Cry (2001)
Steel Battalion (2002)
Resident Evil Zero (2002)
Viewtiful Joe (2003)
P.N.03 (2003)
Under the Skin (2004)
Resident Evil 4 (2005)
Killer7 (2005)
Devil Kings (2005)
Dead Rising 2 (2010, plus DLC)
Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z (2014)
The Evil Within (2014)
Mighty No. 9 (TBA)

Interview with Shinsaku OHARA

31 October, 2013, Comcept office, Tokyo / Duration: 1h 10m

My interview with Mr Ohara took place the day after I interviewed Keiji Inafune, in an adjacent office at the Comcept building in Tokyo. While I did ask a few questions about Mighty No. 9, the majority of the interview covered several, more interesting topics related to Mr Ohara's earlier career. In fact, as was revealed, he was to be leaving Comcept in the coming weeks and his colleagues did not yet know.

This interview starts with and is followed by correspondence conducted via email (slightly edited), since to begin with Comcept were still running their Kickstarter campaign, and afterwards Mr Ohara encountered some unexpected developments. It all provides a more interesting context. I was first put in touch with Mr Ohara by a friend of his, who was also a backer on my Kickstarter project.

As my contact explained: *"I'm happy to say that my friend Shin Ohara is on board for an interview. Shin worked at Capcom for many years in production, design, and translation. He's pretty tight with Keiji after all these years so he'll have some interesting insight into working with him (and Shinji Mikami) and Capcom's design processes."*

Email from Shinsaku Ohara, 05 Sep. 2013

"Yes, I was told about your project so we're all good. I'd be glad to do an interview. You asked about Dead Phoenix. I was not part of that team, but I remember vaguely about what was going on. It's so long ago. But I'm sure I have some contacts who will remember something. I'm currently at Comcept, Inafune-san's company, after leaving Capcom three years ago. When I was at Capcom I was in R&D 4 group, that Mikami-san led. I have some former colleagues that work at Tango and Platinum Games.

"By the way, my Assistant Producer is running the *Mighty No. 9* Kickstarter project. He's sitting at a desk next to mine and watching the numbers go up, LOL. If you can give me some timeframe of when you want the interview, I will make time. I look forward to locking down the details."

Email, 19 Sep. 2013

"My apologies for the late reply. Pre-TGS madness had me swamped. Your questions about Kickstarter / Mighty No. 9 are more appropriate if Inafune-san answered them directly. I can certainly hook you up with Inafune-san for an interview. He would be delighted to have coverage."

JS: What was Mr Inafune's reaction after our interview?

SO: I didn't have any time to chat with him after the interview. We went to a meeting, so...

JS: What did you think of the interpreter? He was part of an emergency crew I put together.

SO: I thought you were going to bring a translator who did simultaneous translation.

JS: I prefer consecutive, because they take notes and you get more material.^{[914](#)}

SO: His co-worker joined us in the Osaka office. He's with a localisation company.

JS: Active Gaming Media. They saved my project.

SO: His translation wasn't bad!

JS: Let's start easy. What's the first game you saw?

SO: *<softly, to self>* What was that...? *<normal>* That's a hard question. You mean first game that's memorable, right?

JS: Well, the first one ever.

SO: The first one? Maybe the first one... I don't know if it's a videogame, but it was maybe *Game & Watch*?^{[915](#)} Yeah, *Game & Watch*. Maybe that's the first? There was also like a system, with a *Pac-Man* game built-in. Like a rip-off *Pac-Man* game, that I played over and over.

JS: Was it a handheld device?^{[916](#)}

SO: Remember they used to have little *Donkey Kong* games, that had the LEDs? There was a *Pac-Man* version of that.^{[917](#)}

JS: That could be the Coleco versions...

<discussion with Nico about photos - we walk outside, illuminated by street lights>

SO: I think I had three *Game & Watch* games, which I owned. *Parachute*, and *Mickey Mouse*, and the other one... Maybe it was actually only two.

JS: Was your first console a Famicom?

SO: I grew up in the United States. So I was a latecomer to the Famicom. Actually my friends from Japan had a Famicom, so we would go to his house and play - whereas my home gaming system was a ColecoVision. But the *first* game that I played on consoles was probably something from Atari? I don't know which. With the stick and a button.

JS: Wood grain effect on the system itself?

SO: No, no wood grain effect. I think it was... Actually, maybe it did. I did not own it, so I'm not sure. *<laughs>*

JS: When did you first have the feeling you wanted to work in the games industry?

SO: Actually, I never saw myself as working in the games industry. Because it was just

something I liked - I didn't think of that as a profession. When I was young... You don't really think about, or rather, you don't really seriously consider working, or what will be your job someday. Part of it, I think, is it was not really a lucrative industry at the time. It was still emerging, it wasn't something where people would think: "I want to be in videogaming!" Other people would have called them crazy.

JS: At age three I knew I was going to be a time traveller.

SO: Yeah? It wasn't until I was maybe twenty-... *<pause, as if to finish the age>* It was after college when I thought that I want to work for a gaming company. Thanks to my ability to speak English and Japanese, I looked for a trading company as my first job. I worked there for three years. It was the semi-conductor industry; pharmaceutical equipment, and stuff like that. A small trading company in Tokyo. So I did that for three years and...

<Nico gestures with hands>

Nico: Move a bit, like zis. Watch between us.

SO: OK. So I worked there for three years, and then... Before that, I guess right after college, I actually applied for Capcom, and other companies. At the time they weren't hiring, or rather, there were not a lot of job opportunities in Japan.

JS: How old were you when returning to Japan?

SO: Eighteen. So they weren't hiring and there was not a whole lot of job opportunities. I decided to work for the trading company that I'd been working at part-time.

Nico: OK, move here, so we shoot the opposite side.

SO: So three years, and a friend of mine who got into Capcom called me and said, "Would you like to come work for Capcom?" He lived in Osaka.

And I was like, "**Yes!** But what is it? What would I be doing?"

He was in the legal department, and also the overseas department, because he could speak English and Japanese. That's why he was there - just because of that. It just so happens that he became a game designer, he moved on to R&D, with strong connections. He was going to be a game designer, he was going to get his own game.

JS: What was his name and the game?

SO: It's probably best not to mention his name. His first game was *Dino Crisis 3*.



Dino Crisis (PS1)

JS: I believe you were a designer on *Dino Crisis 2*.

SO: Yes. So they needed a replacement, because he used to help with voice recordings, and stuff like that, for *Dino Crisis 2*, and they needed a replacement. So he said, "It'll basically be about coordinating voiceovers in the sound studios, and translating scripts, and also localisation." We had been playing videogames in school, because we'd been friends, and we knew how Capcom games - the localised games - were terrible. We knew we could do it much better, even though we didn't have game experience.

Nico: OK, move just a little bit on left. Just here.

JS: You also did level design for *Dino Crisis 2*?

SO: Actually... I'm credited for level design?

JS: Yes, as planner, on MobyGames.

SO: Oh, planner. OK. Planner is just, like, a Japanese way of saying you're just a game

designer. They put everybody **but** the people that have actual skills. <laughs> Like if I was an artist, they would call me an artist. If I was a programmer, they would call me a programmer. Everybody else, who designs the game, and does all of the grunt work, is called a "planner".

JS: The terminology is interesting. "Designer" in Japanese usually means graphics. An art designer, rather than building the structure of a level.

<we move back inside the Comcept building>

SO: Yes. But it also depends on the company that you work with. They all have different ways of naming their staff and what they actually do. At Capcom a planner was a game designer. So the other guys, that would design the game, they would work with the level designer: this is sort of the level, this is the sort of puzzle this game is going to have. They would design everything, and there's what's called a spec sheet, given to the artists, or the programmers. This is how it needs to be scripted, because this is how the puzzle is going to work. Or this is how, once you beat this boss, it's going to trigger this event, and blah, blah, blah.

JS: And you did this for Dino Crisis 2?

SO: Yes. I wasn't the main guy, it was my first job as a gamer designer. Not a lot of experience. They quickly moved me to what I was really good at. I was translating scripts and handling localisation, because that's where they originally needed me. I would help out on some of the game designs. I helped out with the Resident Evil remake, on GameCube. Many titles, I can't count.

<SO greets colleagues; move to room>

JS: Could you sign my two signature books?

SO: Sure. This page? In Japanese or *romaji*? <laughs - signs> So I'll just sign it in Japanese.

JS: Remember the cover for first Mega Man?^{[918](#)}

SO: Oh yes, oh yeah!

JS: Did anyone at Capcom know who drew that?

SO: I don't know! <laughs> It wasn't until later, joining Capcom, that I knew of its existence. But it was, ah... Unique! <laughs>



JS: For Mega Man Universe⁹¹⁹ Capcom would allow players to use the "bad American art" Mega Man.

SO: Oh yeah. Yes.

JS: Know anything about Mega Man Universe?

SO: Sorry I wasn't involved.

JS: You're credited with a "special thanks" for Resident Evil: Gaiden on GBC.⁹²⁰(right)

SO: <laughs> You saw that?! That was a game that, ah... I think it was...

JS: Outsourced to a British company, M4?

SO: Yes. I think they needed someone on Japan's side to... Not supervise, but oversee some of things they were doing? Basically communicating with the developer. It came out of nowhere and they put me on that project, and I was working on it as one of my side projects. I wasn't part of the original deal when it happened, so I was just looking at the development side of it. But it was interesting, because nobody in Japan knew about that game. It was something that only the management knew about - was it even sold in Japan?⁹²¹



Resident Evil: Gaiden (GBC)

JS: I think 2002 in Japan?

SO: I don't know how it was regarded, or what its position was in Japan, at our company, but I would say to people, "I'm working on this *Resident Evil: Gaiden* game, do you know about it?"

And they would be like, "No, what is that?"

"It's a Game Boy Color game," I'd say. "And Barry is the..." <laughs> "He's the main protagonist!"

And they'd be like, "What?!"

So what we did is, we would take that script, and make sure that it's in the setting and everything fits in with the *Resident Evil* universe.⁹²² We would also comment on how, "Barry is not this kind of character, in this situation he would do this kind of thing. And Leon is this

kind of person, so he wouldn't say this, or..." You know, it was a case of just trying to get everything right.

JS: I loved it, and interviewed the team. They made a Dino Crisis demo for GBC at the request of Virgin, who was asked by Capcom. Then, Capcom was so impressed it asked M4 to make Gaiden.

SO: Really? You know more than I do! <laughs>



JS: I didn't want to say anything until I'd heard your story.

SO: <laughs> It's interesting! Because Capcom is a big company, so there was like 600 people in development, and there's more people if you include everyone, all the staff. I think it went to over 1'000 people at the time?^{[923](#)}

So back then, R&D was divided into different companies, basically. So I was on the R&D 4 team, and there was at least, I think at the time, there was about eight teams. So if you're in one team, you don't really get to meet or do anything with everybody else. So there's no mixing of people; every team was sort of like its own company. No communication with the dev staff between each other. Even though they're in the same building, on different floors, you would not be able to see a floor that you were not a part of.

JS: If you snuck onto another floor, everyone would be like, "Whose that guy?!"

SO: Yeah. So it was interesting. That's why some people did not know what other teams were doing.

Nico: See you Saturday! <everyone says goodbye>

JS: You're credited on four of the Capcom Five.⁹²⁴ *P.N.03*, *Viewtiful Joe*, *RE4*, *Killer 7*. Mainly localisation. The fifth, *Dead Phoenix*,⁹²⁵ was never released. Tell me *everything*.

SO: *Dead Phoenix*...



JS: Footage shows a character with golden wings fighting huge armies, a floating city, dragons, wow!

SO: Yes. It *was* one of the Capcom Five, for the GameCube, right? I think at the time, we really wanted to strike up a relationship with Nintendo.



JS: Did Capcom approach Nintendo, or...?

SO: I think GameCube needed mature games, because at the time they were associated with - and I think they still are - associated with a younger audience. You had competitors, other consoles, that had the adult audience, and I think Nintendo just needed some strong content that would interest adults. I think that was the prime reason, one of the reasons... I don't know if they approached us, or if we approached them, but I think it was a mutual thing. We saw value, I think both companies saw value in doing these games. As for Dead Phoenix, I don't remember too much about it.

JS: Did you play it? Were you allowed to play it?

SO: Not really. I was on these two, these three games. *<pointing to sheet>* Actually, I guess I worked on everything *but* Dead Phoenix. It was still in the very early stages, and I don't think there was a whole lot of people working on it. The game was still very much in the concept phase, what we showed. I don't think it was really a game yet. You saw a dude with wings, flying through canyons, and that was about it.

JS: More a proof of concept?

SO: Yeah. It used to be a different game before. Ahh... *<pause>* It was more like... I just know the name of it, I did not see it, but it was called Saiyuki, its codename was Saiyuki. And that's actually sort of, a type of Chinese content from history. Dragon Ball is the same. It's actually from a Chinese story...

JS: Are you referring to Journey to the West?^{[926](#)}

SO: Yes! Journey to the West. So that was the title. It had many concepts, and was changing. I think it was the slowest moving of the Capcom Five, the slowest from the rest. That's why I don't think it was very playable. In the end, I don't know the exact reason why they cancelled it, but it did not come out! *<laughs>*

JS: Presumably locked in Capcom's vault?

SO: Yes.

JS: Does Capcom keep archives? Some companies keep everything, others throw stuff away. People raided Sega bins and salvaged Sonic prototypes.[927](#)

SO: <intense laughter> Capcom does have an archive. I don't know if they had it... I mean, we started taking back-ups and data, even of those titles that were cancelled. But I don't think Capcom really goes back to its archives to dig stuff up. Because, let's say it was a bad idea, <laughs> why go back to a bad idea? I guess that's Capcom's way of thinking?

JS: Some people would pay for the chance to download and play an unfinished, unreleased game.

SO: Yes, I *do* think people would pay and play, but I think from the standpoint of a developer, or a creator, you don't want people getting their hands on something we're not satisfied with. Actually having people pay for it, and then being criticised for it, or being praised for it - whatever the outcome - I don't think they want to put out anything half-hashed.

JS: You can't win either way. They'll criticise the fact you put it out, or complain you didn't finish it.

SO: You know with Resident Evil 4, there used to be a different game. Right before it became the over-the-shoulder look. It used to be the old-school, third-person, fixed-camera style. I think when we first announced Resident Evil 4, you saw that video, where Leon had his arm sort of infected, or haunted, and he would go crazy. You'd have to find medicine or something to stabilise your arm. It was a slow-paced game, but it wasn't really working for us. And it had been going on for... I think it was going on for a pretty long time, and then we just decided that Mikami-san had to step in and get the game done. So he just changed everything, to the over-the-shoulder look.[928](#)

JS: I miss old RE. For me it was about spending more time planning a route than playing, and not enough resources.

SO: Yeah.



Resident Evil 3.5 (GC)

JS: Going back to *Dino Crisis 2* - any interesting stories?^{[929](#)}

SO: I don't know if it's interesting, but when I joined, they were ready to go for the second round of voice recording. In three or four weeks. So I joined, and was supposed to visit Toronto to record.

JS: From Japan?

SO: Yes, we did all of our recording in Toronto back then. I think just because there was one person, who used to work with Capcom, and we had connections there that would organise the Toronto side of the recordings. We did a lot of fighting games - voiceovers for fighting games, back then in Toronto. I'm sidetracking here, but after *Resident Evil*, maybe after *Killer 7*, I don't remember, we decided to... Well, myself as the VO person, I did not want to go all the way to Toronto to record voices for all of the games I was doing. Because it's on the other side of the world, the time difference is too much,^{[930](#)} I wouldn't even be able to make a phone call. **It was cold.** So I decided, maybe from *Killer 7*, that I wanted to record in Los Angeles.^{[931](#)} Yes, I think it was *Killer 7*, with Suda-san.

The original *Devil May Cry*, even though we recorded all of the voices in Toronto, all of its sound design was being done in a studio called Soundelux in LA. I was the coordinator

there, so I asked the studio, "Do you guys happen to do VO as well? Other than sound design?"

And they said, "Yes we do. Actually, we just started."

It was this relationship, where we started to work with Soundelux, and moved our recordings from Toronto to LA.

JS: Regarding Killer 7, did you see or play any of the earlier *beta* versions? It went through a lot of changes.

SO: Yes, yes! Yep. Since Capcom is in Osaka, every month or every two months, Suda-san would bring a build of Killer 7 over to Osaka, for Mikami-san to play. And I was in that meeting, for most of the time.

JS: Why was the game changed regularly?

SO: He changed the game because, because, because... Some of it is because Mikami-san commented on some of the game design, and some of the flaws, or what could be better. So it was changing from that respect. But it was also changing because Suda-san's story was changing, and his story was changing because it was too long. The original script was maybe twice as long. I was translating all that.

JS: You translated material that was never used?

SO: Yes. Yes I did.

JS: Can you remember *anything*?

SO: <laughs> What can I remember - *gosh!* Ahh, god, it's so long ago. The original Killer 7 was meant to make sense, but it only ended up being crazy due to stuff being cut. Unfortunately it just got cut. Lots of it was cut. But it was still crazy. <laughs>

JS: Like most of Suda-san's games. I think that's why people like them - they have a fresh twist.

SO: Yeah. <nods>

JS: Did you stash a copy of the uncut script?

SO: I couldn't say if I did... But I don't have a copy...

JS: Old man Harman originally was not in a wheelchair - he walked with a cane. There was also a nun shown, who wasn't in the final game.^{[932](#)} (above)

SO: Yes... Gosh! <laughs>





JS: There was controversy over the nun, because she was shown being shot in a cut-scene.

SO: Did that scene get censored in the foreign copies? Because I think I remember there being a nun. But I don't remember her being shot.

JS: All I know is that a lot of content didn't make it to retail, and there was a stronger puzzle element...

SO: Oh yes.

JS: Characters shown in pre-release videos weren't in the final game. *Give me details!*

SO: <laughs> Did you like Killer 7?

JS: I loved Killer 7.

SO: So, I don't know if this will answer your question, but the story was rather confusing. Part of the confusion of the story is because we cut out lots of stuff. So the transition from one scene to another scene, and the different personalities, also added to the complexity of the story. But a lot of it is because his story was too long; even though I translated most of it, we had to cut most of the story because there was no budget or schedule to make the scenes - the cutscenes - or to do all of the animation and still do the VO. That's why it got cut.

I think one of the scenes, one area of scenes, it's all done in flash - it's not Computer Graphics. Do you remember that scene where... Most of it is where Ulmeyda comes in. Everything was done in sort of an anime style? The style changes. If I remember correctly, that's because we didn't, or rather Suda-san and the team, didn't have the time to make those cutscenes. Because they were too busy working - they had to prioritise their efforts and resources on something else. So that scene was being outsourced to a company. Everything, all the story, and all the VO was done, they just had to create the scene itself. So that was being outsourced to the "flash" company.⁹³³([top](#))

JS: I wonder... Could we see a director's cut of Killer 7?

SO: I don't think Suda-san wants to. <laughs>

JS: Write your recollections in a diary. I ask about lost material because it might become the only record of what existed - or *did not* exist. Who can you ask in 100 years?

SO: Yeah. There was also talk about turning this into a Hollywood film. I don't know who approached us, I don't actually remember because I was not part of that discussion. But there was a lot of interest in that content, and the IP, because it was just so whacked and crazy. It would probably be a nice film if Tarantino worked on it.

JS: Have you ever seen Oliver Stone's television miniseries, *Wild Palms*?

SO: *Wild Palms*? I've heard about it.

JS: I saw it long before Killer 7. So many similarities! <lists them>

SO: <laughs> Maybe he *was* influenced. Suda-san draws inspiration from many things. It's hard to rule out.

JS: There's an interesting difference between the Japanese original and the localised version: that strange gimp-like character, Iwazaru,⁹³⁴ who in the localised version has a garbled machine voice, but in Japan it was actual speech.⁹³⁵

SO: <pauses to think> Oh god.... Hmm...

JS: I think it's because in Japan he spoke English, which would seem alien to players, so outside of Japan his voice was changed to machine noise, to simulate a similar feeling of alienation?

SO: Ohh, yes! I think the guy in the outfit, right? He's the guy who would give you advice. Yes, I think even in the Japanese version, it was in English but very broken English. That was intentional. But in the English version - since it was broken English, and it was hard to understand - we just put sound effects over it. But yes, that's a long time ago, and I had completely forgot about that fact, <laughs> until you just brought it up.



Real harsh, and I mean it.

JS: You were the only translator on the Killer 7 script?

SO: I was the only translator. I had a little bit of help, from an outsource company, but I did the majority of it.

JS: Any other anecdotes?

SO: Suda-san's writing, even in Japanese, is very... He chooses his words very carefully and it's got a very distinct style. So that was something I wanted to keep true, even for the English version. So some of the phrasing is, I guess, not normal? But you can make out what it means. I don't think people would say some of the things, they would not phrase it the way I phrased it in the game. Just because Suda-san's writing was that way. I wanted to avoid abbreviating, and instead give you what he *meant to say*. But what he was saying and... Because a lot of it has double meanings, his stories. So one word would have multiple meanings, and I think that led to some of the depth and complexity of the story, and I wanted to keep that.

JS: If you recall content you translated, but never made it in, please email me.

SO: <strong laugh> OK!



JS: It's got a fan following who love anecdotes.

SO: Yes! *<slight pause>* Well, with Killer 7... There's two politicians who you kill.⁹³⁶ One is where you have to shoot the guy's tie. *<laughs>* And the dude, the other politician, fixes his tie, and when he looks sideways that's when you can shoot him, right? When we were doing the "exertion sounds" for those two characters, at the VO session, basically we had to record sounds of them being hurt by bullets. Usually it's like "UGH!" *<makes noise and movement as if being shot>* But Suda-san's direction was, "Can you make it sound like it's an old man ejaculating very pathetically?"

<everyone laughs>

SO: So like, "OK, how does that sound, Suda-san? Because I don't know if I can really translate that and have the voice director understand."

So Suda-san goes, "Something like this: 'uuuuuuuuurrrgh!'" *<mimics Suda-san, changes posture to put head forward, makes old man noise>*

JS: *<intense laughter>*

SO: You know? Very, er... His direction was that. So I said to the voice director, "Make it sound like that! Apparently it's supposed to sound like an old man having an orgasm, but not very energetically." *<laughs>* That was an interesting voice recording session. *<laughs>*

JS: That's hilarious, though I'm not sure if it will come across in print.

SO: *<laughs>* So probably the first time that the actor would actually have to act that way. The first time getting directions like that. *<laughs>*

JS: *<laughs>* What about Viewtiful Joe? That also had an unusual style and humour. The main guy screams, "**HENSHIN A GO GO BABY!**"⁹³⁷

SO: I really worked closely with Kamiya-san, the director; my second game working with him. The first one was of course Devil May Cry. He really relied on and trusted me with the translation because - I guess - he liked what I did for Devil May Cry. You know, getting Dante's character the way he wanted it, some of the cocky lines he would say. He liked it, so he trusted me with Viewtiful Joe. As for "henshin a go go", I don't think there was even a Japanese version of it. Kamiya-san asked, "What's cool?" And at the time we were just watching... What was that, the British movie, that stars "Mini Me"...



JS: *Austin Powers*.

SO: *Austin Powers*! So that was I think at about that time, [when *Austin Powers* was out], and Kamiya-san was into that. He likes England, you know, so naturally he gravitated towards *Austin Powers* and its humour. So I studied a little bit of, sort of the vibe that *Austin Powers* had. I just came up with "henshin a go go", and said, "How's that?" We just wrote it down, and then during the shoot, the VO session, I just wrote it down as a placeholder; I believed it could work, but it depended on how it was delivered. If it didn't work out, I would work with the actor and figure something else out. That was my plan. But Dee Bradley Baker, the actor who plays Joe, delivered it perfectly. All the actors really. We auditioned, so I knew it was going to work, but on the actual recording sessions it *really worked*. So we decided to go with, "*HENSHIN A GO GO BABY!*"

JS: You were script translator for Steel Battalion,^{[938](#)} by Nude Maker. I interviewed Hifumi Kono. Any stories?

SO: I don't know if you could get your hands on the original document, that Kono-san brought.

JS: He drew sketches for the book. Originally he wanted buttons for the end of each finger on the gear shift.

SO: <laughs> There's actually my name on that box, I later found out. I never had visual confirmation, but they told me, "Ohara-san, your name is on that box!"

JS: The big green one? I'll have to check.^{[939](#)}

SO: Yes. <laughs> I did not buy it, so there's no way for me to check it. They wanted me in charge of translating everything, so I had all my - when I was working on it - all my shortcuts on the internet was just military related. I didn't know what these missiles were called in English, so I had to figure out or find out. So anything that had to do with English I had to create, do research and make sure it's authentic. I'm not a military specialist, but at least to a certain level, I had to make sure it was legitimate.

They also wanted me to come up with a name for the Operating System that Vertical Tanks

use. I think it was called COOS? <spells it C-O-O-S> I came up with the name for it, I think it was meant to stand for "Combat Oriented Operating System" or something like that. I guess to make it more real. So all those little things that I did, to help sell the world.

JS: To produce a good *sekaikan*.

SO: Yes, *sekaikan*. Because it was *really* deep. <laughs> His design doc, which he first showed us, was sort of like in an instruction manual style. For a Vertical Tank. Usually it's like a PowerPoint presentation, or a document that just says what the game is going to be. But it was more in the style of a manual. So it would have a picture of a Vertical Tank, and would talk about what it could do. Everything was so stylised. Even from the first pitch which he brought us. We also went voice recording with Kono-san. Erm... He might get mad if I told you this...

JS: He seems so laid back. You can tell me.

SO: Yes, he is a laid back guy. We were staying at the Renaissance Hotel in Hollywood. I think it's called something else now. We would be recording from 10am until 6 in the evening or something, and then we'd go out to eat. But being jetlagged and staying in a [recording] room all day without windows really screws you up in terms of time adjustment.

I think late evening, maybe 11 or so, I get a call from Kono-san, saying, "Ohara-san, there's a problem!"

And I said, "What is it?"



JS: Ooh, this is going somewhere interesting...

SO: So he replies, "It's my bathtub!"

And I say, "What happened?"

"I turned on the tub, to soak in it," he says. "And while I was waiting for it I just crashed on my bed, and let the water go. I didn't stop it. So my room, the floor of my room is all wet, and I need to have it taken care of."

So I said, "OK, I'll be there right away." And I go to his room, and even before I reach his room, the hallway is **all** wet. The carpet is **all** water, so when you step on it, it would squish. I go into his room, and I said, "Kono-san, how long have you let this go on?"

"Maybe two hours?"

<everyone laughs>

SO: So I call the janitor, or the front desk, and they come up with a vacuum to suck up all the water.

I asked them, "How long would it take to get this all cleaned up?"

"Maybe an hour or so?" they say.

And I just said, "Kono-san, they said it's going to take about an hour. It's late, there's nothing I can do here anymore, so I'm going to let you go, and let myself go." And then I just added, "You know, leave this guy maybe a tip of \$20 or something, after he's done, and you should be OK."

Yeah, that was it. I can see how that could happen, but it was the first time I had actually seen it happen. <laughs>

JS: What a ride - now that's rockstar game development! You're credited on Under The Skin⁹⁴⁰ as "Special Thanks Planner". Can you recall your involvement? The game is awesomely bizarre - it's unlikely it would be made in today's climate.

SO: Under The Skin - which I named - was somewhat the end product of the cancelled Dead Phoenix. After not being Dead Phoenix it was something else a number times.⁹⁴¹ Under the Skin was an odd game but still fun. It just didn't appeal to a wide audience.

I helped out with the localisation but I fully coordinated the voiceover recording. Kawamura-san⁹⁴² and I went to Vancouver to record the voices. It was a few [days] of voice recording. As you know, Vancouver is known as Hollywood North for being the entertainment city they are. They do a lot of voiceovers for Japanese anime, so I chose to record in Vancouver for their talent pool. The game had a very cartoony feel so it was a great match. Since there were so many characters we had many talents come in. They were great and we got some really good voices.

What I remember well is that we rented bikes. We would ride our bikes to the recording studio everyday and later eat dinner at a Chinese noodle place called Shaolin Noodle House. It was so good we went there everyday! <laughs>



Under the Skin (PS2)

JS: It's nearly time - let me ask some *Mighty No. 9* questions. Did you immediately go to Comcept after Capcom? The last thing I have you credited for is *Devil May Cry HD Collection* in 2012, [943](#) on MobyGames.

SO: Ahh, OK. Well... Oh, yes! I didn't actually work on that game.

JS: Because you worked on the previous...

SO: ...previous games, <nods> had me credited. But the last game I worked on was *Dead Rising 2: Case West*.⁹⁴⁴

JS: Then you came to Comcept?⁹⁴⁵

SO: Yes.

JS: How many staff are there on the *Mighty* team?

SO: I don't know, actually. If you think about the start-up members, who helped with the Kickstarter project, like making that first movie on Kickstarter...

JS: There's key staff...

SO: Key staff, I think from Comcept's side, it's maybe about... I don't know if they will all be involved until the end, but I think it's about 10 people. On the developer side I don't know how many, because I'm not involved, but probably 10 people.

JS: The console versions were stretch goals - I've seen several projects with such goals. But to me it seems like a chicken and egg scenario - you get the money, but what if you can't get permission? So do you try to get confirmation of the license first, to later make that promise? In the past some console manufacturers have refused permission to develop on their hardware.

SO: Yes, I think it's a commitment to develop for the specified consoles, but it's not a promise. Because it all depends on the platform, the first party. So it's like, "If we get this much money, we'll start discussions on developing for... the PS3 or the WiiU or the Xbox." It's going to be a discussion that's going to happen after we reach the stretch goal, after the campaign is done. There's no point in talking to the publisher, "We will do *Mighty No. 9* for PS3 if we get enough funding." It's pointless to have that meeting, they'll just say, <laughs> "When you get the funding come back to us again." I think it's a discussion we're having right now.

JS: The Kickstarter mentions a Ben Judd, of the DDM Agency,⁹⁴⁶ saying, "Without Ben this project would not exist in the first place." What does that mean?

SO: Ben was instrumental in helping us out. I was just having coffee with him, right before I met you. He just happened to be in town. Ben was the producer on the *Mega Man* game, *Maverick Hunter*, that was cancelled.⁹⁴⁷ I think it leaked - that information got leaked. Some footage was just leaked, maybe four months ago? The developer we were working with was Armature,⁹⁴⁸ which is an Austin-based company, that did *Metroid Prime*. It was ex-Retro guys. So Ben was a 'core *Mega Man* fan, and he had a reboot of a *Mega Man* game working, but it just got cancelled. After that he left Capcom. I think he just really wanted to work on a *Mega Man* game, so it initially played a part in convincing Inafune to work on a *Mega Man* spin-

off... Wait, I should not say Mega Man spin-off, right? <laughs>

JS: <quickly, defensively> Mighty No. 9 is not Mega Man - it's a homage to classic platformers!

<everyone laughs>

JS: One of my questions yesterday was if Comcept was worried about Capcom suing. I did not mean because the character was similar - lots of companies make games with similar characters. It was more because... At TGS there was gossip that since Mr Inafune had been on the board of directors at Capcom, he would have privileged or inside information from Capcom.

SO: In terms of game development I don't think he's got any special privileged info that nobody else knows. From that angle, I think there is no fear of being sued. If they were to sue, I think it would be because it looks so much like Mega Man.





Maverick Hunter (unreleased)

JS: Today so many games look similar; it would be a PR disaster for Capcom if they tried it. What a dangerous precedent! Is there anything else you'd like to share?

SO: Maybe I have a story about *P.N. 03*, which was released before *Resident Evil 4*. It was one of the earlier titles that we worked on.⁹⁴⁹ So *Dead Phoenix* got cancelled, right?⁹⁵⁰ So one of the Capcom Five is gone, lost. So we really needed to come up with another game, and Mikami-san was asked by the company, by management, to come up with a game in - I believe - either 6 months or 10 months. I think it was 10. With only 10 months, there's not a whole lot of things you could do. One of the easiest shortcuts was to utilise the game engine that we had for *Resident Evil 4*. So every day, after 5:30 or 6 o'clock, we would gather with Mikami-san, the leads from the animation team, and one of the game designers, and a programmer. Plus me. We'd come together to come up with or brainstorm ideas for a game that could be released in 10 months. After 5 or 6, until later into the night, we would be discussing and brainstorming what we could do.

The visual style, and the engine that we used, was not a game development process that we were used to. Because we had a lot of limitations with what we could do. The reason why Vanessa, the main character, speaks to her replica - the last boss is her replica - is because we only had time to make one model. The reason why you fight mechs is because mechs are easy to design, because it's straight lines. <laughs> And you can make it transform, and you can make it bigger or smaller, proportionalise it, and it's very easy. Actually, I shouldn't say "very easy", but it's *easier*. The reason why it's set in a desert is because we don't have to create anything. <laughs> The game did not need a whole lot of assets. So a lot of it, the game design and the choices we made, were based on lots of boundaries.



P.N.03 (GC) - Vanessa Z Schneider fights enemies and gyrates, while wearing the utterly delicious Papillon Suit

JS: And interior environments were all very similar.

SO: We weren't like, "Oh! We want to make this Vanessa character move this way! Or have her do this!" It was just based on a lot of the limitations that we had, or something that we thought we could pull off. To some extent I think we did pull it off; we made management happy because we had a product out to a certain date that they wanted. It was interesting enough, at least for me. I thought it was easy to pick up, not a long game, but for what it was, I think the action was good enough. It wasn't the best action game ever, but I think it catered to some people's taste. I think it did its job. <laughs>

JS: It had mixed reviews, but there was a cult following, and magazines like *EDGE* seemed to like it.

SO: I wonder if you can now download it on Nintendo? I have a copy of the game, but I don't have a GameCube anymore. <laughs>

JS: You can pop GameCube discs in the Wii to play them.

SO: You should go to Suda-san and ask for the lost scripts for *Killer 7*. I don't know if you can write about it, but the game that Suda-san did with the Wii, oh gosh... My memory is really bad. With Travis.

JS: No More Heroes!

SO: That's the one. *No More Heroes* was developed at Marvelous, I think it just used to be

AQI, or maybe it was just Marvelous at the time, before their merger.⁹⁵¹ At the time of No More Heroes I was still working at Capcom, but Capcom was not in charge of that game. However, Suda-san asked me to translate the script for No More Heroes, even though I was at Capcom.

And I said, "No, I can't really work on that game because, you know, that's a competitor's game." So I declined.

But he didn't accept my declination. <laughs> He said, "Ohara-san, I really need you to work on this, because you're the only guy that can translate my writing well into English."

So I said, "OK, because you asked me to work on it, I'll work outside of company hours. I'll just work on the weekends. And you cannot credit me. That's the only condition." So I did the translation for that game. Just the first one. It's not credited, not by my real name. <laughs>

JS: A world first! Thank you for sharing.

SO: Yeah, but I might get into trouble.

JS: You won't get into trouble. Any future plans?

SO: Nobody knows this in my company here, they will know next week, but I'm actually... Well, Inafune-san knows, but I'm leaving Comcept. It might stir up some noise, it may not. I'm on really good terms with Inafune-san, right now. <laughs> So we'll see! I'll talk to him maybe in the next few weeks, about my next step.

JS: Please pass my regards to Mr Inafune. I look forward to sending you all the book. Thank you for your time.

SO: Not at all - thank you! When you walk out, you should go out the big side door. Thank you again!

An amalgamation of paragraphs taken from emails, sent between April and May 2014, after I'd shipped my DVD. I noticed Mr Ohara's credits on newer games on MobyGames, and asked about the move he had mentioned in our interview.

SO: Thank you for your email and I look forward to watching the DVD. Apologies for my late reply. I left Comcept as of December of last year. The new job is keeping me very busy as the game is nearing completion. It's good to be back in the game. No pun intended.

[Author's note: At the time of transcribing, February 2015, Mr Ohara has been credited on Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z (Spark Unlimited, March 2014) and The Evil Within (Tango Gameworks, October 2014). Later on in May, after sending the text for approval, Mr Ohara mentioned releasing two DLC for The Evil Within.]



WILD PALMS

Everyone who is a fan of Suda 51's games should right now buy this off Amazon, and the journalist who interviews him next - ***please ask about it***. The visual style, iconography, and narrative themes in *Wild Palms* seem to bleed into the games of Suda 51 like a fever dream, especially *Killer 7* and *No More Heroes*. For a start, there's a hidden area under someone's pool, and the lead character's wife appears to him in a dream with the same bloodstained dress as Kaede in *Killer 7*, plus there's a dark conspiracy involving TV and media control, secret societies, the government, and kidnapping children. Oh, and samurai swords.



KAWASAKI, Takayuki

DOB: 25 May 1970 / Birthplace: Kyoto / Blood Type: O

Interview with Taka KAWASAKI

31 October 2013, Tokyo

Duration: 1h 56m

The end of October was an intensely busy though fun day, featuring three English speaking interviews. First I met Mr Kawasaki around midday for lunch, at a posh restaurant floor in a Tokyo skyrise. He brought with him a small suitcase, because he was to be travelling to the Kansai region on business later that day.

Although not involved with the history of games in quite the same way as other interviewees in this trilogy of books, I was extremely keen to speak with Mr Kawasaki on his involvement with the future of Japanese games - specifically Epic Games Japan, which licenses out the Unreal Engine. The Western press has become obsessed with the narrative that the Japanese games industry is somehow failing, and even some developers have started to internalise this fiction, believing they need to compete with games like *Call of Duty*, or even Epic's own *Gears of War*. However, this author feels that Japan is still creatively dominant, even if its confidence is shaken.

To understand the complexity and context of the situation, you need to know that traditionally Japanese developers usually create their games from scratch, using proprietary tools. This goes back to the Famicom era, where companies would reverse engineer their own bespoke set-up. As the generations moved on and hardware specs went up, so did cost and employee numbers. Western developers were quicker to adopt and license third-party tools, which allowed for more resources to be spent on game creation. As discussed in our interview, Japanese developers have started to see great success by licensing third-party tools such as Unreal Engine. We also debate other big, contemporary issues. The future is bright. If you've not done so yet, please read the intro on p330 where I list my personal top 108 Japanese games from the past generation - a topic which I brought up with most interviewees. Anyone who argues Japan is losing its creative ability has their eyes closed.

After lunch my photographer Nico met us for picture taking, and from there we embarked on a madcap adventure across Tokyo, meeting Professor Hiroshi Ishikawa at Waseda University, and then after dark Shinsaku Ohara, at the Comcept offices. En route Nico also had to pick up a bag of that season's first-harvested rice, from a friend of his who ran a curious store, for reasons I never quite worked out. We ate, saw the sights, and rode the trains; two *gaijin* laden with cameras, recorders and other gear, on an epic JRPG quest for knowledge.

JS: Hello Mr Kawasaki.

Taka Kawasaki: Please just call me Taka, I go by it in English environments.

JS: I'm looking forward to views on regional relations. You're with Epic Games Japan now, right?

TK: I started my career in the games industry after nine years working in a non-game industry - my days in suits. Having worked for foreign game companies for many years, I

think I'm positioned something like an amphibian on the water's edge. I think my perspective is pretty unique, though I'm not sure if it's helpful for your project. I'm always happy to chat about the experiences I've had in this charming industry. I joined Epic in 2009 to open up their Japan office. Since then, I've worked on licensing sales of Unreal Engine, customer relationship management and people management of the local office.

JS: Where is the local office?

TK: Epic Games Japan's office is located in Yokohama, a large city next to Tokyo. It is about 30 to 40 minutes by train from Shinjuku.

JS: What was your introduction to games?

TK: In my life? As I was born in 1970, I witnessed the birth of videogames. The first time I saw a game was back in 1976 at an amusement arcade. The title was Breakout by Atari, and lots of its copycats. If I talk about my very first game I had at home, it was a volume controller type. My parents gave me my first game console, *Color TV Game 15* by Nintendo, in 1977. A kind of Pong, by Nintendo. This machine offered 15 types of Pong variation, but it didn't even have AI and you could not play alone - except for "Shooting" in which you shoot by moving flat bars with dots.

JS: With an orange box?

TK: An orange box. But before, I think when I was 7 years old, back in 1977, before getting that machine I loved to go to the amusement arcades in Japan. The first game I really loved was, I think it was by Namco or Konami, it was a submarine game.⁹⁵² You would look into a scope like this... *<mimics movement>* It was not a videogame actually, it was made of paper and...

JS: ... a mechanical type game?

TK: Yes, yes. So you'd shoot a torpedo and you'd hit the enemy battleship, or destroyer, or carrier. I was crazy for that game. After that, amusement arcades were one of my most favourite places to go with my family.

JS: Then there was Space Invaders in 1978.

TK: Yes, and before Space Invaders it was Block Kuzushi, or Breakout. A lot of copies of Breakout came out in Japan. So I have two senior brothers, who are much older than me; there's 15 years between myself and the eldest, and 13 years between myself and the younger of the two. So maybe when I was 6, my elder brother was like 20 or 21. So they took me out to the game centres, or amusement arcades, to play Breakout, Space Invaders, Galaga, Galaxian, these types of games. I never grew tired of saying "take me to the amusement arcade" every weekend. I spent the late 1970s and early 1980s with a bunch of LSI games,⁹⁵³ then finally the Famicom came to my home in 1984 together with Excitebike.

<food arrives, diverse sushi platter - itadakimasu>

JS: A lot of Japanese enjoyed the Famicom.

TK: At the same time, I was crazy for board games and pen & paper RPGs. I translated the *Players Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* from the *Dungeons & Dragons Basic Set* during my first summer vacation of junior high. As I only knew very fundamental English grammar, I translated almost every single word of those books referring to a dictionary, and tried to "guesstimate" what they were supposed to mean. It was the reason why I became relatively good at English in my school days - I owe my English skill to Gary Gygax!

JS: Do you still have the translation?

TK: I still have the original red box at my home in Kyoto, but unfortunately I lost my translation, because... It went somewhere.

JS: That's a shame. In Japan, pen & paper RPGs are referred to as "table talk" games. Can you describe the "scene" when you were younger?

TK: Yes, "Table Talk RPG" is a very common name among Japanese gamers, to clarify you are not taking about computer games, but pen & paper. As I said, my very first Table Talk RPG was *Dungeons & Dragons*. I discovered it when I was 13 years old. After that, I played *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, *Traveller*, *Rune Quest*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Mega Traveller*, and so on. At the same time, I have been an enthusiastic player of board-based war games. I still belong to a war game circle and play them with my friends, once or twice every month. My favourite is *Advanced Squad Leader*, by Avalon Hill, now Multiman Publishing.^{[954](#)}

JS: That's a diverse selection! You mentioned that before the games industry you...

TK: ... I was at NEC. Yes. I was totally an ordinary office worker, it was that kind of job. Not entertainment, not the game business. It was in the international sales group for telecommunications equipment, like telephone exchange or microwave antennas. Our customers were located in developing countries, like Colombia, Thailand, Indonesia. So I was part of the international sales group for these kinds of infrastructures.

<brief talk about the meal>

JS: Did you visit Colombia?

TK: Yes. It was a unique experience! <laughs> I'm not sure I'd wish to go back again.

JS: Any adventures while travelling for NEC?

TK: I went to Colombia in 1996, when they had the Atlanta Olympics in the US.^{[955](#)} Maybe you remember, some terrorists shot down an aeroplane in New York using some missile, or

something.⁹⁵⁶ My flight was maybe one or two flights after the flight that went down, so I was very close to the accident. That was scary. In Colombia I went to the capital city, Bogotá, and inside the city it's almost safe - you don't have any problems. But once you go out the city, it is totally surrounded by guerrillas. So the Colombian government, regarding the spaces they occupied, the government holds only a very small portion of the land. Maybe 70% or 80% of the land was occupied by guerrillas. So it was like a surrounded city in the midst of the guerrilla's land.

<we pause to eat>

JS: What motivated you to leave NEC?

TK: Working for NEC for many years, I was kind of bored. NEC is a good company, but a very Japanese company, where you're expected to work as just a gear, or parts of a huge machine. I wanted to be somebody who could work as an independent professional. So I was interested in foreign companies. On the other hand I had been a gamer since I was 5 or 6 years old, so working for the games industry was one of my long time dreams. I got married when I was 27, back in 1997, so I already had a family.

JS: I've read about Japanese work practices. Long hours, only leaving after your boss, sleeping in the office... Do Japanese salarymen view the Western work style as an ideal? What were your thoughts?

TK: When I decided to leave NEC? Maybe the biggest reason I picked a foreign company was because I couldn't do anything for game development. I cannot write code, I cannot draw pictures, I cannot make music. So the only thing I could do was business or project management. So maybe my bilingual skill was the only skill I could rely on to find a new job. That made me focus on foreign companies. Talking about the working environment, that's true. The working environment in the Japanese games industry could sometimes be terrible - people sleeping on the floor everyday.

<waitress brings dessert plate>

TK: The biggest difference between the Western games industry and the Japanese games industry is whether people working for games are enjoying their job or not. I think this is a Japanese cultural thing, but there is a tendency among Japanese people that enjoying something makes you feel guilty. So if you, for example, were listening to music when you are working on code, or when you're writing on a tablet... The games industry is OK regarding this, but outside the games industry listening to music during your work time, your manager would get mad.

JS: Really?

TK: Oh yeah. So... How can I say this? It is expected that people behave seriously when they are on duty. That is the typical cultural perception in Japan. So the games industry is relatively

free from these cultural aspects, but still, enjoying your job could sometimes be perceived as or make one feel guilty. But my impression about the Western games industry is they love games, and they enjoy working for their project. I think that is a very big difference between these cultures.

JS: <noting delicious food> This is *uni*, right?

TK: Sea urchin, yes.

JS: There's a view that Japan is having difficulty because of the HD era. Before, a small team could make a game, but now you need hundreds.

TK: Yes, so games became 3D and textures became more and more precise, and the customer's expectations were getting bigger and bigger. For an early PS1 game the field could be very small, but now you need to have *GTA V*, like an entire city needs to be in the game. The budget and required time is growing more and more. This is my personal perception, but I think Japanese people are very good when they are working in a small team, or maybe as an individual. As you see, we have amazing creativity in *manga*, or *anime*, but when thinking of movies, Japanese movies are only so-so. They cannot beat Hollywood or European movies. So when Japanese people are working individually or in a very small team, two or three people, they can show great creativity. But we're poor at planning or scheduling project management. So that makes it difficult for us to show our creativity or come up with a high quality thing, when we work in a large group of people.

JS: As for small groups, you played *Cave Story*?^{[957](#)}

TK: Yep.

JS: And ZUN's Touhou series...

TK: Uh-huh. <nods>

JS: The small Japanese indie teams produce some really amazing work.

TK: Yes!

JS: Do you enjoy Western games?

TK: Uh-huh.

JS: In the West it's believed that Western games aren't enjoyed in Japan. Apparently there was the phrase *yoge-kusoge*, meaning crappy Western games. Did that perception really exist?

TK: I think the word *yoge* is already dead. Up until maybe... The last generation when people looked down on Western games, calling them *yoge*, was the original Xbox and PS2. After the

360 and PS3 the quality of Western games went above Japanese games, and people came to understand we were overtaken, and Western developers are providing better quality. When talking about technology or graphics. Back in the original Xbox or PlayStation 1 days, when people say *yoge* it means terrible graphics, or terrible gameplay, terrible navigation, bad user interface. So *yoge* meant low quality, but these days when people say *yoge*, it means it looks great. The technology is awesome, and the navigation and UI are perfect. But it's - again - it's just kill, kill, kill, kill. Like *Call of Duty*, or *Gears of War*. So the meaning of *yoge* is changing from low quality to high quality.

JS: I wouldn't agree the West has overtaken Japan. A colleague wrote about cool Japanese games from this generation.⁹⁵⁸ I asked myself, could I come up with 100 games? And I did, easily! That's more than I can complete in a lifetime. Maybe sales of Western games in the West are higher, but Japan has not lost its creative ability. Take *Valkyria Chronicles*. Both artistically and mechanically it is exquisite. No Western company could have made that. Japan's decline is not as some writers imply. Context is important.

TK: Yes, I think that potentially because of my job, I am kind of an evangelist of Western technologies to Japan.

JS: That's cool. I'm an evangelist of Japanese games, hence this book.

TK: So sometimes I am too pessimistic about the current situation.

JS: Everyone says "Japan and the West", which is an unfair comparison. If you're comparing Western games, you're throwing together Canada, America, England, France, Germany, Spain, Scandinavia, Australia, plus others, and you're comparing all of these against Japan by itself. When you say Japan has fallen behind the West, you're actually saying one country has fallen behind the combined effort of at least 10 other countries together.

TK: Yes, that's a very good point. It maybe feels like we're fighting against international forces alone. That's true. But I think at the same time, people's perception about Japan, one country against the world - maybe we can see it as the exposure of our pride in our games industry. Japanese people believe videogames were born here, the Japanese games industry made it. So we believe it's like *judo* or *karate*; games are Japanese culture. We were responsible for leading videogames, and we were responsible to provide the very best quality in the world. That was people's expectation and belief. So people tend to compare, Japan versus The World.

JS: What was the last Japanese developed game that you really enjoyed?

TK: Hmm... *Monster Hunter 4*.

JS: I keep meaning to try *Monster Hunter*. But I've heard that you can put a lot of hours into it.

TK: 300 hours, 400 hours, just to finish.

JS: Have you put in that many?

TK: Nooo. <laughs> I can't. I play it because it sells like crazy, so I need to catch up with the trends. But I have played almost all of the Monster Hunter series, from the original. I love it, personally.

JS: Let's discuss Epic Games, and its influence on Japanese developed games. Epic opened its Tokyo office in 2009?

TK: Yes. At that time I heard that Epic was planning to set-up a Japanese studio, and were looking for a studio manager. The situation was that they didn't have anything. So they were looking for a person who could set up the company here, and that was a very exciting opportunity. That seemed very exciting to me. So I applied through the internet hiring page of Epic, and I went through the interview, and I moved to Epic in December 2009.

JS: You're currently involved in licensing the Unreal Engine⁹⁵⁹ to Japanese developers.

TK: I am selling the Unreal Engine to Japanese developers and publishers.

JS: Is that difficult? In America it's common to buy an engine and use it. Whereas in Japan there's a preference to make tools from scratch.

TK: It used to be. When I started my job four years ago, buying the engine and using it was not common at all. Everybody wanted to create something from scratch. But it is changing very rapidly, and especially this generation change has accelerated that trend. Now, almost all Japanese publishers and major developers, my clients, they understand the value of third-party engines. Of course some teams are still working on their engines, but they are not trying to reject third-party engines any longer.

JS: Why do you think there was this resistance?

TK: They cannot afford [to create] an original engine any longer. It takes too long, it requires too much cost, and looking at the success of Western developers with third-party engines... Maybe you might disagree, but Japanese developers understand their technology level is behind Western developers. Especially for graphics and product efficiency. So looking at success stories, their minds are changing.

JS: But before this, why do you feel developers did not want to use third-party engines? Was there a problem with documentation?

TK: Ahh... That's part of it. Documentation was in English, and support was provided only through English, and another thing is, they used to misunderstand and think that game engines could be a silver bullet. "If you use a game engine, it solves all problems." You know, you won't have any difficulty to develop games. Some early adopters tried game engines, in the

very early days, back in 2004 or 2005, and *Lost Odyssey* was one of these. But of course game engines cannot be a silver bullet. It has bugs, you need to customise the engine for your games. So a game engine is just a tool to make a game, so people didn't understand it during the early days of game engines.⁹⁶⁰ Too much expectation led to disappointment about game engines. But after we set up our Japanese office and started to support it in Japanese, and people could meet me in person, and speak in Japanese, they started to understand what a game engine is and what they can expect in reality or actuality. I think a more accurate understanding of what a game engine can provide, helps them understand and helps change their mind.

JS: Would a company approach Epic Games Japan, and then you would persuade them, using slides or brochures? Is there a sales pitch?

TK: Yes, usually we bring our PC, which runs Unreal Engine, and we show off the demo. Have you seen the "*Infiltrator*" we showed at GDC?⁹⁶¹ It's a very, very beautiful real-time demo. We show it, and people think it's just a pre-rendered CG movie. But after that, we turn on the engine and bring them into the editor, and they understand, "Oh! It was real time!" That's a shocking experience for them. We explain the technical details of our features. That's the ordinary approach. Talking about my "pitch talk"... Unreal Engine is not cheap. You need to pay like, sometimes more than a million dollars.



Infiltrator demo

JS: Can I quote that figure?

TK: Ahh... Yes. But a million dollars, so let's say one million dollars, it can be translated like [being equivalent to] 100 man months. So let's say if you have 100 man months, can you make the same thing as Unreal Engine 3? Or Unreal Engine 4? Maybe you can, maybe you cannot. But we have spent 15 years to reach Unreal Engine 4, with more than 100 people every day. So the possibility that you can beat Unreal Engine with only 100 man months is not so likely. Even if you can make the same thing as Unreal Engine 3, with your 100 man months internally, it will still take you maybe a year or maybe 6 months in real time. But if you buy Unreal Engine now, you can start today. No risk.



Street Fighter V (multi)

JS: Do publishers often buy Unreal Engine for third-party developers to use?⁹⁶²

TK: It's case by case and subject to project scheme. In some cases, such as *Street Fighter V*, Capcom buys Unreal Engine and lets Dimps - the developer - use it for development. We also have other cases, such as *Kingdom Hearts III* or *Tekken 7*, where publishers buy the engine and their internal teams use it.

JS: *Street Fighter V* by Capcom and *Tekken 7* by Bandai-Namco use Unreal Engine 4. Both are big franchises by powerful companies. Can you talk about how this came about?

TK: Since the set up of Epic Games Japan in 2009, I've been talking to a bunch of people in the Japanese game industry, including publishers, developers, producers, directors, programmers, artists, game designers... And we also keep trying to make more exposure

through tech demos, sessions, game jams, onsite support, evaluation programs, and so on. Adoption of a game engine is very different from purchasing a laptop PC or shoes. People don't buy game engines impulsively, they're never like: "Hmm, it looks great, maybe I want one!"

Instead, we need to take a very long time to find consensus among the dev team, understanding between developer and publisher, and approval by management. First of all, without a new project being kicked off, there is no chance for them to use a game engine. So, we need great accordance of timing, technical demands, and what we can provide. I believe our continuous effort to occupy some mind share among people in the Japanese game industry helped us pop up in their mind when the time was right - for example when they kicked off a new project.

JS: Notable Japanese companies using Unreal Engine include... [...]⁹⁶³ Do you have any interesting stories you can share regarding these partners?

TK: Stay tuned and make sure you have a wide enough space for your question, that list will continue to become much more longer!

JS: Do you feel using third-party engines or tools will help Japan? Where do you see the future?

TK: What the Japanese games industry has been struggling with, during the 360 and PS3 days, were very fundamental parts of games. Just to show graphics, or to move characters. They needed a lot of investment, of time and cost, for non-creative parts. What Japanese developers were struggling with, was something like reinventing the wheel.

A game engine can give them the "skip route" for that fundamental part. So without game engines, maybe they might need to start from here, *<mimes base location>* from the ground. But with a game engine they can start from here. *<gestures vertically higher>* Even if they invest the same amount of time and people, they can focus on the creative part, on top of this. So free from this very fundamental, technical part, which can be re-used for many games, they can be freed by game engines, and they can focus on what matters for each game. The creative part, the fun part. So that will help Japan to come up with much better quality games. My personal dream is to help Japanese developers and publishers to come back to the red carpet of the worldwide games industry, and become the dominant content provider again, with our technology.

JS: Places of education in the West use Unreal Engine for game development courses. Are any in Japan incorporating it into their curriculum?

TK: Yes, of course. After introduction of *UE4: Subscription*, a great number of universities and professional schools in Japan have adopted UE4 into their curriculum.

JS: Epic Games Japan, is its primary job licensing the Unreal Engine, or does it have other roles?

TK: Its primary job is licensing the Unreal Engine, and providing technical support to our partners.

JS: No game development?

TK: No. We are only six people, including me.

JS: Quite a small office.

TK: Yes. Oh, and translation of documentation.

JS: You accepted an award at CEDEC 2014. Can you tell me about this?

TK: It was a great honour for Epic and Epic Games Japan. CEDEC is the Japanese version of GDC; it is a gathering of developers and students. They have three days of sessions, workshops and parties in Yokohama in the summer, and 5'000 - 6'000 people attend every year. At CEDEC, they have a public vote for some genres, such as engineering, visual arts, design. Attendees vote for games, tools, companies, teams and so on, which are nominated for each genre, and winners are accoladed as a "CEDEC Awards winner". UE4 was accoladed for the engineering award in 2014, for providing the best engine to a broad audience at a reasonable price, and enhancing democratisation of game development. UE4 was also nominated for "visual arts" with the *Infiltrator* demo.



JS: I feel I should ask about *Gears of War*. What do you feel the perception of Epic Games' *Gears of War* is, in Japan? What about Epic itself?

TK: We are very well known by people in the games industry. Everybody knows about Epic and Unreal and *Gears*. But outside the game industry in Japan nobody knows. *Gears* is selling like, ahh... 80k to 100k per title in Japan. Which is almost negligible, compared to the Western market. So we are uniquely positioned. We are very, very well known inside the game industry, but nobody knows us outside the game industry.

JS: Obviously the Unreal Engine can be used for any system. What do you think of the next generation of systems? You saw Microsoft's Xbox One announcement.

TK: Yes, I was there for E3. I attended all of Nintendo, Microsoft and SCE, and I felt the atmosphere live. But, you know, what happened was Microsoft had been a little bit arrogant, because of their success with 360. People in the market were feeling that their arrogance... They could become a very brutal tycoon if they win again. So consumers were concerned. That arrogance, Microsoft tried to conceal it, but it leaked out and people felt it. In that situation Microsoft announced information about digital copies, and you cannot lend games,

and no second-hand. That set the fire for people's complaints.

<waiter ushers us to leave>

JS: Should we head off? Nico should be arriving for photos.

<we both walk outside the restaurant, still within a large building, continuing to chat>

JS: I thought Microsoft's reveal of the Xbox One was a disaster.

TK: Yeah, so what happened was, Sony hadn't done anything new, they said: "We are just as we were." And people were excited...

JS: *<laughs>* Yeah!

TK: That was ridiculous.

JS: Yes, Sony won by maintaining the *status quo*. While Microsoft lost by being *insane!*
<laughs>

TK: The interesting thing was Sony made a mistake when they announced the PS3. They became very arrogant, and Kutaragi-san said, "We're a high class restaurant, and if you want to have a cheap burger, you should go to a cheap restaurant. We only care about a 'high class restaurant' audience." And people got mad. That led to the "drop down" of PlayStation. You know, a successful experience can be very dangerous for the future, I think.

JS: As they say in English, "Pride comes before a fall." They were too proud and it collapsed.

TK: Yes, yes.

JS: Ah, here's my photographer Nico. Where would you like to take photos?

Nico: Maybe outside, it's a sunny day.

JS: We can talk while we walk. You need to leave at 1:30 correct?

TK: Yes! I think there is some kind of internal garden, downstairs. Should we try there?

Nico: Yeah!

JS: Lead the way! *<noting the suitcase>* You're heading on a trip?

TK: I'm going to Osaka tonight.

JS: Nice. I spent three days in the Kansai area a couple of weeks ago. So, will you be buying an Xbox One, or a PS4?

TK: No comment!

<everyone laughs>

JS: Good answer.

TK: But we cannot buy it until next year.

JS: Yes, because the PS4 is being released outside of Japan first, I believe.

TK: Yes, the PS4 is coming 22 February 2014. People from Microsoft were laughing, because 22 February in 2002 was when they launched the original Xbox, and so they feel it's a very unlucky day. <laughs> But Sony likes things like 222, or 123. It's very unfortunate for the Japanese audience. When Sony announced the PS4, in New York for the very first time, last year, people were disappointed. They were asking, "Why in New York? Why not in Japan? Sony is a Japanese company." And again, they're going to launch their hardware outside of Japan first, and then inside Japan later. That's very disappointing for a Japanese audience.

JS: Does it seem strange that Japan is a secondary concern, after Western markets?

TK: Talking about sales volume, I think America is number one, and Europe comes second, as a collective group. While Japan is far behind.

JS: Is this because of the increasing popularity of smartphone games? I've heard comments that the Japanese games market is in decline.

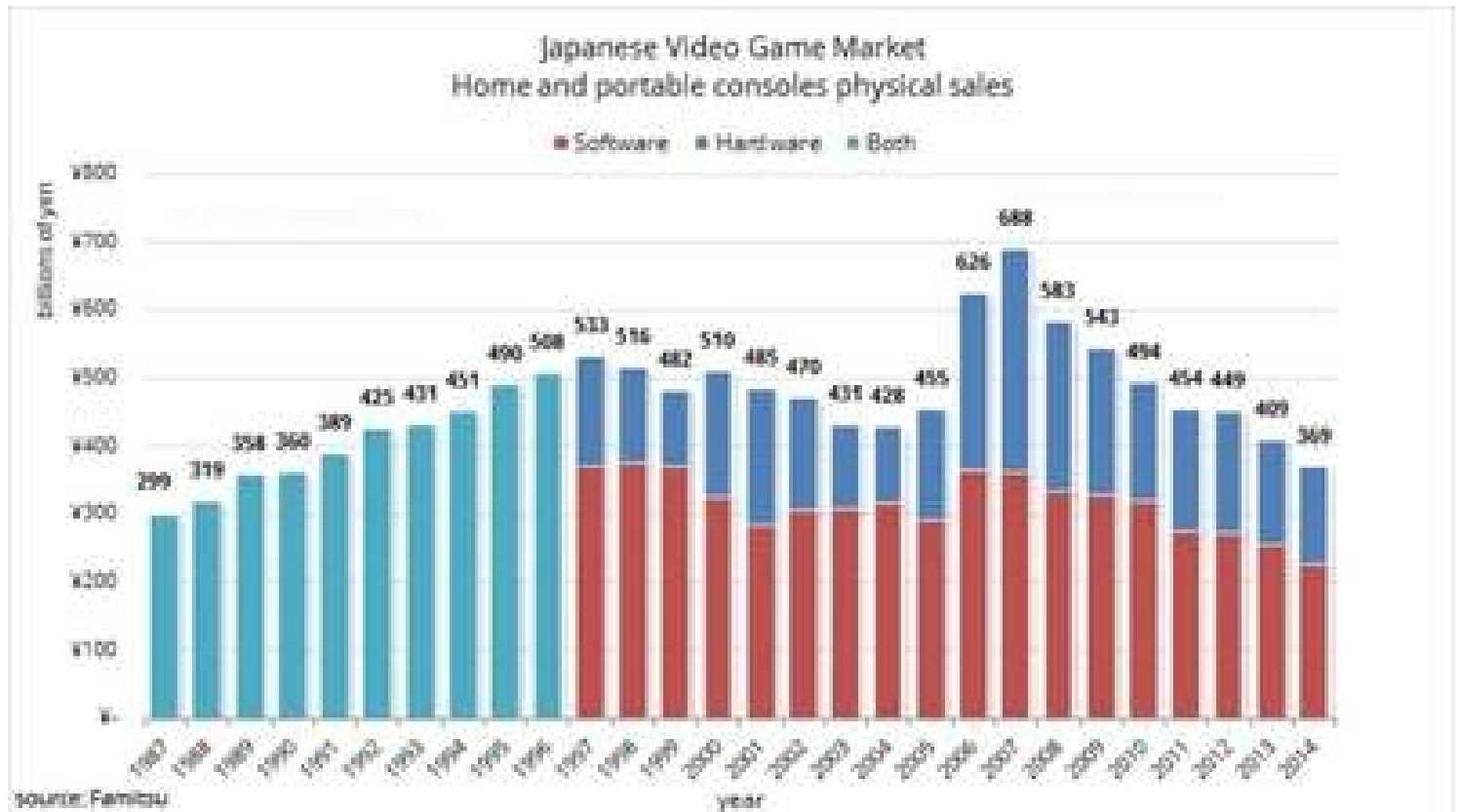
TK: Ahh... The Japanese *games market* is **not** declining. But the Japanese console market is declining, because of smartphones and other things. So I think the lifestyle of stopping by Yodobashi Camera, or Bic Camera, and picking up a game for 60 or 70 bucks, as an initial commitment, that kind of lifestyle is diminishing. You know, you can buy a game for free, even at 2am in your bed. So why bother going to the store to pay \$70?



JS: Because it's a richer, deeper experience when you play it on your HD TV, with optimal controls?

TK: People don't care about a richer, bigger experience. Some people care... My favourite analogy which I often use is: *It's like a camera*. For ordinary people, the iPhone is good enough to shoot or take a picture. But some people, who really like photographs, they will dare to buy a huge, single-reflection lens. So the console game is something like that. People who dare to care are the only ones who buy. So I don't think consoles will go away, or consoles will die. But rather the market size cannot be as huge as it used to be. It's a very

disappointing forecast for my generation. But the good news, or bright side, is since smartphone and tablet performance is getting much higher and higher, soon it will catch up with the 360's performance. That will mean you can play something like *Gears of War* on your smartphone, connected to a huge television.



Graph posted by NeoGAF user Road, in forum thread titled: "Japan 2014 Console/Handheld Market: Lowest in 24 Years + Top Games"

JS: Where will console games be then, if you can connect your smartphone to a TV?

TK: Those will be very difficult days for the console market, or rather the console makers. But it will be good for gamers, I believe. It will mean more than 3 or 4 billion consoles in people's pockets, worldwide. It must be exciting days.

JS: There was a news story by *Famitsu* on sales of console games in Japan, which have dropped to the same level as in 1990.^{[964](#)} It was covered by *Forbes*.^{[965](#)}

TK: Back in 1990 we didn't have the internet, DVD, mobile phones, smartphones or 24 hour broadcasting of TV. Nights were much more silent and long. As teenagers, all we could do after 1am was reading a book or playing Famicom. In that sense, games were enjoying almost exclusive position in the "battle of hours". Now, although we still don't have hover-boards or auto-fitting Nike,^{[966](#)} our available 24 hours are much, much more crowded. Consumer games need to fight against other competitors of entertainment or social networking. So, in short, our lifestyle has changed dramatically in the last 25 years and I don't think we need to be pessimistic at all with this result.

If we look at the entire game market, including smartphones and PC, it's getting bigger

and bigger. Very soon hardware performance of smartphones will catch up and go over PS3 or even PS4. When it happens, we can say there are over a billion pieces of hardware with high end games, all over the world, in people's pockets. It is a super exciting vision for all game developers.

JS: A brave new world...

TK: I hope so!



Unreal Engine has allowed cult developers like Swery65 to make games like [D4: Dark Dreams Don't Die](#) for Xbox One

Volume 1

For more detailed information on the first volume of *The Untold History of Japanese Game Developers*, visit the page on Hardcore Gaming 101, or the Amazon pages. Below is the Gold Edition cover - the simpler cover, with blue background, has been discontinued. Please support the books by spreading the word. Volume 3 can only be written if Volumes 1 and 2 receive enough sales. Thank you.



THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF JAPANESE GAME DEVELOPERS

36 interviewees, 526 pages, over a quarter of a million words, with more undocumented information than any other source. Dozens of unreleased games, Konami and Namco and Taito's unreleased home consoles, the sneaky politics behind Enix's early years, the pre-history and founding of Game Arts, plus the unheard secrets of Telenet, Falcom, Quintet, SNK, Sega, Hudson, Namco, Capcom, Mitchell Corporation, Love-de-Lic, and more, straight from those who were there. Features hand-drawn office layouts from these classic developers, plus never before seen archive photographs, all documenting the last 35 years of Japanese gaming history.

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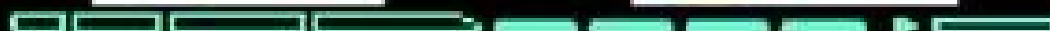
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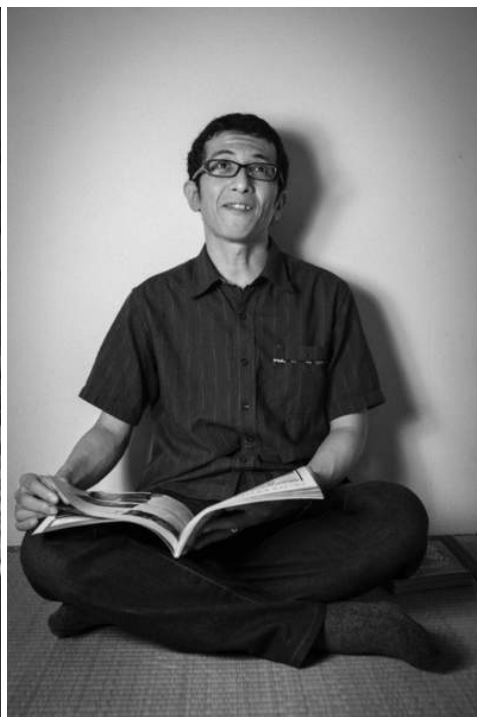
A partial selection of interviewees from Volume 3



Kouichi Yotsui



Takashi Tokita



Aziz Hinoshita



Yoshihide Kobayashi



Toshinari Oka



Yoji Ishii



Yukata Sugano



Naoto Ohshima



Manabu Kusunoki



Kotaro Hayashida



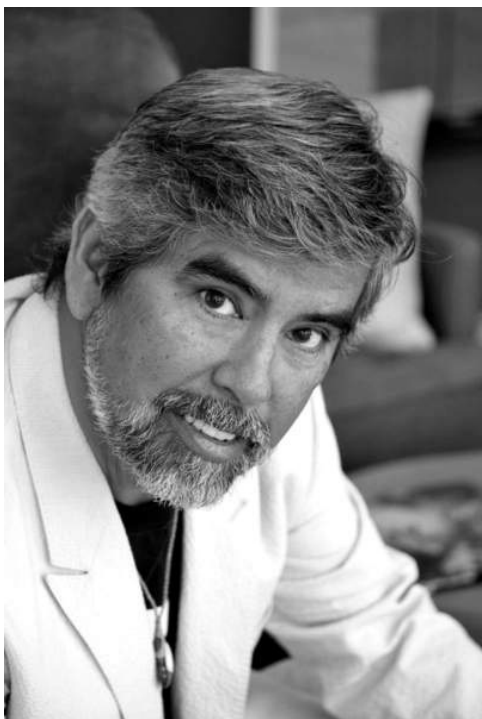
Takato Yoshinari



Ken Ogura



Masahiro Fukuda



Henk Rogers



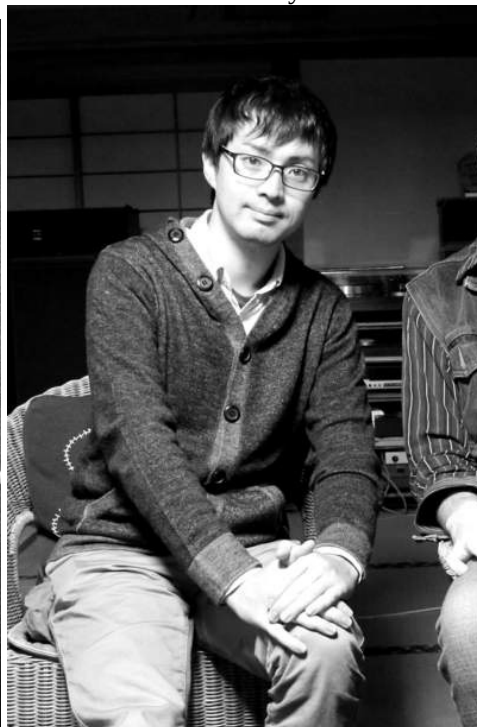
Yoshio Kiya



Manabu Yamana



Hidenori Shibao



Ryota Akama



Takayuki Komabayashi



Anonymous (Microsoft Japan)



Yuichi Toyama



Kenichi Yokoo



Mitsuakira Tatsuta



Naosuke Arai



Takayuki Hirono



Satoshi Fujishima

Other great game books

These Are Secret Games: 50 Obscurities You Should Play and Love

By Donald Benfield



Hardcore Gaming 101 contributor Donald Benfield pens a series of essays on some truly excellent obscurities - it's a real labour of love because he insists on only playing original copies of the games on their original hardware. **Covering:** Alisia Dragoon / Armored Police Batrider / Battle Mania Daiginjou / Bio Force Ape / Boogie Wings / Border Down / Cannon Spike / Chikyuu Kaihou Gun Zas / Chou Aniki: Kyuukyoku Muteki Ginga Saikyou Otoko / The Cliffhanger: Edward Randy / DreamMix TV: World Fighters / Dynamite Cop! / Famicom Tantei Club Part 2 / Game Dev Story / Hajime no Ippo – The Fighting / Halo 2600 / Harmful Park / Jump Ultimate Stars / Kaeru no Tame ni Kane wa Naru / Live A Live / LSD Dream Emulator / Matrimelée / Mega Man: The Wily Wars / Mother 3 / Mr. Gimmick / Mushihime Sama Futari / Ninja Baseball Batman /

Outfoxies / Osman / Pepsiman / Policenauts / Powerstone 2 / Power Strike 2 / Progear / Project Justice / Red Earth / Shining Force 3 / Sin and Punishment / Skull Monkeys / SNK vs Capcom: Card Fighters 2 Expand Edition / Star Fox 2 / Steins;Gate / Streets of Rage Remake / Summer Carnival '92 Recca / TearRing Saga / Tingle's Rosy Rupeeland / Top Shop / Trip World / The Typing of the Dead / Wonder Project J 2

Monochromatica: Tales of Original Game Boy Development

By Sorrel Tilley

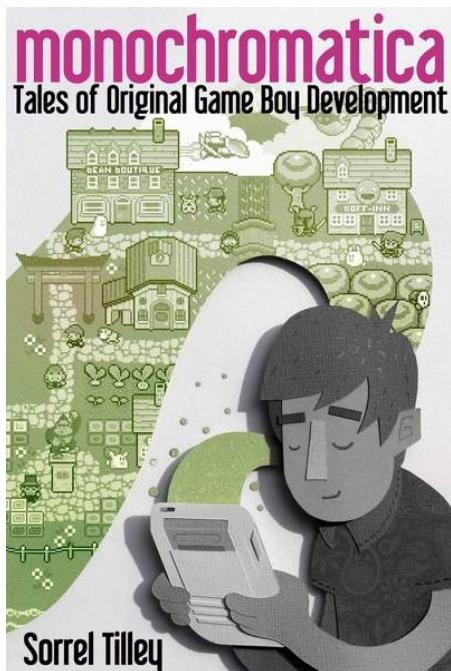
Mentioned in the last volume, *Monochromatica* is still in development. Mr Tilley also juggles all manner of real-life matters (like a day job and family), so be sure to visit and like the book's Facebook page, in order to nudge him along. The book compiles dozens of brand new behind-the-scenes interviews with the people responsible for *Pokémon*, *Worms*, *Bubble Ghost*, *Monster Max*, *Die Maus*, *Ottos Ottifanten*, *R-Type*, *Turrican*, *Micro Machines*, *X*, *Donkey Kong Land*, *Rescue of Princess Blobette*, and so many, many more! Coming in 2016, if enough people show interest.

<https://www.facebook.com/monochromaticabook>



HG101 Digest Vol. 1: Strider and Bionic Commando

By Kurt Kalata



Introducing the first HG101 digest! This series is smaller than the other books, coming in at 74 pages, covering a variety of different topics rather than focusing on one large one. In this edition, they're examining Strider and Bionic Commando, two of Capcom's most beloved franchises. To complement these, they're also looking at a handful of Strider clones, and other games with grappling hooks and swinging, particularly the oddball Umihara Kawase series. Additional features include an Inventory focusing on Western-developed computer games that were ported to the Famicom but not re-imported back to America, and capsule reviews of 80 Japanese PlayStation games.

For more HG101 books, visit the official page:

<http://www.hardcoregaming101.net/books.htm>

1 Author's note: excellent point, since for a long time the majority of Japanese games localised for the West had distinctly Japanese traits removed, whether *onigiri* in *Alex Kidd*, or altered cover art on just about every NES game. The promoting of a game's Japanese origins only started with Working Designs and its localisations - and even then, this was an isolated example until much later

2 *Batman* came out June 1989, though had been in production as early as 1986

3 Despite wanting the license to tie in with the original 1989 film, Konami's first license was for the film sequel *Batman Returns* (1992), thereafter producing the NES and SNES games, both released 1993

4 This is actually extremely complicated. SunSoft developed games for the NES, Game Boy and Mega Drive, all apparently to tie in with and inspired by the 1989 film, though the games were subtitled "*The Video Game*". SunSoft also developed a PC Engine title featuring Batman, but without any subtitle and it did not feel particularly related to the film (they actually made two PCE games, the other was unreleased). In turn Ocean Entertainment also made games, known as "*Batman: The Movie*", for various home computers. Atari also gained a license, producing an arcade title of its own (which is what Konami originally wanted the license for), and later an Atari Lynx game. Atari's arcade game has Copyright 1990, but Arcade-History.com says released April 1991. It was headed by John Ray of Atari (see [his interview](#))

5 The cut-scenes in the prototype show a Joker who resembles Jack Nicholson, but that's not conclusive as to its origins

6 I trawled MobyGames, and SunSoft was apparently publishing *Batman* games as late as May 1992 (*Return of the Joker*, GB); however, the European Mega Drive release was indeed published by Sega, though there's no mention of the month

7 www.chrismcovell.com/secret/PCE_1989Q3.html#batman

This version looked like a cool platform title, rather than the utterly awful *Pac-man* style game released on PC Engine

8 Oh the irony, that while editing this interview Konami delists itself from the stock exchange, fires Kojima, and seems on the verge of imploding

9 Segabits.com on YT: "*Pre-alpha prototype SEGA Australia pitched to SEGA as part of their new 'SEGA Reborn' line of remakes. The idea was all games under the 'Reborn' label would share the same universe!*"

10 ¥ - roughly, "YOU'RE KIDDING ME?!"

11 High-res sprites in a similar style to Vanillaware games (*Odin Sphere*, *Muramasa*, *Dragon's Crown*). IE: a large, grotesque skeletal monster, each part a separate image, joined together on "hinges" in an almost "paper marionette" or "shadow puppet" style. For the

skeleton, the skull, jaw, eyes, upper & lower arms, hands, were all separate images moving independently (*Rumble Fish* on PS2 did something similar). You'll have to take my word for this, but the artwork for the game looked *incredibly beautiful*

[12](#) [REDACTED] / [REDACTED] - president until [year]

[13](#) AKA: Mas Oyama. Founder of the Kyokushin school of karate; his nickname was "God Hand"

[14](#) This isn't unique to [REDACTED], it's a well established tactic among Japanese companies for forcing resignations; Google terms like "banishment room" or "forcing-out rooms". The point of this is to bore or depress employees into leaving, thereby denying them the full benefits from if they were officially retrenched

[15](#) [REDACTED], lit. "isolation room" - Googling in Japanese brings up news stories about [REDACTED]; some firms call it "*oidashibeya*" - according to **Asahi Shimbun**, firms like Sony and Hitachi did it

[16](#) Ironically, in August 2015 Nintendo fired Chris Pranger for speaking honestly (and positively) about the company

[17](#) Google various terms related to "games journalism corruption" to bring up multiple examples of "incentives" and arm-twisting by big publishers

[18](#) Formed by former Telenet staff, notable for the *Star Ocean* and *Valkyria Profile* games

[19](#) Several announced games, to be published by Square-Enix, were cancelled, including: *Fortress*, *Highlander*, *Gun Loco*, *Catacombs*, *Project Dropship*, and *Downfall: San Francisco*

[20](#) For X360, cancelled March 2011. **SiliconEra**: "*A sprint action shooter, Gun Loco had players run, slide, and shoot each other. The game was set on a prison planet with wacky inmates and used plastic models as the base for the character models.*"

[21](#) Taro Yokoo, of *Drakengard* / *Drag-On Dragoon*

[22](#) Lit. bullet curtain shooter

[23](#) The often swearing Kainé, who is fused with a Shade and is also a hermaphrodite

[24](#) There's a little wooden staircase to the right side which is much quicker

[25](#) Japan had two versions, affecting the main character: *NieR Gestalt* for 360, with the father, and *NieR Replicant* for PS3 starring the brother. The relationship and dialogue with Yonah (daughter or sister) changed, otherwise the versions are identical. Outside Japan, on both 360 and PS3, only *Replicant* was released, albeit titled just *Nier*. Cavia director Yoko-san later confirmed the two designs were to cater to different markets

- [26](#) Fascinating publisher of Japanese obscurities, including T&E Soft's *Floating Runner*; Naito was director of a Xing S-RPG for PS1
- [27](#) Naito's involvement was regarding the PS1 board-game *Dragon Money*, but Microcabin is part of Japan's collective of fascinating Action-RPG developers, alongside Falcom, Xainsoft, and T&E Soft, and developed the *Xak* series
- [28](#) Developer of *Dragon Quest*; Naito was director on their PSP ver. of *Fushigi no Dungeon - Fuurai no Shiren 4 Plus*
- [29](#) The name is now slightly different, but you can find them at: www.hal.ac.jp
- [30](#) Praline enveloped in yoghurt with angelica, so as to appear green like *edamame* beans
- [31](#) *Legend of PC-8801 Revival*; ASCII, ISBN 4-7561-4730-5, over 220 pages, bookazine; although I was unaware of this publication prior to arriving in Japan, I discovered it contained interviews with a diverse selection of famous PC-88 developers, several of whom would feature in my own books, including: Tokihiro Naito and Yoshio Kiya (they were dressed up in armour having a mock sword fight), the late Kazurou Morita, Kohei Ikeda, Takeshi Miyaji, Yuzo Koshiro, and Takaki Kobayashi; it also contains detailed examinations of popular games and respective genres, in addition to technical information on the PC-88; essential for fans of Japanese computer games (comes with a CD-ROM)
- [32](#) Probably referring to *Terebi Tennis* (テレビテニス), also known as *Electrotennis*), a single-game home console system very similar to Atari's Pong that was released in Japan by Epoch in 1975
- [33](#) Part of Sharp's MZ range of computers (circa 1978); the MZ-80K was also sold in Europe
- [34](#) Prize money was about \$4'500 USD in 2014, adj. for inflation
- [35](#) T&E Soft was founded by the brothers Toshirou and Eiji Yokoyama (hence T&E); Naito never specified which brother, though it's probably Toshirou
- [36](#) ; controlling the eponymous Mutar, players navigate a forest, avoiding or shooting enemies, and collecting parts to rebuild the Cosmo Battle Ship ZANZIBAR. Upon take-off the game turns into a 2D shmup akin to *Galaga*
- [37](#) Given that no-one could recall the game, I asked arcade expert and dealer, **Takayuki Komabayashi**: "Naito-san's *Cosmo Mutar*, isn't it similar to *Blue Print* (1982) published by Jaleco? The collecting of parts is very similar." Amazingly this seems right! In *BP* you collect parts to a giant machine to then shoot enemies
- [38](#) Most likely Kayoko Miura; various T&E Soft roles up until 1992

[39](#) Nagoya HAL is a large training college specializing in subjects like game and CG design; www.hal.ac.jp

[40](#) Early T&E Soft coder; later worked on a series of golf games

[41](#) T&E programmer, but very few credits in English online; worked alongside Eiji Kato and Tokihiro Naito on *Daiva*

[42](#) www.msx.org/forum

[43](#) Forum user Guillian: "In the *Hydlide* ROM there is a message from Mr Kato asking to contact him if you discover how the password system works. I reverse engineered the Z80 code and examined the encoding and decoding routine. So I found out the meaning of all bits in the code, and made a simple tool to generate passwords. I thought it would be nice to contact Mr Kato - I think he'd be surprised someone found it 30 years later."

[44](#) Confusingly, there is a website for a data security company, www.ed-contrive.co.jp, but this claims they were founded in 2006. Both *Hydlide 3* and *Undeathline* credit ED-Contrive Co.,LTD

[45](#) Note that in the Japanese titles at least, *Hydlide II* uses a Roman numeral, while *Hydlide 3* uses an Arabic numeral

[46](#) PC-9801 sound boards were built around the Yamaha YM2203 or YM2608 sound chip, both of which included an internal programmable sound generator (PSG) module, also known as a software-controlled sound generator (SSG) in Yamaha jargon, and a separate FM synthesis sound module

[47](#) At least 8 formats: PC-6001, PC-88, X-1, FM-7, MZ-2000, MSX, MSX2, PC-98

[48](#) Famous Japanese singer, composer, lyricist and pianist

[49](#) Refer to the Exchange Rates chart, circa 1986

[50](#) *TBO*: first-person dungeon crawler for computers by Henk Rogers / *ToD*: top-down arcade game by Namco/Masanobu Endou

[51](#) Taken from the "Hydlide Museum" featured in *Hydlide* for Windows 95/98 (Apr. 1999). Here's an archive: www.hardcoregaming101.net/hydlide/MUSEUM/MUSEUM.HTM

[52](#) As researched by S. Derboo on HG101, *Courageous Perseus* is one of the earliest if not the first Action-RPG; worth reading up on

[53](#) Myself and Joseph had long conversations about this outside of interviews, specifically how and where Japanese developers were first exposed to European medieval-styled (or even Tolkien-esque) fantasy tropes; it's fascinating, because while a high number of Western

developers openly admit to drawing directly from Tolkien or Dungeons & Dragons (or even European history), a surprisingly high number of Japanese developers actually had their first taste of European fantasy (elves, orcs, sorcerers etc.) through various Western dungeon-crawlers which came over; one exception is Falcom, which took most of its ideas from a very specific book, which is covered Yoshio Kiya's interview in Vol.3

[54](#) There's a detailed write-up on *Mugen no Shinzou* on HG101's blog; thoughts from expert Matt Fitsko: "The more I study early Japanese games, the more I realize that *Mugen no Shinzou*, in its quiet little way, is one of the most influential Japanese RPGs of all time. There are even claims that *Dragon Quest* plagiarized *Mugen no Shinzou II*." (*I've often heard this too! - ed*)

[55](#) The history of Carry Lab warrants a chapter in itself. The only detailed English information is an unsourced Wikipedia page, though it's less detailed than the Japanese page. The following paragraph, based on both pages, lacks primary sources and should NOT be cited as a source itself: Established sometime around 1981 by students from Kumamoto University's microcomputer club, initially as a part-time job but later a company after good sales. The name comes from the "carry flag" term in computer science. There were seven main programmers, including Hiroshi Hasegawa. The company was famous for a language they developed (BASE). Carry Lab produced an enormous amount of software, including a range of word processors for popular computers, and a staggering number of original games and conversions for other companies, such as Taito and T&E Soft. Their Famicom platformer *Hao-kun no Fushigi na Tabi* () was released in America as *Mystery Quest* on NES. Dates vary, but between 1986/87 many staff left, and from this apparently four new companies formed, including Alfa System (the other three have no internet presence)

[56](#) Taken from the **Game Developer Research Institute** website: "Established in December 1979 as Jordan Information Service Co., Ltd. (¥) by president and CEO Toshikazu Sato (), Jorudan Co., Ltd. (¥ - as it was rechristened in December 1989) is a company involved with software development, digital content for the web and mobile phones, the travel industry, and more." ; portfolio is interesting, they were involved with *Bloody Bride* on PS1 (see [Tsuruta chpt](#)), & made *Xardion* and *Alien Vs. Predator* for SNES

[57](#) Interestingly, there are quite a few Japanese games featuring "god killing" in the storyline, including: *Guardian Heroes*, the *Shin Megami Tensei* series, the *Xeno-* series of RPGs, *Fire Emblem* series, *Breath of Fire* series, *Star Ocean*, and - of course - the obviously titled *God Slayer* on the Famicom; while there are some god-slaying games by Western developers, it seems to be an especially popular trope in Japanese videogames

[58](#) Referring to Toshiro Yokoyama, co-founder of T&E Soft

[59](#) T&E Soft has a history of and good reputation for golf games

[60](#) Yasuo Yoshikawa's interview covers the series in-depth. There were seven versions, released over the course of a year. The release of the PC-9801 version was a little later

[61](#) *Daiva 6* credits a Daisuke Asakura; Wikipedia has a page for a same-named musician (kanji:) born 1967, which would have made him around 19 during *Daiva's* development, however Wikipedia states he joined Yamaha right after college

[62](#) In other words, an RTS/RPG hybrid

[63](#) One exception is Sean Naden, interviewed in *Retro Gamer* #43; if you know other *RotR* staff, put them in touch

[64](#) 26 April 1996, establishment of E.O.Imagination Inc., (Pres.)

[65](#) BOX. There is zero information in English online. From all I've seen, it appears to be akin to Sony's Net Yaroze for the PS1; device(s) allowing users to program their own games, for various systems incl. PCE and SS. This topic deserves deep research!

[66](#) **Tokuma Shoten** via **Mobygames**: "*Starting in 1985 with the Family Computer Magazine and Technopolis magazines, was a strong pretender to ASCII's throne in the games magazine market. Apart from the main business of magazine publishing, Tokuma also published some games.*" / **Bits Laboratory**: founded Dec 1985, primarily did cross-platform conversions. Lots of coverage in V1. Not to be confused with the UK's BITS Ent.

[67](#) 1st Sep. 1999, joined COMPUTER SOGOGAKUEN HAL Nagoya College. Instruction Dept.

[68](#) It's unclear what TP means in "4-year game course TP". Possibly "teaching portfolio"

[69](#) Hiroshi Makabe; eyeresh.com - handles many projects

[70](#) Masanori Yagi; Artdink created the *A-Train* and *Aquanaut's Holiday* series

[71](#) Unclear whether *Pong* at the arcades, or Epoch's home version

[72](#) Year 10 / 10th grade

[73](#) NBC was eventually absorbed by Hitachi; now part of present-day Hitachi Information Systems Ltd.

[74](#) (MSX range, 1985 / FM-7, 1986); followed by *Super Laydock* and *Laydock 2*; short-lived series of innovative vertical shmups emphasising 2P simultaneous play; each player controls one of two ships that can "dock" either vertically or horizontally to increase firepower

[75](#) Trivia found on JPN Wikipedia page for *Laydock*; on the title screen of both *Laydock* and *Super Laydock* for the MSX series you can hear an English radio conversation; apparently other speaker is Conrad Kozawa, who has an eclectic range of credits

[76](#) (MSX2, 1989) ; resembles a colourful, cute or *chibi* version of *Laydock*; available through Project EGG

[77](#) Loosely analogous to FDS vending machines. From MobyGames: "*Takeru was a software label by Brother Industries. Takeru did not sell software over the counter, instead it used vending machines placed in computer shops.*" Sadly a lot of vending machine exclusive titles are feared lost forever after Takeru closed the service. Vending catalogues detailing these lost games are now possibly our only record

[78](#) Unknown; prob. not Yasuo Yoshikawa, he was in development

[79](#) (lit. *Top Dog Quest*, MSX2, 1989); amusing hori-shmup, check YouTube vids

[80](#) This is both ingenious & hilarious; there's dozens of unique placements - in one example you fly past the Seto Swimming School and a real-life shopping plaza, blowing up sign boards

[81](#) www.msx.org/forum/msx-talk/software/unknown-te-soft-game

[82](#) *Komainu* are statues of guardian lion-dogs originally based on a Chinese motif, and can be found decorating various Shinto shrines throughout Japan. *Komainu* are associated with Seto because the city was historically a major centre of Japanese pottery, where many of the *komainu* statues were made

[83](#) Google search for a DropBox download on the [retrogamesrevival](#) blog, in DSK format

[84](#) ; probably best known for its MD iteration and high difficulty, this vertical shmup started on the MSX2 (1989), later upgraded for the X68000 (1990); beautifully realised setting - players select a stats-based character and one of several starting stages, then walk upscreen shooting enemies in an environment that looks like it's ripped straight from an RPG

[85](#) , lit. *phantom beast demon*

[86](#) / *Baikingu no Daimeiwaku* (X68k, 1990)

[87](#) According to Damocles on Shmups Forum: "*The supposed difficulty comes more from lack of familiarity and preconceptions about shooters than anything else.*" He wrote a detailed guide, with several forumites completing the game

[89](#) Bizarre trilogy, see accompanying section. First title on MSX2 (1987):
 , lit. "*Holy Warrior of Legend*"

[90](#) Specifically the A1 series

[91](#) *Story II* , lit. "*Citadel in the Void*" ; fan-translated into English

[92](#) *Story III* , lit. "*Fires of Revenge*"

[93](#) Similar to the situation for the original *Megami Tensei* on MSX and Famicom, developed by Telenet and Atlus respectively; the two games were based on the same source material, but entirely different interpretations. See K. Yokota in Vol.1 for explanation

[94](#) Listed in a portfolio email; zero info online, in JPN or ENG

[95](#) Satoru Aoyama, credited on several T&E games, including *Wing Arms* and *Undeadline*

[96](#) ¥ / *Enjin Danshaku*

[97](#) So probably 1992 or early 1993

[98](#) Numbers here presumably refer to the limit on support characters who follow the protagonist (normally there's up to 4, for a total of 5 onscreen), difficult to find more info in English; screens of *Sword World PC* (PC-9801) show up to 6 support characters, for a total of 7

[99](#) Kenji Nakashima, various T&E credits

[100](#) (1995); development credited to Bell Corporation; WWII 3D shooter

[101](#) *F-1* / *F1 Challenge* (SS, 1995)

[102](#) Given the volume of things named *Musashi* it's impossible to research - there doesn't seem to be any trace of it online, despite heavy trawling in multiple languages; possibly unreleased

[103](#) , lit. "*Yu-kun's Savings*"

[104](#) There is no record of this game online which I can find, even in Japanese; Joseph Redon had no knowledge of the title

[105](#) Hence the term "*pachislot*"

[106](#) Only three games credited on MobyGames, all are from the *Laydock* series of shmups

[107](#) Simple top-down shmup for MSX1; MobyGames says 1984, Generation-MSX says 1983

[108](#) Toshiba EMI published *Daiva* for the Famicom

[109](#) The FM77AV was the only model to feature 4096 colours and built-in FM synthesis as a standard feature; it was a late update to Fujitsu's range, but was technically very impressive

[110](#) Astoundingly, the MSX1 version is better than the MSX2 version; although less colourful, there's *much* greater background detail, and the scrolling and movement is noticeably smoother

[111](#) amusement-center.com/project/egg/cgi/ecatalog-detail.cgi?product_id=610 (pictured)

[112](#) There appears to have been more than one attempt at fan-translation; the latest by Django Translations is from around 2010, search MSX.org for more info

[113](#) For NDS, March 2011

[114](#) Very unusual Action-RPG for SFC (Jan 1997); it regularly switches perspective between top-down, side-on and first-person, for exploration, combat and dialogue

[115](#) Nickname changed since 2013; Twitter name is still @yopikapa

[116](#) Both Irem, out 1987 and 1988 respectively; *Image Fight* was a vertical shmup and apparently, according to producer Hiroshi Iuchi, inspired *Radiant Silvergun*

[117](#) **MobyGames:** "1 October 1990 Xtalsoft combined with T&E Soft to form its Osaka development department"

[118](#) Casey Loe: "Twice he makes references to what T&E stands for in a slightly odd way. I'm not sure if I'm reading too much into unusual word choices, or if this is some sort of sly running gag about what T&E officially stands for VS what it's rumoured to actually stand for"

[119](#) ZAS (¥) / Lit. "Earth Liberation Force ZAS" (GB, Dec 1992); one of the GB's most technically accomplished titles, creating transparencies and parallax scrolling through use of an alternating background layer

[120](#) Michiaki Takahashi - not much online

[121](#) Tadashi Nakatsuji; director on *Red Alarm*, also handled a lot of audio work at T&E Soft

[122](#) Look up Stereopsis for a detailed explanation

[123](#) February 1993, SFC

[124](#) Note that "Vulcan cannon" was mistakenly translated as "Balkan cannon" within the game itself

[125](#) **Kurt Kalata** via HG101: *"By default, the machine gun is set to auto-fire, as the three [Mega Drive] buttons are used to fire missiles, speed up and slow down."*

[126](#) Casey Loe: He used a term that translates as "Coordinate Processing" for which there are few references online. This may have been something more specific to the era - basically, he means "calculating the coordinates of all the wireframe points"

[127](#) Released march 1996 in America; although a Japanese version was planned (× / *Polygo Block*), it was never actually released

[128](#) Puzzle mode was ingenious ([pictured](#)), but it's difficult to convey in screenshots: you're shown a 3D object at the bottom of a well, built out of blocks, and must replicate it using the pre-chosen blocks which fall down the well - what makes it tricky is some blocks overlap, and specific shapes can be achieved in different ways. After completing the construction correctly it morphs into a cuboid version of what it represents (eg: a Sea Lion that looks like it's made of Lego)

[129](#) For all of them: [youtube.com/watch?v=3n6J3JyICQ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n6J3JyICQ0)

[130](#) Ultimately *3-D Tetris* was published exclusively in America by Nintendo, while *V-Tetris* on VB was published exclusively in Japan by BPS several months prior. *3-D Tetris* is undeniably the more ambitious and better game, and it seems logical Nintendo of America would prefer to focus on it as their main US *Tetris* release, blocking release of *V-Tetris*; it's conceivable the JPN release of *3-D* was cancelled so as not to conflict with *V-Tetris*

[131](#) **TCRF**: At title screen press Select 60 times. In-game, press L, R, Select and A simultaneously

[132](#) www.oki.com/

[133](#) Cuboid shape with a radial dial on the right, resembling an old radio; the series launched in 1969, with the 4300C version arriving 1972; improved revisions were released until 1980

[134](#) **MobyGames**: Hudson was founded on May 18th, 1973, by the brothers Yuuji and Hiroshi Kudou. The company was named after Hudson locomotives due to its founders' love of trains. It was initially a shop called CQ Hudson, which sold radio telecommunications devices and art photographs. In September 1975 Hudson began focusing on computer-related products, and in March 1978 they started developing computer games

[135](#) System Development Kit - single-board computers to allow familiarisation with new Intel

microprocessors; the SDK-80 allowed evaluation of the 8080 MicroComputer System (MCS-80)

[136](#) "Training Kit" for the 8080; according to Old-Computers.com it's considered Japan's first home-computer and was the base for the PC-8001, 8801 and 9801

[137](#) / *Princess Tomato in the Salad Kingdom*; computer versions released circa 1984, the FC conversion May 1988 and the NES localisation in 1991; a delightful graphic adventure set in a world of anthropomorphic vegetables

[138](#) A joint venture between Hudson, Nintendo and Sharp, *Family BASIC* for Famicom was released 21 June 1984 and came with a bespoke FC keyboard; incl. a few, simple pre-made games; data had to be saved to cassette via an attachment; later revised to include more RAM. *Pokémon* creator **Satoshi Tajiri** described the creation of his first Famicom/NES title, *Quinty* (aka *Mendel Palace*) to the Tokyo Met. Museum: "*It became possible to see what was actually going on inside the Famicom, when software for beginners called 'Family BASIC' was released. When I completely understood its mechanism, I went to Akihabara to buy a multi-use circuit board, added the terminals from my Famicom, and ran my programs over it. That was our first step. Then I made a long-lasting battery, to save the memory on the circuit board. It was all a handmade developing environment.*"

[139 \[hardcoregaming101.net/princesstomato/princesstomato.htm\]\(http://hardcoregaming101.net/princesstomato/princesstomato.htm\)](http://hardcoregaming101.net/princesstomato/princesstomato.htm)

[140](#) Similar to *Mario Bros.* with the POW block, but you have balls you can punch at enemies

[141](#) 31 July 1984 (FC)

[142](#) 28 July 1984 (FC), also released on C64 as *Hot Pop*; cute & fun single-screen platformer, where what appears to be an anthropomorphic *derriere* collects fruit and avoids blue *derrieres*, to be reacquainted with his true love (another pink *derriere*). Hudson also developed a game with the same name for Japanese home computers, but these are very different, having a top-down perspective; the computer versions have "Copyright 1983" on the title, making the FC version a re-imagining done from scratch sometime after; the programmer for both PC and FC versions was Masaaki Kikuta, who also made *Punch Ball Mario Bros.*

[143](#) "Bomber Man" is basically a robot, and completing the game makes him human, and the ending message says "See you again in *Lode Runner*", the enemies of which are the same such robots

[144](#) , lit. "Bomber Man", the original version of the *Bomberman* game; released in 1983 on most of the major Japanese computers of the day; a version of it was converted to the ZX Spectrum as *Eric & the Floaters* circa 1983/84

[145](#) , sequel to original *Bomberman*, released 1984 across the usual *maicon* suspects: PC-8801, PC-6001, MSX, FM-7, and Sharp X1; although stating no involvement with *Bomberman*, I asked about the "3-D" sequel on the off chance. This one-shot sequel is unique: it functions like the original *Bomberman*, but players are in a first-person maze, being chased by enemies. Getting the timing for bombs was difficult in 2D, but in 3D the game takes on an almost survival-horror atmosphere as you desperately run around, never sure where the enemy is. The concept was never used again, but it's fascinating to examine

[146](#) Initially I thought there was a mix up, and instead of *SMB Special*, it was regular *MB Special* that Takebe worked on, but as we concluded, he did indeed work on *SMB Special*, but not to the extent that he witnessed everything going in; given previous answers this makes sense - he may simply have laid out the stage structure, while the rest of the team hid the Easter Eggs. For the record, regular *MB Special* is **amazingly excellent!**

[147](#) Takashi Takebe is credited under "Special Thanks"

[148](#) × / *Jaseiken Necromancer* (22 January 1988); traditional JRPG quest for a sword of both good and evil

[149](#) · ; text adventure with graphics exclusive to computers. First release 1983, followed by conversions. Released on PC-8801, PC-6001mkII, MSX, FM-7, X1, MZ-1500, PC-9801, S1, SPC-1000. Title is a pun on "Disneyland", with the protagonist visiting six satirical versions of well known Tokyo Disneyland attractions. This was a breakthrough release for Hudson! Had a sequel for computers, · / *Dezeni World*, released circa 1985 followed by conversions. Similar to its predecessor, but with better graphics and even crazier parodies of known properties (Superman, C3PO, etc.). As the box states: "Warning: For Crazy People Only"

[150](#) The 1983 videogame crash in North America

[151](#) Read: hardcoregaming101.net/dezeniland/dezeniland.htm

[152](#) ; prototype for *Pang*. Spectrum version released 1983 as *Bubble Buster*. Original JPN release probably for PC-6001, but there were many home computer versions. Also bonus game in *Susanou Densetsu* for PC Engine

[153](#) Alluded to in the Roy Ozaki chapter, V1, though I never quite got all the answers; the first *Pang* came out in arcades 1989

[154](#) According to J. Redon of Japan's Game Preservation Society

[155](#) Consider this in the context of interviews from V1, such as Toru Hidaka's and those by Game Arts founders, and also that of Tokihiro Naito, since we're in that transitional period

where focus started shifting from arcades and computers over to the Famicom

[156](#) Precise dates are difficult, but all of these computer conversions were released late 1985

[157](#) Series of JPN arcade games based on *Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King*. Players battle monsters and can win real-life cards with monster data imprinted on them. The first game was released June 2007 using the Taito Type X2 system. Games are based around coliseum battles; monsters can be chosen from either the game or cards players insert

[158](#) AKA: Erdrick's Sword. Powerful sword found in the first three *DQ* games; once belonged to the legendary hero

[159](#) Blend of SoftBank comments from V1: "Now it's mostly about mobile phones, but they were called 'Software Bank' because they were a big seller of PC software. It never invented, only published. Masayoshi Son, the CEO, was cooking up the idea of a 'logistics business', naming his company SoftBank. Not sales, distribution; from the beginning they said, 'We'll only distribute.' They did well, having 70% or 80% of the distribution market in Japan. Masayoshi Son was a real shark; kind of like the Bill Gates of Japan, a really sharp businessman. SoftBank is hugely successful now, bringing the iPhone to Japan & things like that."

[160](#) worldofspectrum.org lists the following Hudson developed games released circa 1983/84: *Bubble Buster* (aka: *Cannon Ball*), *Driller Tanks* (aka: *Itasundorious*), *Eric & the Floaters* (aka: *Bomberman*), *Frog Shooter*, *Stop the Express*, *Vegetable Crash*

[161](#) Hudson's "package" system also explained in Iwasaki's chapter

[162](#) Susukino is the major nightlife district of Sapporo, home to countless bars and clubs where Japanese businesspeople go to unwind and speak openly over a pint of Sapporo Draft

[163](#) / *meijin*, lit. master or expert

[164](#) **Kurt Kalata:** "From 1985 to 1992 Hudson ran a nationwide tournament called the 'Hudson All-Japan Caravan Festival', where players could compete and test their skills. Each year they'd have a new game to challenge. [Given its popularity] the genre of choice was the vertical shmup. From this came Hudson's early shoot-em-ups: *Star Force*, *Star Soldier* and *Starship Hector*."

[165](#) So true - Hudson produced the first HDTV game (*Hi-Ten Bomberman*), years before HDTV; shown at the Hudson Soft Super Caravan 1993 event, it allowed up to 10 players. Only 5 units were made, at a cost of 200'000'000 yen each (source: a now 404 entry on Takahashi Meijin's blog [16Shot](#)); more on Gamasutra (search "Game Master Speaks") and here: randomhooahas.flyingomelette.com/bomb/arc-hiten/

[166](#) **Flyingomelette:** "*Hi-Ten Bomberman* was not created on a specific console or hardware

board. Running the game was a joint effort between two PCE consoles, and brand new circuit boards that handled the high-definition video display, allowing the 16:9 resolution (rather than the PC Engine's native 4:3 display). This hardware later became the 'Tetsujin' board (/ Iron Man)"

[167](#) The plan was to print scans of the 4 page brochure, but Joseph misplaced it when moving offices. (Argh!!) Will put online if found

[168](#) **Wikipedia:** "A Bee Card () is a ROM cart developed by Hudson as a software distribution medium for MSX. Only a small number of titles were published on Bee Card. To use a Bee Card, the cartridge slot of the MSX has to be fitted with an adapter: the Hudson Bee Pack." For more info, visit MSX.org

[169](#) / hachi / bee in Eng.

[170](#) PC ¥ → PC ¥ → PC ; the last two kanji (, pronounced *genjin*), literally mean primitive man, so it's actually ingenious wordplay. **Author:** "If I was forced to make an English equivalent, imagine if Sega created a highly-intelligent mascot called 'Sega Genius', starring in a series of games for its 'Genesis' system... Or Microsoft had a mascot game series for its Xbox, featuring a pirouetting cuboid chicken called 'Eggs Blocks'"

[171](#) This is incredible - basically the screenshots online are just mockups! The game never existed in any functional form

[172](#) (lit. "To the North"); super obscure series by Hudson, the first being "*Kita e. White Illumination*" for Dreamcast (Mar 1999); likely the one referred to, given Takebe's leaving Hudson in 1999; it's set in Hokkaido and is a VN/dating sim style game

[173](#) / *Meikyuu Kumikyoku* in Japanese, FC (Nov 1986)

[174](#) This also happened at Namco, see Pr. Kishimoto chapter

[175](#) 5 October 2013, www.loft-prj.co.jp/schedule/plusone/17742

[176](#) Key Performance Indicator - a business metric used to evaluate factors crucial to something's success

[177](#) There were many *Star Trek* games during this era; *Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator* for arcades (1982) was ported to the Apple II and featured 3D graphics. Given the 1979 date though, it was more likely *Apple Trek*, based on the earlier mainframe version of *Star Trek*, or a variant thereof

[178](#) Very Tiny Language

[179](#) Oh wow - there is almost no information on this in English online, though there are Japanese results. If wanting further reading, try searching for "GAME ". Appears to have many variations for different systems

[180](#) From the inception of the Compact Disc there began a series of "Rainbow Books", initiated by Sony and Philips, which were standardised definitions for the various different types. There are 9 official colours in the range, each with sub-variations; a 10th term, Black Book, refers to non-conforming discs, such as those for NEC's PC Engine CD-ROM (explaining why they have weird file structures). This is also why developers say stuff like "we added Red Book music to our game", meaning they added CD Digital Audio which streamed from the disc. Having interviewed Dale DeSharone, creator of the two side-scrolling *Zelda* games for CDi, this subject greatly interests me. The DeSharone interview is online and contains further details on Green Book

[181](#) **Dale DeSharone:** *"In 1987 I moved from California to Boston, to help build a CDi team for Spinnaker Software. Spinnaker had a deal with Philips to produce seven launch titles. I was brought on to help understand the capabilities of the platform and act as design lead. My immediate supervisor, Steve Yellick, was a guy out of MIT who knew a lot about laser technology and image compression and had been a part of the original Red Book specification team. He didn't know much about building games however. About a year into the project he put his head in an oven (literally) and I became the manager of the development group."*

[182](#) Docs from the conference were leaked by Steve Lin via social media in earl 2014 and state: "Nintendo Technical Conference of February 1, 1993" and describe the proposed add-on, including CD caddy (if you've never seen one, like a PSP UMD) - these documents were only leaked **after** conducting **this** interview. Iwasaki's description and Lin's documents cover the same hardware and are completely unrelated to DanDiebold's claimed Sony prototype, which would have been earlier than 1993

[183](#) Mentioned in magazines of the time and above docs; based on this description, Nintendo and Philip's caddy cases would also have connectors, similar to cartridges, for things like SRAM - Lin's documents have scrawled pen writing: "cartridge in caddy"

[184](#) **Casey Loe:** "The way this is written it could be interpreted as him saying the Super-FX chip is in the disc cases, but that seems so outlandish I think we can assume he's talking about the CD-ROM hardware itself." For further info see the SNES CD entry on **ConsoleDatabase:** *"Nintendo intended that CDs would be encased in a custom caddy with SNES-style lockout chip (Nintendo Disc, 'ND') to ensure full control over game licensing. Sony wanted to put the lock-out chip inside the CD-ROM drive controller, inside the machine, and leave the games as normal CDs. Nintendo's original agreement with Sony from 1988 granted Sony the right to license all CD-based games for the system. So Sony quietly did, and announced the system at the Summer CES of 1991 in Chicago, proclaiming they intended to license it to the whole software industry. Nintendo CEO, Hiroshi Yamauchi, had no intention of losing control and so made an agreement with Sony's rival, Philips, to produce the system instead."*

[185](#) *20 Years of Turbo Power*, Kevin Gifford, 1UP.com **(404'd)**: "[PCE] was one of the easiest consoles to program for, free of the idiosyncrasies that coders had to deal with for both the NES and its successor. 'If you had a basic knowledge of 6502 assembly language, you could get something up and running onscreen after a couple hours,' said Hiromasa Iwasaki, a game journalist and programmer who worked on several TG-16 titles, including *Ys Books I & II*. 'There was no need to memorise any exceptions or special tricks, because as long as you weren't trying anything too impossible, they didn't exist.'"

[186](#) One wonders if this advice given to Sony trickled down and influenced development of the PlayStation...

[187](#) This attitude from those behind CDi is elaborated on by **Dale DeSharone**: *"It was just obviously not a game system and Philips was very clear in telling us they didn't believe the market for this device was games. There was a subtle hostility toward games that I noticed from the upper echelon of execs at American Interactive Media (Philips' CDi software publishing arm). They were somewhat supportive of games for young children. Philips thought that people would buy the machine for home educational purposes. Bernie Luskin was one of the top execs at AIM and his background was in College Level education systems. The other top exec at AIM, Gordon Stulberg, was from the film business, not the game business. This all changed after the launch of the CDi, because the only titles that actually sold were the games."*

[188](#) YUV is a colour encoding system for analogue TV; it represents human colour perception more closely than RGB. Y is luminance (brightness), while U and V are the chrominance (colour) parts. **PrintWiki**: *"DYUV is a video compression format supported by CDi. It is a means of compressing and storing digitised photographic images by reducing the amount of colour info saved while retaining all luminance info. The principle behind it is that human eyes more easily detect changes in luminance than changes in colour. Despite its advantages, however, it can result in a loss of contrast between pixels and diminished definition."*

[189](#) Kadokawashoten / ; to every interview I brought the January 1987 issue of *Comptiq*

[190](#) Shinichi Nakamoto (), creator of *Bomberman* and a high-level executive with varying roles

[191](#) The CDs are mixed mode, and if you've viewed one in a personal computer you might see that instead of one data track followed by audio, there are sometimes multiple data tracks throughout; it's tricky to backup PC Engine CD-ROM games, at least compared to more straightforward formats like Sega CD

[192](#) Early logical file system for CD-ROM - en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_Sierra_Format

[193](#) PCE CD-ROM emulation on a computer is a nightmare. For the Sega CD you simply use

one of any number of free emulators, grab some BIOS, and click "Load" from the drop-down menu. Zero hassle. For PCE-CD there are fewer options and all are a pain to get functioning. Ignore emulation on computers: grab the latest Mednafenx_PCE for the original Xbox. It comes with a premade TOC for every release, and is 100% hassle free! Incredible!

[194](#) ; for a game so significant there is surprisingly little about it online, in English or Japanese. It was developed by Hudson, for home computers, though the launch date and system are uncertain - some say PC-6001, others the X1, circa 1983. It received an official conversion to the British ZX Spectrum microcomputer. Strangely, according to [WorldofSpectrum.org](#), first under its original name (1983), and then as *Bubble Buster* (1984). In fact a lot of Hudson games were ported to the Spectrum, including *Bombberman*, which was renamed *Eric and the Floaters*. In *Cannon Ball* you control a figure who shoots a hook & rope into bubbles to pop them, exactly like *Pang* by Mitchell Corp. *Pang* itself was ported to the ZX Spectrum, and the similarities between it and *Bubble Buster* were not lost on journalists of the time, such as Stuart Campbell who wrote about it in 1993. Roy Ozaki of Mitchell Corp, interviewed in Vol.1, was reluctant to give specifics, and as yet I've found almost no information on the background. However, it seems there was some sort of official licensing deal between Mitchell and Hudson

[195](#) Sharp X1, rival to NEC's PC-88, usually had the superior version of cross-platform games

[196](#) Literally "*Frog Shooter*", it sort of resembles the *Star Wars* trench-run arcade game, albeit with simpler graphics. According to the MSX version's packaging it was published under the "Honeybee Soft" label - precise release date unknown, circa 1984

[197](#) The PC Engine infamously only had one controller port - for multiplayer games like *Bombberman* you needed to attach a multi-tap and then two or more controllers

[198](#) Not accessible from the game's start, however the password for maximum strength on **GameFAQs** unlocks it

[199](#) Keita Hoshi, lengthy portfolio with lots of classic titles

[200](#) Large English-language presence online, including Amazon. Seemingly no videogame credits though

[201](#) Magazine expert Kevin Gifford on **GameSetWatch** (2007): "*Beep is very strange. Launched by Softbank in late 1984, Beep was one of the first truly multiplatform mags in Japan. It kept a unique style, concentrating on weird columns and even weirder 'theme' features. The mag [regarded] game music as a real genre of audio entertainment, including free flexi-disc game soundtracks with some issues. If you count all its various incarnations, Beep is the longest-running console mag in Japan - it changed names over the years to Beep! Megadrive, then Sega Saturn Magazine, Dreamcast Magazine, Dorimaga, and then Ge-Maga, its current title.*" According to Wikipedia *Ge-Maga* closed in 2012

[202](#) Original story: highriskrevolution.com/gamelifelife/index.php?c=4-

[203](#) *Daimakaimura*, Capcom, arcades (1988); port by AlfaSystem, released by NEC Avenue, for SuperGrafx in 1990; SuperGrafx was an upgraded PC Engine with only 5 game releases

[204](#) SuperGrafx title, Nov. 1989; strongly resembles Sega's *After Burner*, albeit exclusively in first-person and on alien planets

[205](#) *Tengai Makyou Ziria* / ZIRIA (1989); follows *Dragon Quest* template, quite likely the first console RPG on CD-ROM

[206](#) Mind-numbingly enormous portfolio of popular games across multiple systems, both originals and conversions, both as developer and publisher - everything from *Bonk* to *Gungrave*. Started as Red Company and changed its name in 2000 to Red Entertainment. Wikipedia has an **unsourced** claim it was founded in 1976 and started operating in 1985. The official company page states: "The business was founded in 1984, and incorporated on December 4, 2000." Strong support for Hudson in its early years; worked alongside other companies for a lot of titles

[207](#) Shortened nickname for *Momotaro Dentetsu*, Hudson's board-based videogame. Not to be confused with the *Momotaro Densetsu* RPG series based on the "boy inside a peach" legend (also by Hudson); *Densetsu* has the nickname *Momodan*

[208](#) Released 1989, in both Japan and US

[209](#) Few credits on MobyGames; though Kawaguchi does have a listing for bizarre PCE-CD adventure game *Mitsubachi Gakuen*

[210](#) *PC Genjin* / PC / *Bonk* / *BC Kid* series; first released December 1989; mascot series for the hardware, the Japanese title is a pun on PC Engine

[211](#) Best known for its *Megami Tensei* and *Persona* series

[212](#) Previews shown in Japanese and American magazines; *PC Engine Fan* magazine tentatively labelled it *RPC Genjin*

[213](#) See Takashi Takebe chapter

[214](#) Hiroshi Hasegawa - MobyGames lists two people with this name. Person #571879 is credited with *Mystery Quest* by AlfaSystem, and several graphics positions at Taito. Person #204985 has several programming credits on Hudson titles. It's unlikely these two are the same person, however, the *Mystery Quest* credits definitely belong to the second person

[215](#) AlfaSystem is one of the coolest companies no one talks about. Some might recognise them as creators of the *Shikigami no Shiro* series of vertical shmups, or their involvement in

the *Tales* and *Phantasy Star* series. But it's their origins and back catalogue which are most interesting. Founded January 1988 from former Carry Lab staff, AlfaSystem immediately began producing games for Hudson's PC Engine range - according to Mr Iwasaki, they were actually working out of Hudson's Hokkaido offices. They are credited on a long list of high-quality conversions, including *Fighting Street*, *Ys*, *Wonderboy III*, *Ghouls 'n Ghosts*, *Exile: Wicked Phenomenon*, and *Dragon Slayer: The Legend of Heroes II*, all for the PCE range. They also made some fantastic original games such as the excellent hori shmups *Down Load* and *Down Load 2*, plus vertical shooter *Psychic Storm*. The diversity of games narrowed somewhat after AlfaSystem moved on from Hudson, but the company's lineage is tremendously fascinating

[216](#) Name for PCE-CD conversion of *Street Fighter* one (Dec 1988)

[217](#) The history of Carry Lab warrants a chapter in itself. The only detailed English information is an unsourced Wikipedia page, though it's less detailed than the Japanese page. The following paragraph, based on both pages, lacks primary sources and should NOT be cited as a source itself, unless already backed up by Iwasaki's account: Established sometime around 1981 by students from Kumamoto University's microcomputer club, initially as a part-time job but later a company after good sales. The name comes from the "carry flag" term in computer science. There were seven main programmers, including Hiroshi Hasegawa, mentioned earlier. The company was famous for a language they developed (BASE). Carry Lab produced an enormous amount of software, including a range of word processors for popular computers, and a staggering number of original games and conversions for other companies, such as Taito and T&E Soft. Their Famicom platformer *Hao-kun no Fushigi na Tabi* () was released in America as *Mystery Quest* on NES. Dates vary, but between 1986/87 many staff left, and from this apparently four new companies formed, including AlfaSystem (the other three have no internet presence)

[218](#) Published by Square (May 1987); aka *Mystery Quest*; both Carry Lab and Thinking Rabbit were part of the DOG (Disk Original Group) coalition of developers alongside Square

[219](#) A mass exodus of Falcom staff happened around 1989, after *Ys III* for computers was done - the events are detailed in Vol.1, the Kouji Yokota and Jun Nagashima interviews

[220](#) To give some context to the significance of this event: As reported by both Kouji Yokota (Vol.1) and Yoshio Kiya (Vol.3), one source of frustration for staff at Falcom was the president refusing to allow them to work on console games, instead (usually) delegating console development to outsource companies. When Miyazaki and Hashimoto broke off to form Quintet, they developed *ActRaiser* as a way of fulfilling their desire to make a console-based side-scrolling action game similar to *Ys III*. Their statement about wanting to make games such as *Ys* on PCE adds to the evidence of growing staff frustration at Falcom

[221](#) *Omni* was a science and science-fiction magazine published in the US and UK; print 1978-1995, online until 1998

[222](#) Highlights the significant benefit of expanded capacity through CD-ROM, and is also an excellent example where a game received improved content during localisation - compared to cartridge-based RPGs, such as *Secret of Mana*, which could lose nearly half the text in the transition to English, due to memory restraints

[223](#) First credited game is *Ys Book I&II*; strong involvement with entire Ys series, also *Tengai Makyou* and *Dragon Slayer*

[224](#) Range of roles at Falcom; credits include graphics for *Ys I: Vanished Omens* on PC-88, and both story writing and graphics on *Ys II: Ancient Ys Vanished* on PC-88

[225](#) Hideyuki Amagi credited on several Hudson titles, 1989~1992

[226](#) Cross between an adventure game and a hori-shmup (1989); available on PC-88, later ported to X68k, ditching the adv. parts

[227](#) Expansion pack for *Xanadu: Dragon Slayer II*, requiring the original game to play; not to be confused with *The Legend of Xanadu II* on PCE-CD

[228](#) Third in Falcom's *Dragon Slayer* series (1986); a side-scrolling Action-RPG, the visuals are much cuter than others in the series; released across multiple computers and the Famicom

[229](#) PCE and SFC vers. radically different; PCE is better, but SFC is canon; a third title as part of the Sega-Falcom deal was meant for Sega CD but never completed

[230](#) In *Ys Book I&II* Iwasaki was in charge of scenario, with Nagayama helping, while for *Ys IV* Nagayama was in charge of scenario arrangement and production coordinator

[231](#) Brother Yuji Kudo, one of the two co-founders of Hudson

[232](#) Toshinori Oyama; long Hudson career dating back to 1986, when he programmed Hudson's Famicom conversion of *Wonderboy* (AKA: *Takahashi Meijin no Boukenjima / Adventure Island*); director on Iwasaki's *Susa no Oudensetsu*

[233](#) Toshimasa Ebina and Takahiro Haga, both have lengthy careers at Hudson starting with *Ys Book I&II*

[234](#) In fairness, though Ys fans are heavily critical of the SFC vers., it's actually a fun game. It's an entirely different vision, rather than a weak conversion from PC Engine. Cartridge limitations are apparent, and the PC Engine vers. overshadows it completely, but it's still a really nice title for the Super Famicom

[235](#) There were three CD game formats: CD-ROM2, Super CD-ROM2 and Arcade CD-ROM2. To facilitate use of these on the varying hardware formats in Japan and the US, there were System Cards 1.0, 2.0, 2.1, 3.0, plus two variations of Arcade card; the cards contain BIOS and RAM

[236](#) So 256kB compared to 64kB

[237](#) Casey Loe: "My attempts to verify the history of Winds Co. Ltd (Iwasaki implies it was an independent company, Satoshi Nakai said it was a subsidiary), suggests Nakai was right - they were established in Sep 1989, before *Gynoug* or *Cho Aniki*, so presumably it was established to do graphics for Masaya but as an independent company allowed to work for other clients under certain circumstances. Although *Tengai Makyo II* is literally the only non-Masaya game that they're officially credited on during the Masaya era. Winds seems to be thriving. They have 72 full-time employees, still get a lot of work, and in addition to lots of mobile games, did modelling, texturing and animation for *Metal Gear Solid 5* and *Pokemon X/Y*, and many other console titles."

[238](#) Also credited as director; long career with RPGs, notably multiple games in the *Metal Max* series

[239](#) Colorful Pieces of Game: highriskrevolution.com/gamelife/

[240](#) When playing the two games Feena is rescued early on (*Ys I*), but regarded as a normal girl. Only later into *Ys II* is the goddess revelation made. Seems they hastily removed dialogue from the final boss so players would not realise *Ys I* was "incomplete"

[241](#) Name unknown; assumption is it's Ichirou Sakurada's nickname

[242](#) Sporadic credits until 2012, possibly diff. people/same name

[243](#) Ichirou Sakurada, credited for "Course Design"

[244](#) Retail version of *SMB-S* has no scrolling, the screen flips when at the edge & turtle shells bounce off the edge as if it were a wall

[245](#) Important contextual point: the first *Ys* was released on PC-88 (mid-1987), and regarded highly for its smooth multi-directional scrolling (rare at the time). Although simple by today's standards, back then its technical achievements were staggering

[246](#) AKA: Kenshi Kaido, Papara Kaito

[247](#) AKA: *Rastan Saga Episode III*

[248](#) , surreal FC platformer with high vertical jumps

[249](#) Fantastic series; you literally enjoy a summer vacation as a kid

[250](#) , PS1 (1999); "Over my dead body"; RPG life-sim where you control multiple family generations to lift a curse of sped-up ageing; the cover shows a young boy's face

[251](#) AKA: Atsushi Ii

[252](#) According to Facebook, Iwasaki travelled on November 2011

[253](#) www.geniusgames.co.kr

[254](#) As of January 2015 their website was cryptically empty

[255](#) 5 July 2011 was this message: "Sorry to all staff, my patience was running out. Perhaps, every staff has to find your new way as soon as you can. There's no hope to complete that project."

[256](#) Gameloft: dev & pub based in Paris, branches all over the world

[257](#) Ironically, at the time of this interview, Microsoft had yet to back-pedal on making Kinect mandatory with every Xbox One

[258](#) Red Company (Red Entertainment) worked extensively with Hudson and are the developers of the *Bonk* series; Oji Hiroi has an enormously prolific career, and was one of the creators of the *Far East of Eden* and *Sakura Wars* series

[259](#) Google for more info in English; gameshop.ocnk.net/

[260](#) About £1'600 / \$2'500

[261](#) No MobyGames profile, no results on Google

[262](#) Creator of the *Bomberman* series; held various very important roles at Hudson; curiously, his "power rating" is only around 32 at the school in 1991

[263](#) Single credit for graphics on *Kirby's Avalanche*

[264](#) This makes *Tritorn* sound like Falcom's *Xanadu*, however all sources point to both *Tritorn* and *Xanadu* being released October 1985; *Tritorn* also has fewer RPG trimmings than *Xanadu*, and is more focused on action, perhaps also drawing from 1984's *Dragon Buster*

[265](#) Kouji Yokota in V1 talked about the original *Tritorn*, and his surprise at the sequel's release!

[266](#) The kind involving static images and text

[267](#) www.nicovideo.jp/watch/sm2030448

[268](#) This would be Michel, who wrote the intro

[269](#) **Programming:** *Garyuuh* (1987), *Bastard* and *Bastard Special* (1988), *Galf Stream*

(1989), *Dios* (1989/90, & **planning**), *Valusa no Fukushu* (1990) / **Assisted:** *Mirai* (1987), *Deep Forest* (1987), *Hideger* (1988), *Jotunn* (1988)

[270](#) Hata-san: / Furutani-san: ; full names and portfolios unknown, several names were listed in the Excel file, but they're difficult to trace

[271](#) The file only listed President Miyamoto on *Cluju* and *Tritorn 2: Road of Darkness* for PC-98, which Mr Takahashi pointed at

[272](#) Akin to £300/\$550 in 1988 (roughly double incl. £/\$ inflation); factor overall living costs and that's not enough for food at all!

[273](#) Music Macro Language, for sequencing music on computers

[274](#) It looks like a mirrored version of the Emerson Lake & Palmer cover for the album "*Then & Now*" which Giger painted, however this was released 1998, a decade after *Dios*; I have a vague recollection of seeing the same or similar painting, listed under a much earlier date, possibly titled "The Mouth", but cannot find a source. Giger produced **a lot** of art in his life

[275](#) On the file Miyamoto-kun is credited only on *Herlesh* for PC-88

[276](#) Many tales. IE: a Spectrum game, to hide that they couldn't fit the advertised number of levels in, so made it impossible to finish

[277](#) This is the friend of Joseph's who first introduced him to KT

[278](#) Medical food fact: a cycle of fasting and then immediately binging tends to cause the body to store more calories than a regular, steady food regimen

[279](#) Despite this, at the end of the interview after Joseph had left, KT came up to me and placed his last copy of *Dios* in my hands - a gift for documenting his work

[280](#) Discussed in Vol. 1; adverts by Enix made a big show of programmers like Kouich Nakamura striking it rich from royalties, even though the reality was very different!

[281](#) Hostages develop positive feelings towards their captors

[282](#) Doomsday cult, carried out the 1995 sarin attack, Tokyo

[283](#) The final PC-88 release came on 8 floppies

[284](#) *Fatal Fury Special* (Jul 1994); Kensuke Takahashi is credited under the Monolith staff as programmer

[285](#) KT is not referring to the leak of pirate copies of their games. Certain companies created

special tools for analysing and copying protected disks, and periodically released "**filer**" disks containing algorithms for cracking the latest games. Since the filers were only the tools, and did not contain any pirated data, they were legally available for sale, and their official purpose was for making personal backups. Here, KT is speculating that someone at ED-Contrive or Tokyo Denca (not Zainsoft) was leaking details about the copy protection algorithms being used to protect Zainsoft's games, making it possible for a crack to appear before the release of the game itself. / **Below:** the original *Tritorn*

[286](#) Multiple photos show female staff in matching pink dresses

[287](#) One *Mirai* fansite stated: "*This sense of being slightly broken grammatically, in a way that can't be imitated, is the really amazing thing about Zain's writing. There's so many weird things about the language choices in its games.*"

[288](#) A little west of Kobe and Osaka

[289](#) The *Dios* box comes with some cool stuff: 8 disks (5.2"), reg. card, 34 page manual with character/ enemy/ item profiles (like a mini guide), a printed "photo" ID card for Zack Hunt, an apology slip for a printing error in the manual and - best of all - a 10 page b&w manga comic offering a sort of closure to the game's events. A spoiler if ever there was one!

[290](#) Joseph and Nico had to leave early to reach their accommodation for that night in Osaka, hence Joseph's prepping me for questions after he left. I very nearly didn't make it myself, only just catching the last train that night to Serguei Servianov's apartment out in the countryside!

[291](#) **Matt Fitsko:** I think Takahashi-san is misremembering about the sound effects. I'm certain that the regular floppy disk version includes digitised sound effects as well

[292](#) Presumably Nippon Planning Centre, established by Pony Canyon in 1971; npcinc.net/

[293](#) **Matt Fitsko:** Not quite. The FM Towns predates *Dios*, debuting in February 1989 with CD-ROM launch titles such as *After Burner*

[294](#) Providing of dev hardware is an important contextual point regarding the success of certain machines, and was also touched upon in Kohei Ikeda's interview in Vol.1

[295](#) "*chan*" is a diminutive or cute way of addressing one's offspring or a close friend

[296](#) A couple of utilities. Information was scarce and these are omitted from the company softography

[297](#) Monolith Corp.

[298](#) *Kid Niki* in the West - this version was seemingly unreleased

[399](#) **Casey Loe:** "Continuity system" is not a common term. Either it's their internal tech term for data carrying over (referring to the RPG bits), or it's referring to the cinematic nature of the game, with the actually meaning the Japanese for storyboards

[300](#) **NESblog interview:** "*I was a student in the FoA at the UoN, during which I took courses in animation. In my second year, I worked part-time for Tehkan, and I helped with the development of Swimmer.*"

[301](#) Tehkan arcade game (1982); swim up a river avoiding enemies, logs and the occasional boss (diving helps!), while collecting fruit; it's honestly good fun still!

[302](#) There are a variety of conflicting/unsourced statements regarding Tehkan. As officially taken from Tecmo.co.jp - original company founded 31 July 1967; started selling amusement equipment 1969; US subsidiary Tehkan, Inc. formed March 1981 in LA; in April the company's first arcade title *Pleiades* is released; the name is officially changed to Tecmo on 8 January 1986. From here things continue until around 2008, when Square-Enix made moves to acquire the company (this isn't documented on the official site, but it's well sourced). Instead Tecmo pursued Koei for a merger, and from here we need to switch to the official www.koeitecmo.co.jp history - in November 2008 the companies entered into a contract to merge; Koei Tecmo Holdings established April 2009. There's a lot of background, including variant company names and Tecmo apparently spinning off as a separate entity and again being dissolved. The Japanese Wikipedia page for *Tecmo* says it started September 1964 as *Teikoku Kanzai* () and changed its name to *Tehkan* in October 1977 (MobyGames says 1975) - however, not only is this unsourced, it conflicts with the rather detailed official company history

[303](#) The other side of this story is in the Nishizawa chapter!

[304](#) Kazutoshi Ueda, creator of *Mr. Do!* (Universal, 1982, arcades) and cofounder of Atlus, instrumental in the *Megami Tensei* series; loves traditional pinball

[305](#) Arcade title (1982), published by Universal; resembles *Dig Dug* (you dig through the earth collecting fruit)

[306](#) Not only were there home conversions for Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, C16, C64, and ZX Spectrum, but the Game Boy release was based on the Speccy port, and there was even a *Bomb Jack II* by Elite Systems for British home computers

[307](#) The first level of *Bomb Jack* features the ending theme to *Spoon Obasan*, an anime series also known as *Mrs Peppercot* in English; the second level uses the song *Lady Madonna* by *The Beatles*; the fact Tehkan licensed the music is fairly well known, as is that the music was replaced in later re-releases

[308](#) *Nihon Housou Kyoukai* (Japan Broadcasting Corp.)

[309 www.jasrac.or.jp](http://www.jasrac.or.jp) - Japanese Society for Rights of Authors, Composers and Publishers

[310](#) This is basically how much arcade operators would pay when buying it for operation

[311](#) Devs selling arcade PCBs did so at a high price and kept all revenue, so the per-unit licensing fee for music was tiny, whereas it was a much larger % for cartridges when the dev had to split the proceeds with Nintendo

[312](#) Different "memory mapper" chips increase functionality on FC/NES games, such as multi-directional scrolling, or more sound channels; some companies such as Namco, Konami, Irem, SunSoft and others produced bespoke chips; it's a complex subject - the NESDev Wiki has detailed info on NES mappers; a lot of Tecmo's Famicom games use the CNROM board, assigned to iNES Mapper 003, such as *Mighty Bomb Jack* and *Solomon's Key*

[313](#) Nintendo's MMC3 (Memory Manager Controller 3) chip is assigned to iNES Mapper 004 (along with others)

[314](#) Masahiro Ueno, former programmer at Konami, explained why the eponymous bipedal tank was replaced with a giant computer in the NES conversion of *Metal Gear*: "*This was simply due to the hardware limitations. It's probably possible to implement the robot if we had used a better mapper chip such as the VRC4, but it was not available for us back then.*"

[315](#) Trip to Beep Shop and its PCB store, shown on DVD; staff Takayuki Komabayashi asked that I request any arcade title for him to retrieve (he could almost guarantee availability), and after jokingly asking for several highly unfeasible titles (*Prop Cycle*, *Gamshara*, etc.), I settled on *Bomb Jack* in preparation for this interview

[316](#) ; portmanteau of **edit** & **computer**; it joins a growing list of bespoke tools created to help with pixel art, but due to being exclusive to specific devs are undocumented; Toru Hidaka (V1) coded art software specifically for *Gandhara* on PC-88; Yoshiro Kimura (V1) described the Sony developed "NEWS" system, used at SquareSoft in conjunction with Nintendo SFC devkits; Ryuichi Nishizawa in this volume describes the "Digitizer" used at Sega and loaned to Westone; it's fascinating to think that during the early days of the games industry in Japan there were no standardised art tools, with hardware and/or software being created as needed, and now there is almost no record of them

[317](#) There's a photo in the Mitchell chapter, Vol.1

[318](#) It's fun to tinker with the "code search" functions in emulators, since in-game variables appear in decimal onscreen (ie: 10 pieces of gold), but behind the code it might be tracked as multiples of 255, represented by numerals 0-9 and letters A-F. So the number 254 would be "FE" at a specific alpha-numerical address within the code, whereas 300 gold pieces would be represented by two separate interlinked hex values, at two different addresses. Hexadecimal is cool because while the human brain instinctively wants to function in units of 10 using a base of 10 numerals, hex uses a base of 16; to me hex seems like a natural expansion to the binary

used by computers (0 or 1), and hex also reminds me of biological cells, which split into 2, and by continuing to divide will reach 16, so the whole hexadecimal system seems very organic - when you think about it, decimal is a bit weird, and is probably only used because we have 10 fingers (there's no logical symmetry in a 5 fingered hand!)

[319](#) I had been invited by Kouji Yokota, interviewed in Vol.1; while there I met Yoshiro Kimura, ZUN, and James Mielke, all of whom would play a role in that first book

[320](#) There's a lot of nice pixel art today, but it makes you appreciate older stuff more considering how rudimentary the tools were and how difficult it was to make changes; an old game looked good because of true artistry

[321](#) Players acquire limited fireball attacks during play, which destroy both enemies and helpful fairies

[322](#) The description here is slightly different to how it appears in the final game

[323](#) The sketches were amazing, and the pages were filled with little caricatures, cartoons, manga, messages, and humorous situations which his game characters found themselves in, plus other whimsical flights of fancy

[324](#) The Nishizawa chapter has a detailed footnote on how interconnected everyone was via Tehkan and UPL

[325](#) ¥ / *Digital Devil Saga: Megami Tensei*, published by Namco for FC (11 Sept. 1987); seen as on par with *FF* and *DQ* in terms of JRPGs; Telenet also produced a licensed version of *Megami Tensei* (a pure action game), as explained by Kouji Yokota in Vol.1

[326](#) 1986 fantasy film by Lucasfilm, starring David Bowie; lots of game adaptations across multiple computer and console formats by different developers; it's amazing to think that for the first few years of the company Atlus was dealing in film licenses (their big claim to fame, *Megami Tensei*, was itself a book license!); Atlus' *Labyrinth* pub. by Tokuma Shoten for FC (Jan 1987); players search mazes for coins against a strict time limit

[327](#) US, Japanese and British terms differ - I personally prefer and use the US/JPN method, naming them 1st and 2nd floors, whereas in Britain it goes Ground floor and then 1st floor (which makes zero sense, because that means the second floor you set foot on, after climbing some stairs, is called the first floor)

[328](#) June 2013, Index offices and home of its pres. under investigation for improper accounting; May 2014, former CEO Masami Ochiai and his wife, former pres. Yoshimi Ochiai, arrested on charges of false financial records

[329](#) 19 September 2013

[330](#)

/ *Kakurenbo Battle Monster Tactics*,

tactical RPG for GBC (2000)

[331](#) Italian interview by Andrea Babich, some uncertainty whether location was Tecmo offices or a Tecmo booth at a convention; Tsuruta said: "*A Tecmo staff member showed me the game, explaining how to play, saying, 'Oh, this is not an enemy, you have to collect the fairy.' I had that strange feeling you have when you meet an old school friend after many years.*"

[332](#) GBC (2000); remixed update of *Solomon's Key*; not as good as the original or earlier GB conversion!

[333](#) 2016 update: Chris Covell solved this mystery. Babich's original interview mentioned *Monster Rancher Explorer*, hence my question, but Tsuruta mixed it up with *Zipang* for PCE (1990). Both games are reskins of *Solomon's Key* - it's possible Tsuruta played *Zipang* on the handheld PC Engine GT, later thinking it was a GBC. *Zipang* has elephants as fairies and a samurai theme

[334](#) Officially there were two sequels: *Mighty Bomb Jack* and *Bomb Jack Twin*; *Bomb Jack II* was an anomaly, being a Euro-only sequel licensed by Elite Systems circa 1986; the company handled the original *Bomb Jack* arcade license and many other arcade titles too

[335](#) Main character is red on the CPC, whereas he's blue on the C64 - I loaded the latter due to it having music

[336](#) Fan Kralizec ported ARC version to MSX2 (2004)

[337](#) A floppy-eared brown rabbit mascot wearing a red Tecmo T-shirt; appeared on the title screen of various games, Tecmo arcade tokens, even on labels for game prototypes (which is the best artwork I found, courtesy of SirGraboid on ASSEMBlergames forum); searching title screens it seems the rabbit first appeared in arcade games from 1987, such as *Gemini Wing* and *Tecmo Bowl*; impossible to find precisely when it was created

[338](#) The way he specifically said "arcade wireframe" made me think of arcade vector graphics games like *Star Wars* (1983); given Tsuruta's work on *Swimmer* (1982) and *Bomb Jack* (1984), this unreleased arcade game would fit in around 1983. Just imagine: Tecmo developed a wireframe racing game which never saw wide release due to low player response, and it's never been documented!

[339](#) *Captain Tsubasa* Wiki: there were 3 mobile games, all by Konami. Looking at screens it was probably either *Captain Tsubasa: Golden-23 - Asia Gekito Hen* (GOLDEN-23 ¥) or *Captain Tsubasa: Nankatsu vs Toho* (VS)

[340](#) For British computer adaptations the games were licensed but the source code almost

never provided. The person converting it would play through the arcade game, often filming it with a video camera, later copying what he saw. If you've ever read a Making Of feature in *Retro Gamer* magazine, for an arcade conversion on C64, Amstrad or Spectrum, this story is almost universal

[341](#) At GDC 2015, Jason Scott of Internet Archive said: "*Workplace theft is the future of game history.*" This is true, almost all stuff which is now archived is the result of individual employees hanging on to stuff

[342](#) To see YouTube videos of another unreleased Tehkan game, related to *Star Force*, search for "AU" online

[343](#) / *Ghosts 'n Goblins* (Sept 1985)

[344](#) Famicom Disk System launched 21 February 1986; *Captain Tsubasa* released 28 April 1988 (released in US as *Tecmo Cup Soccer Game*, 1992)

[345](#) , 18 September 1987

[346](#) The Famicom Disk System was a revolutionary idea: disks were cheaper to produce (and buy), plus it allowed greater capacity than cartridges of the time, saving of data, and rewriting of games via vending machines; however, memory mapper chip tech. within cartridges evolved very quickly and soon outclassed the FDS

[347](#) Subtitled *Super Striker*, rel. 20 July 1990 on FC

[348](#) *Solomon's Key* 30 Jul. 86 (cart) / 25 Jan. 91 (FDS) ; *Zelda* launched with FDS 21 Feb. 86

[349](#) He used the English title

[350](#) You only find this playing the older computer versions, and it is rather weird - boulders will float in midair until you walk beneath them, whereas on GB they have to be resting on breakable blocks (having said that though, lots of other things float, such as stepladder segments)

[351](#) Circa Aug. 1983 - there were many type-ins back then

[352](#) Explained by Pr. Ishikawa, for his two X1 games

[353](#) The original *Star Force* was a 1984 arcade title by Tehkan (US release renamed *Mega Force*); a Famicom, MSX and SG-1000 port followed a year later, with an X68000 port in 1993; the original received various rereleases over the years; the follow-up, *Super Star Force: Jikuureki no Himitsu*, was exclusive to the Famicom and released 1986. It's an amazing and fairly bewildering vertical shmup, with shops to buy items from and the ability to travel back in time to different time periods (game levels), plus there are dungeons you explore on

foot, with enemies to be shot - the storyline alone is worth Googling for; there was a 1992 follow-up for arcades titled *Final Star Force*

[354](#) There are no credits after finishing *Super Star Force*, so impossible to determine who this is

[355](#) This answer was very revealing, because added to that, while *Star Force* was an excellent though very pure shmup, the follow-up *Super Star Force* incorporated RPG elements, like secret "dungeons" containing vital crystals

[356](#) So Tecmo was sort of forced into making the sequel, out of anger at Hudson starting their own sequel without asking permission; fascinating because anyone who has played both can attest to the fact that the 1985 released *Star Force* runs more smoothly and has better visuals than its 1986 follow-up, giving an indication of how well Hudson knew the FC hardware compared to Tecmo; I wonder what Hudson's sequel would have been like...?

[357](#) The answer is interesting; Isokawa created some *Pitman* puzzles by randomly placing objects in interesting visual patterns and then seeing if the puzzle was solvable

[358](#) *SK1* you can either create an adjacent block to jump onto, or a block lower down to walk along, whereas with *SK2* you can only form ice blocks on the level below you

[359](#) In the final version players cannot carry ice, only create blocks below them, and on the same plane kick blocks along; the actual design of each stage is quite ingenious, and the solution rests on players having a limited move set; allowing players to carry blocks would have made most puzzles redundant, while necessitating increasingly convoluted situations where this technique could work

[360](#) **Babich** (2004), Tsuruta said: "*Ironically, despite original poor sales, the game is now quite expensive on the used games market! What a mocking destiny.*" Today *Fire & Ice* sells for over £150 on eBay if CiB, while the European *Solomon's Key 2* sells for slightly less

[361](#) ASK Kodansha - see Isokawa chpt. V.1 for more info

[362](#) × ; 20 April 1989; see portfolio

[363](#) MobyGames credits Masao Asakawa; also credited for sound on *Catrap*, co-director on *Necros no Yousai*, and event script designer on *Dark Half*

[364](#) Notable works include *Xardion* and *AvP* for SFC. **MobyGames**: "*Founded 1979 by Toshikazu Sato. Makes software, digital content for mobiles and the web, and is involved in the travel industry. Fairly prolific developers during the 1990s, particularly for the SFC. In the second half of the 2000s they resumed game development after a long hiatus, focusing on NDS and Wii.*"

[365](#) MobyGames credits Reia Mizushiro and Toshiki Inoue for scenario, neither has anything else on record

[366](#) "Text adventure" was the term used - see Vol.1 for discussion on "visual novels" and Japanese terminology

[367](#) bloodybride.home.comcast.net/%7Ebloodybride/main.htm

[368](#) I'm not entirely sure where this happens. Some ways into Ch.1 there's a mandatory fight with main antagonist Ryouji, a vampire hunter; if you lose to him he reveals he forgot to bring the correct vampire killing sword and you're spared - however, it is possible to beat him with persistence, resulting in a slightly different cutscene

[369](#) By "hayabusakun" (12 Aug 2007); search **RHDN**

[370](#) He doesn't mention the specific board game names. The Red Baron and Desert Fox have been featured in countless games, so impossible to know which. There's quite a few WWI board games - a cursory glance at BoardGameGeek.com listed 62 pages with 10 entries on each; many feature the Red Baron, including several eponymously named games (it could be the 1985 release by 3W); given Tsuruta's birth in 1961, a likely candidate is Avalon Hill's game from 1972, *Richthofen's War*

[371](#) Plenty of candidates; one eponymously named board game released 1973, and two more released 1981, not to mention WWII games by other names

[372](#) So not just Tecmo was overly protective of its talent

[373](#) *Hydlide* on Famicom, for example, sold over 1 million

[374](#) For info visit: www.turu3.net/PPFlash/index.html

[375](#) itunes.apple.com/jp/app/astro-zill/id384356532

[376](#) The soundtrack to *Mouser* is the song "Turkey in the Straw"

[377](#) Large portfolio, most of it super obscure. Stuff like *Psychic 5*, *Akrista's Ring*, and more. **MobyGames:** "*Nippon Microcomputer Kaihatsu was formed in 1985 by former Universal head of development, Yukio Kotoyori, with much of the original staff recruited from the team behind Tehkan's Bomb Jack. Incorporated in 1989 as NMK Co. Ltd.. Mainly active in the coin-op field. It rarely published its own games, instead relying on partners such as Jaleco, SNK and UPL.*"

[378](#) Tsutomu Fujisawa was main designer on *Gomola Speed*

[379](#) According to Wikipedia, Fujisawa developed the *Ninja-kun* sequel and then left UPL in 1987 to become a freelancer, though he continued to work with UPL on many later projects

[380](#) Article by Paul Drury, who put me in touch with Sandy White, who gave permission to use the original. He shared his thoughts: "Ah yes, the *Casio VL-Tone*... I have many happy memories inventing little tunes for Speccy games. You are welcome to use the photo. In fact I'd be delighted! It is a lovely anecdote - I'm pleased the photo jogged your distinguished interviewee's memory... It's the best I could have hoped for!"

[381](#) My plan was, where possible, to give interviewees the British home computer conversions of their games - the likelihood is they had never seen them, since often the parent company's UK or foreign department sub-licensed them. It seemed like a nice way to showcase the fact that these games were loved globally

[382](#) By Images Software, comes on magnetic cassette tape

[383](#) *Sorcerian* for DOS by Sierra (1990) is one example; Kyodai Software Marketing also brought over games, including Falcom's *Ys: Vanished Omens* for Apple IIs (1989), and Xtalsoft's *Curse of Babylon* for C64 (1990); generally though, Japanese RPGs on Western computers **were** rare, and *Monster Land*'s release in 1989 across multiple computer formats is interesting, since although an arcade title, it took a distinctly RPG approach

[384](#) Sega's Master System was phenomenally successful in Brazil thanks to Tec Toy; classics and local exclusives came out; to appeal to the local audience the *Wonder Boy* games were rebranded with popular comic chars.

[385](#) Nishizawa specifically refers to the introduction of the Japanese language in videogame text

[386](#) There's a lot of conflicting and unsourced info on the company. As taken from Tecmo.co.jp - original company founded 31 Jul 1967; started selling amusement equipment 1969; US subsidiary Tehkan, Inc. formed Mar 1981 in LA; in April the company's first arcade title *Pleiades* is released; the name is officially changed to Tecmo on 8 Jan 1986. From here things continue until around 2008, when Square-Enix made moves to acquire the company (not documented on official website, but well sourced). Instead Tecmo pursued Koei for a merger, and from here we switch to the official Koeitecmo.co.jp history - in Nov 2008 the companies enter a contract to merge; Koei Tecmo Holdings established Apr 2009. Lots of background, including variant company names and Tecmo apparently spinning off as a separate entity and again being dissolved. Japanese Wikipedia says Tecmo started Sep 1964 as *Teikoku Kanzai* () changing its name to *Tehkan* Oct 1977 (MobyGames says 1975) - however, this is unsourced and conflicts with the official company history online

[387](#) *Tehkan*, 1982; swim up a river avoiding enemies, logs and the occasional boss (diving helps!), while collecting fruit; it's surprisingly good fun still

[388](#) / Michishito Ishizuka, Westone co-founder, left in the mid-1990s for Matrix Software (company behind *Alundra*); MobyGames lists the name as programmer on titles

until 2006, including those by Atlus and GAIA; surprisingly small online profile and difficult to research. The answer here was slightly ambiguous on Ishizuka, but was expanded in an interview Nishizawa gave *Retro Gamer*: "When I was 17, Ishizuka and I were playing at an arcade run by Tehkan, the company where he worked. He asked, 'If you like games, would you like to try working part-time at the company?' We both learned how to develop games at Tehkan." In that same interview Nishizawa revealed he'd been classmates and good friends with Ishizuka since they were 14

[389](#) Nishizawa / [西沢](#), the [西](#) means West; Ishizuka / [石塚](#), the [石](#) means stone; the pronunciation of the kanji in the surnames is the *kun-yomi*

[390](#) Co-founded 1986 by Ryuichi Nishizawa, Michishito Ishizuka, and Hiromi Suzuko; Escape was the company's original name (like "Esc" on computers); due to concern it suggested unreliability, it changed to Westone in 1987

[391](#) Universal Play Land, closed 1992; made some semi-popular shmups, but their most prominent contributions to gaming appear to be *Ninja-kun*, and *Gomola Speed* for PC Engine (which is more fun than it looks!)

[392](#) 1983, fun game which is like a tech-demo for how many enemy ships can appear on screen at once

[393](#) 1984, the start of the *Ninja-kun* series

[394](#) 1985, obscure spaceship shooter set in a maze

[395](#) The *Ninja-kun* series, with its distinctive red protagonist, is still going today, having been released across multiple formats including SFC, PlayStation and 3DS; the Famicom conversion of the original arcade title was handled by TOSE and published by Jaleco (1985); as I later found out, I had owned this and some of the other Famicom releases that followed; if you include the *Jajamaru* spin-offs, but not the myriad of mobile phone titles, there are at least 14 games in the series (many receiving multiple releases across formats), plus a musical stage production (not kidding!) and other "stuff" - visit HG101 for detailed coverage of the franchise

[396](#) According to *Game.Machines 2nd Ed.*, the FM-8 was an office computer released 1981; the FM-11 and FM-7 were its successors (the FM-7 being something of a rival to NEC's PC-88 and Sharp's X1); Nishizawa would have used the FM-8 between 1983-1985 at UPL

[397](#) Control Program for Microcomputers; an operating system for certain Intel-based microcomputers

[398](#) Z80 was a popular 8-bit microprocessor by Zilog, from 1976 onwards

[399](#) See [Pr. Kishimoto chpt.](#) for detailed explanation

[400](#) A logic analyser displays the signals coming from a circuit board; companies such as Codemasters used them to create the GameGenie, by ripping apart an NES and attaching the device. As Richard Aplin told [Gamehacking.org](#): "A logic analyser is basically a digital oscilloscope (shows you what high-speed signals are doing in real time). You connect each channel to signals/chip pins that look 'interesting', then spend time figuring out what the hell is going on."

[401](#) Several times Nishizawa refers to "my generation" or "our generation", broadly referring to all the young game developers who were active in the early to mid-1980s

[402](#) In 1985 that was around £1.56 / \$2 (fxtop); according to the Bank of England, inflation for £££ nearly triples the price; not a huge sum for one, but you don't really want to be wasting them

[403](#) There are 5 main types: ROM (Read Only Memory) / PROM (Programmable ROM) / EPROM (Erasable PROM) / EEPROM (Electrically Erasable PROM) / Flash EEPROM memory; your basic ROM chip is "write once", like a CDR, and if a change is required you need a fresh ROM

[404](#) Arcade RPG

[405](#) Auto-scrolling platform/shmup

[406](#) Picture originally put online by Yosuke Okunari

[407](#) ; long-time Sega employee involved with many classics (*Dynamite Headdy*, *Dragon Force*, et al); appar. started at Namco; production manager on *Shenmue*

[408](#) The "Shy Guy" nickname seemingly stems solely from a name credit in *Space Harrier* for the SMS

[409](#) The high-score table does indeed list Bucha at #1

[410](#) *GameSide*; good example is *Chatan Yaraku Shank*

[411](#) Ultimately I stuck with the working title, because backers complained when I suggested a change; amusingly, I did stumble across one person saying they were looking for Oliver Stone's *Untold History of the United States*, and got results for my book which they bought, so that's at least +1 for sales

[412](#) #124, p50-, *Wonder Boys: A Westone Retrospective*

[413](#) The skateboard came about as a result of Nishizawa finding an abandoned one on the veranda of the apartment they rented, where development of *Wonder Boy* took place; during breaks he'd try skating up and down and, finding it fun, implemented it in the game

[414](#) *Takahashi Meijin no Boukenjima* was renamed *Adventure Island* for NES, and it's a reskin of the original *Wonder Boy* for arcades; the two series split from this first title, but there's been various of cross-pollination over the years; Hudson continued to rework later instalments for release on other platforms (ie: WB5 became *Dynastic Hero* for PCE-CD); as Nishizawa explained in another interview, he's not sure why Hudson almost always changed the characters when converting his games, since Sega only owned the trademark/name, whereas Westone kept the copyright for the graphics assets; Nishizawa once asked them politely why they changed the characters, but they would not say... It's a mystery!

[415](#) *WBIII: Monster Lair* is an auto-scrolling platform/shmup hybrid first released in arcades (1988), where 2 players on the same screen can run and jump and shoot enemies; it is as awesome as it sounds!

[416](#) Amusingly he gave the answer away: if originally Bocke in the first game, they're obviously the same

[417](#) The *Monster World Collection* title for PS2 has *superplay* videos showcasing perfect playthroughs

[418](#) AKA: *WB in Monster World / WB V* (1991), action-platformer + RPG bits (AKA: *Dynastic Hero* on PCE-CD)

[419](#) Released 1992 on GG, *Monster World II* is the Japanese name for what was *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* on SMS (1989)

[420](#) 3D platformer with overhead camera (Saturn, 1997); initially started as a 2D side-scroller for the SFC, but with the shift from 16-bit to 32-bit hardware it was reworked to feature 2D sprites within 3D environments

[421](#) *Pix'n Love* magazine interview, #22

[422](#) Famous for its vector graphics; replicates some dogfights and the Death Star trench run scene (1983)

[423](#) If you've read the interviews in the preceding book, you'll know that tracking down the Quintet founders has been a quest of mine

[424](#) Tsuruta also recounts this event in his interview!

[425](#) This was probably around the time Quintet was working on *Terranigma*, published in Japan by Enix (Oct. 1995); *Dark Half* came out May 1996

[426](#) Sega's MS actually has a surprising number of obscure but excellent Japanese RPGs released in English (HappyConsoleGamer on YouTube covers many), but *Ys* was definitely a gem in the system's library; for the American TurboGrafx-16 CD-ROM, it was not only an excellent RPG, but one of the best games for the system, with extremely high production

values. What I wanted to convey was the era and context of the first Ys; technically Ys *III* had more exposure, releasing on all three major 16-bit platforms, but anyone who played the original Ys will attest to it being something very special

[427](#) Many Japanese developers told me the same thing: the smooth top-down scrolling in Ys *I* and Ys *II* and the parallax scrolling in Ys *III* was **very** impressive for computers of the time (see Vol.1 Toru Hidaka, computer limitations). Some programmers wanted to join Falcom just to know how they did it. The series started out as a technical showcase in Japan, contrasting with its arrival in the West, where host platforms were already known for smooth scrolling. In this sense the Western fondness for the games is more closely linked to the availability of console RPGs at that time; they're also really fun

[428](#) The *Princess Maker* series was fairly long-lived, with multiple sequels and spin-offs across many formats, later with development being outsourced; don't judge it by the title, *Princess Maker 2* was officially localised into English for DOS but never released, and it's one of the best "raising simulations" you'll find - try it and see

[429](#) PC Engine (1988), pub. by Hudson

[430](#) The connections between Universal/UPL, Tehkan, Westone and Atlus are complex. The URL below links to an interview archived by the GSLA (though its source isn't listed). It's a cross interview between Michitaka TSURUTA (see [chpt.](#)), Kazutoshi UEDA (Universal/UPL, Tehkan, Atlus), Michishito ISHIZUKA (Tehkan, Westone, Atlus), and Hideyuki YOKOYAMA (Universal/UPL, Tehkan, Atlus). In it Ishizuka says: "*More than half those employed by Tecmo in the dev dept. came from Universal/UPL, nearly 20 people! <laughs> We joked, 'If you didn't work at Universal you wouldn't have a career here!'*" In my Tsuruta interview he details how Tehkan staff later formed Atlus. Nishizawa did the reverse (leaving Tehkan to join UPL), and later formed Westone which ended up working with Atlus. Meanwhile Ishizuka left Tehkan for Westone and then left, eventually ending up at Atlus for a time chibarei.blog.jp/gsl/words/atluswestone/atluswestone.html

[431](#) Also known as *bishoujo* (), lit. "beautiful young girl"; sub-genre of the dating sim, interaction with young women in a particular art style

[432](#) According to the Excel file from Nishizawa, company's first *galge* appears to be "*Kekkon*" circa 1995 for the Saturn, published by Shogakukan Production

[433](#) Detailed in Kalata's *RG* article: jointly created by Ishizuka, Sakamoto, and Nishizawa (who did graphics), over roughly two months between the releases of *Wonder Boy* and *Monster Land*, at the request of Atlus; published by LJN Toys in US (1987); although poorly reviewed (Nishizawa describes it as "slipshod"), it's interesting how the game resembles a "shark hunting RPG" with random battles on a world map

[434](#) Almost certainly LJN Toys, which had an extremely diverse range of toys, including film licenses and other Spielberg creations *E.T.* and *Indiana Jones*. What's interesting is LJN Toys

also published videogame-film adaptations of *The Karate Kid* and *Friday the 13th*, both developed by Atlus - for whatever reason, Atlus chose to subcontract Westone to develop its *Jaws* order

[435](#) / *Aquario of the Clockwork*; the last arcade title developed by Westone circa 1993, though unreleased; there's only one known image, taken from an old arcade blog, and some graphics materials Nishizawa put online; OST published 2006. According to Nishizawa the team struggled for a long time to finish it, but due to poor results on location test they never released it. The graphics were excellent, having a similar style to the *Monster World* series, and it's been described as an "eccentric" action game, allowing up to 3 players to play simultaneously. My question was in response to Kalata's Q&A

[436](#) M2 goes to incredible lengths, allowing players to select different game regions, tweak internal variables to rebalance difficulty (such as reducing RPG battle rates), view artwork and *superplay* videos, select a myriad of different screen options and filters to achieve perfect visual fidelity, and more; Backbone on the other hand is too lazy/stupid even to allow players to "virtually attach" *Sonic 2* or *3* to *Sonic & Knuckles* in its Sega compilation for PS3/X360, despite Sega themselves allowing this in *Sonic Jam* on the Saturn **a decade earlier**. Backbone has been producing substandard work for years, denying more reputable companies like M2 the chance

[437](#) K. Abe (Vol.1) explains set-up for *Crest of Wolf* between Westone, Hudson, Red Company, and Agenda

[438](#) It was never overtly stated, but it seems there was a need for Hudson to alter the graphics for *Riot City* in order to put it on home systems; however, this is different to the situation with *Wonder Boy*, where Nishizawa expressly stated that he retained and allowed use of the main character, but Hudson chose to replace him with Takahashi Meijin

[439](#) It was the true developer behind Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* and Sega's *Congo Bongo*; uncovering Ikegami Tsushinki is one of my many quests

[440](#) There were loose plans for me to be put in touch with Ishizuka, but given my busy schedule and the 80+ interviewees I would still meet, it was not possible

[441](#) DC launched Japan Nov 1998; I've never found a precise date for Ishizuka's leaving, but based on Nishizawa's statement about *Willy Wombat* (1997) being their last joint venture, sometime in 1998 seems right; Ishizuka's last Westone credit online appears to be *Dark Half*, circa May 1996

[442](#) Credited on *Quartet*, *SDI* and *Galaxy Force*

[443](#) Although not mentioned in this answer, in *Retro Gamer* #140 (and online), Thomas Kern of FDG, publisher of *Monster Boy* (by Game Atelier), revealed that after Westone shut down assets were transferred to LAT Corp, from which FDG licensed them for use; there's

seemingly zero online presence for any company named LAT Corp which deals with videogame assets...

[444](#) Official sequel to *MWIV* - www.monsterboy.com/

[445](#) AKA: *The Dragon's Trap*

[446](#) There's an interview with Hifumi Kono in this volume

[447](#) I asked the following, hoping for info on the amazing NES version of *Die Hard*, though the answer was no: *"Did you ever work with Tony Van? You're credited on SCUD for Sega Saturn, which was made by Syrox Developments. That same company developed SCUD for Windows, on which Tony Van was Director of Product Development. He was also a planner on Die Hard for the NES (1991). So, I wondered if maybe you were involved with the Pack-in-Video/Activision version of Die Hard, since Monster Land was also published by Activision."* The story of *Die Hard* (NES) is another quest of mine - it features a unique "line of sight" mechanic, where players only see what the in-game character sees, akin to an FPS in 2D; it's also a damn fantastic game

[448](#) Ideon had a big role inspiring *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

[449](#) Both games are credited for 1990, with *Cosmo Tank* around September in the USA. It's worth watching some YouTube videos since the two games are *eerily similar*!

[450](#) AKA: *Space Invaders*

[451](#) ; aka: Hiromi Kurihara after marrying; one of the three co-founders of Westone when it was still known as Escape (alongside Nishizawa and Ishizuka); MobyGames credits Suzuko on *WB in Monster Land* and *WB III: Monster Lair* as character designer, and Kurihara on *WBIII: Dragon's Trap*, *Aoi Blink*, and *WB in Monster World*. **Ryuichi Nishizawa** in an interview with **Andrea Babich** for Outcast.it said: *"The team for the original Wonder Boy featured only three members: me, Ishizuka-san and graphic designer Hiromi Kurihara (née Suzuko). When we began developing Monster Land we added to the team Rie Ishizuka (née Yatomi, graphic designer), Naoki Hoshizaki (programmer) and music composer Shinichi Sakamoto."*

[452](#) Scrolling fighter for arcades, 1991

[453](#) At the time of this interview I still hadn't uncovered everything regarding the *Riot City* and *Crest of Wolf* connection; most of the mystery is documented in Vol.1, in the dB-Soft chapter; there was an issue regarding asset rights, so Agenda was subcontracted by Hudson to half-remake Westone's *Riot City* into a sort of semi-sequel on the PCE-CD

[454](#) PCE Super CD Action-RPG (1994); Westone's more fascinating titles, mechanically similar to Telenet's *Exile* series, blending overhead RPG and side-scrolling action; a steep

language barrier, but worth struggling with

[455](#) SFC RPG (1996); featuring a dark gothic art style, players alternate between the hero and villain

[456](#) In Kalata's interview Nishizawa stated: *"Because of the constantly changing nature of the series, it was necessary to come up with something different from MW3. I wanted to betray the expectations of the fans, but in a good way. About the protagonist becoming female, there were some pros and cons, but I was glad to change it to a girl. Asha's running animation is incredibly adorable."*

[457](#) Sprite rips courtesy of einstein95 on **RHDN**

[458](#) www.mars.dti.ne.jp/ikj/ohzora/ ; www.inv.co.jp/~route16/ohzora/ohzora_gallery.html

[459](#) I was given a book as a gift, of Ms Ohzora's artwork, titled _____ / Sorairoemaki, lit. *Azure Picture Scroll*

[460](#) In the original Japanese statement *doujinshi* was used, and then the English words "fan art"

[461](#) More info here: vintage-computer.com/vcforum/archive/index.php/t-4798.html

[462](#) American pianist, keyboardist, bandleader and composer; has a funky electro-jazz sound - check out *Rockit* from 1984

[463](#) Three guys who play jazz, since 1992

[464](#) Best check YouTube if you've never heard these; it's an eclectic mix of sounds

[465](#) Japan Satellite Broadcasting Corporation

[466](#) Hence the Super Famicom Satellaview

[467](#) ZUN spoke about the X-55 in Volume 1. Footnote: *"According to adverts on YouTube it could play early Taito games and cost around 65,000 yen. Images and information online are scarce. While there's a few interesting looking X-55 brochures online, they're all thumbnails and too small to print."*

[468](#) ¥ _____ (ARC, 1978); Namco's first videogame, a cross between *Breakout* and pinball; by Toru Iwatani of *Pac-Man* fame, and Shigeichi Ishimura, who developed the hardware for most of Namco's early games (including *Pac-Man*), and served various high level leadership roles in the company

[469](#) It's worth noting that 8-bit computer ports of the time, especially ZX Spectrum or

Amstrad conversions, would put screenshots of other versions on the back, such as from the more advanced Atari or Amiga computers, stating as such - however, the C64 version proudly proclaims: "Actual screen shots taken from Commodore 64"

[470](#) It's interesting to note that in Japan arcade prices were consistently 100 yen per play; today that's around 70p or \$1, so it would have been comparatively expensive 30+ years ago

[471](#) COBOL, **C**ommon **B**usiness-**O**riented **L**anguage (app. 1959); FORTRAN, **F**ormula **T**ranslating System (app. 1957)

[472](#) Professor Kishimoto was fun to interview because of the lively way he presented answers - clearly putting to use the experience of keeping students enthused. When reading answers with *<described gestures>* or *onomatopoeia*, please try to visualise it

[473](#) Time-sharing allowed groups of individuals to simultaneously use a large computer, such as at university; it superseded the old, slower batch processing method, and is worth reading up on

[474](#) Arcade release 1983, MSX1 conversion a year later; *Mappy* was converted to a wide range of computers

[475](#) Though graphically limited due to the hardware, it's a faithful conversion; it does however seem to be missing the bonus level

[476](#) Planning, Hideharu SATOU; Hardware, Tohru OGAWA & Shigeru SATOU; Programming, Kazuo KUROSU; Sound, Nobuyuki OHNOGI. Most of the staff either have no or very limited online profiles, apart from Ohnogi who was a prominent musician

[477](#) Toshinari Oka, featured in Vol. 3

[478](#) The HP 64000 was a hardware-based emulation system. It had swappable emulator pods for various target microprocessors. You would remove the actual microprocessor chip from the target system (such as an MSX computer) and insert the chip into the emulator pod. The emulator pod connects to the main HP system on one side, and also plugs into the now-empty microprocessor socket of the target system. The emulator pod, now housing the actual target CPU, acts as an intermediary between the HP64000 host system and the emulated target system

[479](#) i.e., the empty microprocessor socket on the MSX motherboard after the CPU chip is removed

[480](#) The name was said in English

[481](#) Likely Hiroshi Ono, AKA: Mr Dotman; lalabitmarket.channel.or.jp/feature/imas_dot/

[482](#) Vol. 1's interview with Toru Hidaka describes flow charts in programming, with *Cosmic Soldier* as an example

[483](#) Ohmori is a residential and business district slightly south of central Tokyo; Yaguchi is nearby to the West

[484](#) Integrated Circuit chip; Large Scale Integration, meaning tens of thousands of transistor per chip

[485](#) *Pac-Man: The Animated Series*, produced by Hanna-Barbera; Sep. 1982 – Nov. 1983 (2 seasons, 44 episodes); stories followed the adventures of the *Pac-Man* nuclear family & pets

[486](#) Throughout this explanation Professor Kishimoto would re-enact the walking animations on the spot, conveying the energy and enthusiasm the team had when creating the game

[487](#) Assuming 2 or 3 frames

[488](#) According to the sprite sheet by Techokami on www.sprisers-resource.com, there seems to be over 50 unique animation frames for the main character - more if you factor in variations like smiling or having flashing boots (but these are derived from the base set). The sprites shown here are based on Techokami's

[489](#) Different sources cite either August or October 1984 for *Pac-Land*'s release; *Jump Bug* (1981), *Moon Patrol* (1982), *Stop the Express* (1983), *Circus Charlie* (1984) and *Quo Vadis* (1984) are all part of this early collective, which feature smooth horizontal scrolling; *Mappy* (1983), which Professor Kishimoto ported, has smooth scrolling but isn't quite a platformer, since the character can only jump via the trampolines

[490](#) Arcade game, released circa 1983; aka: *Track & Field*

[491](#) He's definitely referring to 2-layer parallax scrolling, not left/right scrolling; parallax in Irem's *Moon Patrol* predates it

[492](#) Although the curved screen was a side-effect of what was available, the games of the time would have been created with this in mind; it's another example of how there are certain *qualia* you can only experience on original hardware

[493](#) This might be missed with written text, but Pr. Kishimoto was always keen to emphasise the roles of different colleagues, and ensure that readers knew who they were; first by introducing the Namco staff listing, and later throughout crediting colleagues on projects; it conveyed a warm and strong sense of egalitarianism

[494](#) ; a T. Negoro was director on Namco's *Rolling Thunder 2*

[495](#) **Pac-Land staff:** Planning, Seiichi SATOU & Tsukasa NEGORO; Hardware, Tohru OGAWA & Shigeru SATOU; Programming, Yoshihiro KISHIMOTO; Sound, Yuriko KEINO

[496](#) According to System-16 only five titles used it: *Pac-Land*, *Dragon Buster*, *Baraduke*,

Metro Cross and *Sky Kid*; some included revisions to increase the palette or add vertical scrolling

[497](#) Throughout this explanation Professor Kishimoto performed the same actions as the player he describes

[498](#) Worth Googling if you've never seen them; a "yankee" (sometimes *yankii*) dresses in a super exaggerated style that mimics Americana culture, with big hair Elvis-style hair, star-studded clothes, and a tough-talking attitude

[499](#) Kissy and Takky investigate the once-peaceful Planet Paccet, which has been invaded by bad aliens called Octy

[500](#) II / *All About Namco II* - ISBN 4885541573; amazing follow-up book with 496 pages & colour imagery detailing the history of Namco

[501](#) Yukio Takahashi; scenario writer and artist on Namco's *Genpei Tsuma Den*; large portfolio on MobyGames for art and programming roles, though possibly a combination of other people with the same name

[502](#) The one-eyed orange alien faces that aid the player; killing them allows for a massive score bonus when collecting the faces, but leaves you without shield upgrades

[503](#) This mystery has been puzzling fans for some time! The first sprite is a helmet like that worn by the player, damaged and resting atop a rifle (aka: a fallen soldier's cross); the second, as pointed out by fans online, looks a bit like the skull from the *Nausicaa* manga; the third doesn't have any obvious connections

[504](#) Dempa are credited on the title screen of the X68000 conversion, under "Program Works 1995", alongside Micomsoft and Acquire, all as separate entities. Interestingly, **MobyGames** describes "Dempa Micomsoft" as a single entity: "*The software division of publishing company Dempa Shimbunsha. In 1993 it was broken off as a separate company, though fully owned by Dempa. Apart from programming games, with Dempa earning a high reputation for its arcade conversions, it also made joysticks and other hardware. The company now remains as Micomsoft Co., Ltd., with TV scan converters as its main business.*" Dempa credited on numerous Namco arcade conversions. Micomsoft has a long history of separate credits on conversions (mainly for the X68000), starting first in 1984 with *Pac-Man* for the PC-6001, leading up to *Baraduke* (X68k) in 1995. Difficult to ascertain the background of Acquire's credit, unknown if it's the same company behind *Tenchu*

[505](#) It varies between being given the arcade PCB or a camcorder (think massive 1980s one); if you read *Retro Gamer*, quite a few had to recreate an arcade game based on video footage. Given the X68000's reputation for pixel-perfect arcade ports, it would be surprising if *Baraduke*'s conversion didn't use source code

[506](#) Japan exclusive, arcades (1988)

[507](#) No source for this; my suspicion is an over-zealous Wikia editor was typing while in a state akin to what they described

[508](#) Arcades (1983), converted to X68000, FM Towns, and SFC; conceptually fascinating; you independently control 2 characters at the same time, attempting to gain territory, similar to *Qix*

[509](#) Arcades (1979); early arcade game credited to Nintendo: shoot the bandits surrounding the screen without getting hit

[510](#) I specifically listed older Namco titles from the era Professor Kishimoto worked in. For post 8-bit games I'd rate the following highly: *Genpei Tsuma Den* series, *Splatterhouse* series, *The Outfoxies* (arcade), *Klonoa: Door to Phantomile* (PS1), *Katamari* series, and for outrageously strange arcade titles, an original *Prop Cycle* cabinet, which I played in the mini-arcade on P&O Ferries

[511](#) Pr. Kishimoto worked on *Toy Pop* (arcades, March 1986), and then *Pro Yakyuu Family Stadium* released on 10 December 1986 (a phenomenally popular baseball series, rebranded *R.B.I. Baseball* in the West); from this point he worked exclusively on consoles

[512](#) Although the word Famicom was used rather than console or "consumer", the overall feeling of the answer was that at Namco, there was no distinction between arcades or games for home use; Namco was one of the first Famicom licensees - according to *Family Computer* 83-94 their debut was *Galaxian* in Sep. 1984

[513](#) Given the variable surname spelling difficult to track down - "Special Thanks" on GameFreak's *Quinty*

[514](#) 7 December 1983, the first baseball game for the FC

[515](#) Weirdly, while you can control when the defence throws a ball after retrieving it, you cannot actually control their movement, making a mid-air catch seemingly random - with *Famista* you could move outfielders freely, guiding them via the ball's shadow

[516](#) There have been over 30 individual *Family Stadium* and *World Stadium* titles released, including on FC, SFC, N64, GC, Wii, GB, GBA, DS, PCE, MSX range, PS1, PS2, plus arcade and computer versions. Within specific periods there's a clear visual evolution

[517](#) According to ReyVGM via **GameFAQs**: "*Pick 1 Player Mode, select the 'N Team' and enter as the password '1198'. Beat all the teams and at the ending, when the player is getting thrown up and down in the air, hold Start to go to the title screen. Once on the title screen, wait 5 seconds and the credits will appear.*" - an alternative documented method is to hold A+B and push START; I didn't actually check to see if the reset method works

[518](#) There's a whole bunch of secrets in various *Famista* titles, including hidden staff portraits in *Famista '91*

[519](#) 27 September 1988, developed by Atlus for publishing by Namco; visit tcrf.net to see the full message

[520](#) Taken from **The Cutting Room Floor**: "*Beat the game. The last screen is a photo of the characters with the word (END). Let the screen sit for 18 minutes. The photo will go black-and-white. Let it sit for 18 more minutes. The photo will go sepia-tone. Wait 55 minutes. The music stops suddenly. After the BGM stops, press A + B + Start + Select + Left on Controller 1 and A + B + Right on Controller 2. Some new music will begin to play. Press B + Select + Right on Controller 1 and B + Right + Down on Controller 2. The message will start.*"

[521](#) Namco's *Star Wars* for FC came out 4 Dec 1987

[522](#) Long running career at Namco; multiple director and producer credits on various *Xenosaga* and *Tales of...* RPGs

[523](#) (6 Dec. 1985); technically impressive real-time first-person 3D space shoot-em-up (imagine *Elite* but without vector graphics); with intense combat and a large free-roaming map containing enemy bases and refuelling stations, players need to plan their attacks strategically. Was adapted for Nintendo's VS arcade system and, years later, updated for the X68000

[524](#) *Alex Kidd in Miracle World* for MK-III released Nov. 1986

[525](#) My feeling is Pr. Kishimoto regards the earlier *Star Luster* as being closer to what people expected of a *Star Wars* game (3D battles, etc.), than the SW game released (2D platformer); in fairness, Namco's SW title does have 3D battles very similar to *Star Luster*, though the final X-Wing stage is in top-down 2D

[526](#) Published by JVC (Nov. 1991); online sources claim Beam Software made it, but the back of the box states Lucasfilm, and Lucas veterans Kalani Streicher and Mike Ebert are credited on it

[527](#) Dev. by Lucasfilm, Pub. by Victor Entertainment (15 Nov 1991)

[528](#) Well, up until meeting Han Solo in Mos Eisley. I've never bothered to get beyond this part of the game

[529](#) 19 Sep. 2013

[530](#) Most likely Haruhisa Udagawa (aka: HAL/UDA); various coding related credits on *Xevious*, *Galaxian*, *The Tower of Druaga*, *Super Xevious*, *Dragon Buster*, and *Dragon Spirit*

[531](#) Wii RPG dev. by ArtePiazza, pub. by Koei (JP: Nov 2007 / EN: Mar 2008); Western critics failed to appreciate the depth of the inter-character interactions and beautiful setting, scoring it low. Read the article on HG101 to understand *Opoona's* excellence

[532](#) Lit. worldview, but encompassing everything related to a game's lore, including things not seen by players

[533](#) ; Japanese dish, as it sounds: omelette with rice in it

[534](#) There's a few rare instances of developers with the same name merging into one, but otherwise I'd say it's the best English language resource for games available

[535](#) : *How to Make Games*, Pr. Y. Kishimoto (Sep. 2013, SoftBank Creative) - ISBN 4797372265

[536](#) Very little online, so I'm quoting Kevin Gifford of **Magweasel**, 18 March 2010: *"Released to arcades in 2001 and still going on Wii, PSP and DS. A unique word game that takes advantage of Japanese's complex writing system. Each level consists of a grid, a row of kana tiles on the left, and a goal - make 20 words, fill in squares with words, etc. - to complete before time runs out. There was commentary on blogs over the departure of Takashi Nakamura from Namco Bandai Games. He's the most well-known among the 168 NBGI employees who accepted severance packages this month from the company, which is trying to shed 10 percent of its workforce following major losses. Nakamura's main contribution was producing the Mojipittan series, but he didn't design it - that honour goes to Hiroyuki Gotou."*

[537](#) *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, written 1938; aka "Man the Player" and "Playing Man"; Japanese title: ; **Blurb**: "Dutch philosopher Johan Huizinga defines play as the central activity in flourishing societies. Like civilization, play requires structure and participants willing to create within limits. Starting with Plato, Huizinga traces the contribution of 'Homo Ludens,' through Medieval Times, the Renaissance, and into our modern civilization. Huizinga defines play against a rich theoretical background, using cross-cultural examples from the humanities, business, and politics."

[538](#) This is referring to *naitei*, a tentative job offer that Japanese companies often extend to promising students a few months before they graduate from school

[539](#) At GDC 2015 Jason Scott (archivist at the Internet Archive) stated that staff at companies should indeed take items from the office to preserve and save history

[540](#) Casey Loe: "That '...' hides the fact that Wikipedia cut out most of the text. The whole thing is here, as well as a video of it: gmdisc.com/archives/385 - the full text is basically the game's ending, and only the parts they excerpted are believed to be a reference to Mr Fukatani. It is believed that Mr Fukatani is the 'God', and Kazuo Kurosu, Namco's other genius programmer, is the 'Devil', as that was apparently his nickname and he left the company

around this time."

[541](#) Probably referring to the Cinematronics arcade game (1977), later ported to the Vectrex (1982)

[542](#) The three at Taito are: *Operation Thunderbolt*, *Ninja Warriors*, and *Thunderfox*. Those at other companies: *Illusion City*, *Bad Omen*, and *Bio-Ship Paladin*. I assumed the credits at other developers was someone else, but to have another same-named graphics artist at Taito during the same period was surprising!

[543](#) (PC-88, 1987); ported to PCE (& fan-translated)

[544](#) From a particular Japanese turn of phrase, *sekai ni habataku* (, lit. "to flap one's wings through the world"), similar in meaning to the English phrase "to make a splash"

[545](#) Surprisingly little on Uminin in English. He's the little blue fellow who looks sort of like a ghost; he's grown in popularity, and there's plenty of fan art and an entire Japanese website on him, but it's difficult to find references to his first appearance. In *Cho Aniki* (1992, **top**) he's easy to spot, but he also appeared in *Shubibinman 3* and apparently some *Langrisser* titles too

[546](#) Literally "restricted to those older than 18"

[547](#) Mr Suzuki's reaction was priceless - a mixture of astonishment and embarrassment, though clearly impressed we knew it

[548](#) (PC-88, Sep 1986); strange fascinating RPG, with some of the best 1980s cover art ever, looking like a cross between *Indiana Jones* and *Romancing the Stone*; oddly, ads for *Maidum* appeared alongside ads for *Sekai Yaruhodo*, showing NCS started advertising it well before completion!

[549](#) Law discussed in V1 and, at the time of editing, the law was passed in a lighter form, preventing the destruction of games

[550](#) Multiple online sources reference either a Robert M. Timbello or Bob Timbello - both are the same person; worked for or was associated with multiple developers including NCS/Masaya, Sega, Hudson, Red Company, Konami, Acclaim, and Hit Maker (not the Sega Hitmaker); notable credits include *Shining in the Darkness*, *Ys IV: The Dawn of Ys*, and *Sakura Taisen*; you can find an interview with him, by Brandon Sheffield, on Gamasutra

[551](#) Big hex-based strategy series on multiple formats; by SystemSoft (first 1985); only a few saw official release in English

[552](#) According to multiple sources NCS/Masaya only published two Famicom games (the

first only in 1992), and developed none - significant, when you consider its enormous portfolio

[553](#) Actually, Joseph went on a *Moto Roder* tangent, but Suzuki obviously enjoyed speaking with a sincere fan, so I let it ride

[554](#) Nothing in English; only a couple of Japanese blogs document it

[555](#) Although it sounded like Colombia in South America, Mr Nakai meant Columbia, USA, later elaborating the individual was a member of the Project Umbrella website

[556](#) "Telling one's fortune by the number of strokes/lines used in the kanji characters of one's given and family name"

[557](#) Broadly speaking the first means "memory" and the second, in Chinese, means awareness

[558](#) It can also be read "Satoru", highlighting the difficulty of Japanese etiquette and an important facet of business cards: having the precise kanji and pronunciation

[559](#) Casey Loe: This *seimei handan* stuff has become very mainstream/popular now. It's famously the reason the Toyoda family decided to name their company Toyota

[560](#) As later discussed, there were **at least 5 people** named Suzuki at NCS, so it's always essential to clarify who

[561](#) . / *Lightning Vaccus: The Knight of Iron* (aka *Bacchus*), MSX2, PC-88/98, X68000; mecha hex strategy

[562](#) Mr Nakai used the English names for these - the brief summaries he gave are printed on his portfolio pages

[563](#) PCE-CD (Jun 1990); NCS / Masaya / Winds collab. based on the anime movie; conventional looking JRPG with sci-fi theme

[564](#) On MobyGames for monster design as part of Winds - resulting dialogue moved to later in interview

[565](#) In Japan "maniac" refers to the hardcore *otaku* or *cognoscenti*

[566](#) Interview with S. Fujishima in Vol.3 - he created *Golvellius*

[567](#) *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989); Lynch/Cronenberg style body-horror film where people grotesquely metamorphose with metal

[568](#) This particular journalistic saga, regarding Andrew Whittaker, warrants a book in itself;

someday I will travel to that island and discover what happened to the unreleased *Power Crystal* RPG for the unreleased M2 hardware

[569](#) A curious example of an unreleased *gaiden*, first shown on the back of the original game's manual ([top pic](#)), and then later at least 6 times in different MSX magazines, between Dec 1988 and Mar 1989. Full title: */ Youkai Hen Kikou - LAST ARMAGEDDON 2 - Bangai-Hen*, lit. "*Youkai's Strange Journey - LA - Extra Edition*". Instead of Western type monsters like the original game, screens showed Japanese folklore creatures such as kappa, tanuki, oni, the one-eyed hitotsume-kozou, and several others. It was only cinematic screens, not gameplay - turns out they were just mock-ups

[570](#) Nameko, also known as Funghi, is a mushroom character originally spun off from the NDS game *Touch Detective* (*, Osawari Tantei: Ozawa Rina*, lit. "*Touch Detective: Rina Ozawa*"), and now star of a popular iOS/Android game. A very famous and recognizable character in Japan today

[571](#) beeworksgames.com/

[572](#) *Kumamon* is the mascot of Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan, and went on to become well-known nationwide

[573](#) I had a mini-interview with one of the *Cotton* developers, Masahiro Fukuda, for V3 (FYI: *Virtua Fighter* was an influence!)

[574](#) *Culdcept Complete Illustration* - ISBN: 4840103623 ([pictured](#))

[575](#) Imagine a cross between the board game *Monopoly* and the card game *Magic: The Gathering*; it's surprisingly engrossing!

[576](#) */ Tomoharu Saitou*

[577](#) Credited in various graphics, illustration and design roles, on the following: *Sol Bianca*, *Ranma 1/2*, *Cyber City Oedo 808*, and *Moto Rader* (all PCE-CD), *Head Buster* (GG), *Shubibinman Zero* (SFC), and *Lord Monarch* (various systems, originally by Falcom), plus two *Culdcept* games; his biography on **MobyGames**: "*Japanese illustrator and programmer, born 1966. Ketsu started his career in the games industry at Masaya, where he soon left work as a programmer to concentrate on graphics. Together with Hideo Suzuki, he left Masaya to found Omiya Soft. At Omiya, Ketsu has been head of the graphics department. Being quite a cook, he also prepares the food at Omiya Soft.*" For context, Omiya Soft is also the developer of *Front Mission: Gun Hazard*, which followed the template of NCS's *Assault Suit* series

[578](#) PCE (1989), later converted to/updated for multiple systems; aka *Military Madness* in the West; futuristic hex-based strategy

[579](#) / Kouji Hayame; enormous music portfolio including *Chou Aniki* and *Shubibinman* series, *Front Mission 3*, *Mega Man ZX*, *Ape Escape 2*, *SSB: Brawl*, and *Half-Minute Hero*

[580](#) As we soon discover, there were five (5)!

[581](#) There's a disjointed MobyGames profile, but few overall records; confusingly, *Gaiflame* for PCE has a "C. Suzuki" credited on game design (connection unknown)

[582](#) The original printed packaging states it **does** support FM sound; the ink stamp, sticker and internal leaflet were added afterwards, apologising for the in-actual-fact **lack** of FM sound

[583](#) , lit. "*Legend of Landslide*" ; a *dosekiryuu* is a debris flow, a natural disaster similar to a landslide/mudslide

[584](#) ⁴⁴ extreme Co.,Ltd. - spelled with a lower case "e", their website has a detailed page on Masaya. Whoever set this up clearly has a lot of love for the company's catalogue, and it contains a ton of resources and links to EGG: www.e-extreme.co.jp/masaya/

[585](#) Myself and Joseph had a long conversation about this mysterious warehouse, debating trying to find someone in charge, in the hope of the GPS rescuing surviving materials and taking photos for the book; sadly neither of us had time in our schedules

[586](#) One of two fabled expansions for *The Black Onyx*, it would allow players to explore the wilderness; neither this nor *Arena* were released

[587](#) , lit. "*Royal Knight Story*"

[588](#) A preview was in *Technopolis*, April 1990 issue, which is where these image scans come from

[589](#) Suu-san, often interchanged with nickname Susan; full explanation a bit later in the interview

[590](#) Localised as *Drone Tactics* on DS (2008); received positive reviews overall. This *Cthulu* game could have been **amazing**

[591](#) Basically, when creating large images such as backgrounds or perhaps cut-scenes, the tools allowed artists to fill or "paint" entire areas using not just a single colour from a limited palette (thereby creating a flat shade from 1 of 8 available), but a pre-defined & varied combination of pixel colours (almost like a repeating texture). In the instance described above, Mr Suzuki showed two different adult games featuring nude women. In the first, the woman's skin tone was created by the artist filling the entire body silhouette using a blend of alternating red, yellow and white pixels - the result was a kind of flat orange/beige, which

gave the image an unsophisticated cartoonish look. The next game featured a woman who had been coloured manually, varying the grouping of pixels at each area, for example to simulate the curved appearance of a thigh

[592](#) All three combined separate, modular strategy maps (large & small), and in addition all three used a strange non-aligned square grid system; *Langrisser* (1991) used more conventional mechanics, including a standard grid-based system resembling *Fire Emblem* (1990) in many ways, and single large maps

[593](#) (Japanese); while in English it was Rance Culzas (*Target Earth*) and Lance Kalzas (*Warsong*)

[594](#) "Best Strategy Videogame" in *Videogames & Computer Entertainment's* "Best Games of 1992 Awards." (#49, Feb 1993)

[595](#) **Kurt Kalata:** "*All of the versions of Langrisser II feature a cameo by the Cho Aniki characters in a hidden stage, the Muscle Shrine - while the ambiguous strongmen from Masaya's shooter series are quite difficult, beating them will yield one of the most powerful summons in the game.*"

[596](#) Derrick is clearly an enormous fan; it's well worth checking out the translations he did. Given his hardcore knowledge on the games, I've quoted him verbatim - it's rather insightful! I provided his question (in Japanese) as is to Mr Suzuki. For more information, visit the *Langrisser* Wiki - langrisser.info

[597](#) Credited on the entire *Langrisser* series, first as support or assistant, and from *III* onwards as fulltime writer

[598](#) ; prolific Japanese artist and illustrator for manga, anime and games; voluminous portfolio, including roles on *Crying Freeman*, *Growlanser* series (anime & games), *Plastic Little*, *Bubblegum Crisis*, *Record of Lodoss War*

[599](#) Removed from *Cybernator*. In *Valken* the following message is repeated in segments: "
, . Lit.: "*This is the Outer Space Expeditionary Party. Please Respond.*" Directly ties into the *Leynos* ending, where the antagonist says they sent a message which was ignored. For some reason message is missing from the *Valken* fan-translation

[600](#) This is pretty cool! In Stage 7, when you get inside the enemy colony, there's an entire map section along the top of the playfield, with buildings and water pools. If you hex-edit the following cheat code while playing (3000B0550019) you should have a super powerful jump allowing you to reach the top. Be careful, because the collision detection is really weird, and you're guaranteed to end up stuck in scenery

[601](#) An excellent point. Interior stages in *Leynos* feature wall cannons which you can destroy, but doing so leaves the walls entirely unscathed as if the cannons never existed - it's kind of jarring, and so the ability to damage walls in *Valken* makes sense

[602](#) Published by Konami - see accompanying chapter

[603](#) / Toshiro Tsuchida; **very huge** portfolio, including *Shubibinman* & *Ranma* series, *Valken*, *Cho Aniki*, *Langrisser*, *Arc the Lad I&II*, *Front Mission 1~5* plus spin-offs, and much more

[604](#) So *Gun Hazard* officially **is** related to *Valken*!

[605](#) / Hisou Kihei *Kai-Serd* (PCE, Feb. 1990); roughly "*Flying Cavalry Soldier: Kai-Serd*"; the soldier symbol () is the same for *Leynos* and *Valken*, whose titles start "*Heavy Machine Soldier*". "Serd" is the name of the robot weapons used, and turns up again in the sequel *Vixen 357* (MD, Oct. 1992). A lot of places Romanise it *X-Serd*, which seems odd given the katakana spells "kai", but as explained by **Michael Tedder**: "*Doing a conversion on 'kai' shows χ in the list of possible kanji symbols on OSX. That character maps to 'Greek small letter chi' in Unicode.*" Game is standard grid-based strategy with big mecha

[606](#) There are at least two Hideo Suzuki in the games industry; the Masaya person left in 1994 to form Omiya Soft, and has credits on *Gynoug*, *Leynos*, *Valken*, *Langrisser*, *Gun Hazard*, *Gleylancer*, multiple *Culdcept* entries, and as director on *Lord Monarch* (Omiya Soft handled the MD conversion of Falcom's original)

[607](#) Let's recap this wonderfully complicated saga. *Kai-Serd* (PCE, strategy) and *Leynos* (MD, action) started off at Masaya as crossover titles by Tsuchida and Suzuki respectively, though they later diverged (3 x Suzuki on *Leynos*: Hideo on code, Masa on grfx, and Takayuki on music). Tsuchida then went to Square to make *Front Mission* (SFC, strategy) while Hideo Suzuki made *Valken* (SFC, action) at Masaya, as an official "*Assault Suits*" title to follow *Leynos*. Subsequently Hideo Suzuki went to Omiya Soft and, in collaboration with Tsuchida, made *Gun Hazard*, which was published by Square, set in the *Front Mission* universe, but playing like *Leynos* and *Valken* before it. Most players are probably aware of much of this, but the part usually overlooked by English press is *Hisou Kihei Kai-Serd* for PCE. In many ways, it's the unspoken progenitor of the *Front Mission* series and brother to the *Assault Suits* series which then continued on to the PlayStation and Saturn (making *Kai-Serd*'s Mega Drive follow-up *Vixen 357* something of an odd cousin to the rest)

[608](#) Actually... **There were five (5) people named Suzuki**; the 5th is Masaya musician Takayuki Suzuki; he worked on *Leynos* though never came up in conversation

[609](#) This is the "Susan" mentioned earlier in the interview; credits for the first *Shubibinman* lists an Urabe Suu for illustration. Passed away in 2001, memorial page on Volume 1

[610](#) - fairly well known *mangaka*, large portfolio of *Rockman* manga, also graphics work on several games including: *Illusion of Gaia*, *Streets of Rage 2*, and *Story of Thor 1 & 2*

[611](#) 7 October 2001, according to message boards of the time

[612](#) Mr Nakai originally said 20 years - technically it was closer to 12 years; however, the way the answer was conveyed implied more the feeling of time (ie long ago), rather than an error

[613](#) ; 17 November 1967 ~ 29 July 2006; notable artist for Sega in later years, memorial in Vol.1

[614](#) Note from expert Matt Fitsko: visiting such a bar doesn't imply sexuality. In Japan, it is common for heterosexual men and women to frequent such *okama* bars () and be served or entertained by cross-dressing men

[615](#) They had personalities that were nothing like the typical character who ends up dying in a story

[616](#) Earliest work by Winds, according to their website, is character design & pixel graphics for the original *Shubibinman* on PC Engine in 1989, while more recently the company worked on the 3D computer graphics backgrounds in *MGS V: Ground Zeroes*

[617](#) Jodorowsky is also know as "that crazy *Dune* guy" since he started the original (uncompleted) film adaptation of the novel, which was to feature Salvador Dali and a burning giraffe. I've not seen *Holy Mountain* (1973), but I've seen *El Topo* (1970). It is without question the strangest film I know. Given the extreme hypersensitivity of today's Millennial generation, *El Topo* will offend **everyone** - but it's actually a sort of prototype "videogame film" before videogames even existed. It's incredible how much like a JRPG it is in terms of tropes and structure: a wandering gunslinger goes on a quest to defeat four bizarre masters and gain their powers. After doing so he's rendered unconscious and kidnapped by subterranean dwarves, is sealed underground for decades in hibernation, metamorphoses into a blonde Messianic figure who has to visit a local town to "grind" for money, and ultimately "saves" the dwarves by having sufficiently levelled-up

[618](#) www.projectumbrella.net - a website devoted to all things *Resident Evil*; the gentlemen from Columbia is listed on the staff page as Ridley; the site administrator, who I spoke with while producing the books, is Paul Birch from Ireland; the actual name Nakai mentioned was not at all audible

[619](#) Misters Suzuki and Nakai were off to the side during filming, looking at materials unrelated to *Resident Evil*

[620](#) Artist renowned for his Falcom and Sega covers, interviewed in Vol.1, cover featured on Platinum Edition

[621](#) This was not a game, but rather a proof of concept. The game would feature dozens if not hundreds of ship "parts" that could be overlaid and combined to create much larger battleships, small enemies or the player. There have been vaguely similar ideas before, such as procedurally-generated *doujin* shmup *Warning Forever*, but this featured detailed high-res 2D sprites

[622](#) The name of the company really was not audible, but the sound effects masking it were **hilarious**

[623](#) We'd visited Eighting to interview: Yuichi Toyama, Mitsuakira Tatsuta, Kenichi Yokoo, Takayuki Hirono, and Satoshi Fujishima

[624](#) More info here: leynos.dracue.co.jp/ps4/top.html

[625](#) *Re:Incarnation*, 3DS title; langrisser.jp/

[626](#) Mr Suzuki referred to himself in the 3rd person and used some standard Japanese phrasing which might sound odd translated - phrasing was adjusted, but the 3rd person references were kept

[627](#) Casey Loe: Dioxin pollution is a big thing in Japan and the last "motto" seems to be a take off of a famous film about it

[628](#) Brand of acrylic art materials; basically, he painted it the old fashioned way, rather than on PC

[629](#) As a 2D style RPG on PS1, *Vellideselba* has some very nice pixel-art backgrounds; presumably this high quality was only achieved after Nakai stepped in and redrew the maps. The game also features 3D aerial combat sections, and is a fascinating title

[630](#) This was a mystery at first. On the Project Umbrella interview, Nakai lists *Gunstar Heroes* for Nintendo DS, which I assumed was a mistake since no such game exists, and it was instead meant to be *Gunstar Super Heroes* for GBA; the GBA release credits a **Satoru** Nakai for graphics design, which I assumed was a kanji mistranslation. After the answer explaining his kanji, I'm certain it's the GBA release, and **not** an unreleased *Gunstar* for NDS

[631](#) Referring to the game's built-in level designer, which used both screens and was available to players too

[632](#) ; manga artist/anime chara designer, notably *Patlabor*

[633](#) Casey Loe: This was some sort of play-by-mail game that was run in various Dengeki

magazines, which was eventually adapted into a videogame and released on the PC Engine

[634](#) "Playing Catch Up: *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*' Mike Ebert" - excellent feature which adds background to this interview; gives a fascinating overview of LucasArts

[635](#) *Armored Trooper VOTOMS* / ; long running series starting in 1983, first on TV and then with OAV follow-ups; around 20 original videogame spin-offs as well

[636](#) Production Manager/Art Director for Japanese Animation magazine "Animag" (1985-1989); several issues on eBay and Amazon; animeofyesteryear.blogspot.com has entire issues scanned for download! It's a really fun fanzine

[637](#) Extensive portfolio, incl. art for *Maniac Mansion*

[638](#) *Mecha* #1 published June 1987; written by Randy Stradley, pencilled by Harrison Fong; 6 issue series; highlights the fact the dev team had long been interested in Japanese style robots

[639](#) Toshiyasu Morita - "*Technical director at Sega of America throughout its 16-bit dominance and past the demise of the Dreamcast*", www.sega-16.com/2008/02/interview-toshiyasu-morita/

[640](#) Also credited on music for *Metal Warriors*; **incredibly long and extensive career** warranting its own interview (lots of Sega Saturn work too). **MobyGames:** "*A longtime computer music and sound person, David Warhol was one of the Blue Sky Rangers, the team developing Intellivision games in the early 1980s. Founded Realtime Associates in 1986, president of the company. In early 2008 co-founded Music Video Games, LLC where he is now chief creative officer.*" - more info here, www.rtassoc.com

[641](#) Released 1990; somewhat obscure, but it's actually very clever and a lot of fun, as you pilot an ED-209 look-alike, jumping in and out to solve puzzles

[642](#) Underwent lots of changes; radio portraits were still present in early English builds

[643](#) This explains the crazy eBay prices today

[644](#) **MobyGames:** "*4A Games formed in 2006 in Kiev, Ukraine, by former employees of GSC Game World, including programmers who worked on S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Came to prominence with Metro 2033. May 2014 the company announced new headquarters in Malta.*"

[645](#) Extensive LucasArts portfolio, incl. *Full Throttle*

[646](#) Big Ape Productions, circa 1997-2003; developer of *Herc's Adventures* and *Simpson's Wrestling*

[647](#) For example Human Club developing games then published by Human Entertainment itself

[648](#) Initially I thought it was *Bad Influence!*, one of the best televised shows about games, circa 1992~1995. Each episode was well researched, and documenting a Japanese game design school is just the sort of thing they'd cover. However, trawling episode descriptions (www.bad-influence.co.uk) yielded nothing. The site admin confirmed as much: "I looked up *The Firemen* game, and I am certain it never appeared on *Bad Influence*." This leaves alternate British shows, possibly *BI!* spin-off *Bad Level 10*. The most likely candidate is *Cybernet*, which started in 1995. Sadly few episodes are archived online. I am however quite certain that it was not *GamesWorld* or *GamesMaster*. If you know which show/episode this segment featured in, please send an email

[649](#) Although news broke on 4 April with Suda51's Tweet, a family member gave the earlier date via Twitter

[650](#) At the time 50, it grew to over 80 as the projected went on

[651](#) On the red Marunouchi Line

[652](#) Hex-based strategy title for PCE-CD, similar to *Daisenryaku*, but with real-time action when units attack; published in Japan by Human (1990), and in US by Working Designs (1993); Amano is credited on music: an unexpected easy-listen' JAZZ soundtrack!

[653](#) As stated by **MobyGames**: "*Human Entertainment was [first] established as Sonata through the merger of two software companies, TRY Co., Ltd. and Communicate, Inc. The company originally produced ports, licensed titles, and peripheral games under contract from publishers such as Bandai and Konami.*" ; ascertaining the date is tricky, since the archive for Human.co.jp says that Human was established May 1983, whereas staffer Hitoshi Akashi in an interview with **GDRI** states: "*Sonata was the result of a merger in 1987. One was Communicate, Inc., which mainly developed products for Japanese NEC PCs and the Sharp X1; the other was TRY Corporation, which mainly developed for the Famicom. I joined Communicate in 1986. 80% of the employees were amateur musicians including the president. I play and compose music, and I like art and games. That's why I joined the company. Unfortunately, Communicate was not doing very well, so it merged with TRY. After I left it became the publisher Human Corporation.*" ; MobyGames states Sonata was renamed Human in 1989, which lines up with Amano's statement about *Vasteel* (1990) starting development under Sonata

[654](#) / Youichi Soki; some coding credits for Taito and one for Toaplan on MobyGames (most likely someone else)

[655](#) / Shinnosuke Takahashi; no English online entries

[656](#) *Tatakae!! Ramen-Man: Sakuretsu Choujin 102 Gei* /
; released 1988, it's a spin-off of the *Kinnikuman* franchise, so therefore connected to the

M.U.S.C.L.E wrestling game released in America (the thin-moustached character is the eponymous Ramenman); this Famicom release was a mix of adventure game and one-on-one fights; allegedly it was the first cursor-driven adventure for the system, given that previous such games used menus

[657](#) ; surprisingly little info online

[658](#) Phonetically this sounded like "nice" - but given the vague nature of the word it's impossible to find more information; unlikely to be related to Japanese *eroge* developer NIC

[659](#) Difficult to research; however, JPN title screen for *Septentrion* lists Human Entertainment alongside Field, so there is definitely a connection (the English title screen replaces Field with Vic Tokai)

[660](#) Search gdri.smspover.org for interview with **Hitoshi_Akashi**

[661](#) See Toru Hidaka interview in Volume 1 for detailed explanation

[662](#) Resembles *Excitebike* (29 January 1989 - Level X FC Book)

[663](#) Extremely obscure (8 Aug 1989); seemingly based on an anime first aired Oct 1988

[664](#) The series had a reasonable run, starting on PC Engine, moving to SFC (and receiving four sequels), and even being updated for PlayStation and Game Boy Advance; personally speaking, while I've not played the later versions, the first SNES release is probably my favourite football game, being fun and devoid of the fiddly complexity found in more serious footy titles

[665](#) **Wikipedia:** "*A player is offside when in the opponents' half of the pitch and closer to the opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second-to-last opponent (usually the last defensive player in front of the goalkeeper); players in an offside position when the ball is touched or played by a team-mate, may not become actively involved in the play.*"

[666](#) Japanese name for *Pro Evolution Soccer*

[667](#) Although I never clarified, I assume this was also in *TILT* magazine. According to Wikipedia it also won "Best PC Engine Game 1991" in German magazine *Power Play* (Feb, 1992)

[668](#) See www.final-match-tennis.com

[669](#) Although not a permanent school, Enix set-up game development seminars, as discussed by Toru Hidaka in Vol.1

[670](#) Honorifics are very important in Japanese - *san* can refer to anyone, usually of equal stature / *kun* refers to a junior / *sama* is very polite, used towards a senior or in letter writing /

sensei means teacher and is one of the highest terms, highlighting the intrinsic respect Japanese culture has for teachers, and is sometimes used for those who act as mentor to someone else; I try to keep the original honorifics, since it's amusing to note when the diminutive *kun* is used between colleagues

[671](#) I want every reader, when absorbing these interviews, to ***really be there***. Can you do that for me? As you read the words which describe these places, take a moment and close your eyes: notice the desks and windows, imagine them around you as you hold this book. You're not sitting in your home or on transportation, you are in that game developer's office, the papers around you contain concept art, the air is rich with instant-ramen vapour and nicotine - YOU ARE IN JAPAN RIGHT NOW

[672](#) The vaguely "H" shape made me think it could be two buildings

[673](#) TV in Japan and the US use NTSC and are clocked at 60hz, so in the case of retro games you'd get 60 frames per second gameplay; in contrast to the UK with its 50Hz PAL TV system

[674](#) There were lots of soccer games bearing official "J League" endorsement, as far back as 1992; the first by A-MAX was the *Excite Stage '94* iteration on SFC, published by Epoch in Japan and later published by Capcom as *Soccer Shootout* on SNES; *Excite Stage* went on to see multiple sequels and, according to Amano's resume, A-MAX made the '94, '95 and '96 iterations

[675](#) From around 1997 A-MAX switched to the *Dynamite Soccer* series, developing the 64, 98, 2000, 1500 (budget range), 2002, and 2004 iterations

[676](#) Founded 1986 and still around, with an enormous **publishing** portfolio on just about every hardware platform; seemingly didn't **develop** much, with *Quest 64* being the highlight

[677](#) - by Mamoru Nagano, from 1986 onwards

[678](#) February 2004; online only add-on for *Steel Battalion*, for a time featuring a persistent online campaign mode

[679](#) January 2006 (PC); erotically themed adventure game published by Elf, which specialises in adult games (notably the *Dragon Knight* RPGs); a loving couple try making adult videos to pay off debts - improve your film making skills and grow the fan base!

[680](#) More discussion on the *Mikagura* series later in this chapter

[681](#) Googling later revealed this was not the private dungeon of a sexy Tokyo dominatrix, but in fact a private hair-dressing salon

[682](#) Some examples added post-interview, but all show creativity being shot down by puritanical nutjobs: Suda51 for the beauties in *Killer is Dead*; Katsuhiro Harada for Lucky

Chloe in *Tekken*; George Kamitani and his gorgeous art in Vanillaware games; Kenichiro Takaki for the Rubenesque portrayals in his *Senran Kagura* series; Hideo Kojima for his strong female characters; plus Swery65, Hideki Kamiya, Tomonobu Itagaki, even Kinu Nishimura (Capcom character artist), have all been wrongly targeted

[683](#) May 1993 (SFC), aka: *SOS*; phenomenal and unique 2D game set on a capsizing cruise-liner, tasking players with escape while the game world regularly rotates; credited as **Midori Masato**

[684](#) Keita Kimura - not much else on MobyGames

[685](#) 4 chars and ~17 endings, based on how many NPCs you save

[686](#) Actually, it was Vic Tokai in America

[687](#) Since Vic Tokai was the overseas publisher this anecdote might be referring to another Human game; or the representative wasn't from Ubisoft. *F1 Pole Position 64* was made by Human and published by Ubisoft, so the companies had connections

[688](#) It was in a list of accomplishments, under entries denoting being a pixel artist and directing games at Human, and mentioned doing "consultation work" - an easy assumption to make!

[689](#) Overhead action game where you put out fires, with a strong narrative structure (SFC, 1994); great game & released in English!

[690](#) Taichi Ishizuka - see his chapter!

[691](#) By Epoch, successor to the Cassette Vision; released 1984, the Super Cassette Vision received 30 games and was discontinued

[692](#) 1981 predecessor to the above, technologically simpler; Higuchi and Kono alternate between Super and "non Super", though given the games mentioned Kono is talking about the original, whereas Higuchi is definitely referring to the *Super*

[693](#) Dec 1993 (SFC) - aka: *F1 Pole Position 2*

[694](#) Given the ambiguous name, impossible to find info on

[695](#) thegamesdb.net: "Racing game developed by Open System, published by Forum, Jan 1994"

[696](#) *Dream Basketball: Dunk & Hoop*, Nov 1994 (SFC)

[697](#) President of Human Entertainment, surprisingly little info online

[698](#) JPN: Dec 1996 / USA: Oct 1997 simply as "*Clock Tower*"

[699](#) Localised as *Super Soccer* for the West

[700](#) Jun 2012 (PS3/X360); Grasshopper Manufacture (Suda51)

[701](#) , Jan 1995 (SFC); cute Mode 7 skiing game, with pudding themed levels. *PUDDING!!*

[702](#) There are a few female wrestling games; given the timeframe, definitely *Fire Pro Joshi: All Star Dream Slam* (Jul 1994)

[703](#) Tomonori Koike, credits on Human's soccer and tennis games

[704](#) Presumably Hamster Corporation, founded Nov 1999 - which ties in with Human Entertainment closing circa Jan 2000

[705](#) Read this comment in the context of Hifumi Kono's success on Kickstarter, earning over \$300'000 for his horror game, *NightCry*

[706](#) Difficult to find online news stories - likely too old

[707](#) Given timeframe, possibly *Hyper Formation Soccer* (PS1, 1995)

[708](#) Series of 5 minimalist Japanese horror games released between 1996 and 2000 (*Tansaku-hen*, *Kyuumei-hen*, *Moonlight Syndrome*, *Special*, and *Sakai*); Suda51 involved in the first 3

[709](#) Or, in the case of some publishers, stops paying staff, then declares bankruptcy to write off debt, then starts a differently named publisher in the same building with same senior managers

[710](#) See conversion chart at book's start

[711](#) **MobyGames:** "*AKI Corporation is a game developer based in Musashino, Tokyo, employing around 80 people (as of 2004). AKI's mainstay, ever since its foundation in 1995, has been wrestling games, ranging from official tournaments to comic licences.*" Known as AKI Corporation from 19 Jun 1995 to 1 Apr 2007 - current name of "syn Sophia, Inc." apparently used from 2008 onwards. www.syn-sophia.co.jp

[712](#) Nothing online in ENG, but several hits in JPN, including blogs mourning lack of release; full JPN title was ¥ × , lit. *Geo Catastrophe Ninth Chapter "Noah"*

[713](#) An online trawl reveals only two baseball games: *Meimon! Daisan Yakyuubu* (FC, 1989), and *Human Baseball* (SFC, 1993); online videos for *Human Baseball* show it to be quite

terrible!

[714](#) This sounds very similar to Human's *Dragon's Earth* for Super Famicom (sources say it was released either at the end of 1992 or start of 1993), a sort of RTS with RPG overtones - this doesn't necessarily mean *Dragon's Earth* is related to *Geo Catastrophe* in any way, the themes are entirely different for a start, but both were isometric games for Super Famicom with an RPG flavour

[715](#) SCD (1993); localised as *Android Assault: The Revenge of Bari-Arm* for US release (1994)

[716](#) Shigeaki Nezu is credited (programmer) on both *Egypt* (FC, 1991) and *Septentrion* (SFC, 1993) by Human, however he is not credited at all on *Bari-Arm* (5 other programmers are)

[717](#) (WS, 1999); truck racing, credited to Human and Kaga Tech co. Ltd., published by Naxat (**pic, centre**)

[718](#) Tetsuya Hosobuchi

[719](#) Unknown

[720](#) For PS1 (Jul 1999); retro-themed mecha action game by Human Club, published by Human Entertainment

[721](#) JPRG for PS2 (2005)

[722](#) The PS2 sequel to *Roommania #203* for Dreamcast, by Wave Master, released January 2000. I regret not asking about this topic further, because it's fascinating. The original *Roommania* was a sort of cross between a raising-simulation and *The Sims*, with players watching and trying to influence character Neji Tahei in his daily routine. The PS2 sequel, *Roommania 2* (New Roommania: Porori Seishun), came out 2003 and greatly expands on the scope of the original, introducing a love interest for Neji. If you followed the Dreamcast back in the day, this was one of those legendary import titles people wondered about

[723](#) This resulted in second interviews with Toru Hidaka and Hifumi Kono, filmed for Fuji TV. Broadcast on 11 February 2014. <NONFIX>

[724](#) Website: "*The Neko-Zamurai fanzine one of our fans sent has been kept close to my heart to this day (I take care of all of the things fans send me for other titles as well!)*"

[725](#) Website: "*During an interview I was asked if Tokito Mikagura was a self-insertion character. If you're familiar with [my] games you would easily see that the answer to this*

question is 'No way!' My self-insertion is none other than Gonroku Hirata."

[726](#) *Eroguro nonsense* is a nihilistic and deliberately low-brow artistic genre combining the erotic, the grotesque, and/or the nonsensical. Originally a literary genre from the 1920s, *eroguro nonsense* has worked its way into most other forms of Japanese media, particularly film, and has exerted a significant influence on 20th century Japanese subculture. Herschell Gordon Lewis created the "splatter" sub-genre of horror,

[727](#) See Pr. Kishimoto interview for more

[728](#) I can't recall where I read this - I think a *GamesTM* interview

[729](#) Used the Kinect - universally regarded as unplayable

[730](#) *Clock Tower* (SFC, Sep 95); *Clock Tower 2* (PS1, Dec 96); *CT: Ghost Head* (PS1, Mar 98); *Clock Tower 3* (PS2, Dec 2002)

[731](#) Previous games were point-and-click, with mouse pointer; *CT3* had direct control; story also isn't so connected to earlier games

[732](#) / *Demento* in Japan (PS2, Apr 2005); although both *CT3* and *HG* were by Capcom and share staff, the only source for this rumour is speculation by website "Just Adventure"

[733](#) In the corner of the room was a cabinet of Kono's past games

[734](#) Joseph Chou, producer on *Halo Legends*. They met through Shinji Mikami

[735](#) During this period the Japanese film industry was in decline, whereas the games industry was in one of its blossoming golden ages. www.arsenal-berlin.de: "*Disintegration of the traditional studio system, lack of adequate budgets, and a drop in audience numbers influenced Japanese films in the 1980s. Unfavourable circumstances in those 10 years have often been called the 'lost decade' of Japanese film history.*"

[736](#) *The Firemen* was released Sep 1994; the closest likely candidate would be *Bari-Arm* on Mega CD (Jul 1993)

[737](#) Classic 1974 disaster film, starring Steve McQueen and Paul Newman; a newly completed building catches fire as a result of faulty wiring; there are actually some clever parallels between the game and film, and also Ishizuka's later game, *Fire Heroes*

[738](#) Players can unleash a screen-filling deluge of water, wiping out smaller fires & severely damaging bosses

[739](#) Danny is one of the **best** AI controlled sidekicks in any videogame. Always present, genuinely functioning sidekicks in games were rare at the start of the 1990s: there was Tails in

Sonic 2 (Nov 1992), and the *Chaos Engine* (Mar 1993) provided several active AI buddies; keep in mind that a sidekick like Yoshi (*Super Mario World*) was little more than a vehicle to ride, while others (*Donkey Kong Country*) were inactive window dressing - Danny in *The Firemen* is extremely helpful, and can be relied upon to handle difficult situations if the player is struggling

[740](#) See Kono's interview for more details

[741 \[easternmind.tumblr.com\]\(http://easternmind.tumblr.com\)](#) - lots of amazing Japanese content!

[742](#) There are a few other obscure examples, such as the *Mercenary* trilogy (incl. *Damocles* and *The Dion Crisis*), but these were for computers and had severe limitations; for the PS1 era and earlier, you will struggle to find anything nearing the epic, three-dimensional scope of *Mizzurna Falls*

[743](#) *Twin Peaks* was a TV series originally airing 1990~1991; *Blue Velvet* was a 1986 mystery/horror film starring Kyle MacLachlan, Isabella Rossellini, and Dennis Hopper

[744](#) The murderer within the 9 suspects changes with each game; the idea of shuffling characters and real time movement is ingenious, though surprisingly there are few examples in games. *Murder on the Zinderneuf* (1983) springs to mind, as does *The Last Express* (1997); and *Cluedo* the boardgame/movie, obviously

[745](#) One name on MobyGames, lots of high-profile mo-cap credits

[746](#) This would have been a great idea; games such as *Forbidden Siren*, and updates to *Kamaitachi no Yoru*, allowed players to see which paths they'd already accessed, thereby allowing alternate choices to be made later on subsequent playthroughs

[747](#) The environments have a lot of polygons. Check out the library - there's more environmental polys than in some PS2 games

[748](#) - several programming credits, including *The Firemen*, *Clock Tower*, and *Super Fire Pro Wrestling X Premium*

[749](#) Mar 2001, Japan; pub. by Midas Interactive, EU, Nov 2002

[750](#) Detailed biography online

[751 \[www.greathikesjapan.com/\]\(http://www.greathikesjapan.com/\)](#)

[752](#) Aka: / *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi*, PS2 (2002)

[753](#) Aka: × / *Ponkotsu Roman Daikatsugeki: Bumpy Trot*, PS2 (2005)

[754](#) F2P puzzle game with RPG overtones on various handheld devices (2012); I saw more people playing this on crowded Tokyo subway trains than anything else

[755](#) Irem long ago closed down all its game related websites, but the web pages for both *Disaster Report* and *Steambot Chronicles* were excellent - the *Steambot* website had adorable papercraft models you could print off and construct; sadly, not long after cancelling *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi 4*, and pulling its games from PSN, Irem removed the websites and all content

[756](#) This is not as surprising as the question makes it seem. Whereas Western businesses hire people for specific jobs, Japanese businesses traditionally follow something similar to an apprenticeship model. Every year they will take on fresh graduates for career track positions, but these career track employees don't really even have a job description when they first start out. Instead, they are shuffled around to different departments to learn about how the company works as a whole, and over time they are gradually promoted into a more specialised position. These are the "salarymen". On the other hand, companies still need dedicated clerical and office administration staff who know what they're doing, so they also hire people into specific roles with limited options for promotion. In the past, women would usually fulfill these office administration roles, since most women would work for a few years at one position, and then leave the workforce upon getting married/pregnant

[757](#) Nanao/Eizo history is complex, please see opening pages for more detail; this would mean Ms Nishimura joined from 1997

[758](#) A lot of interviewees refer to "invader" type games, as derived from the progenitor, *Space Invaders*; can be broadly used to describe (m)any such space-based *shmups*. Ironically Irem created its own *Space Invaders* clone, *IPM Invader*, in 1979

[759](#) This is an important point, because it was Nanao that reformed Irem in 1997; see opening

[760](#) *Retro Gamer* #98, The Making of *Metal Slug*

[761](#) It was **very** apparent that Ms Nishimura was feeling **very** uncomfortable with this line of questions (*especially* after my mentioning Nazca), so I shifted to something more light-hearted

[762](#) World view or setting - it's a nebulous word that carries multiple layers of meaning; it goes beyond simple "*lore*" within a game, and includes things not automatically apparent to players

[763](#) I highly recommend everyone read Zach Wood's online article: "*Characters and Worldbuilding: Analyzing the Strength of Japanese Games*"

[764](#) There's a fantastic moment in *BT/SC* where you can join the bad guys and spend the rest of the game on their side

[765](#) Many big websites run April Fools jokes, but those by Irem were some of the funniest, showing witty self-acknowledgement.

[766](#) granzellagames.com

[767](#) The first part - - literally means goofy, the second part sounded like "nichi" meaning day; it's Granzella's diary section, updated regularly by staff, often under a nickname; it gives the impression of a fun company environment

[768](#) While the English site has manga, it's not the 4-panel variety mentioned here, but rather characters with speech bubbles; the Japanese site had 195 *yonkoma* as of April 2015

[769](#) Japanese arcade games over the years have consistently cost 100 yen per go; please see conversion table

[770](#) Arcades, December 1989

[771](#) / *In The Hunt*, arcades (1993); submarine shmup

[772](#) / *Shisenshou: Match-Mania*, Game Boy (Jul. 1990); basically a variant of mahjong solitaire. Interestingly Tamtex is credited as developer, with Irem as the publisher. **MobyGames:** "Originally a subsidiary of Irem, Tamtex was later turned into its Tokyo development office."

[773](#) / *Oni* means demon, so variants featuring that

[774](#) Website GamingHell ran an excellent comparison between Irem and Nazca staff listings, trying to ascertain who was who - my interview in *RG* #98 was a key resource! Search the company's games for "NAG"! gaminghell.co.uk/NazcaStaff.html

[775](#) GamingHell listed a HIRONAG credit, which fits the "nag" style, though I never had a chance to say it aloud and actually confirm

[776](#) This comes from , to lose one's temper. Metaphorically related to , to break or split. Very similar to English phrase "to snap" in anger

[777](#) Given this explanation, the "nag" endings are likely ironic, based on which lit. means to "calm down"

[778](#) Vertical shmup for arcades by Irem (1990); control a helicopter or jet. Some music tracks remixed for Irem's *Gun Force II*; one track remixed for *Metal Slug 3*, enhancing the Nazca connection

[779](#) I first discovered this in an interview by Ollie Barder; it focused on *R-Type Final* but gave

away the *Metal Slug* connection in an opening question on previous work; this knowledge formed the basis for my *Metal Slug* article in RG #98

[780](#) Given that Irem made *Kaitei*, and published both *Sqoon* (FC, 1986) and *Sub Rebellion* (PS2, 2002), it's easy to assume there's some kind of submarine theme the company likes - but given the explanation it turns out to be coincidental, esp. since *Sqoon* was developed by Home Data; there are no known credits for *Sqoon*

[781](#) *Sqoon* was set underwater but lacked underwater physics

[782](#) This is **ingenious**; although you have vertical firing weapons underwater, when they reach the surface they simply create a harmless splash - to attack enemies above it your submarine needs to break the surface, whereupon it fires an entirely different type of airborne weapon

[783](#) When the construction vehicle hits the trucks of cattle they fall in and swim about. With enough power-ups you can also send missiles to destroy the first bridge, which results in civilians (who are running away) going off the edge and into the water

[784](#) Explained by Golgoth13 on Shmups Forum, there's a big difference in stage order for the JPN and international versions, both the PCB and PS1 port. It's interesting that the international version uses the originally planned stage order. **JPN:** South Pole, The Channel, *Seabed Ruins*, Sunken Town, Deep Dark Sea, Enemy Base. **International:** South Pole, Sunken Town, The Channel, Deep Dark Sea, *Seabed Ruins*, Enemy Base. While the international has a more logical thematic progression, the JPN release has a more balanced difficulty progression

[785](#) In earlier emails Mr Kujo had expressed a slight hesitance about being photographed

[786](#) Something almost every interviewee mentioned was the need to sleep in the office during busy times

[787](#) Retro Gamer: "At first, the tank itself was the player. However, when we did location testing, we did not get a good response from customers. So, we changed the game so that the central characters, the heroes players controlled, were soldiers."

[788](#) Rechecking the audio, it sounds like the boss was exasperated and approved having soldiers just to end the debate among the dev team; which is amazing, because that defined the franchise!

[789](#) Tarma was missing from *MS4*; some entries like *MS Advance* and *2nd Mission* have entirely new cast

[790](#) I was stunned to discover this - but that's what was said!

[791](#) *Disaster Report/Raw Danger* and *Steambot Chronicles* really are something special; the

former offers significant narrative-splitting choices, allowing players to focus on themselves & let characters die, meaning you're seldom forced to play "the hero"; the latter is an open-world sandbox game set in a whimsical steampunk world; both encourage you to play things *your way*

[792](#) This is a spoiler, I know, but don't let it put you off - there's still amusing surprises that happen in the end, plus you can play post-game. Be sure to try it!

[793](#) ; an ear bud, cotton bud, cotton swab or Q-tip; I wanted to be certain so used the Japanese word; in the game they're referred to as a "Lil' Swabby" and can be bought from stores

[794](#) You can take female characters on dates and build up their heart level; if they agree to retire indoors and you've got a "Lil' Swabby" in your wallet, the player can have their "ears cleaned"

[795](#) This ties in to the meaning of *sekaikan*, which incorporates things outside the player's view. In addition, comments about creating accessible aspects of a game that players might not see are important, since games are perhaps the only medium where there is joy in knowing there are things you might not experience - it's the basis of exploration, that you go forth and discover or, possibly, fail to discover hidden things. As Mr Kujo mentioned earlier, games are distinct from linear mediums such as books, comics and film. It seems a shame that other developers are fixated on replicating narrative methods from other mediums, when the player-controlled "discovery" aspect of games (and the chance of not discovering something) is unique to games, whether it's action-focused titles or something purely about story. Admittedly it is perhaps wasteful to create content which won't be experienced, but it makes for a richer experience. The evolutionary pinnacle of games is not the works of David Cage et al, but rather the works of Kazuma Kujo and others, and titles like *Shadow of Memories* and *Deadly Premonition*. More games should attempt things which only games are capable of doing

[796](#) Again? Yes, again!

[797](#) Mentioned as an influence in a few interviews; - ISBN: 4845813114 - by the creator of *Golgo 13*, first published 1976, though still reprinted. I easily found a new copy of Vol.1 in a Japanese book store, and it's quite excellent! Even if you read no Japanese, it's a very visual story of survival. As far as I can tell it's never been officially translated

[798](#) From an old Ollie Barder interview: "*My hobbies now are watching horse racing, Japanese chess (Shogi), and mah-jong. I like the element of deduction.*"

[799](#) Literal translation of / *Nihon Chinbotsu* (1973) - English release named *Tidal Wave*; film based on book of the same name by Sakyo Komatsu

[800](#) We were in Sep. 2013, so either 2014 or 2015

[801](#) SiliconEra reported two trademarks filed by Granzella for the Vita in Dec. 2013; one was for *Manga Kakeru*, a game allowing you to create your own manga stories; www.manga-kakeru.com

[802](#) Announcement was made 7 September 2013, so 11 days prior

[803](#) Gamasutra, Christian Nutt, "*Considering Japan*"

[804](#) gematsu.com/2015/02/granzella-founder-discusses-disaster-report-acquisition-playstation-home-shutdown

[805](#) American developer and publisher (1998-2004); led by former Capcom employees Joe Morici and George Nakayama; had a subsidiary, Metro3D Japan, Inc.

[806](#) Lots of different things online. Here's one: www.cancerresearchuk.org/support-us/citizen-science-apps-and-games-from-cancer-research-uk

[807](#) Coding language, published 1970

[808](#) Lang., published mid-1950s; oft. updated

[809](#) Japanese picture book series by Takashi Yanase (1973 - 2013); lots of merchandise based on it, a lot produced by Agatsuma; the company's games division website lists at least 4x NDS *Anpanman* titles, plus 1x Wii and 1x 3DS title

[810](#) 1 10 DS / *1-Nichi-10-Pun de Ega jouzuni Kakeru DS*, now available as *Let's Draw Simple!* for iOS

[811](#) Acc. to Wikipedia, owner was Dr. Stephen C.H. Lin

[812](#) Oct. 2007 (X360); WWII turn-based strategy; although localised by Atlus for USA, the JPN release had full English if you set your 360's internal lang. to English

[813](#) Conceptor, writer, designer, and manager - his interview will be in Vol.3

[814](#) I borrowed a friend's X360 to play it, and soon after bought my own; see my article on HG101

[815](#) JPN: Apr 2012, Agatsuma; USA: Oct 2012, Atlus; fantastic 2D brawler reminiscent of *Guardian Heroes*

[816](#) www.saizensen.co.jp - surprisingly very little online! **MobyGames:** "*Studio Saizensen (¥) is an independent developer based in Saitama. Est. September 1997 by*

Toshinobu Kondo. The company also does design and planning for card and tabletop games. The company has employed several Treasure and Fill-in-Café alumni, incl. Tetsuhiko Kikuchi and Masaki Ukyo."

[817](#) Programmer **Masaki Ukyo** had heavy involvement with *Guardian Heroes*, *Mad Stalker*, *Bangai-O Spirits*, *Sin & Punishment: SS*, *Rakugaki Showtime*, *Silhouette Mirage*, and *Yuu Yuu Hakusho* (MD); planner and motion director **Tetsuhiko Kikuchi** (aka: HAN) was involved with *Gunstar Heroes*, *Radiant Silvergun*, *Guardian Heroes*, *Rakugaki Showtime*, *Silhouette Mirage*, and *Yuu Yuu Hakusho* (MD); story writer and character designer was **Kinu Nishimura** formerly of Capcom

[818](#) Credited as illustrator or character designer on the following titles on MobyGames, though her portfolio covers many more: *999*, *Darkstalkers Chronicle*, *Cannon Spike*, *Capcom vs. SNK* (multiple titles), *Street Fighter* series (multiple titles), *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow over Mystara*. I initiated this line of questioning because certain corners of the internet went into histrionics, complaining that the sexy characters in *Code of Princess* were somehow sexist, when in fact the character designer was a women, thereby utterly demolishing their arguments; Kinu Nishimura is renowned for illustrating some truly gorgeous female characters - her artwork (**adjacent, right**) is fantastic and not to be criticised

[819](#) Released April 2014 on 3DS eShop for Europe; AKA *Yumi's Odd Odyssey* in US. Released on Vita Q2 2015; will be released on Steam Q4 under the Agatsuma name

[820](#) Region locking the 3DS not only inconveniences consumers, it adds barriers to publishers wishing to know the market. No one benefits from region locking

[821](#) Sather Gate leads to the centre of the campus; Sather Tower is a campanile (bell & clock tower)

[822](#) *Legends of Game Design: P.M.*, Ron Dulin, GameSpot (url 404); Peter was convinced one was his mother

[823](#) *Dark Angel: Vampire Apocalypse*, PS2 (July 2001, US only); announced but never released for DC; the planned but cancelled Japanese release was covered by IGN; Metro3D was also working on two other games in the series, *Dark Angel II* (PS2) and *Dark Angel: Anna's Quest* (GBC), neither of which was released

[824](#) I trawled for *hours* online - this could be anything

[825](#) *Nyan-Jelly* is an *ingenious* experiment. More info, App Store pages, and YouTube preview here:

* www.facebook.com/NyanJelly

* itunes.apple.com/us/app/nyan-jelly-get-run/id886114244?mt=8

* itunes.apple.com/us/app/id950562456

* youtu.be/P80V4_gzjmU

[826 www.tachyonworks.co.jp](http://www.tachyonworks.co.jp)

[827](#) I've never ascertained what its role was on these two; the company is also behind the *KISSCOMI* series on iOS (kiss images of celebs on your touch-screen for points)

[828](#) Referencing 2014

[829](#) Earlier *Flappy Bird* was mentioned, where a bird flies between pipes; *Angry Birds* is where you knock down structures housing pigs; both have garnered insane sales

[830](#) *Nyan-Jelly: Get & Run*, the first in the series, by German developer Immanitas Entertainment

[831](#) This ingenious idea reminds me a bit of the *Roland* series by Amstrad, circa 1984. The eponymous *Roland* was conceived as a mascot for the Amstrad CPC; games were published by Amsoft, but developed by various others. There seems to be 8 physical releases and 1 type-in listing; however, the various *Roland* games lacked any conceptual consistency between them. The idea is also perhaps analogous to HP Lovecraft's creation of the *Cthulu* mythos, which he encouraged other writers to adopt and use in different ways

[832](#) According to Wikipedia, "*Moshi Monsters*" started in April 2008 and is a sort of browser-based MMO game, with over 80 million registered users across 150 territories. It's aimed at children aged 6-14 and involves raising a pet monster, while solving puzzles, playing games and earning in-game currency. It spawned a large quantity of merchandise, including toys, magazines, music albums, and videogames

[833](#) Japanese hiragana and katakana characters are perfectly phonetic, but due to the way certain English letter combinations and pronunciations (notably L&R) are converted, some words sound identical; it's feasible that *Nyan-Jelly* (ニャンジェリー ¥) and *lingerie* (リンジェリー ¥) could momentarily be mixed up

[834](#) https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/lets-draw-simple!-***-play/id839876262

[835](#) Taking a guess, this might be referring to Nintendo's *Color TV-Game 6*, released 1977

[836](#) *Otogirisou* (SFC, Mar. 1992) by Chunsoft is generally regarded as the first "sound novel"; *Kamaitachi no Yoru* (スーパーファミコン, SFC, Nov. 1994) was the second such title by Chunsoft, and its success cemented the genre's popularity (there's a video walkthrough on *Game Centre CX*). The script was by Japanese author Takemaru Abiko; in 2014 localised into English for iOS by Aksys Games as *Banshee's Last Cry*

[837](#) Better known as *Shiren the Wanderer* for its few Western releases (SFC, Dec 1995); the GB/SGB conversion titled *Fuurai no Shiren GB: Tsukikage-mura no Kaibutsu* (Nov. 1996)

[838](#) Shown on supplementary DVD; interview in Vol.3

[839](#) ; impossible to find info online in any language; most places don't even acknowledge their existence, apart from the Japanese Wikipedia page for *Kamaitachi*, and MobyGames credits for Saitoh

[840](#) Y. Kimura used NEWS at Squaresoft, see Vol.1 chpt.

[841](#) Tokihiro Naito for the *Hydlide* office; *hamachi* is a type of fish, so it's like saying "the marlin room"

[842](#) Dec. 1996; technically impressive puzzler where you roll a coloured cube around a board, attempting to match face colours to those on the board

[843](#) Digital Kids Co. Ltd. (1996-2008), acquired and renamed Ubisoft Nagoya (credits include *Hamsterz Life* and *Petz*); Masahito Hasegawa, some minor credits programming on WWE games

[844](#) Interview done by email, see chpt.

[845](#) MobyGames lists major Chunsoft credits until 1994

[846](#) Sept. 1993; *Dragon Quest IV* spin-off with merchant Torneko/Taloon; some of the best box art on SFC!

[847](#) The GB launched about 5 months after the SFC ver.

[848](#) Some describe Shinjuku as the "most labyrinthine station in the world"; a game based on this concept was made for iOS/Android, titled *ShinjukuDungeon*

[849](#) CEO is not referring to Koichi Nakamura, but rather the head of Aquamarine

[850](#) Financing company for developers on Nintendo platforms; founded Jul 1996, closed May 2003. **MobyGames**: "*Marigul is a combination of the mascots of the companies that jointly owned it (Nintendo 40% and Recruit 60%), **Mario** and **Seegul**, respectively. Marigul is a development conglomerate, funded by Nintendo, to provide a safe haven to focus on original game design, rather than big-time sellers. It consists of development studios such as Param, Noise, Clever Trick, Ambrella and Saru Brunei.*" Ascertaining precisely which games it helped fund is difficult, but likely these: *Hey You*, *Pikachu!*, *Echo Delta* (unrel.), *Custom Robo*, *Doshin the Giant*, and *Cubivore*. What's mind blowing is that Nintendo money was funding a PS1 game; this raises the question of whether Saru Brunei's *Jungle Park* games (PS1 & Saturn, 1998) were Nintendo funded. There's an old Gamespot/EGM interview online, "*Marigul and Noise Interviewed*", which sheds light on Marigul

[851](#) **Wikipedia**: "*Recruit Co., Ltd. () is a classified advertisement,*

publication and human resources company in Japan, founded in 1963 originally as an advertisement company specialized in university newspapers." **Author:** this does not sound like the right company, and Recruit's website history page makes no mention of Nintendo nor Marigul

[852](#) Dev. by Ambrella (JP: Dec. 1998 / US: Nov. 2000); localised as *Hey You, Pikachu!*

[853](#) According to the official site original version was for Saturn (1997), follow-up PS1 ver. subtitled "expansion" (1999); development credited to Omiya Soft

[854](#) ¥ , Media Factory, PS1 (2001); super obscure puzzler, some vids on NicoNico

[855](#) × ×7, Bandai, NDS (Jan. 2006); not a PS1 game like the others; looks like a puzzle action game

[856](#) Definitely Masayoshi Saitoh, as credited on *Dragon Quest IV* and *Kamaitachi no Yoru* (1994); curiously there aren't any credits after 1994 until you reach 2004

[857](#) Released 1997 for Windows, by Cavedog Entertainment; well received, winning multiple awards

[858](#) A sub-genre of visual novel, dating-sim, or story-driven game aimed specifically at women; originating in the mid-1990s there's now an enormous variety, aimed at everyone from pre-teens up to adult women

[859](#) A school girl caught in a surreal sea-themed world - the word "umi" is Japanese for ocean, making the name a play on words; she's armed with a backpack and fishing rod, which she uses like a grappling hook, scaling and abseiling various heights and obstacles. The game is both fun and unique!

[860](#) I had hoped to negotiate buying the rights to these interviews, but Garner was concerned about how his interviewees would react to his selling them

[861](#) Mostly unknown outside Japan; famous for its adventure game series; this is the developer Manabu Saito composed for (V1, p461). Notable credits include action-RPGs *Euphory* and *Marchen Veil*, programming on *Jerry Boy* (SFC), *Mansion of Hidden Souls* (SAT), and according to GDRI some 3D work on *Blue Stinger*

[862](#) × and ; you'll struggle to find screens or video online, even in Japanese, but both games are on Project EGG and look like really excellent clones of Falcom's *Ys* (*Valna* also has side-scrolling); both games have fantastic music (check YouTube)

[863](#) Check Wayback for www.fillincafe.co.jp/hist.html

[864](#) My first task was to clarify the timeline, since as Matt Fitsko explained: "*Metal Sight* was released in December 1989, although the old Fill-in-Café website incorrectly lists 1988. *Providence* and *Valna* were released in April and May of 1989, respectively, which fits with Kondo's statement that he worked at System Sacom for 6-12 months before releasing *Metal Sight*."

[865](#) Small biography on MobyGames; *Mad Stalker* and *Neural Gear* programmer

[866](#) Oct 1993; simple scrolling fighter with a funky art style and the ability for characters to turn *super-saiyan*

[867](#) Nov 1993; linear overhead Action-RPG with AI controlled party members, reminiscent of *Secret of Mana*

[868](#) Mecha-themed scrolling brawler; initial releases for X68k, FM Towns, and PCE, throughout 1994 (very good!); later remade for PS1 (absolutely awful!)

[869](#) Mecha-themed scrolling brawlers for computers and consoles, released 1989 and 1991; later remastered together on the FM Towns; the SFC conversion of *G2* was done by British developer Bits Corporation, better known for *Alien 3* on Game Boy. *G1* is not great, but *G2* is really cool in that early 1990s kinda way. Series developed by ZOOM in Hokkaido, which also made *Lagoon*, *Zero Divide*, and *Mister Mosquito*

[870](#) I asked for elaboration but he preferred not to comment on "a now bankrupt company"; I can confirm they are unrelated to the Television Niigata Network; apparently the game company had an office in Minato-ku, Tokyo; involved with *Umihara Kawase* (1994) and *Shijou Saikyou League Serie A: Ace Striker* (SFC, 1995)

[871](#) Kiyoshi Sakai (programming, system and map design, director); limited portfolio online, mainly *Umihara Kawase* series, programming on *Ape Escape*, and multiple roles on System Sacom's *Euphory*

[872](#) Akin to an indie comic; see ZUN chapter in Vol.1

[873](#) Multiple meanings - basically a style of "cuteness"

[874](#) Credited as illustrator or character designer on the following titles on MobyGames, though her portfolio covers many more games: *Nine Hours*, *Nine Persons*, *Nine Doors*, *Darkstalkers Chronicle*, *Cannon Spike*, *Capcom vs. SNK* series (multiple titles), *Street Fighter* series (multiple titles/versions), *Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow over Mystara*

[875](#) On Metacritic highest score was 93; Destructoid's review (90) is probably the best written; Polygon gave the lowest score (30), citing too many clichés, though it's questionably low even by Polygon's standards

[876](#) In the Western press her female character designs were criticised for being just too

damned sexy

[877](#) **GDRI**: *"Character editor prog originally developed for in-house use. Sold well (at ¥2'000) to home coders and professional developers, prompting the release of Pixel-kun Ver. 2.0"*

[878](#) The easy availability of "dead copy" clones of the Apple II in particular helped fuel the nascent home computer culture in late 1970s Japan, and such clone boards were easily found in the electronic districts of Akihabara (Tokyo) and Nipponbashi (Osaka)

[879](#) I went down this route of questions given Yutaka Isokawa's story of creating *Pitman* as a type-in listing for *Oh!MZ*

[880](#) Dempa is an enormous publishing company, with divisions dealing in newspapers, mags, games, even hardware; its games division handled many arcade home conversion, mostly Namco titles. **MobyGames**: *"Dempa Micomsoft was the software division of publishing company Dempa Shimbunsha (literally 'Radio Wave Newspaper Publisher Company'). In 1993, it was broken off as a separate company, though fully owned by Dempa. Apart from programming games, with Dempa earning a high reputation for its arcade conversions, it also made joysticks and other hardware."*

[881](#) Ichikawa met Yuzo Koshiro at Dempa and they became friends

[882](#) (English honorific used rather than Japanese.) Tadashi Fujioka, aka Naniwa-san. **MobyGames** on Lashnu Soft: *"Lashnu () was a short-lived software developer based in Osaka, founded by Tadashi Fujioka () and Shinobu Michiura (). It closed up in late 1983, when both programmers went to Dempa, their main contractor."*

[883](#) Combined Exhibition of Advanced Technologies; annual Japanese trade show, equivalent to CES

[884](#) Game and pinball designer, prolific career. Started at Atari, moved to Williams, produced numerous successful pinball tables; voice of Shao Kahn in the *MK* series

[885](#) Game and pinball designer; started at Williams

[886](#) Being a *Trekkie* pays off!

[887](#) Stands for company policy: *"Minna de Nakayoku Moukeyou"*, lit. *everyone making money together harmoniously*

[888](#) Cross between *Breakout* & pinball; X1 and PC-98 unreleased

[889](#) *Bomb Bee* and *Cutie Q* were two side-by-side sequels to *Gee Bee*; they both look and play very similarly

[890](#) - long topic on Tokugawa Forums, Google "Seraph - Lets try and rescue this Takeru only release!" Apparently released Jan. 1994 (credited to M.N.M Software), but exclusively through Takeru vending machines rather than normal retail distribution. There is almost zero information online, in any language. Described as an Action-RPG, the only 6 known screenshots show 2 battles and cinematics. It's never been dumped, making it one of the PC-9801 holy grails

[891](#) Brother Industries is an enormous multinational electronics company. **MobyGames:** *"Takeru was a software label by Brother Industries. Takeru did not sell software over the counter, instead it used vending machines placed in computer shops."* Sadly a lot of vending machine exclusive titles, such as *Seraph*, are feared lost forever after Takeru closed the service. As explained by **Macaw on Tokugawa:** *"There are no complete lists of Takeru stuff because the amount of titles would be massive, but it's important to note that Takeru games essentially came in 3 categories: (1) Budget 'digital' releases of games previously sold in boxes, (2) Original games by commercial software companies only distributed through Takeru, (3) Doujin games."*

[892](#) Naniwa is the historical name of the geographical area that later became the city of Osaka

[893](#) Although not named, almost certainly the *Tongari Boushi* () series; first came out on NDS in 2008; localised as *Magician's Quest: Mysterious Times* or *Enchanted Folk and the School of Wizardry*; multiple sequels followed, including on 3DS. Author can't comment on the series' quality, but screens make the games look **a lot** like *Animal Crossing*

[894](#) PC-98 and X68k (1991); impressive 3D wireframe shooter

[895](#) Sega actually has a long history of patent trolling, including with *Crazy Taxi*'s floating arrows, and trying to sue Level 5. **GDRI:** *"In 1992, around the time of Virtua Racing, Sega filed a patent in Japan for 'viewpoint change'. About five years later, the patent was granted. Atari Games and Sega made a deal, but not everyone would. Konami, Nintendo, Technosoft, and T&E Soft came together and opposed the patent, citing Attack on the Death Star as prior art. Mindware president Mikito Ichikawa testified in court that he had shown the game to Sega. The patent was revoked."*

[896](#) During a Facebook conversation he confirmed that on one occasion he'd stayed awake for 120 hours

[897](#) Andrew Scott Reisse killed May 2013 (about 6 months prior)

[898](#) See Volume 1 for memorial page

[899](#) "Vice-president" is probably referring to the VP of Dempa

[900](#) Unfortunately this interview was not transcribed at the time of drafting Morita's memorial

[901](#) This is actually quite ingenious; Cave has managed to carve out a niche by marketing purely to the hardest of the 'core

[902](#) 2D shmup for computers; released Steam 22 Sep. 2014 (other platforms too); at the time, the longest videogame ever developed! Its resolution is **3'200×800** and requires multiple monitors to play properly; the enormous 3'200 pixel length is to allow massive combos and chaining of enemies as they pile up onscreen(s); features 2P mode too!

[903](#) Search Gamasutra for multiple such stories

[904](#) Arcade *Darius* was displayed on three monitors side-by-side

[905](#) I have no idea how to verify this in a time effective manner - sounds like a fun forum board challenge for readers though

[906](#) pinball.co.jp/OnlineRanking_EN.pdf

[907](#) gamersuniverse.jp - "Gamers Universe has the goal of running a player community implementing features such as activation, ranking, achievements, and friends. As of March 2013, the only software supported is *Super Chain Crusher Horizon*, but we have made offers to multiple publishers and developers. Many PC games have features such as online ranking and achievements, and we are consistently aiming to expand the functions of Gamers Universe to better perfect the lifestyles of PC gamers."

[908](#) 30 Aug. 2011

[909](#) Apr. 2011 Nintendo officially announced Wii successor

[910](#) Recently GOG released a client, Galaxy - *I WILL NEVER YIELD!*

[911](#) Wii, Aug. 2008

[912](#) Search NintendoLife.com for "Mindware interview part 1"

[913](#) Varied career, later worked on iOS and DSi projects

[914](#) **Simultaneous:** interpreter translates at the same time as the speaker; **Consecutive:** one person speaks at a time, interpreter makes notes, slower but more precise

[915](#) Liquid Crystal Display handhelds; the *Game & Watch* series was by Nintendo

[916](#) I was thinking of the yellow domed handheld game by Tomy, but there were a few types over the years

[917](#) Given the *Donkey Kong* comparison, these would have been the table-top "mini arcade" games by Coleco, which were produced using either VFD (vacuum fluorescent display), LED

(light emitting diode), or LCD (liquid crystal display). There's some nice photos of Coleco's range on www.miniarcade.com, including the two titles mentioned

[918](#) A neckless *Mega Man* in pyjamas (with broken arms) doing the squats in front of submerged "peaches"

[919](#) A game/utility where you can create your own *Mega Man* title, a bit like *Little Big Planet* perhaps. It looked amazing, but was cancelled March 2011

[920](#) I interviewed the British team behind this little gem for Retro Gamer (#89), because despite online and press criticism, it's actually a very enjoyable survival horror - full of tension, as you manage limited resources, and with some excellently detailed 2D graphics. It actually started out as a *Dino Crisis* demo for GBC. The Biohaze.com fansite has article scans on its forum. It's also online at www.nowgamer.com/retro-the-making-of-resident-evil-gaiden/ but missing its boxouts. I recommend everyone read the article and then give the game a fair chance. Trivia: a bootleg Chinese "demake" of the first *Resident Evil* for Famicom copies the battle system from *Gaiden*

[921](#) Wikipedia says Dec 2001 (EU), Mar 2002 (JPN), Jun 2002 (US); whereas MobyGames says May 2001 (US) and Mar 2002 (JPN). The only consensus is March 2002 for Japan, but neither website give a source, so who knows? There are box scans of the Japanese version, so it does exist - though it would have been released between 3 and 10 months after whichever English release came first, presumably without much publicity

[922](#) Project lead, Tim Hull: "*Capcom gave us the basic storyline, we developed and embellished it.*" Artist, Elliot Curtis: "*We had a decent amount of freedom on everything apart from the story, which was something I would have loved to tinker with!*"

[923](#) Capcom website, non-consolidated staff (as of 30 September 2014): 2'039 - presumably worldwide, it's impossible to find numbers for only Japan circa 2001

[924](#) Announced in 2002, these five Capcom games were for the struggling GC; initially described as exclusive, to boost GC sales, but in the end only *P.N. 03* did not receive a port

[925](#) *Dead Phoenix* was a free-form aerial shoot-em-up, perhaps comparable to *Skygunner* on PS2. Footage showed large bosses, detailed environmental architecture, and large numbers of enemies and allies onscreen at once. See Unseen64.com for a detailed overview including explanation video

[926](#) *Saiyuki* / *Saiki* ; classic Chinese novel from the 16th C., about an epic quest west, to India; the story is full of rich iconography, such as the monkey protagonist (Sun Wukong / Monkey King), and his ability to fly atop clouds, influencing everything from *Dragon Ball* to *Chuuka Taisen*; this is **conjecture**, but it is feasible that *Dead Phoenix* started as an aerial combat game aesthetically closer to Taito's *Chuuka Taisen* shooter

[927](#) There's more than one story like this online

[928](#) McFerran's fantastic article on EuroGamer (January 2015) features an interview with scenario writer Yashisa Kawamura, detailing an unreleased *Resident Evil 4* with "hook man" as the main enemy; this never got past the prototype stage, though there are videos online. The article contains fascinating details on the history of the *RE* series - *Biohazard 3* became "*Biohazard 4* for PS2", while a spin-off *Biohazard* (codenamed 1.5) became the official *Biohazard 3*, and then eventually "*Biohazard 4* for PS2" became what we now know as *Devil May Cry*, resulting in an entirely new *Biohazard 4* project commencing. Kawamura wanted a more supernatural feel, "*I came up with the idea of Leon getting infected by a mysterious virus, and suffering from hallucinations. There wasn't any solid story behind it - we just made something up to test the horror aspect. But when we started the experiment, we ran into problems.*" The team wanted a random element to hallucinations, but the GC lacked the memory for this; one solution was to have only a single enemy, making it sound a lot like *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, but ultimately Mikami was called in and the project rebooted

[929](#) I considered moving this Q&A to the interview start, but it dealt with the Capcom Five so I left it as is

[930](#) Tokyo/Toronto time difference is 13 or 11 hours

[931](#) Tokyo/LA time difference is 16 or 8 hours; technically, if you're acclimatising, it's 3 hours less for the body to adjust; so midnight in Tokyo is like only 8am, whereas in Toronto it's more like 11am - plus, it's warmer in LA!

[932](#) Shown in an old pre-release video; there's speculation that the "nun character", seen after an image of a church, was actually an earlier version of the Linda Vermilon character

[933](#) If you play *Killer 7*, you'll notice the style of cutscenes change between what appears to be cel-shaded animation, 3D polygons, and the aforementioned flash animation style scenes; for the latter example, see the one which starts with a cowboy on a tractor, and leads onto Ulmeyda in a spacesuit

[934](#) His full name: "Wenzel Dil Boris the VIIth Iwazarskoff"

[935](#) The voice in the Japanese release is still digitally created, making it tricky to hear, but Iwazaru's spoken English is clearly recognisable, though odd

[936](#) Kuruhashi & Akiba ([pictured](#))

[937](#) / *henshin* means to transform, popularised by the *Kamen Rider* series; the first kanji () means strange, and is the same *hen* in the word *hentai*

[938](#) AKA: *Tekki* / this was the "Vertical Tank" game for Xbox, where you used an

enormous bespoke controller

[939](#) My box was in storage, so I was unable to verify

[940](#) . / *Meiwakuseijin: Panic Maker* (Aug/Oct. 2004); highly original, and the kind of strange mechanics you just don't see anymore - you control an alien who can transform into different types of NPC, and then use their specific talents to create panic amidst the populace. It's kind of freeform and offbeat, and features multiple Capcom cameos, including a level based on *Resident Evil 3*

[941](#) Likely referring to project slots in Capcom's development timetable, rather than re-using art or code assets; the dates align

[942](#) Yasuhisa Kawamura (planner). Not many credits online, though notably *Resident Evil 3*

[943](#) Since interview Ohara's MobyGames profile has additions, notably *Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z* and *The Evil Within* (both 2014)

[944](#) DLC to *Dead Rising 2*, released 27 Dec. 2010

[945](#) Comcept was established 1 December 2010

[946](#) Digital Development Management (ddmagency.com); a media/talent agency which handles multiple roles; my interest was in the fact that Ben Judd was a former producer at Capcom; **VentureBeat** wrote an interesting article about a month before this interview, describing how DDM was a key factor in Comcept's KS campaign being so successful

[947](#) A *Mega Man*-themed first-person shooter being developed by Armature Studio; according to the *Mega Man* wikia it was cancelled in 2010 but only revealed in 2013; gameplay videos on YouTube from early April 2013. Not to be confused with *Mega Man Maverick Hunter X*

[948](#) Armature Studio, founded 2008 by former staff of Retro Studios, the developer behind the *Metroid Prime* trilogy; it's interesting to imagine what they could have done with a first-person *Mega Man* game like *Maverick Hunter*

[949](#) *P.N. 03*, Mar 2003 / *RE4*, Jan 2005

[950](#) According to GameSpot, cancelled Aug 2003; given the earlier release of *P.N. 03* though, it shows that Capcom had been internally aware of the cancellation for some months

[951](#) Marvelous Int. and AQI merger was reported on Gamasutra Aug 2011; *No More Heroes* was released Dec 2007 in Japan

[952](#) There were a few submarine games towards the late 1970s, featuring a scope. This one was most likely *SUBMARINE* by Namco, released 1978 and having a large yellow scope. The

official Namco-Bandai website archive features screenshots, a video, and 3D model. Google search: "namco ayumi elemecha"

[953](#) Large Scale Integration, referring to the circuitry; handheld games, similar to but less sophisticated than *Game & Watch*; for example "*LSI Baseball*" by Bandai, which produced many such handheld LSI games

[954](#) 1985, 2 players, games can last upwards of 6 hours

[955](#) Atlanta, Georgia; from 19 Jul to 4 Aug, 1996

[956](#) Trans World Airlines Flight 800, which exploded on 17 July, 1996. Initially thought to be terrorists

[957](#) AKA: *Doukutsu Monogatari* (2004), created over five years by Daisuke "Pixel" Amaya. Highly acclaimed

[958](#) Christian Nutt's "*Considering Japan...*", a testament to the fact that Japan produced some fantastic games during the last hardware generation

[959](#) A "game engine" is a pre-made set of code which drives various diverse functions within a game; for example the physics of 3D objects, texture mapping of large surfaces, collision detection of 2D sprites, etc.

[960](#) A perfect example is *Red Seeds Profile / Deadly Premonition*, using NVIDIA's PhysX engine, as detailed by programmer Yutaka Ohkawa in *Game Developer Magazine* Vol.17 No.8 - Google search for the full article, it's highly recommended reading!

[961](#) At GDC 2013, Epic Games released the Unreal Engine 4 "*Infiltrator*" demo, running 100% in-engine in real time, showcasing various effects and rendering features. Available on YouTube, 3mn 44sec

[962](#) **Questions answered via email in 2015 following new announcements.** After this were further announcements regarding Koji Igarashi's *Bloodstained* and Yu Suzuki's *Shenmue III*, both of which use Unreal Engine 4!

[963](#) I listed the following: Access Games (*D4*), Arc System Works (*Guilty Gear*), Bandai-Namco (*Tekken 7*), Capcom (various), Comcept (*Mighty No. 9*), CyberConnect2 (*Asura's Wrath*), Grasshopper (*Let it Die*), iNiS (various), Koei (*Fatal Inertia*), Platinum (*ScaleBound*), and Square-Enix (various); list continues to grow each year

[964](#) www.famitsu.com/news/201501/06069057.html

[965](#) www.forbes.com/sites/olliebarder/2015/01/07/games-console-and-software-sales-in-japan-return-to-90s-levels/

966 *"Marty! You need to reach 88 miles per hour!"*