

DISPOSABLE MEDIA

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

Issue 10

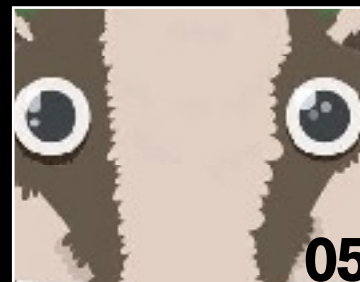
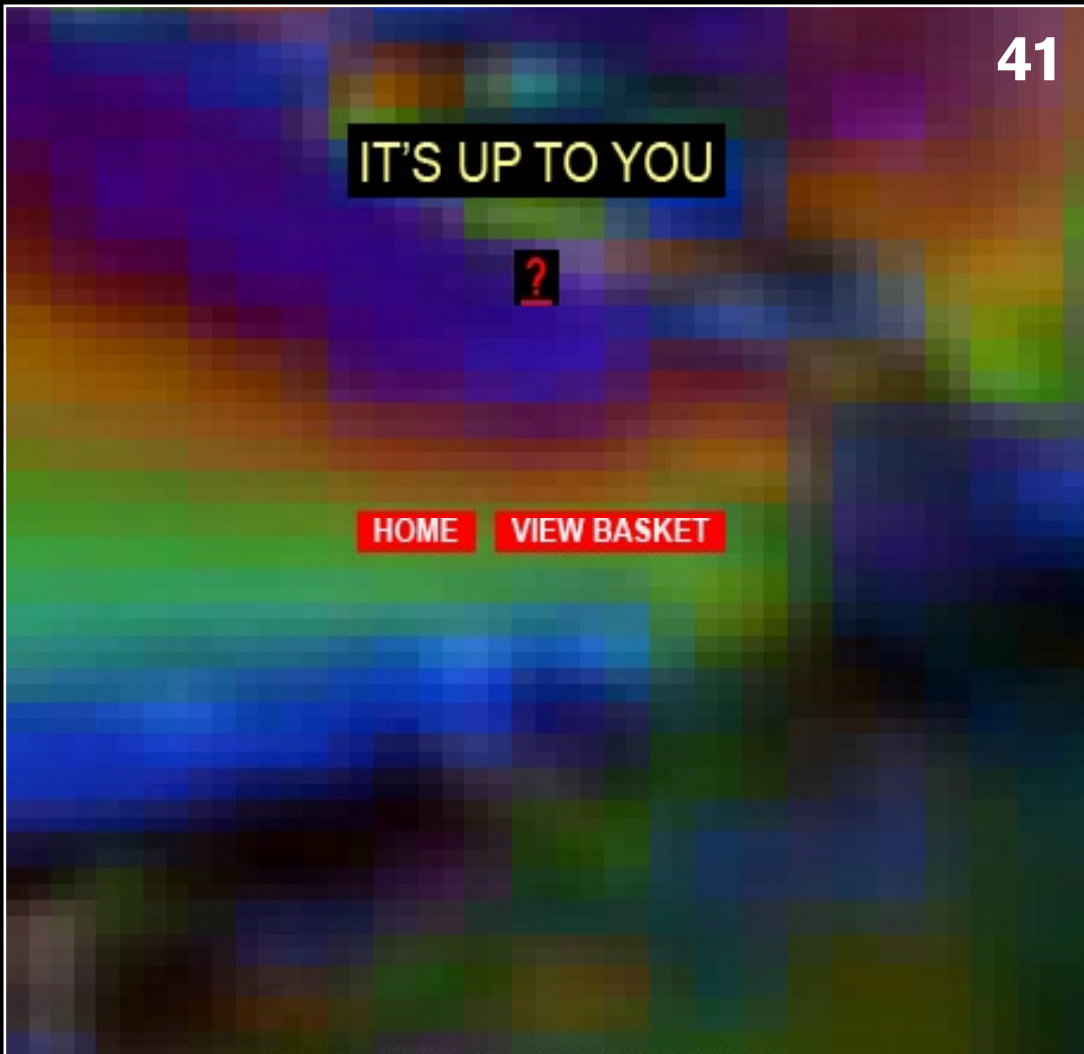


Mr. Biff '08

10

MOC-MOC-A-MOC

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**2007
WAS**

a big year for Disposable Media.

We saw our audience jump by a huge amount (thanks again David Perry), and more and more people in the entertainment industry have admitted to being part of our audience.

But we're going harder, faster, better and stronger for 2008. We'll continue to bring you the best interviews, features and reviews – to match anything you've paid for. But we also want everyone that reads DM to know they can contribute – whether it's a story, a design, some art, or a forum post. This isn't 'my' magazine. It's our magazine.

The last year has also seen some changes with staff arriving, leaving, and occasionally trying to escape by tunnelling their way out under a wooden horse. But we're not going to let our best talent get poached by people dangling shiny coins at them. Which is why you may notice adverts appearing in the mag and on the site.

Rest assured that that advertising will have absolutely, positively, and 100 per cent fuck all effect on what we feature, and how it's covered. The decision was inevitable if we want to pay our server bills and craft more than a couple of issues a year. And especially if we want to invest in more cool stuff for the future, without being bought by a publishing company.

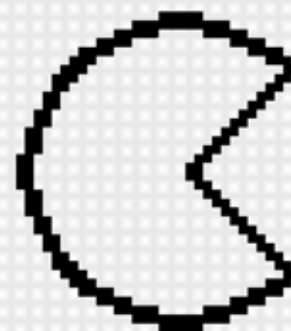
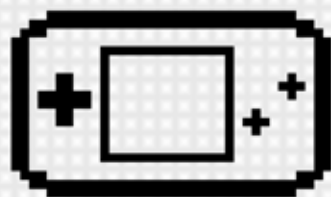
If you're really worried about the idea of adverts, you can always register your disapproval by using the Paypal donation button on the website.

Have a good one.

Dan

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If you're still reading Disposable Media after all this time, it's safe to assume that you've kept an interest in the magazine's views, opinions and biases without being enraged and insulted. You see, it's ever so easy to use the release of a big-name game as an excuse to whip up some controversy with insincere negativity. This issue, our mini-reviews show a catalogue of special games - uncommon for the magazine, but certainly not unjustifiable.

The icing on the cake is our Game of the Year feature, where one beautiful example of gaming perfection has caused DM to cast away unnecessary cynicism and recognise what is undoubtedly an incredible, exceptional title.

As well as all this, we have three eloquent screams from our columnists, the regular freeware recommendation and retrospective critique on a somewhat under-appreciated EAD gem, plus an interview with Goichi Suda on his latest stylised curio, *No More Heroes*. All of which injects our games section with more positivity than it has ever seen, which we hope will reflect onto you.

Dan Gassis
Games Editor
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currently playing ...

super mario galaxy / the orange box / clean asia / call of duty 4 / crysis / halo 3 / phantom hourglass





“ SINCE I FIRST hooked up my original Xbox to the internet, online gaming has become an addiction.

Victory over bitter human rivals is usually preferable to computer characters, and it's even better when I can bump into my vanquished foe at work the next day, or in the pub. Obviously, it's also a bonus to be able to chat with mates and catch up with people I wouldn't have had time to visit, but that's very much a secondary thing.

One of the main chat topics is 'randoms' – that is, players we don't know who either join our games, or we're forced to join when our entire friend list is busy or offline. Whether or not these



BADGER TAILS

DM EDITOR DAN THORNTON EXPLAINS WHY VIDEOGAME DESIGNERS HAVE GOT IT ALL ARSE BACKWARDS...

players turn out to be OK is largely down to luck, although geography is usually a clue (Europeans = good, Americans = bad - according to the stereotypes). But the main problem faced by most of my online gaming chums is the same. And it's down to game designers.

See, as much as I hoped I'd be paid to play games, my life generally revolves around working on a website, household chores, and paying bills. So when a game comes out, for instance *Forza 2* or *Halo 3*, I try and cram in as much game time as

“INSTEAD OF UNLOCKING WEAPONS WITH TIME AND POINTS, WHY NOT REDUCE THE ADVANTAGES AS PLAYERS GET BETTER?”

I can, but other commitments interfere. The only problem is, when I get back online, those with more time (mainly kids and students), have had a few days to hone their skills, learn all the maps, and figure out which weapons are most deadly. And they've inevitably levelled up and unlocked superior armour, weapons, and skills.

Within the space of a couple of days, I've gone from being slightly advantaged by my experience of playing a huge number of games, to being the doddering old fella in the middle of the map, desperately wondering who just

sniped him, and whether this 'needler' thing is any good.

So why don't game designers level the field? Instead of unlocking weapons with time and points, why not make them all available at the start? Then, as players get better, reduce the number of guns and armour available. That way clueless newcomers can score lucky kills with the rocket launcher and redeem some self esteem, while skilled players can earn grudging respect when they can earn a kill using nothing more than a pointy stick.

It also means a longer life for Microsoft and the developers to earn cash for downloads, as the game won't fall out of favour so quickly. After all, what's the fun in playing a shooter or racing game if you know you need 48 hours of solid play to unlock the unbeatable car everyone else is using?

It's the reason why American sports teams have a draft system to avoid the best players always ending up with the same franchises, and why British Touring car race winners get a weight penalty for the next race. It makes for closer results, and more fun, especially as user-controlled handicap systems are rarely used unless playing with a family member. And even then it's still just an excuse to beat them 25-0 and be able to boast just that little bit more...

So come on games companies. Be a bit daring and turn the elitist curve upside down. Then we'll really get to see who the best gamers are, and not just who has the most free time. Now I'm off to go and fit a laser sight to my pointy stick, in case my shotgun gets taken away...

”



“THAT’S WHERE THE people go for, um, please...” said the chauffeur, pausing for a moment to consider the translation, “for dying. They go up here and they jump to die.”

Odd to have it said to me with such enthusiasm, akin to how I imagine a zesty coach-tour-announcer would have said it. ‘Coming up on your right, a suicide hotspot’ was the punchline I jokingly repeated to myself as the chauffeur made smalltalk, interspersing his view on the autobahn stretch with the kind of probing eye contact that you can only get from a rear-view mirror.

However, the chauffeur’s odd little ice-breaker worked. My attention was stolen by the setting



CONFESSION BOX

ROB CROSSLEY SEARCHES FOR THE ELUSIVE BEAUTY OF THE FUTURE IN VIDEOGAMES.

beyond the bridge’s side-railing. Halfway across, the underpass leaned out of sight and a spread of soft, hilly grassland scrolled into view.

It was a solitary acreage, trapped by stretches of autobahn, yet somehow well-kept. The patch gently dipped in on itself, with a slender thread of water lined across its foot. The sun was sitting directly above, flickering silver in the brook, and spread a healthy glow across the strokes of grass. It was a voiceless, timid little meadow, sitting between the raucous buzzes of efficient

German automobiles.

This is the last thing they would see, I thought.”

Beautiful, yes?”

And I did, for a moment, pause to think about those with nothing more they’d like to think about. I’d noticed we had

“AREN’T THESE JUST SIMPLY A FULFILMENT OF TODAY’S FANTASIES, RATHER THAN SOLID THOUGHT ON IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE?”

gone over several underpasses before reaching the one overlooking the meadow. And I realised that anyone who wanted to get to this particular bridge would need to pass others, all of which met suicide-spot criteria. I pondered, why do people chose to die here instead?

Perhaps it offers a final bargain, I thought. Take away family, take away friends and lovers, take away all the tiny insignificant joys that get us through our days – take it all, and the world still has something we can appreciate, admire, give to ourselves. If you can jump from that, then you well and truly have no second doubts.

Suicide may be senseless, but here it sort of made sense. And it became clear to me that – even in the darkest corners of the human mindset – location is an essential impetus. And art, reflecting our mindsets, is indebted to the impression setting can make. This is something videogames can actually be proud of; not only can they capture a scene, but they offer us the chance to explore it, and exploit it, as much as we care.

Not only do videogames have the advantage of interactivity (or, to avoid debate, absolute interactivity), but gaming has lent us a host of diverse and interesting locations to play in. From the abstract, rhythmic network infrastructure of *Rez* to the soothing swirls in *F10W*’s petri dish to (and here’s my habitual *Half-Life 2* reference) the fallen mining town of Ravenholm.

But there is a type of setting that gaming never takes full advantage of. Nor does film for that matter, nor books, poems, paintings or TV. Nothing has quite got the future right. Too many shortcuts are taken to give an impression of the future, like an oven in *Back to the Future* that cooks food in milliseconds, or a teleportation device in *Star Trek*. Aren’t these just a fulfilment of today’s fantasies, rather than solid thought on ideas for the future? In fear of ending up as embarrassed as Charles Duell (google him), I’ll say this: we’ll never be able to time travel, we’ll never be able to teleport. But our social habits and lifestyles will always adapt technology and innovation. Small-but-big-and-most-recent example: mobile phones.

And there are people out there who are facing future challenges, who have made innovations that are just waiting to be funded and implemented. If, in a game’s development process, writers are hired for its script and composers are hired for its music, why are not architects consulted in envisioning the wildest of worlds?

At first, it may sound utterly specious; hiring wise old architects to add a little bit of future in games like *Crackdown*, despite the fact that such things will always be a mystery. But this isn’t about accuracy or hitting predictions, no. Like a suicide hotspot in Essen, Germany, this is about taking our breath away.





“ WHY IS IT THAT developers are quite so obsessed with bi-pedal, humanoid avatars? Do they believe,

in order to be accepted by us, as humans interacting with an electronic input device, videogames need to appear more human, more approachable? Is this not patronising the audience? Or is it just intrinsically more satisfying to be able to control a digital avatar in ways that we may never be able to control ourselves?

Neuromancer author William Gibson recently said, of videogames: “[they] are models of our reality; in order to work they have to be, to some extent, mimetic – representations of something we have actually experienced in life.”



WISHLIST

ADAM PARKER TELLS US WHAT HE WOULD WISH FOR TO MAKE GAMING BETTER. THIS ISSUE: MORE IMAGINATIVE AVATARS.

There is certainly the argument that, in role-play, most narratives will need characters to focus on for development; for the user to have a role to assume. The increasing familiarity with of your avatar – by the very nature of it being, in third person games, permanently on the screen during play – adds strength to the illusion of a cohesive storyline. Perhaps this is why *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Halo 2* received a negative response for their character changes, mid-story: you, the player, have not changed, so it would be far better to continue on as the character you’ve come to

“IS IT JUST MORE SATISFYING TO BE ABLE TO CONTROL AN AVATAR IN WAYS THAT WE MAY NEVER BE ABLE TO CONTROL OURSELVES?”

bond with thus far. Avatars have also made it possible for developers to give cheeky winks, literally, to the camera, in an explicit way that most other mediums wouldn’t dare to emulate: Sonic tapping his foot with impatience; Commander Keen sitting down to read a book; countless other characters yawning, peering round back through the screen at the player, and cheerfully breaking the fourth wall.

And there are countless links between our physicality in the virtual and real world. The stories of physically (and mentally) handicapped people finding escapism through videogames, and being able to interact with others more effectively and with less prejudice in online virtual communities, are well documented. Meanwhile gait – the unique personal style which every person

has when they walk – is being analysed by numerous research institutes, some of which are receiving funding from military sources, in order to see whether the way in which we move could betray a potential jittery terrorist.

Nintendo is a company that clearly understand the relationship between user and their technology. It revolutionised the games console controller with the Wii-mote, but also in the astonishingly simple, and less noisily-trumpeted, user interface for the Wii. Its ‘multi-screen’ aesthetic, calling to mind The Architect’s domain in *The Matrix Reloaded* and Mr. Universe’s media war room from *Serenity*, almost satirises user input and the user’s role as a watching, critiquing, and media-aware being. *Wii Fit*, too, looks set to revolutionise our own real world avatars, by helping us shed a few pounds; and it’s about time too!

But where next for avatars? Might the future see the avatar done away with all together? User-created avatars, whether 3D models built from a template or from scratch, or ‘Digimask’ faces made from photo inputs, suggest otherwise, instead pointing to a trend of affirming the user’s role in-game.

Above all, though, the onus must be on sensitivity when integrating the real-life user into a videogame, especially one based on actual historical events. Following the face mapping included in titles such as *Rainbow 6: Vegas*, imagine a scenario in which you’re required to become an Allied soldier. And then imagine the reactions of elderly relatives, who may have experienced the war, watching you in battle.

”

CLEAN ASIA

SWEEPING THROUGH THE LITTER OF FREEWARE SHMUPS, DM FINDS A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD CLEAN ASIA](#)

“
THERE'S
NOTHING TYPICAL
ABOUT THE
BRUTALITY OF THE
INITIAL PUNCH
THROUGH AN
ENEMY
”



It isn't necessarily true that the only freeware games worthy of discussion are complex and obscure ones, but that can seem the case with something as diverse, as expansive, and as full of crap as the free games scene. So much of the market is taken up by derivative material that shamelessly rips off the past – and usually does a far worse job of it – making it harder to find the simple gems. Thankfully *Clean Asia* takes rudimentary building blocks and meshes them into a refreshing whole. It may be played as a vanilla vertical shooter, but the gameplay is solid and challenging, the graphics minimalist and tidy, and the features complimentary and sensible.

Having chosen your character and level, you enter the bullet-dodging fare typical of many freeware shooters. But as you take on enemies that approach one at a time - not unlike *Warning Forever's* boss-rush scenario - your choice of character will have a big effect on the gameplay. As Mickey, play is risky and aggressive: he has no ranged weaponry as such, but he can punch his way through an enemy, breaking it up into chunks. Moreover, he is also equipped with a magnet that can attract the smallest chunks of an enemy and then either repel them as makeshift bullets or release them simultaneously in a blast powerful enough to take down an enemy in one hit. It's quite interesting to have to change tactics so frequently, from suicidal blasts through the enemy to careful expenditure of the debris, and it takes some getting used to before you are accustomed to the way Mickey is supposed to be controlled.

DM could label this as a typical scrolling shooter, but there's nothing typical about the limited ammunition or the way you acquire said

ammunition, or the brutality of the initial punch through an enemy. Thankfully, if such activity is off-putting, the other character available, Mackey, has a gun from the offset. The debris doesn't go to waste here though, either: it can be collected to make the gun more powerful, or the collected debris can be used up gradually as a shield, or collectively as another powerful blast.

It all sounds quite confusing, but the game effectively describes how both characters' abilities can be used and so a player can understand how it all works in a matter of minutes. The game is also full of unique presentational touches, such as the simple representations of the gameplay and characters, and the bizarre soundtrack which seems to mash together *Quake III* vocals in a funky techno-style tune. However, the game play is the real star: the challenge of carefully weaving through hazards as Mickey and then breaking apart an enemy - only to then try and retire back to safety - makes a change from the kind of shoot 'em ups where you are continually hanging back, in no real danger, and letting an infinite supply of ammunition do the hard work for you.

Mackey also toys with typical shooter convention: whereas something like *Giga Wing* has a permanent rechargeable shield as well as firepower that gets bigger and better, a Mackey player has to decide which of the two abilities would benefit him or her more.

In placing such a unique range of abilities in the hands of the player - whichever character they choose - *Clean Asia* offers all the freedom of choice one could hope for. The skill is in carefully choosing the best method to succeed, the pure joy follows.

games/game of the year

game of the year



MAYBE THERE'S A TYPO IN THAT HEADLINE, PERHAPS IT SHOULD REALLY READ 'YEAR OF THE GAME'. BUT WITH SO MANY GREAT GAMES RELEASED THIS YEAR, WHY DID DISPOSABLE MEDIA FIND IT SO EASY TO CHOOSE A FAVOURITE?

As the latest generation of consoles have come of age, there's been an enormous wealth of great games demanding our praise and attention. Highlights have included titles like *Halo 3*, *the Orange Box*, *Forza Motorsport 2*, *God of War 2*, and many, many more.

In picking the game of the year we could have polled our staff, or our readers, to get a title based on the popularity of a particular console, publisher, developer, or what people think is the cool choice.

But DM does things differently. Our game of the year was picked because it produced the most passion in one of our staff. And, after all, that's the sign of the best games. They provoke passion, emotion, and debate. Which we're sure our choice will do. Feel free to come and join the debate at:

www.disposablemedia.co.uk/forums

Mario is *Mario 64*. And despite Nintendo's superfluous and often trite profiteering from his reputable name – *Kart*, *Tennis*, *Golf*, *Paint*, *Baseball* – the true identity of one of the oldest gaming icons can only be found in his most recent classic. *Donkey Kong* to *Super Mario Bros.* to *Super Mario Bros. 3* to *Super Mario World*, these seminal titles were the embodiment of everything Mario – and the reason for his reputation – until the next arrived.

It's a testament to the exquisite conviction of *Mario 64* that the standards of the genre have remained dormant for a longer period than Mario's evolution from Jumpman to a Yoshi rider. Mario is *Mario 64*, and has sat on that podium – unchallenged – for over a decade. And after a gloomy holiday and DS remake, *Super Mario Galaxy* has demonstrated the discipline, the aspiration and the utter gall to attempt shatter what is set in stone.

Mario is free. What *Galaxy* offers is an utterly impossible idea of navigation, one that is remarkably fresh as it is alien as it is astonishing. He can skate the circumference of a doughnut-shaped ice-planet or loop loops in its centre, he can jump between the polar ends of a peanut-shaped globe or run across its face, he can fall up, he can jump down.

It kills the conventions of platforming without creating any new ones; while it can be geocentric there's no rule of geocentricity, while there are moments of falling to death and climbing to proceed there is no Newtonian law. It's one of the most playful and wild ideas ever seen in such a high-profile game – and one that can barely be contained with fingers and a thumbstick.

Your Wiimote lends a hand in the proceedings, allowing you to snatch pieces of the game's currency – Star Bits – by moving the cursor over them. And at the touch of a button that currency becomes ammo and that cursor becomes a crosshair, stunning Goombas and Piranha Plants and the like



super mario galaxy

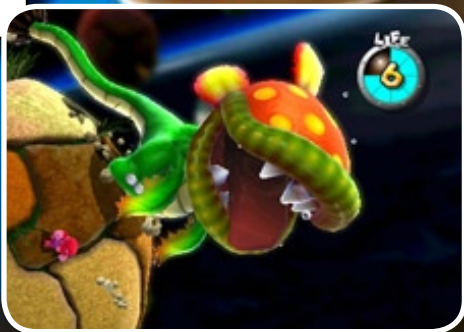
WORDS: ROB CROSSLEY
DESIGN: TASHA CAINE



with a well-aimed shot, allowing Mario to finish each with a conventional stomp.

Mario is diabolical. The pointer becomes an essence of the gameplay, it will occupy your concentration as much as Mario does, yet it doesn't shackle him the way *Sunshine's* FLUDD did. The pointer and the plumber are separate entities, giving Mario the freedom to play as himself, yet are brought together as a team by the stick and nunchuk. If *Galaxy* wasn't staggering enough with its stupefying gravitational jazz-playing, it also demands you to traverse its luscious universe with two characters, asking you to run in one direction and point the other. How Nintendo have managed to hold so many of these demanding ideas together – to keep such complexity not feel complicated – is an astonishing achievement.

Mario is beautiful. Each of the forty-plus levels are cut wide open, devoid of linearity and doused in sugar-sweet, bright, bold colours. It's Nintendo's best-looking game by a light-year, it's the Wii's David GPU pushing a Goliath amount of polish and detail. It's a relentless attack of boundless imagination, throwing at you 2D assault



YOU WILL HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA OF WHAT THE NEXT GALAXY WILL BRING

courses encapsulated in a 3D tablet, or a peppering of lush, grassy planetoids, or a seaside resort sitting in a bowl of floating water.

The level of variety on offer is dazzling, and you will have absolutely no idea of what the next galaxy will bring. Mario will soar, Superman-style, between these narcotic worlds, held together by a backdrop of timeless, infinite space. Mario is epic, and it needed to be. Complemented by a sumptuous orchestral score, *Galaxy* has the nerve to play as a more important, more celebratory, and more timeless game than its predecessors.

Mario is fearless, but not flawless. Such boggling confidence can occasionally bite off more than it can chew. The near-automatic camera is occasionally at the mercy of the astounding navigational freedom on offer, the thumbstick sometimes strains against *Galaxy's* itinerant model of up, down, left and right. Such cracked eggs are utterly forgivable, and oddly reflect well on the game; they demonstrate how bold *Galaxy* is. Mario is not flawless, but fearless.

Mario is essential. Mario is simply better. It ups the ante to an unexpected level, excelling in every single way when standing next to its predecessors. Mario is historic. It can't replicate the impact of *Mario 64*, yet provides a harder act to follow. Mario is reborn. Mario is Nintendo's best work. Mario is *Super Mario Galaxy*.

While no-one who has played Nintendo EAD Tokyo's second game will ever forget it, their first outing was one of the most unfairly-overlooked gems of the previous console generation. *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* was dismissed by most corners of the gaming press as a throwaway novelty - a simple way of Nintendo getting more mileage out of the plastic Konga Drum peripheral packaged with bongo-bashing rhythm-actioner *Donkey Konga*. Yet it's a far superior game - certainly among the best three first-party titles on the console, and arguably the finest 2D platformer since the SNES.

The game could be controlled using a standard GameCube pad, but it was only when using the plastic bongo controller that it really came to life. Tap the left or right skin to move Donkey Kong in that direction, hold both to jump, and clap to grab items. That simplicity made it instantly accessible, but it masked a deep combo system that gave the game a surprising amount of replay value.

Jungle Beats slight length was a frequent criticism in its mostly positive reviews, many of which seemed surprised at the quality of the game, but unwilling to rate it too highly - as if anything controlled by such a gimmicky peripheral couldn't possibly be this good. Yet it was only upon completion that the game really came to life, and players could exploit the intricacies of the genius level design to aim for those tricky platinum medals.

Beats - represented physically by bananas, were DK's life force and also the game's scoring system. The idea was to collect as many beats as possible by chaining jumps and swings to increase a multiplier - you might only see one banana, but that could equal seven beats if you'd not hit the floor for

a while. Backflip, wall jump, edge hop into a ground pound down to a squishy jelly, and bounce to a flower to flip you to a flying enemy - the challenge was to stay off the ground for as long as you could (sometimes even for the length of an entire stage). And every time you completed a level, a grainy film clip of an outrageous manoeuvre would tempt you back to better your performance.

Part of its beauty lay in the satisfying physicality of its control scheme - pummeling enemies has never been so palm-blisteringly rewarding, and its boss battles, though occasionally cut-and-paste jobs for later stages, were thrilling highlights. Clap-dodging Ninja Kong's attacks atop a rain-soaked tree trunk was incredibly dramatic, showing off the game's vibrant visuals. Then there were the simpler pleasures - simply pressing the skin to push off a wall gave you a tangible connection to your avatar's actions.

Revisiting *Jungle Beat* shows just how much *Super Mario Galaxy* is indebted to its developer's debut, but it's not the only reason to give the monkey another chance. If you want an exemplary lesson in game design, a reminder of how good the GameCube could be when people made the effort, or simply to relive that moment with the killer whale, then grab your bongos and get ready to grin.



“THE GAME'S SIMPLICITY MASKED A DEEP COMBO SYSTEM THAT GAVE IT SURPRISING REPLAY VALUE.”



AND THE BEAT GOES ON...



SURPRISED AT JUST HOW GOOD SUPER MARIO GALAXY IS? YOU SHOULDN'T BE. EAD TOKYO'S GAMECUBE DEBUT PROVED WHAT A TALENTED TEAM THEY WERE, EVEN IF SOME DISMISSED THEIR GAME AS A GIMMICK...

WORDS: CHRIS SCHILLING
DESIGN: DAN GASSIS/KEITH ANDREW





VIDEO GAME NASTY

WORDS AND DESIGN: ROB CROSSLEY

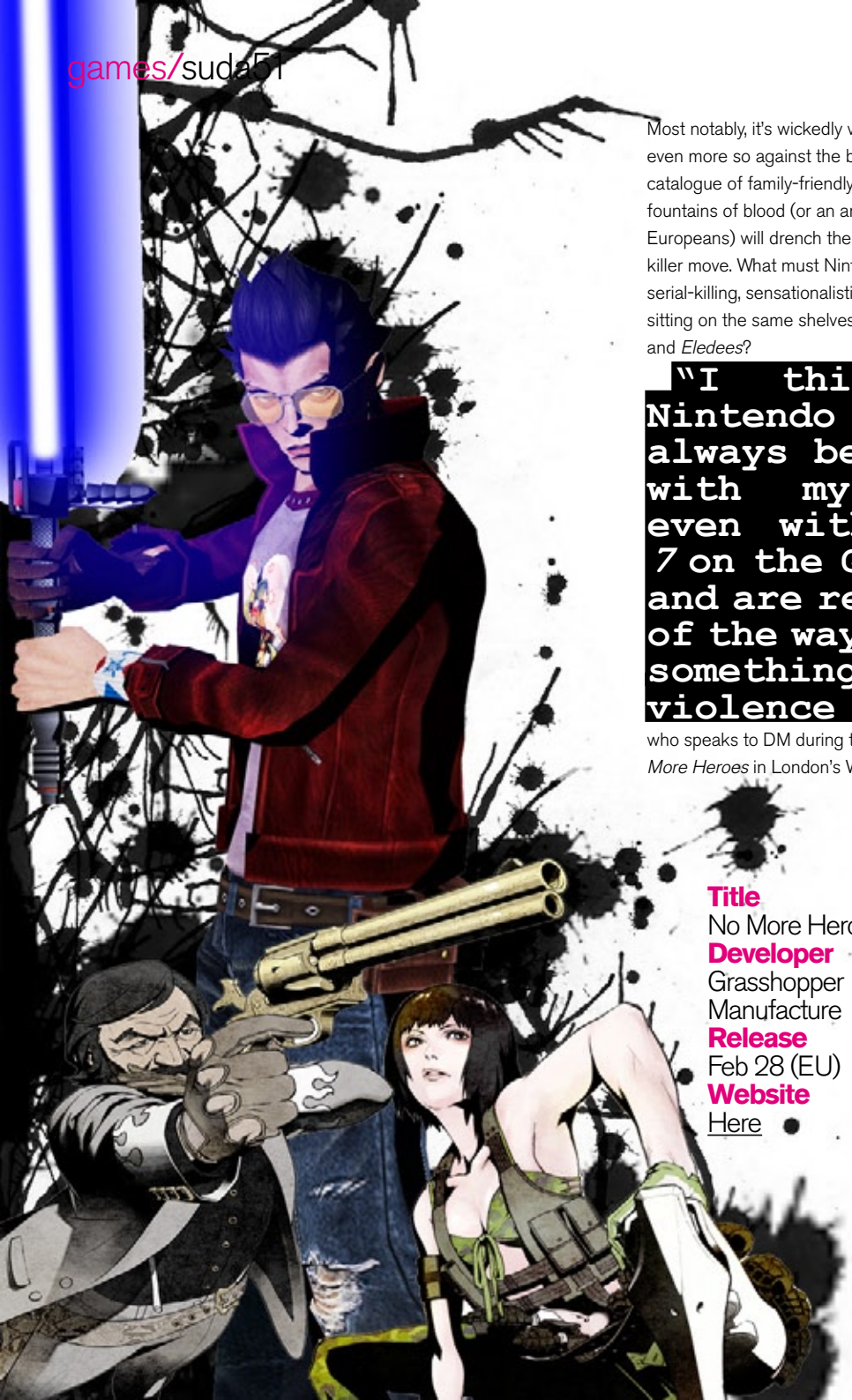


AN
INTERVIEW
WITH
THE
VIDEO
GAME
BAND
FRONT
MAN,
SUDA51

CAN GAMES DO
PUNK? IF THEY
CAN, THEY HAVE.
SUDA51'S LATEST
CURIO **NO MORE
HEROES** IS
CERTAINLY A GAME
THAT EMBODIES
THE PROVOCATIVE
NATURE OF A
BORED-WITH-
SOCIETY PUNK
BAND.

It's a game that has thieved George Lucas' copyright-guarded lightsaber and proceeds to parade it about in every cut-scene, attack pattern and finishing move. It's a game with a narrative that follows an otaku, Travis Touchdown, who wins said weapon from an online auction website and decides to slay his way through hundreds of people to earn the notoriety of a serial killer.

It's hard for a game to be more anti-establishment and rebellious towards the mainstream media than that. Suda51's stylistic successor to *Killer 7* carries the charismatic arrogance and youthful, loud energy that lifted punk into a cultural phenomenon. And fortunately, it offers so much more.



Most notably, it's wickedly violent, and stands out even more so against the backdrop of the Wii's catalogue of family-friendly titles. Pools and fountains of blood (or an anonymous black liquid for Europeans) will drench the screen after a successful killer move. What must Nintendo think of such a serial-killing, sensationalistic blood-fetish of a game sitting on the same shelves as *Big Brain Academy* and *Eledees*?

"I think that Nintendo has always been happy with my games, even with *Killer 7* on the GameCube, and are respectful of the way I design something with violence in,"

says Suda, who speaks to DM during the preview showing of *No More Heroes* in London's Wii House.

Title
No More Heroes
Developer
Grasshopper
Manufacture
Release
Feb 28 (EU)
Website
[Here](#)

"The version of *Killer 7* for the PS2 actually has restrictions in place on some of the violent scenes in the game, so the quality between both the GameCube and PS2 versions are actually different. That's why I'm happy to make games for Nintendo, because they're respectful of the kind of games I like to make."

Even so, the Wii's odd dichotomy of its casual and hardcore audience makes it difficult for developers to judge what to cater for. The list of once-solely-hardcore franchises that suffer from a preoccupation with Iwata's revolution manifesto grows by the month. From *Twilight Princess* to *Metroid Prime 3* to the laughable *Soulcalibur Legends*, each of these respected franchises have, to some extent, fumbled when transfixed by how intuitive they could be, and lose a part of themselves when allured by the glowing sales figures of casual games like *Wii Sports* in Japan, and *Wii Play* in the West.

"Actually, when I was developing *No More Heroes*, I barely played other titles for the Wii. I didn't want to be influenced by other game designs" says Suda. And in play, it's clear he hasn't been distracted by the profits a family-friendly design policy can yield. *No More Heroes* is manifestly hardcore, from its reluctance to use the Wiimote's gesture controls for anything other than finishing moves, to the growing complexities in its battle system.

"I knew the Wii's launch titles were going to focus around the motion sensing and, for the first year at least, all companies would have this fascination with its control system," says Suda. "People get tired of that, and I think that one of the most important things in developing *No More Heroes* was to only use the motions for something special."

Going against the mass-assumption that swordplay on the Wii deserves motion control, swiping and stabbing with the 'katana beam' is assigned to the A button. A successful hit, punctuated deliciously by a micro-pause, can extend into a combo. NPC drones, who challenge by their numbers and not their

skills, will usually lose their life gauge to a single A-A-A combo, after which a QTE command will take the screen, asking you to swipe the controller in a certain direction to deliver a charismatic finishing slash. The complexities that follow this template will grow; the B button delivers a melee attack in which a finishing QTE asks for a simultaneous jolt of the stick and nunchuk, delivering a growing range of copy-cat wrestling throws, DDTs and suplexes.

While the game's attitude may mirror the nature of punk, it eschews the process. In *No More Heroes* you will not find the gaming equivalent of a stripped-down instrumentation in three-minute blasts. Rather, it is a 3D scrolling fighter with an essential chunk of depth. For instance, each finishing slash will bring up a fruit machine window that randomly (and we can't stress that word enough) spins three symbols. Matching three bars, three bells, three logos and so on will result in a shift on the gameplay rules, from slowing time to empowering Travis with one hit kills.

It's a game that unapologetically puts mum back where she was before the Wii and DS appeared: behind the sofa, appalled by the content and confused by the controls. This is a game for the Wii's hardcore fraternity, yet it's unclear how many Wii owners fit into that category. Did this ever concern Suda during the development of *NMH*?

"Well, I wasn't expecting that the Wii and DS would have such a focus on casual and non-gamers."

Even before I started work on *No More Heroes*, I expected that the console would host more games for hardcore gamers. But I have a strong confidence in gaming, and I really believe that the Wii's audience who stick to the casual games will eventually tire of them. They will move onto the hardcore games, and I feel that by the time *No More Heroes* is released in Europe and the US, many of those casual Wii

owners will begin to move towards playing the more 'real' video games."

After a somewhat embarrassing launch event that Suda attended in Japan last December, with a poor turnout at Akihabara's Sofmap Amusement store and 20 agonising minutes where there were no purchases for Suda to sign, it's uplifting to see he doesn't blame the game's style, content and premise for its lack of appeal in Japan.

"Whilst the sales weren't as high as I had hoped, other titles for Wii aren't selling very well either. In Japan, because of the growing casual audience, only the Nintendo titles are doing especially well.

This isn't just because of the current situation in Japan, this is happening outside Japan. The feedback from gamers we've had has also been very good. I expect that other gamers will hear about our game four or five months later, and they will go and buy it. So that's what I expect, that gamers will talk about it and people will play it later."

Even so, it seems that a title like *No More Heroes* would sit better on the 360 and PS3 simply because these consoles have an easier-to-read, more united fanbase. Considering the usually lower time and financial investments required to develop a top-tier game for the Wii - as opposed to its competition - to what extent can this be an influence for an independent developer like Grasshopper Manufacture?

Suda maintains that a more manageable investment had little to do with his decision to ship *No More Heroes* on the Wii: "While it's true that the budget is not as high as some games on PS3 and 360, the budget for *No More Heroes* is far higher than other Wii titles. With this game we are targeting gamers all over the world and not just Japan, so we actually had the money to produce the games for the PS3 or 360, but we chose the Wii."

While *No More Heroes* is destined not to be one of the biggest selling Wii titles out there, today it stands as the most violent, the most stylised, the most hardcore and certainly one of the best. For Suda, without these accolades (earning a very respectable 34/40 in *Famitsu*, to name just one) commercial success would leave him feeling pretty vacant. And that is Suda in a nutshell. He's a CEO that does what he wants, and clearly does what he loves. He's someone who won't sacrifice that for anything else. Of this attitude and philosophy, DM can only think of one word to best describe that.

IMPORT REVIEW



NO MORE HEROES

(Wii)

N*o More Heroes* makes absolutely no attempt to take you out of your armchair and immerse you in a coherent gameworld. Instead, it revels in its status as a videogame - characters break the fourth wall to comment on events, while Goichi Suda's clearly misspent youth is evident in the 8-bit fonts, high score tables and 2D shoot-em-up dream sequences.

Its gameplay is a curious mix of accessible and hardcore - attacks are launched by tapping A and B, with remote swipes delivering the *coup de grace*, as your opponents

explode in a shower of coins and black pixels - at least in the Japanese version reviewed here.

Constantly surprising, gloriously silly yet wonderfully stylish, *No More Heroes'* technical niggles take little away from its hugely satisfying combat and dazzling boss battles. Significantly, it's proof that Wii's future needn't lie in minigame collections and shoddy ports. A deliriously demented masterpiece.

Chris Schilling



"NO MORE HEROES' TECHNICAL NIGGLES TAKE LITTLE AWAY FROM ITS HUGELY SATISFYING COMBAT"





THE ORANGE BOX

(XBOX 360/PS3/PC)

When DM assesses videogames, we refuse to applaud a title's low price. The long list of 'budget' titles makes it perfectly clear that we shouldn't, either. When DM assesses videogames, we refuse to admire any accumulation of old ideas. The long list of 'classic' compilations makes it perfectly clear that we shouldn't, either.

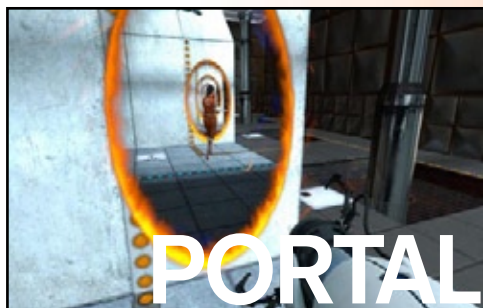
The Orange Box then - with its inclusion of the seminal *Half-Life 2*, and the admirable *Episode One* on top of three new titles, sitting on shelves with a perversely small number of dollars, euros and pounds on its ticket - is the exception to the rule. Here, its bargain price doesn't detract from

its quality, and its inclusion of past glories doesn't overshadow the new showpieces it brings to the table.

The new titles included stand on their own merit, and across this page we have reviewed them as such - individually. On their own, they're wonderful pieces of entertainment. Together, they're the definition of an essential purchase.

If you haven't played *Half-Life 2* yet, then *The Orange Box* truly is the second coming...

"THE NEW TITLES INCLUDED STAND ON THEIR OWN MERIT, AND HAVE BEEN REVIEWED AS SUCH."



PORTAL

Visions of a first-person physics-based puzzle game may have infected the imagination of gamers since their first encounter with a seesaw in *Half-Life 2*. Yet it was only when seven tenderfoot DigiPen students showcased a game called *Narbacular Drop* to Valve's Gabe Newell that such a daydream became reality. Reportedly, it took Gabe ten minutes of showcase footage to offer the rookies a development contract at Valve. It only takes ten minutes of play to see precisely why.

Just like the student project, *Portal* utilises gravity, momentum, inertia and, of course, portals with a robust, simplistic logic. Such trustworthy logic - a puzzle's DNA - is the solid foundation to *Portal's* germ-free prisons of hard plastics and chaste porcelain walls, which slowly ascend from simplistic box-room puzzles to abominable mini-dungeon perplexities.

Utterly charming, playful and distinct, with a pathological undercurrent that lingers behind the walls, as well as a self-referential dark-humour that's desperately needed in videogames, *Portal* allures and amuses the player in the precious few hours it offers.

Rob Crossley

"PORTAL ALLURES AND AMUSES THE PLAYER IN THE PRECIOUS FEW HOURS IT OFFERS."



People willingly forgive Valve's tiresome delaying because, when a product of its sensational *Half-Life* franchise eventually arrives, there's an unwritten guarantee that the game will never slip below the series' high standards. That promise only gets stronger with the release of *Episode Two*; a prized FPS of thrilling set-pieces, fascinating narrative and a gravity gun.

The hilly countryside setting is a surprisingly linear one, which is perhaps fortunate, as the only unrestrained set-piece never quite manages to fulfil the promise made at last year's Leipzig demo. Tight, focused battles remain at the heart of *Episode Two* and are as entertaining as ever; always solid, occasionally stunning.

New arrivals are a mixed bag, with the muscular, intimidating, wild and relentless Hunter synths adding a razor-sharp panic to battles, and a new Strider-buster weapon that dulls the proceedings. *Episode*



EPISODE TWO

Two, however, never fails to announce Valve's perfected formula.

Rob Crossley

"TIGHT, FOCUSED BATTLES REMAIN AT THE HEART OF EPISODE TWO AND ARE AS ENTERTAINING AS EVER."



It's been nine years since *Team Fortress 2* - in its original form - was announced, and despite the lack of concrete information and the breakthroughs in gaming technology that have come and gone during that time, people were still confident that the game would eventually see the light of day. Not only has it done just that, but it's proven itself to be a triumph in knockabout fun and tactical variety.

Whilst a hardcore *Team Fortress* cognoscenti will inevitably emerge over time, the charming aesthetics and accessible objectives make it welcoming for the most clueless of newcomers.

The *Quake*-style pacing gives the game an arcade feel, and each of the nine classes are so delightful to use that it's impossible to ascertain a "favourite".

Finely-tuned for enthusiasts without alienating new converts, *Team Fortress 2* deserves to be experienced by any and all fans of the FPS genre.

Dan Gassis



TEAM FORTRESS 2

"FINELY-TUNED FOR ENTHUSIASTS WITHOUT ALIENATING NEW CONVERTS, TEAM FORTRESS 2 DESERVES TO BE EXPERIENCED BY ANY AND ALL FANS OF THE FPS GENRE."





HALO 3

(XBOX 360)

The flaw: It won't take long to complete it. On normal difficulty, two sittings will see it finished. Whilst it lasts longer on harder difficulties, it doesn't offer any additional content.

Everything else is great. Single player levels are wondrous and online co-op gives more reasons to play them again. New weapons are a joy and new equipment, such as the bubble-shield, offer fresh tactics. Multiplayer is just as good as before, but with more polish and a fantastic new set of maps. Forge might not be a level editor, but the

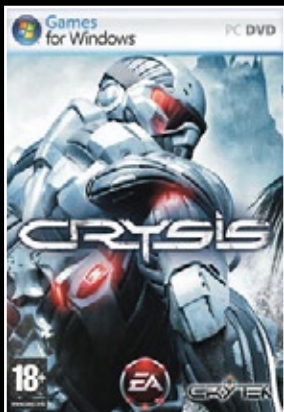
creations it has allowed are nothing short of genius. And the second you do something astounding in-game, you'll wonder how you lived without every second of your gaming being recorded.

Halo 3 is exactly what everyone wanted. As such, we're left looking back fondly on when Bungie told us what we wanted, not the other way around....

Andrew Revell



"WE'RE LEFT LOOKING BACK FONDLY ON WHEN BUNGIE TOLD US WHAT WE WANTED, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND."



CRYSIS

(PC)

Crytek's CryENGINE2 is a canvas of remarkable might; one that *Crysis* exploits to design islands of peerless detail, flair, freedom and beauty. Entanglements of leaf, grass and bark sway together in the wind; casting shadows, bending, burning and breaking at the mercy of crossfire. There's nothing quite as alive as *Crysis*' deep, dense forestry - there's nothing quite as real.

Such stunning immersion camouflages the ingenuity of *Crysis*' playground. This is a sandbox like no other, one which commands the

eyes to observe the mesh of foliage and find the boots, the arms and the eyes of the enemy. AI plays the same way, creating a distinctly tense, sensory play dynamic. Meticulously balanced Nano-suit superpowers add depth and exhilaration, as does the exhaustive customisation of the game's beautiful arsenal of weaponry.

Crysis is unflinching, and makes no apologies for mastering what FPSes have always done best.

Rob Crossley



"THERE'S NOTHING QUITE AS ALIVE AS CRYSIS' DEEP, DENSE FORESTRY."



METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION

(WII)

Essentially a disaster, *Corruption* moves under the helm of a stick and nunchuk with peerless precision, engagement and fluidity - surpassing navigational benchmarks for a console FPS with profound assurance - only to build on these solid foundations with straw walls.

Narratively vulgar, *Corruption* cuts into the series' purity with a collection of petrified-forest-cut-scenes, offensively ugly hunter-antagonists and an incongruous departure of the trilogy's past strengths.

Delightful Space Pirates as well as purposeful gesture-based colouring and a number of exciting pressure-cooker set-pieces cannot remedy the game's plunge from the heavenly heights of the series' original.

'The controls work but the game doesn't' is an all-too common trend for Wii titles to date, and *Corruption* never manages to overcome this. Retro has lost their touch, and the original *Prime* now stands alone as the studio's one moment of glory.

Rob Crossley



"METROID PRIME 3 ONLY BUILDS ON ITS SOLID FOUNDATIONS WITH STRAW WALLS."



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

(DS)

Handhelds have often served Nintendo's highly esteemed *Zelda* franchise very well, and three years after the DS was released, Nintendo has finally delivered a much-demanded *Zelda* with touch-screen support.

Phantom Hourglass has some of the best presentation yet seen on the DS. The graphics are breathtaking, the music is sweeping and the touch-screen controls are superbly executed - so well in fact, that controlling Link with a stylus can make you wonder how he ever got around before.

Unfortunately, the game is marred by repetitive and tedious sea-faring and the increasing annoyance of the ocean temple - a stage the player must traipse through over and over again, in a cynical attempt to stretch the game's lifespan.

Phantom Hourglass is a technically stunning game, but sadly its flaws and short gameplay prevent it from meeting the franchise's usual high standards.

Jezz Bolton



"CONTROLLING LINK WITH A STYLUS CAN MAKE YOU WONDER HOW HE EVER GOT AROUND BEFORE."



PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 4

(XBOX 360)

News that *Project Gotham Racing 4* will be Bizarre Creation's last addition to the franchise will have been greeted by glum faces from a serious chunk of the 360's fanbase, but in reality, the Liverpool-based development team would be hard pushed to ever better this, their series' swansong.

PGR4 is the result of a gradual evolution of every outing since the Dreamcast classic *Metropolis Street Racer*. Everything, from the tracks to the cars, hits top form here. This is not just a simple rehash, however. Proving to be

more than just a marketing tactic is both the appearance of bikes and, more importantly, the game's vast variety of weather. Both manage to feel instantly indispensable by subtly changing the nature of play from the word go.

Bizarre manages to sign out with its head held high. When a game is this good, it's perhaps a little greedy to expect a sequel.

Keith Andrew



"BOTH BIKES AND WEATHER MANAGE TO FEEL INSTANTLY INDISPENSIBLE FROM THE WORD GO."



ASSASSIN'S CREED

(XBOX 360/PS3)

Away from the hype and the unkept promises, there's much to admire about *Assassin's Creed*. It has some of the best animation you'll ever see in a videogame, coupled with a remarkable gameworld in which you can climb virtually every building. Lithe protagonist Altair clings onto ledges and grasps tiny handholds as he clambers up spires to observe his environment, perched like an eagle waiting to swoop down upon its prey.

But while its simplified parkour controls allow the chase sequences

to flow, they make the free running much less satisfying. Couple that with assassinations that are far too regimented, clunky combat and some bizarre inconsistencies – hiding on a bench in plain sight of pursuers, for one – and you've got a game that fails to live up to its own self-promotion. Its incredible universe feels intoxicatingly real, but there's just not enough of any great interest to do in it.

Chris Schilling



"ITS UNIVERSE FEELS INTOXICATINGLY REAL, BUT THERE'S JUST NOT ENOUGH INTERESTING THINGS TO DO IN IT."



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

(XBOX 360/PS3/PC)

Bang, bang, bang... BANANG! While its commonplace these days for big budget FPS titles to rival Hollywood blockbusters, few give you as much bang for your buck as *Modern Warfare*. Stylistically a completely new direction for the series, *Call of Duty 4* retains one the series' core ethics: to have fun making war.

The plot is no slouch, *Spooks* has nothing on Infinity Ward's apocalyptic view of the future. However, *Call of Duty 4* shies away from taking itself too seriously, instead focusing on encouraging

players to make as much noise as possible.

Graphically immersive without being overly realistic (killing people isn't quite so much fun if you feel guilty afterwards), *Modern Warfare* really shines online, where the developer's deft touch in map design is worth the game's fee alone. Bang, bang, bang? More, more, more in the inevitable sequel, thanks.

Keith Andrew



"MODERN WARFARE REALLY SHINES ONLINE, WHERE THE DEVELOPER'S DEFT TOUCH IN MAP DESIGN IS WORTH THE GAME'S FEE ALONE."



MASS EFFECT

(XBOX 360)

If nothing else, *Mass Effect* feels like a hugely important game, particularly for the RPG genre. It's a game that makes *BioShock's* much-vaunted moral choices look as crude and unsophisticated as a Jim Davidson jokebook, and its characters deal with thorny issues of sex and race with rare subtlety.

Its combat system can be as deep or as simple as you make it; orchestrate tactical squad commands from behind cover, or go in all guns blazing, *GRAW* or *Gears*-style. Character development can be automatic, or customised to

the nth degree. Something for everyone, then.

If its plot leans towards po-facedness once too often and its myriad bugs and restrictions draw you out of its immersive universe, then *Mass Effect*, at least, deserves applause for its ambition. It might over-reach at times, but what can you expect of something that aims for the stars, and just – just – falls agonisingly short?

Chris Schilling



"MASS EFFECT AIMS FOR THE STARS, AND JUST FALLS AGONISINGLY SHORT."

DIRECTOR

CAMERAMAN



film & tv

Working at Disposable Media is very much like being part of a select group, these days. A team of talented individuals who pool their resources together every issue, but one still willing to whore itself out to the bigger boys at every single opportunity. Clearly such spirit appealed to the likes of former *GamesIndustry.biz* editor Rob Fahey, who thankfully submitted his first piece to the DM fold this issue - and fans of *Battlestar Galactica* are sure to appreciate his work. Fear not - this editor will be bribing him regularly to make sure he keeps coming back.

Mr. Biffo, a.k.a. established television writer and regular *Edge* columnist Paul Rose, also spilled the beans regarding his take on the current 'crisis' hitting children's television. We're sure you'll agree it's as insightful as it is amusing - we certainly weren't expecting anything less.

And so, on we go, out on the streets in our ensemble of fishnet stockings and suspenders - figuratively speaking, of course. There's not much I personally won't do to ensure these pages continue to be packed with quality, issue after issue. That's how I justify the late lonely nights on the streets in my head anyway.

Keith Andrew
 Film & TV Editor
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currently watching ...

30 days of night / battlestar galactica / californication / the darjeeling limited





“ A FEW MONTHS AGO my PC went caput. It was one of those random shutdowns; upgrading to Vista had gone fine. Fitting new hard-drives had gone without halt. But a beefier graphics card, while initially hitch free, seemed later to cause my hard-drives to start failing, my PSU to give up the ghost completely and, to cut a long story short, resulted in me taking a screwdriver to the whole damn thing. Picture it: PC parts randomly sprawled across the floor, and me, with no clue as to what the hell I was doing.

It was a good fortnight before I finally got my PC back up-and-running again – an utterly



REMOTE REHAB

KEITH ANDREW WONDERS WHETHER THE BIG RED BUTTON WILL BE THE DEATH OF TV AS WE KNOW IT.

unsettling fortnight. Needless to say, work became an issue, but it was the unexpected gap in my life that the lack of a PC made that really got to me. I don't consider myself tech-dependent in the slightest, but it was genuinely startling just how little I could do without it.

It's like when you have a power-cut. Everything you think of doing to pass the time until the power comes back, funnily enough, involves power. In this case, a life without a PC meant I was

desperately clinging to any tech I could find – even the thought of a quick play on a calculator made me oddly horny.

“TV THINKS IF IT INVOLVES US AT EVERY STAGE, HANDS US POWER AND IMMERSSES US COMPLETELY IN THE PROCESS, WE WON'T SWITCH OFF. IT'S DEMOCRACY GONE MAD.”

Eventually, I found a solution. To fill those long, dark nights, I decided to go through my old (and barely watched in recent years) DVD and VHS collection. Nights that would have usually been dominated by time working at the PC were now filled by digital-trips down memory lane. Forgive me for going a bit shopping channel here, but you'd be amazed just how much it changed my life. My pre-bedtime half-an-hour in front of the box improved the quality of my sleep no end. I was calm, serene, and drinking nowhere near as much coffee as before.

You might think switching from PC to DVD hardly dented my dependency on technology, but those nights of sitting down to watch an old episode of

dinnerladies or a classic Davison *Doctor Who* was a very different proposition to the kind of experience television offers now.

No red button. No voting, texting, ringing in or entering competitions. No constant obsession with trying to get me to communicate. Just a one way conversation without the need for me, the consumer, to relentlessly justify my TV's output.

That's the problem these days – traditional media, in all forms, feels threatened by the metamorphic nature of the internet. It begs for attention, validation. It thinks if it involves us at every stage, hands us power and immerses us completely in the process, we won't switch off. It's democracy gone mad.

In the end, it just makes television more predictable. As with all facets of life, if you have your own way all the time, you soon get bored. By handing the keys of the studios over to us, all the men and women in charge have done is stalled progress. All we seem to want is glorified talent contests, freak shows and to send our pictures of interesting weather formations into fucking *BBC News*.

Two-way conversation was never television's strength. Unlike magazines, the internet very rarely challenges television's core asset: the ability to take us aside for an hour or so a day and show us something new. Television's obsession with fighting its borders against its flexible enemy has resulted in it playing by the internet's rulebook instead of drawing on what made it all-conquering in the first place: it used to surprise us.

Someone should really do us a favour and pull out TV's plug for a while. Give those executives time to think, and let me get back to those DVDs of mine. Right now it would feel like a holiday.



TV OF THE YEAR: THE TOWER (BBC ONE)

ENTERTAINMENT AWARDS, WHETHER THEY'RE THE OSCARS OR ONE OF THE LEGIONS OF pretenders, can be indeterminably length all-night affairs. So as not to offend people, they make mention of every big name title, and every star, and throw in some notable independent productions to try and remain credible in the face of complaints of bribery and corruption. In addition to the designer clothes and goody bags, there's also the huge reward of increased cinema audiences and DVD sales for the winners and runners-up.

To be fair, with the huge amount of new films and TV shows released each year, the idea of being able to select a comprehensive shortlist for even one genre is an almost impossible task, let alone deciding on the one supreme champion. Meanwhile the self-perpetuating top films lists on websites like the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com), consist of mainly safe bets, with just one release of 2007 even making the top 15 of films since 2000. And the Coen brothers are always a safe bet.

With countless ways to get an idea of a film to watch (recommendations, reviews, directors' name), DM's TV & Film Editor simply picked the one TV show he's raved about to friends and family all year. No stars, not even a DVD release in sight, but if you need help locating it, ask Keith Andrew himself on the DM forums (www.disposablemedia.co.uk/forums)

WORDS: KEITH ANDREW **DESIGN:** RACHEL WILD

Airing late on Monday evenings, in a slot which remained largely without publicity, *The Tower* took years in the making. Over just eight weeks, it promised to look at "The transformation of Lewisham council tower blocks into chic apartments", but this was no *Property Ladder* or *Grand Design*. In truth, this was something more akin to BBC One's early forays into docu-soaps in the early-to-mid 1990s. *The Tower* was a look at London's changing climate; both for better, and for worse.

More specifically, *The Tower* tracked the social implications of turfing out the inhabitants of the former council flats, and selling them off to a private developer to turn into high class and comparatively expensive apartments for London's glitterati. But the series wasn't limited by the actual tower's somewhat rectangular geography, or even the Pepys Estate in which it resides: *The Tower* was the BBC's attempt to take a snapshot of life in the nation's capital in the noughties – perhaps its first since the excellent *Paddington Green* in 1998.



NO LONGER WERE THE TOWER'S COUNCIL TENANTS ABLE TO GAZE ACROSS THE RIVER IN EITHER ANGER OR WONDER AT LONDON'S MONEY SHOT – NOW, INSTEAD, THE REST OF THE ESTATE COULD LOOK UP AT THE FEARFUL FACES OF THE BLOCK'S NEW INHABITANTS, HASTILY CLOSING THEIR BLINDS.



The Tower's London is one of uncomfortable change. It's in our very nature to celebrate London's renaissance – the transformation from dirty recession-riddled capital of the early 1990s to the financial and fashionable architectural star of films like *Notting Hill*, *Closer* and many more, is something a lot of Britons are proud of. But with success often comes neglect, and The Tower wasn't scared of putting the tainted side of London life on the screen for all to see. The redevelopment of some of London's poorer areas – something which is being ramped up in the run-up to the Olympic Games – is often more about short-term profit than it is any kind of positive social legacy.

And so, while the majority of the Pepys Estate remains in financial squalor, The Tower tracked the lives of those affected by the tower – sat by the banks of the river Thames opposite London's Canary Wharf of all places – and revealed that what, on the surface, looks like urban regeneration, more closely resembles slum clearance. Only problem is, if you clear the 'slums', where do the people go?

People was The Tower's ultimate focus: squatters flooding the flat of mother-of-seven Edith, homeless Lol's daily life (and near death) with heroin, the eviction of the tower's last council tenant – a performing clown, pub landlord Doug's desires on attracting a more classy clientele to his empty boozery, retired gangster Harry out and about on his 'beat' – all contrasted with the lives of those moving in to the newly branded 'Z Apartments'. It would be easy to offset such hardship with the riches of youth and a healthy bank balance, but the

makers of The Tower delved deeper than that, and uncovered an almost equal amount of despair and depression in the lives of those moving into Z – albeit in somewhat less obvious senses.

Arranged marriages, tempered family relations and couples whose relationships seem to thrive on loneliness rather than love, The Tower's new tenants are seemingly intent on locking the world beneath them out for fear of what it might do, yet arguably their own lives are just as sour – if not even more so.

Those behind The Tower were no doubt keen to avoid projecting their own views and opinions on the final product, with the series' voice-over never straying from simple (and thankfully brief) descriptions. The pictures did the talking, with the eight programmes beautifully summarising the Pepy's transition. No longer were the tower's council tenants able to gaze across the river in either anger or wonder at London's money shot – now, instead, the rest of the estate could look up at the fearful faces of the block's new inhabitants, hastily closing their blinds.

What did The Tower say of London? It added a touch of humanity to a city dominated by landmarks, national history and the smell of money. It suggested that we no longer want to deal with our problems, we just want to move them on.

It took less than four years from the initial sale of the tower for 'Z' to make its initial presence amongst the city's people known. Perhaps the BBC will treat us to a look at its more longterm legacy in years to come.

BY YOUR COMMAND

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA DRAGS TV SCIENCE FICTION KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE 21ST CENTURY.

WORDS: ROB FAHEY

DESIGN: RACHEL WILD

For science fiction fans, the last few years have simultaneously been the best of times - and the worst of times.

The long-suffering genre, looked down upon for decades by everyone from literary types to TV programming commissioners, has finally achieved something almost approximating acceptance. It's a trend visible from the resurgence of Doctor Who or the success of sci-fi / cyberpunk crossovers by the bucketload at your local multiplex, right through to the Nobel Prize for Literature being awarded to the wonderful, venerable author Doris Lessing.

So that's good, right? Well, yes - but along the way to widespread acceptance, science fiction has had to make some sacrifices, diluting and dumbing down to reach people for whom spaceships and aliens cause an immediate recoil of knee-jerk intellectual snobbery.

In the literary arena, things aren't so bad; after all, populist authors like Dan Brown or Michael Crichton can write their science fiction "lite" (for, in all honesty, it's hard to classify stuff like Brown's Angels and Demons or Crichton's NEXT as anything else) without necessarily pushing heavy space opera tomes by the likes of Alastair Reynolds or Peter F Hamilton off the shelves.

In television, though, the "shelf space" is much more limited. In this arena, sadly, the rise of some great shows that borrow heavily from science fiction and cyberpunk has been matched by a decline in the kind of series that appeal to dreamers who look up at the stars and think, "what if?" - the audience for whom sci-fi has always been both a lifeline and an inspiration.

Star Trek, the daddy of the space opera, is tottering about on its last legs - some solid storytelling in the latter seasons of Enterprise being totally unable to win over an audience who hated the start of the series, and were in a bad mood after almost ten years of the god-awful Voyager anyway.

Gloriously Shakespearean, Babylon 5, after a disappointing fifth season, failed to spawn any credible spin-offs - with more recent efforts at resurrecting the universe being nothing short of embarrassing, the televisual equivalent of series creator J Michael Straczynski turning up at a family wedding, getting roaringly drunk and puking down the bride's front.



What's left, then, for those who dream of the stars? With Babylon 5 twitching like the unwelcome zombie corpse of a once beloved relative, and the networks seemingly willing to let Gene Roddenberry's grave remain undisturbed at last in the wake of failures like Enterprise and Andromeda, the answer is "not much". There's Stargate SG-1, largely propelled forward through strong, charismatic casting more than anything else, and its spin-off, Atlantis, which is even sillier and vastly less enjoyable.

But then, gloriously, there's *Battlestar Galactica*. By all rights, it should be rubbish - a kitsch late-seventies space combat series that rode on the wave of *Star Wars*' success, focused heavily on the tight trousers of its heart-throb stars, Dirk Benedict and Richard Hatch, and was finally resurrected by Sky One and the Sci-Fi Channel only after a decade of failed attempts to bring it back to the screen.

It should be terrible. It should be camp almost to the point of being cringeworthy, a candyfloss series that lacks all substance and makes you feel vaguely nauseous. It definitely shouldn't be a series that was nominated for four Emmy awards last year, picked up a Peabody award for creative excellence, and was described by *Time Magazine* as the best thing on television.

So how did it all go so right?

Taking that question at face value, the answer is relatively simple; *Battlestar Galactica* is the first space series to seriously take on board the lessons American television has learned since the advent of fast, tense shows like *24* and *The West Wing*, which reference the real world and draw people in with the dramatisation of themes that dominate current affairs.

Where previous space drama series - including the original *BSG* in 1978 - have largely been black and white, upbeat and patriotic tales, with a fixed cast of heroes and somewhat two dimensional villains, the new *Battlestar Galactica* is as complex a piece of storytelling as you could ever hope for from a TV drama. Eschewing the "cowboys and indians in space" mentality of previous series, it uses the premise of a desperate human fleet fleeing from an attack that destroyed their home planets to set up stories that address issues most shows are terrified to touch.



Within a few episodes, the Cylons - the robotic race created by humans, which rebelled and evolved into human-like form - have been established as characters with complex motivations, not just an evil force hell-bent on destruction. Meanwhile, the human fleet is torn between military authoritarianism and the desire to retain some aspect of civilian government.

Over the next three seasons, *Galactica* and its crew confront issues that will be painfully familiar to anyone who follows current affairs. Religious fundamentalism, suicide bombing, the moral case for abortion, the erosion of civil liberties - it's all in there, even down to a gut-wrenching storyline about the rape and torture of prisoners of war, which cuts incredibly close to the bone in the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandals.

Along the way, the show manages to retain its realism - from the gritty, increasingly battle-scarred *Battlestar* itself, through to the startlingly fine performances from some equally gritty and battle-scarred character actors. Veteran actor Edward James Olmos, as the *Galactica*'s commander William Adama, is a superb lead for the cast - but James Callis, as the traitorous and increasingly tormented Gaius Baltar, chews up the scenery with every appearance, while Michael Hogan's alcoholic and self-destructive Colonel Saul Tigh is an uncomfortable delight to watch.

More than anything else, though, *Galactica* works because of its script writing - unflinching, uncompromising, and unafraid to tackle dark subjects in ways which audiences, especially in America, can find difficult. One sequence of episodes, in which the humans find themselves being "occupied" by the Cylons and forced to fight back using guerilla tactics and suicide bombings, was breathtaking in its daring - coming, as it did,

at the point when the insurgency in Iraq was making headlines on a daily basis.

Much of this daring can be attributed to the show's creator, Ronald D Moore, a long-haired Californian who is a veteran of writing for Star Trek - having scripted many well-liked episodes for both The Next Generation and Deep Space Nine. With Galactica, Moore and his team have tapped into a strength of science fiction and fantasy which authors in the field have been using for years - the amazing capability of the genre to tell important stories about current events, without addressing them so directly as to turn the audience off.

The down side of the show, however, exhibited itself clearly in the third season - the down side in question being that it is produced by the Sci-Fi Channel, a US channel which has repeatedly demonstrated an astonishing ability to destroy its best series by interfering with their production. In series three, Moore came under heavy pressure to produce more stand-alone episodes, a major departure from the previous seasons, which had mostly developed ongoing storylines rather than worrying about stand-alones.

The results were obvious, with a large number of slow and disappointing episodes which earned the ire of fans for being "soap opera in space" type scripts. Moore, however, is a rare series director in that he interacts very directly with fans online and elsewhere - and has vowed not to repeat the season's mistakes as the show gears up for its finale, a 22-episode fourth season which will wrap up the entire story arc.

The first two episodes of that fourth season are due to appear in the coming weeks, as a feature-length release which will go back in

time to retell the story of the Battlestar Pegasus, a colonial ship encountered in season two, commanded by the icy and ruthless Admiral Helena Cain. Subsequently, the season will kick off in full swing in February 2008, with the first ten episodes running from then; the latter ten episodes are rumoured to be airing from February 2009 onwards.

With shows like Star Trek and Stargate routinely running to over seven seasons, one might question why something as highly acclaimed as Battlestar Galactica is ending after only four seasons - but according to Moore, it's a decision that was taken out of a desire to end the story properly, rather than cobbling together an ending when the ratings fall low enough for the network to cancel the show.

"This show was always meant to have a beginning, a middle and, finally, an end," Moore and his fellow executive producer, David Eick, said earlier this year. "Over the course of the last year, the story and the characters have been moving strongly towards that end, and we've decided to listen to those internal voices and conclude the show on our own terms."

Therein, perhaps, lies the real joy of Battlestar Galactica. It's a show that tells its stories on its own terms, addresses delicate real-world issues on its own terms, and will end on its own terms - taking no prisoners, stopping to consider no fragile sensibilities or easily offended patriots, and spinning a superb yarn in the process. The desperate flight of Galactica and her fleet may be more about our own world than about science fiction, in the final analysis - but in providing a window on the harsh realities of war, and simultaneously an outlet for starry-eyed dreamers, it's a show whose adulation, and success, is richly deserved.



**IT'S A SHOW THAT TELLS ITS STORIES ON ITS OWN TERMS,
ADDRESSES DELICATE REAL-WORLD ISSUES ON ITS OWN TERMS,
AND WILL END ON ITS OWN TERMS.**

california mating

WORDS: CHRIS SCHILLING
DESIGN: ANDREW CAMPBELL

IT WAS A HIT IN THE US, AND IT'S CURRENTLY PROVING A CULT SUCCESS ON FIVE OVER HERE. DISPOSABLE MEDIA TAKES A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE, AND DREAMS OF CALIFORNICATION.

Hank Moody is a dick. In more ways than one. The opening episode of *Californication* sees David Duchovny's slovenly writer bedding several beautiful LA women, despite looking like he's just woken up. He's a man who thinks with his penis, and it's something that gets him into all kinds of trouble. And yet, somehow, you can't hate him for it.

The main reason for that is that Hank is a lost soul in the City of Angels, frequently craving his soul-mate and ex-girlfriend Karen (Natascha McElhone). The two were together for several years until their recent break-up, though not before spawning a Wednesday Addams-alike daughter Becca who could only be the daughter of two tanned, statuesque stunners in TV land, but it's a quibble most viewers will happily overlook.

This is mainly down to the familial bonding scenes, which feel incredibly real and unforced. Hank and Karen both clearly dote on their daughter, and Duchovny and McElhone share an unfakeable chemistry that can't fail to make you smile when you see them together. They really do look like a couple that still have feelings for each other, gently brushing hands as they chat, with McElhone chuckling naturally at Hank's

Karen. Her fling with Hank - who at the time is unaware of her age - is perhaps the closest the season comes to a story arc, with her manipulative wiles constantly requiring Hank to bail her out of trouble, as he fears she'll reveal all about their tryst, and blow his (admittedly slim) chances of wooing Karen all over again.

The season meanders along at its own pace - rather appropriately really, considering

“Duchovny and McElhone share an unfakeable chemistry that can't fail to make you smile when you see them together”

one-liners and Duchovny gazing at her with adoring eyes. It's telling that Madeleine Martin's Becca is your typical sullen late-pre-teen when they're apart, but visibly warms up when all three share the screen. Her delivery might be a little flat in places, but she's a vital part of the family dynamic. This helps give the show its heart when it's veering towards its bawdy sex comedy leanings, and it's key to *Californication's* appeal. Without this grounding, even Duchovny's implacable charm would struggle to make Moody sympathetic.

It's not just this trio that makes the show such a joy - the supporting cast are all uniformly excellent. Evan Handler in particular as Moody's agent Charlie Runkle shares an easygoing rapport with the star of the show, and their friendship again seems relaxed and natural. Equally successful is Madeline Zima as Mia, sixteen-year-old daughter of the rich-but-bland Bill, who is currently romancing

Hank's hazy, alcohol-and-sex-fuelled existence. After the early nudity-filled episodes, the bedroom action is kept to a relative minimum - perhaps partly to focus on Hank's increasing closeness to Karen - though the dialogue is as fruity as ever. At one point, cajoled by an emasculated Charlie into a threesome, Hank decides to set some ground rules - "I'm not crossing swords with you over her vaganus" he casually intones. Charlie's marital issues form the most intriguing sub-plot, with his S+M affair with his suicide-girl secretary Dani - a memorably sassy Rachel Miner - causing problems with wife Marcy. After a wincingly convincing sexual accident with a nipple clam (you will say 'ow'), it seems that Marcy and Dani prefer each other's company, leaving Charlie to move in with Hank. Meanwhile, Mia plays the role of chief antagonist - frequently imposing upon him at the worst possible times, with Hank forced to 'rescue' her from a drug-fuelled party with her repulsively lecherous teacher.

Just as he's piecing together his fractured relationship with Karen and Becca, he's called away. This eventually culminates in Mia stealing Hank's newly-written novel and attempting to pass it off as her own, to an equally-manipulative Dani, who is simultaneously threatening to spill the beans on Charlie. It's fair to say that the men in this show are generally dominated by the women, neatly sidestepping any issues of sexism or casual misogyny over the sexual content and early nakedness.

If *Californication* has a flaw, it's that it too often tries to have its cake and eat it - allowing Hank to have fantastic sex with a bevy of babes, but following that with plenty of soul-searching and pining over his lost love. It's all done with a lightness of touch that minimises these issues, but the sudden bursts of too obviously sappy music whenever Becca appears jar, as does the bizarrely out-of-place happy ending to the final episode. While Mia is certainly effective as Hank's bete noire, some of her more outlandish behaviour defies belief from someone of her tender years. And the lack of a genuine driving force propelling the series onward might put off viewers more taken with a strong plot, or a more concrete leaning towards comedy or drama.

When it's good though, there are few shows to touch it - as a comedy it's very witty, and on its occasional moves into more serious drama it's terrifically effective. The episode where Hank revisits his relationship with his father through a series of flashbacks following the latter's death is particularly memorable. It somehow manages to avoid feeling rushed, and manages to be emotionally charged while avoiding lapsing into schmaltz where so many other shows would have stuck Coldplay on the soundtrack to jerk a few tears.

As a debut season, *Californication* exhibits a confident swagger more fitting for a show in

the middle of its third or fourth series, and it's little surprise that it's been commissioned for a second series by broadcasters Showtime. It remains to be seen whether it can sustain its laid-back approach for too much longer, but that helps make it such an easy watch that it's hard to criticise its lack of momentum. And if it gets the revelatory Duchovny - in career-best form here - some more work in Hollywood, then it will have already done its job admirably.



K N I G H T A N D A L I V I N G D E A T H

WORDS: JIM MILES
DESIGN: ANDREW CAMPBELL

**DM PAYS ITS RESPECTS
TO INGMAR BERGMAN
WITH A LOOK BACK
AT HIS MOST FAMOUS
FILM, 50 YEARS ON.**



The image of a lone man playing Death at a chess game may be over 500 years old, but it was Ingmar Bergman who first made the scene iconic with his 1957 film *The Seventh Seal*. The simple imagery is elevated in Bergman's vision, for the man is given an identity; he is Antonius Block, a noble knight returning from the Crusades to see his wife after ten years absence. As Antonius travels through a country swept by plague, he encounters characters ranging from the honest to the murderous and witnesses first hand the atrocities that can occur in religious communities under the strain of disease.

The film begins with Antonius standing in sombre-faced contemplation beside a sea shore, approached by the caped and white-faced figure of Death. Antonius knows the end of his life is inevitable and offers a game of chess - a conspicuous ruse to stall for time. When Death accepts, stating "Yes, I'm actually quite a skilful player", even viewers usually averse to foreign, black and white art films cannot help but be locked in Bergman's master grip.

The chess game forms the centre piece of the film - a single match progressing a few moves per act when the two can find a quiet moment to sit and play. Cleverly, the viewer is tricked as to the importance of the game; at first it is implied that it is gravely important, but then reduced to triviality and finally exposed as the knight's most heroic deed. Death's personality is obscured by severity - a humourless character whose shrewdness is best shown in early attempts to trick Antonius into revealing his chess strategies before their next session.

Of those Antonius encounters on his journey, the most crucial is a three person troupe of performers who have a young baby with them. The baby's parents have an innocence that contrasts with the womanising nature of their third member, a risk-taking actor who woos a married woman at one of their performances. As with the chess game, the significance of these roles is toyed with, teasing the viewer as to how their

lives tie in with the events around them, and setting up a satisfying resolution to the film - one which reveals purpose to the knight's actions that even the most attentive viewer may not have picked up on during a first viewing.

Throughout, Bergman projects twentieth-century existentialist philosophies onto his characters, and bends historical realism in favour of presenting issues with which his modern audience can engage. Compared with current cinema, *The Seventh Seal* feels like a stage play; the story naturally divisible into acts, and the sparse action, strong symbolism, and long conversation scenes discarding the spectacle of cinema in favour of the brand of philosophical musings found in Shakespeare. Bergman questions not only the value of life and death - specifically the injustice of loss and the exchange of lives - but, more broadly, discusses the importance of religion to an individual.

While Antonius questions and tests his own faith, surrounded by the religious fanaticism of witch-hunters and self-flagellators, Jöns - his smart-mouthed hard man aide - presents an atheistic contrast to the religious context of the film. He often argues against conventional wisdom or widely held religious beliefs and is a cynic on every subject he discusses. Jöns also provides most of the humour in the film - his dead pan and edgy wit dispensing hard truths to the love-blinded couples that he and Antonius meet on their way.

The Seventh Seal is a thought-provoking film, but not so intellectualised that it cannot be enjoyed as a straightforward and exciting story about one knight's heroic deed. It is a classic of cinema which, once seen, is recalled endlessly in the films it influenced. From marking a way for serious European cinema, to shallow but hilarious parody in modern movies such as *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey*, the legacy of Bergman's most famous work is as substantial as it is ever-growing.

**WHEN DEATH ACCEPTS A GAME
OF CHESS, STATING THAT HE'S
QUITE A SKILLFUL PLAYER,
THE VIEWER CANNOT HELP
BUT BE LOCKED IN BERGMAN'S
MASTER GRIP.**

WON'T SOMEBODY THINK OF THE CHILDREN?

BESIDES DESIGNING OUR COVER FOR THIS ISSUE, MR BIFFO, AKA. PAUL ROSE, GAVE US HIS TAKE ON CHILDREN'S TELEVISION IN THE NOUGHTIES, AND EXPLAINED JUST WHY HE THINKS A COMBINATION OF SARAH JANE SMITH AND JOSEPH STALIN MAY WELL BE THE ANSWER TO ALL OUR CHILDISH WOES.

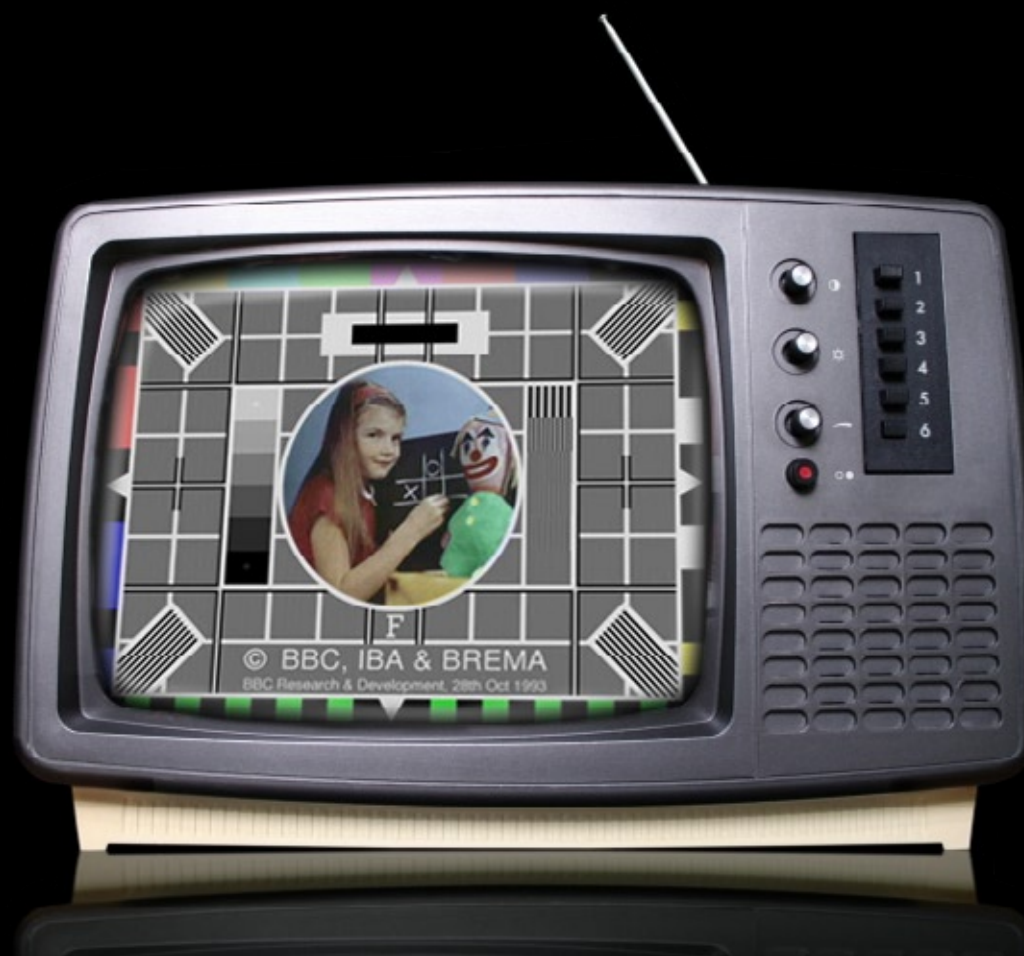
WORDS: KEITH ANDREW
DESIGN: RACHEL WILD

Children's television is in a crisis, with traditional prime-time slots now taken by a glut of cookery shows and loft-clearing auction house action. Even when the likes of CBBC and CITV do make an appearance, the press claims cheaper foreign imports squash any genuine investment in new home-grown series, leaving kids neglected for any entertainment catering to them, and not featuring American or Australian accents.

So is the entertainment of the younger generation in crisis? We spoke to Paul Rose - better known as Mr Biffo and a Teletext legend. The ex-Digitiser man's experience gained writing for the likes of *My Parents Are Aliens*, as well as his work on more adults shows such as *EastEnders* and *Armstrong & Miller*, means he's the most perfectly placed of all of us to either damn the industry with criticism or lick its collective face with unadulterated praise.

Children's television on terrestrial stations seems to be at a crossroads at the moment. On the one hand, the likes of CITV has almost completely retreated to its digital channel and CBBC similarly axed half of its presenters (and studio) this year. Then again, you have evidence of new blood, like *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, which pulled in around 1.5 million viewers an episode. How well do you think the major broadcasters are handling their children's output at the moment?

To be honest, the only major broadcaster that really has any children's output is the BBC. ITV may still have the CITV channel, but it stopped commissioning new shows over a year ago - and there's no sign of that ever changing. Although, it remains to be seen for how long they can continue to recycle the same old repeats. Channel 4 hasn't really had a



“THE CURRENT GENERATION IS GOING TO GROW UP SPEAKING IN TRANS-ATLANTIC ACCENTS, AND THINKING THAT EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN LIFE MUST RESULT IN SOME NEAT, SERMONISING, LIFE-LESSON. WITH HUGGING.”

dedicated kids strand in ages, and what little Channel 5 does has been scaled back, and is being focused on pre-school shows. A couple of the non-terrestrial channels are investing in original programming – *Genie in the House* and *Spy Family* are two examples – but they're the exception rather than the rule. It's a wretched situation, but if I was a commercial broadcaster I'd have probably done the same thing; you can't justify spending millions on shows which are watched by just a fraction of the audience, and don't generate significant advertising revenue. If I could wave a magic wand, I'd limit the number of dedicated children's channels, and impose public service commitments on those that remained. That said, the BBC is continuing to produce decent shows for kids – your *M1-Highs*, *Sarah Janes*, *Ravens* et al, even though the recent license fee settlement will see the corporation's children's department have 10% of its budget slashed. Again, it's sort of difficult to know who to blame, but it is the proliferation of digital channels that's at the heart of it all. Certainly, it's now reaching such a crisis point that the government is going to have to step in, before the current generation grows up speaking in trans-Atlantic accents, and

thinking that everything that happens in life must result in some neat, sermonising, life-lesson. With hugging.

One of the accusations thrown around by the press when a kids show is successful is that it highlights just how poorly treated other series are. Do you think shows for CBBC or CITV are allocated big enough budgets, for instance, or is a series' success or failure ultimately down to the talent working on it?

TV budgets are never high enough, and kids TV is forced to chew on the rawest, most bitter end of that deal. As far as I'm concerned budget isn't necessarily an issue. You don't need a fortune to be creative – you just need passion and imagination. A decent artist will still be able to create something beautiful, even if he only has a pot of mustard and a twig to work with. I think people would be surprised by how low the budget is for a show like *Doctor Who*, but because it is *Doctor Who* the team pull out



THE SARAH JANE ADVENTURES © BBC

entirely generated by foreign imports, and the number of cable and satellite channels showing nothing but foreign imports. I don't think people are sufficiently aware of the problem. If anyone reading this has any fond memories of watching British-made shows growing up, then I implore them to visit www.savekidstv.org.uk and sign the online petition.

all the stops, and go the extra mile. It helps to love the show you're working on. Generally, there does seem to be more passion among people who work in children's telly.

A lot of tabloid attention has been focused on the 'rise of the cartoon' in children's TV output – most specifically, foreign imports. Do you think that's perhaps xenophobia on their part, or are quality dramas and entertainment being squashed out by cartoons?

I'd argue that there hasn't been enough tabloid attention. There is a genuine crisis in the British children's TV industry, and it has been

Xenophobia doesn't come into it: it's about ensuring that the current generation of British kids – regardless of creed or colour – grow up watching shows which say something about their lives, rather than the life of some precocious Disney-brat. Not that all American shows are worthless – indeed, on the whole they're polished, funny, and likeable. But they lack an identity that is uniquely our own. Also, imagine growing up in a world where you're unable to go into school the next day and discuss what you all watched on TV the night before, because everyone has watched different things? I'd rather grow up under Stalin.



M.I. HIGH © BBC

On a slightly cheerier note, what children's TV shows stand out for you at the moment?

Sarah Jane, obviously. And *M.I. High* is a lot of fun. To be honest, I don't get to watch a lot of kid's telly. I'm usually working when it's on. I'm fairly tuned into what is on, and what's being made, though. I do my best to keep up to speed with it. And, of course, that's much easier now there's less of it. Hmm.

You're in the esteemed position of having worked on some of the more recent examples of quality children's TV – specifically in the form of your work on *My Parents Are Aliens*. Do you find that people view your work writing for such shows differently to the other programmes you've written for, or your other writing work?

Oh, absolutely. There's real snobbery where children's telly is involved. Far too many people in 'grown-up' telly look down their noses if you say you've worked your way up through kids

TV. The one exception to that rule does seem to be *My Parents Are Aliens*, which everyone seems to have watched, and loves. The guys who wrote *Peep Show*, and some of the writers of *Green Wing*, all got their break on it – and that totally came across on what was up on screen. I'm biased, I know, but I genuinely think it was one of the top 5 children's shows this country has ever produced. It's going to be interesting to see how the loss of job opportunities in children's TV affects the talent base for grown-up telly. Pretty much every top writer in TV today got their break in kid's TV.

Do you approach writing for children's television in a different way to the other programmes you've worked on?

Not really. Obviously, there are things you can't say on children's shows that you can in post-watershed telly – I remember having to take out a gag in *My Parents Are Aliens*, which involved someone sticking a battery up his bottom – but in terms

of story-telling you can be just as sophisticated, if not more so in some ways, with kid's TV. Frankly, every show has its own format and tone, be it adult or children's, so you always have to adapt to a certain degree. Overall, though – and I know it's a cliché to say it – you never write down to kids. The minute they sense they're being patronised I guarantee they'll be reaching for the Xbox 360 controller.

What shows did you follow when you were growing up?

The Young Ones and *Monty Python*, closely followed by *Doctor Who*, were my favourites, by

“IMAGINE GROWING UP IN A WORLD WHERE YOU'RE UNABLE TO GO INTO SCHOOL THE NEXT DAY AND DISCUSS WHAT YOU ALL WATCHED ON TV THE NIGHT BEFORE, BECAUSE EVERYONE HAS WATCHED DIFFERENT THINGS? I'D RATHER GROW UP UNDER STALIN.”

a long way. Though when I go back to watch those old episodes now they're so painfully slow, and frequently make very little sense. God knows why so many of us remember it so fondly, but maybe we've been spoiled by the new one. I was also a big *Swap Shop* fan, in the days before Noel Edmond's was Public Enemy No.1. I've just read that the BBC is bringing it back, albeit hosted by Basil Brush. Bizarre. *Grange Hill* was a proper, gritty drama when I was a kid, and everyone was sort of required to watch it. It seems to be skewed a bit younger these days. Weird, isn't it? All these shows are around today still. All I need is for someone to bring back *Rentaghost*, and my life will be complete.

Do you think the current crop of kids TV will have much of a legacy? Will the kid's shows going out today inspire the writers of tomorrow?

What's changing is that there's more focus on family shows – *Doctor Who*, *Robin Hood*, *Primeval* et al. Both the BBC and ITV are developing more of this kind of Saturday teatime telly – lordy, even I've got such a show in development with the BBC. *Doctor Who* has been such a hit that there's no way it won't inspire that next generation. I think it's telling,

though, that my daughter wants to make video games when she grows up.

Children's Saturday morning magazine shows – from *Swap Shop* to *Live & Kicking* – now appear to be a thing of the past, with both the BBC and ITV seemingly opting for the usual mix of cookery shows and 'are-there-antiques-in-your-loft?' packages. How much of a loss do you think that is?

I'm not sure, really. Though as I said already the BBC is bringing back *Swap Shop* - although I don't know if it'll be in its traditional Saturday morning slot. My gut feeling is that it is a loss, but that might just be me feeling nostalgic. There's no question that it's just another by-product of kid's telly being diminished overall. And that, obviously, is a bad thing. Besides, aren't kids all killing each other over Xbox Live, or chatting on MSN, on a Saturday morning now? I can't see it coming back in any big way.

A few years ago, family viewing on Saturday evenings suffered a similar crisis. Now families, with *Doctor Who* and alike, are spoilt for choice, with Saturday nights becoming a major ratings battleground again. Do you think there could be a similar renaissance for Saturday mornings in years to come?

I doubt it, sadly. Not unless the government steps in, and orders ITV to start showing new shows for children at that time. There are rumblings that some sort of official legislature is going to happen – the government has already fired a warning shot across the BBC's bows, telling it not to mess too much with its children's output – but whether it comes in time is another matter.

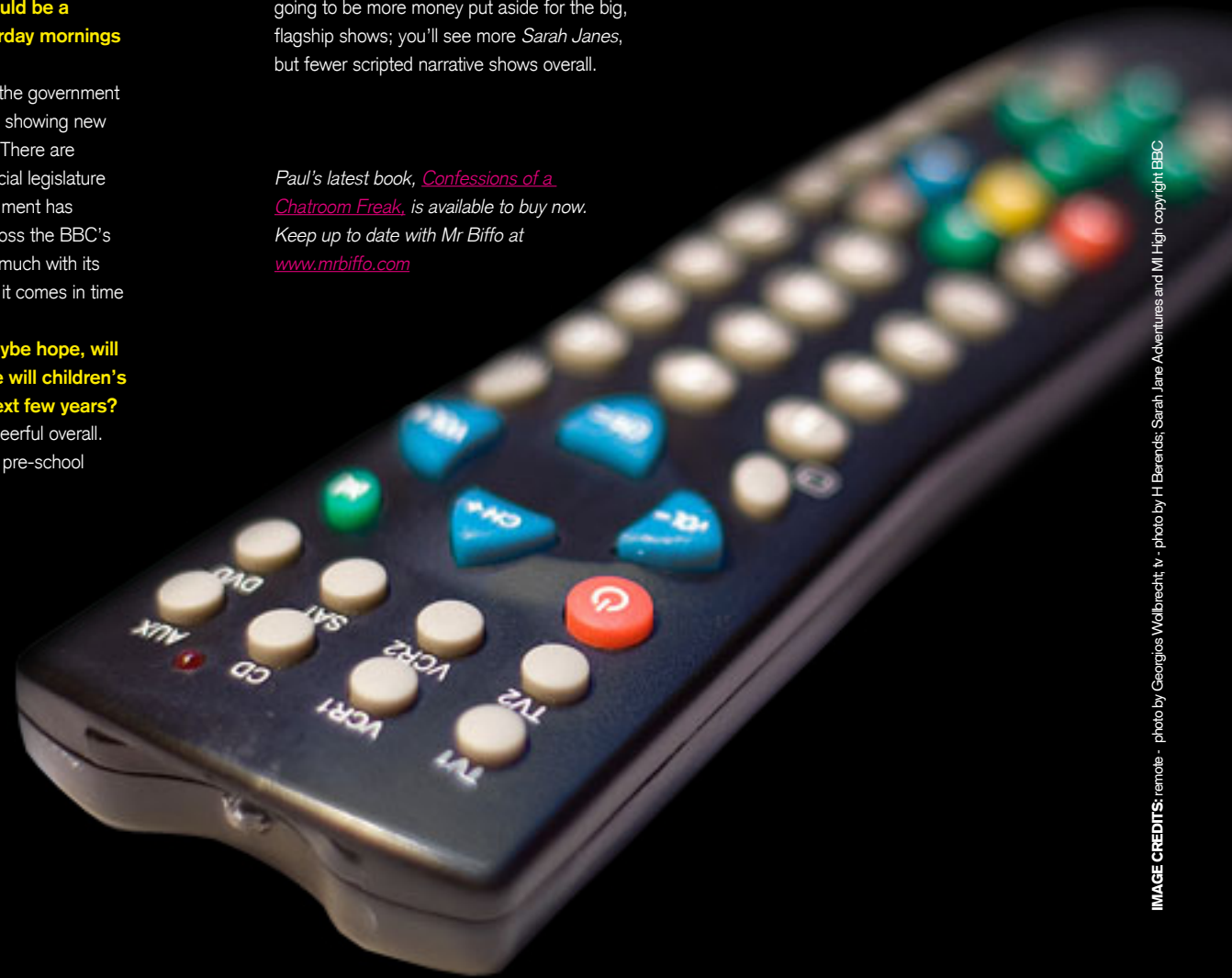
What do you think, or maybe hope, will happen in the future? Where will children's TV broadcasting go in the next few years?

It'll be cheaper and more cheerful overall. The money will be pumped into pre-school

shows, or magazine shows for teens, and more kids' dramas and sitcoms will be co-productions with international broadcaster. But, I think, budgets are going to be more focused. There'll be less money to play with overall, but there's going to be more money put aside for the big, flagship shows; you'll see more *Sarah Janes*, but fewer scripted narrative shows overall.

Paul's latest book, *Confessions of a Chatroom Freak*, is available to buy now. Keep up to date with Mr Biffo at www.mrbiffo.com

“THE GUYS WHO WROTE PEEP SHOW, AND SOME OF THE WRITERS OF GREEN WING, ALL GOT THEIR BREAK ON MY PARENTS ARE ALIENS – AND THAT TOTALLY CAME ACROSS ON WHAT WAS UP ON SCREEN.”





THE DARJEELING LIMITED
(15)

//director:
wes anderson

Wes Anderson has carved out a niche in American cinema for making films about bizarre and extravagant characters - ones who function as humans and dysfunction as families *The Darjeeling Limited* doesn't buck the trend.

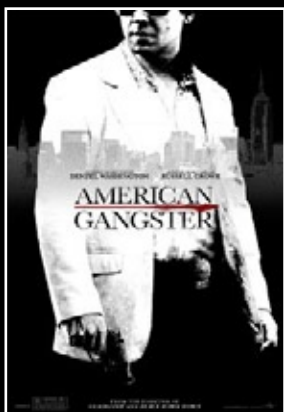
This time three brothers decide to take a train ride through India in order to overcome their grief for their dead father. It treads similar ground to Anderson's previous films, from theme and content, right down to his use of slow-mo set to an indie soundtrack during the film's emotional plateaus.

"THE DARJEELING LIMITED TREADS SIMILAR GROUND TO ANDERSON'S PREVIOUS WORK."



But crucially, Anderson forgoes the magic and whimsy of *The Life Aquatic* and *The Royal Tenenbaums* and adds a little more humanity to proceedings, resulting in a very touching and warm film that sits closer in style to Anderson's masterpiece *Rushmore*. With heartfelt and amusing performances from Owen Wilson, Adrien Brody and Jason Schwartzman as the three brothers, it's fulfilling viewing.

Jezz Bolton



AMERICAN GANGSTER
(18)

//director:
ridley scott

American Gangster documents the true story of a Harlem druglord, Frank Lucas (Denzel Washington) and the one honest cop trying to bring him down, Richie Roberts (Russell Crowe).

With two outstanding central performances, the story is short on action and some moments are strikingly similar to movies of old. There are flourishes of Scott's trademark style, but on the whole it is a fairly measured and slow affair - one that keeps the viewer

"AMERICAN GANGSTER'S TWO CENTRAL PERFORMANCES ARE OUTSTANDING."



engrossed thanks to the massive charisma and the odd outstanding scene.

While Ridley Scott has tackled many genres, *American Gangster* is only his second stab at the crime movie after the whimsical *Matchstick Men*. However, this is a much more serious affair, taking its cue from the best that television and film have to offer, resulting in a highly unoriginal but engrossing thriller.

Jezz Bolton



30 DAYS OF NIGHT
(15)

//director:
david slade

30 *Days of Night* takes place in a town where the sun sets for 30 days, thus allowing vampires to move in and feast on the unwitting inhabitants. What begins with a jumpy, shock-filled first act soon turns into a claustrophobic stand-off, as the humans try and survive the titular time period reminiscent of the classic Romero zombie films.

In an age where horror films amount to no more than a busty blonde getting gruesomely tortured, it is genuinely refreshing to see a good old fashioned monster movie with plenty of gore, scares for the

"IN AN AGE WHERE HORROR FILMS AMOUNT TO NO MORE THAN TORTURE, 30 DAYS OF NIGHT IS GENUINELY REFRESHING."



horror aficionados and a tight, suspenseful plot for everybody else.

It's low on substance, which is a shame as it comes from the talented director behind the superb *Hard Candy*. However, it rises above most modern horror films with its great set-pieces, its extremely taut pace and a surprisingly convincing performance from Josh Hartnett.

Jezz Bolton



BEOWULF
(12A)

//director:
robert zemeckis

Motion capture is a cinematic technique that, so far, doesn't quite work. Director Robert Zemeckis has used the technique before in *The Polar Express* and now, with *Beowulf*, he has created more problems for himself. Some, however, are not always the fault of the technology.

What strikes the viewer first is that the characters fail to look either 100% lifelike or 'cartoony'. Instead, they seem to be uncanny, even creepy, representations of established stars. However, what is more striking is the fact that every

"RAY WINSTONE'S COCKNEY BEOWULF CREATES MANY, MANY UNINTENTIONAL LAUGHS."



character comes from somewhere other than ancient Denmark, where the story is set, with Ray Winstone's cockney *Beowulf* creating many, many unintentional laughs.

On top of this, it is needlessly graphic and plods along at a snail's pace with unnecessary devices. It's an incredibly high-tech retelling of an ancient story, but *Beowulf's* many flaws should banish it from history altogether.

Jezz Bolton



DOCTOR WHO:
SERIES 3 BOXSET
(PG)

bbc

Showrunner Russell T. Davies must feel the pressure around this time every year; the release of each *Doctor Who* boxset only serving to remind him of the quality to be attained in the next series.

The Doctor's third run since his reappearance in 2005 is, without doubt, his most consistent. The sheer variety of episodes on offer here - from Martha Jones' spectacular first appearance, to 'blink and you die' killer statues - is testament to a series gaining confidence.

Indeed, it is probably Steven Moffat's aforementioned 'Blink' and Paul Cornell's adaptation of his own 'Human Nature' novel that take the show to new highs. Both are examples of quality storytelling and go beyond the often clichéd borders of standard science-fiction.

Dodgy closing opus aside, *Doctor Who's* third series is nothing less than a fine documentation of quality British television.

Keith Andrew



"DOCTOR WHO: SERIES 3 GOES BEYOND THE OFTEN CLICHÉD BORDERS OF SCIENCE-FICTION."



MOST HAUNTED:
SERIES 8 BOXSET
(15)

living/virgin media

It's perhaps a little spurious to review a *Most Haunted* package, it's audience divided as to its authenticity. The cynics claim the intellectual high-ground, pointing out that, in eight series, no hard evidence of spiritual activity has ever been found.

On the face of it, it's hard to argue. Series 8 is still just a collection of screams, blurred night vision cameras and a dubious take on history. But my, it makes good television. With the controversial Derek Acorah now thankfully a thing of the past, this package gains -

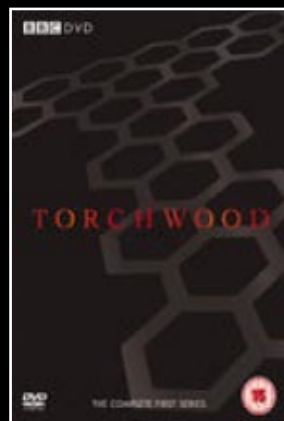
dare it be said - a touch of credibility with resident medium David Wells.

There's still nothing concrete here, but with 15 episodes, each lasting an hour and coming with an extra 25 minutes from behind the scenes., this is a consummate boxset that entertains (in some respect) from beginning to end. Any ghosts are immaterial.

Keith Andrew



"WITH DEREK ACORAH NOW THANKFULLY A THING OF THE PAST, THIS PACKAGE GAINS A TOUCH OF CREDIBILITY."



TORCHWOOD:
SERIES 1 BOXSET
(15)

bbc

Unlike *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood's* festive boxset treads on much less stable ground. Never certain of just who is watching from beginning to end, BBC Wales' spin-off is far from disastrous, but spends the first half of its debut run seemingly obsessed with how it should be telling its stories, rather than the stories themselves.

'Cyberwoman' is *Torchwood's* low point, playing out like the result of the series being let off the leash when what it really needs is some boundaries to bed it down.

Nonetheless, things improve thereafter, with the writers and directors finally focusing on the narrative over the show's sense of style: season closers 'Captain Jack Harkness' and 'End of Days' are up there with *Who's* best.

All bodes well for its second splash early next year, this time on BBC Two, but for £54.99, *Torchwood's* first series is attractive only to the already dedicated.

Keith Andrew



"TORCHWOOD SPENDS THE FIRST HALF OF ITS DEBUT RUN SEEMINGLY OBSESSED WITH HOW IT SHOULD BE TELLING ITS STORIES."



BEE MOVIE
(U)

//director:
simon j smith

Jerry Seinfeld decided to follow up his comedy master series *Seinfeld* by writing and starring in a CG cartoon about a bee who decides to sue humans for stealing honey. It's a dramatic, bold move but he doesn't quite make it.

It treads familiar ground everywhere, especially recalling those other two CG bug movies (*Antz* and *A Bugs Life*) but the idea of animals suing humans is an original idea. There are a fair few gags to be had, but most fail to appeal to children or adults. In fact, it's hard to say whether any of this

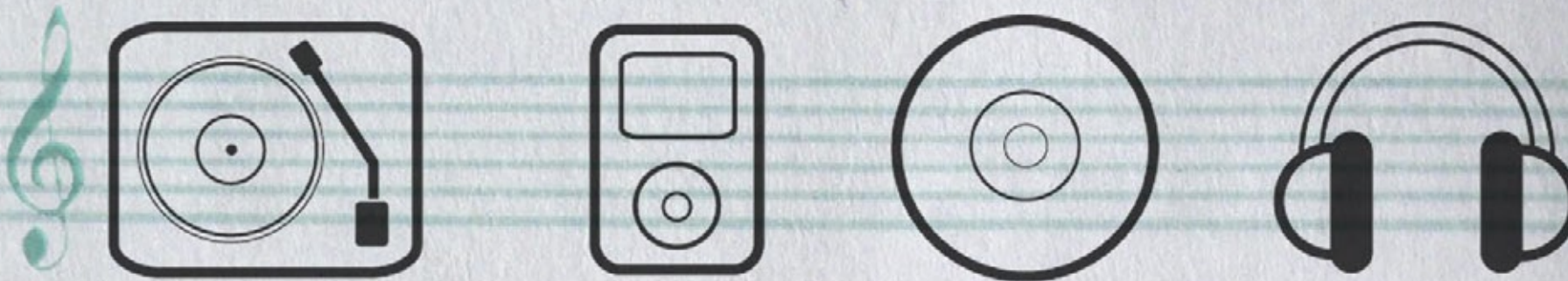
will appeal to children at all, as its plot centralises around a courtroom trial.

Whilst there is fun to be had, it will eventually alienate audiences of all ages. Jerry Seinfeld's co-creator of his eponymous hit sitcom, Larry David, went on to create *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Something a little more along those lines next, please, Mr Seinfeld.

Jezz Bolton



"IT'S HARD TO SAY WHETHER ANY OF THIS WILL APPEAL TO CHILDREN AT ALL; ITS PLOT CENTRALISES AROUND A COURTROOM."



It's emotional, writing this introduction to Issue 10's music section. It opens with our interview with the Gramantics, a new band unlike most you'll hear at the moment, and it follows on with the Stone Gods – returning like a phoenix from the flames of The Darkness.

Then, finally, it casts a tear-filled eye over the best of 2007, including our album of the year, and some reviews to kick start 2008.

But most of the emotion stems from the fact that our beloved Music Editor, Ian Morengo-Melgar, is currently backpacking his way around the world.

So if you see a bemused man listening to slightly depressed music, and looking like he forgot to turn the oven off, say "hi" from us...and, while you're at it, check whether he's getting on with those features he's already got planned for when he hits Australia, will you?

These issues don't write themselves, you know...

Dan Thornton
Editor

dan.thornton@disposablemedia.co.uk

currently listening to ...

grammatics / stone gods / lcd soundsystem / justice / radiohead / kylie minogue / goldfrapp



WITH THE GRAMMATICS

WORDS: IAN MORENO-MELGAR
DESIGN: ANDREW REVELL

GRAMMATICS HAVE RECENTLY
FEATURED IN NME AS "A BAND TO
WATCH" AND FOR ONCE THEY'RE
SPOT ON **DISPOSABLE MEDIA**
CAUGHT UP WITH THE BAND TO FIND
OUT MORE...

It's often remarked that England has an innate ability to produce timeless guitar-pop that stands far apart from its peers, with a cultural identity and signature sound like no other. From The Kinks to The Arctic Monkeys, The Jam to Blur, the history of English guitar-pop is a long and varied one, with a common thread of vivid personality and a knowing hint towards its influences.

In this regard, Leeds-based four-piece Grammatics are no different, but closer inspection sets them apart from those who follow the zeitgeist, and those who make it their own. Memorable melodies, English sensibilities full of imperial majesty, Grammatics cut a swathe through the recent trend for lad rock, and stand worlds away from drunken sing-along tunes and 'lairy' proclamations of grandeur.

With their quirky time changes, their off-kilter melodies and their disciplined abstinence for easily-grouped power chords to achieve their musical aims, Grammatics offer a much more subtle affair. With two of their tracks appearing on compilation CDs by the influential label Dance to the Radio, the band are currently on an ever expanding tour and as well as their NME appearance.

Disposable Media asked singer Owen Brinley and drummer Dominic Ord just how they work, how their pop sensibilities came to the fore, and about their plans for an album full of "happy accidents and spontaneity".

The band name itself strikes as being quintessentially English. The sort of name that Stephen Fry would like, something that alludes to its influences as well as the band and their sound, but is it true that the name came from a club night some of the band ran in York?

"Yes", says drummer Dom, but pointing out that "Grammatics isn't the same thing as

Grammar so we didn't call it the same thing." So what's with the link? "There's an extension of the ideals we had when running the club night and Grammar is where we spawned the idea for the band, which is why I like the connection." The band seems to agree that the name has an English feel: "The word has literary connotations and as you say, feels very English and we're a typically English band, in the classic sense. Articulate, eccentric, diverse with quite a dark sense of humour." Such words embody the band's sound quite well. But was the sound planned?

Singer Owen gives an emphatic response; "Grammatics' sound was definitely planned. Colour Of Fire's (Owen's previous band) sound and whole ethic was so minimal and no frills. The band was just about rocking out as hard as we could. I was very much in development as a singer and songwriter at that time. Grammatics falls on the other end of the spectrum in that everything is so considered, almost self-consciously so. As Dom and I were only in the stages of talking about forming a band I knew that I wanted to be in the middle of a beautiful but cacophonous sound, made with as many complimenting and clashing instruments as possible."

How would Owen describe the sound then? Guitar pop? English Emo? Playfully whimsical rock? "It's a sound very much in awe of experimental music and has a kitchen-sink philosophy in that we'll chuck whatever we can into the mix. However, it's also a deeply melodious sound that's equally in love with pop. It's pop disobeying its own rules, pop disobeying itself... Grammatics are post-pop."

'Post-pop' as an idea seems especially well constructed and considered. Grammatics' own breed of twisted pop is clever, knowing and

executed with a flair that belies their relatively new status as a band. This is pop music as it's rarely conceived or produced, pop music that knows it's heritage and is trying to shape its future by disobeying itself almost. It's complex, but simple. But do the band's songs arrive organically or via a construction or ideas and hopes? "The sound is very constructed and precise," reflects Dom, "we spend a huge amount of time thinking about the 'building' of a song and the end product but at the same time there is absolutely nothing that is contrived about what we do. We're not making music to fit in with anyone's ideas of what is 'cool' or 'now'. I can't think of anything worse to be honest. We are simply making music that means something to us."

Given the current trend for flash in the pop genres, disposable acts who stick around for one album and with labels now looking to invest in 'safe' acts, it's a refreshing change to see a band who don't consciously subvert the mainstream but do so for their own benefit rather than anyone else's. It's very easy for new bands to fall into the needs of labels or their own artistic 'need' or 'vision', especially at a time when the music-buying public seem painfully fickle. Fortunately, great songs always shine through and it's this basis that Grammatics rely on—cleverly constructed, intelligent 'post-pop'.

That exhaustive, considered construction is not the most straightforward process, Owen confesses: "We have many different ways of writing. I'll produce either an embryonic or half-way-there piece of music that is moulded over months by the band into a song. It can be a chord progression or sample with a melody, just a riff, or a bedroom demo." So is the entire band involved? "Well, everyone goes away and stresses over their parts and I fuss over lyrics.

We'll get 85-90% there as a band before hitting the studio. The icing on the cake comes spontaneously in the studio when we're out of a noisy practice room environment and can really tailor and place parts in the mix."

Hearing Owen detail the arduous writing process, one which is valued in its organic properties and complex structure, sounds like a perplexing situation when taking these ideas to the stage. Do the band feel it's best to replicate this as much as possible for a live audience, or is recreation an inevitability? "I think we're still finding our feet live. I know we'll become a great live band and are hopefully well on the way but there is a lot to improve on. I've never liked bands that sound exactly the same live as on record. Where is the fun in that? We can spend so much more time and play so many more instruments on record so our live sound is slightly more stripped down but I think that rawness transfers well in front of an audience."

Is the next step after more gigs the LP, or is that in progress already? "We've always planned to make it a concise but semi-conceptual affair. Dom and I are really in love with the mid to late nineties era of British indie rock when albums had a sense of mystique... secret tracks and brief musical interludes that join songs. I'll be disappointed if the end result isn't something I could of dreamt it being... happy accidents and spontaneity are the most exiting aspects of recording. We'll definitely be going to town on the album. "

It's that sort of striking ambition that marks Grammatics out from the white noise of other new bands. Not reliant on gimmick, uninspired outfits or 'listen to us' rants in the press, but rather a carefully considered, ambition-fuelled desire to produce timeless and peerless pop.



DOM ORD: "WE'RE A TYPICALLY ENGLISH BAND, IN THE CLASSIC SENSE. ARTICULATE, ECCENTRIC, DIVERSE WITH QUITE A DARK SENSE OF HUMOUR."



OWEN BRINDLEY: "IT'S POP DISOBEYING ITS OWN RULES, POP DISOBEYING ITSELF... GRAMMATICS ARE POST-POP."

The Darkness spent a brief but turbulent few years in the limelight; their tongue-in-cheek lyrics and flamboyant costumes (who can forget the bare-chested cat suits?) - backed up with a fine slice of classic hard-rock - quickly caught the attention of the music press, and then the public at large.

Their debut album went five-times platinum in the UK, showing plenty of fans capable of ignoring the 'joke band' tag, but things faltered as their second album failed to match their initial success. Front man Justin Hawkins eventually decided he couldn't continue with the rock'n'roll lifestyle, quitting in October 2006.

But just 30 minutes after The Darkness ended, Hawkins' guitarist brother Dan was on the phone to

STONE GODS

WORDS: TIM CHEESMAN

DESIGN: TIM CHEESMAN/KEITH ANDREW

get bassist Richie Edwards and drummer Ed Graham back on board, with Richie promoted to vocal and guitar duties. Toby MacFarlane was then tempted from Graham Coxon's touring band to play bass.

Fifteen months later, and the Stone Gods have arrived. Their debut EP, *Burn the Witch*, isn't released until February 25th, but they've just completed their first headlining UK tour, and took some time out before the final show to talk exclusively to Disposable Media

The tour has been a strange experience, as most of the audience have heard none of the new material before turning up to the shows. But to the band's relief, the crowds have liked what they've heard.

"It's been a storming success" says Dan Hawkins. "I've been really surprised by the audiences; the fact they turned up! I can't believe it's over!"

**THE MUSICAL FORCE BEHIND
THE DARKNESS ARE BACK AND TALKING
EXCLUSIVELY WITH DM ABOUT
THEIR NEW BAND**

No such surprises tonight though. Norwich is the closest the band get a hometown show, so it seems they've brought most of the crowd along themselves.

"My mum's got a 'Plus 16', which is the biggest guest list I've ever seen!" says Dan. "I've never seen that before! I've seen plus 8, plus 10 sometimes, but not plus 16! I've got all my Norwich mates here too. It's going to be a real party atmosphere tonight I think"

"I've got all my brothers, and my dad, and a few cousins coming as well" adds drummer Ed Graham. "I think some people from (local BBC TV News show) *Look East* are going to be here, and the *Lowestoft Journal*!"

"Wheeling out the big guns tonight! Fucking hell!" laughs Richie.

Playing venues this size, with a capacity of a few hundred, is about as far as you can get from the huge arenas that held the final Darkness shows, but Dan doesn't miss those huge metal sheds at all.

"It's nice to have a connection with an audience" he says. "If you're watching a show from the back of an arena it's not as enjoyable as when you can almost reach out and touch them. It works the same way with the band. If you're a bit blind like I am, and you're playing these big arenas, then you can't really see them. You can't really feel the audience. That's going to be my favourite bit of it, actually riding the audience. Like waves."

"Not literally though" says Richie, "Cos that's very dangerous. Safety first!"

music/stone gods

That's not to say the Stone Gods are adverse to playing huge venues again, of course, but mainstream success is not something they're specifically aiming for again.

"I'm not particularly bothered about obtaining a pop-crossover audience really" says Dan. "We're not snobs or anything, but we're not after about having a pop audience that will desert you. We're more interested in getting just a really big rock fan base, people who'll



stick with you."

"That's the problem when you start appealing to the Saturday Morning Kids TV brigade" says Richie. "All they're waiting for is the next thing to come along, and then they'll leave you like rats from a sinking ship. One thing you can say about the rock audience is that

they're very, very loyal, and tend to stick with you, whereas six year olds don't really know what they want!"

"Except for sweets" adds Toby. "And a good smack occasionally."

"There's nothing wrong with smack and kids!" agrees Dan.

"No, not good smack! A good smack!" laughs Richie.

"All the kids are after these days is some good smack" Toby says sagely.

Musically, the Stone Gods are taking a different direction to The Darkness, but there hasn't been a deliberate effort to avoid emulating their previous band.

"It's certainly a more edgy sound, and a bit heavier in parts" says Richie. "But there was no agenda when we sat down to write the songs. We just threw the shit at the wall and saw what stuck, there was no-one going 'Right, we cannot sound like the Darkness'. We just did it and this is what happened."

Ed adds "The way Richie sings and the way Richie plays guitar is very different from Justin, so it was

always going to sound different really."

"Plus actually in weight" says Dan, "if you were to measure the weight of this band, you'd find it's a bit heavier. As are we ourselves."

"But it is January," Richie says "so Christmas has to be taken into account.

Come and see us in August and we'll be like whippets!"

"Yeah, not after an eating competition" says Dan.

"Which is what Christmas was for me. And I won, with the prize being a box of Ferrero Rocher. One of those pyramid shaped ones, with the white chocolate, and

the dark chocolate..."

"Posh c**t!" says Richie. "I'd better say it like that, in case someone takes offence!"

"He got a bollocking for saying c**t!" laughs Toby (Stars added for our family audience - Ed).

After a tirade of swearwords, ("Thirty-three years old and I still laugh when I say tits" says Richie, shaking his head. "Sorry about that, we digress..."), Dan explains how the recording process is a real group effort.

"It's kind of a four way thing really" he says. "If anyone has an idea it gets worked on. It's very much a collaboration."

"Dan had a stock of pieces of music he'd written" says Ed, "and so did Richie I think."

"I had a few" Richie agrees, whilst Dan adds "and I came up with a few lyrics here and there, and then Toby came in and had a complete thing finished, more or less. Well, it wasn't finished."

"It was finished after I'd done it" says Toby.

When it came to compiling the new line-up, Dan new straight away that he wanted Richie as the front man, and getting Toby on board to play bass proved just as easy a task.

"Toby was definitely first choice" explains Richie.

"He's known Dan and Ed for years, and he was the person that they absolutely wanted from Day One."

Ed adds "You instantly just think of people you know, that you're friends with, and play the bass, and you think 'I could ask him, or I could ask him'..."

"But I was the only one." Toby deadpans. "They thought, 'Who do we know who plays bass? Who's that wanker...?'"

"ALL THE KIDS ARE AFTER THESE DAYS IS SOME GOOD SMACK!"



"...That guy in the hat, who kept getting drunk in Camden?" laughs Dan. "No, Toby was our first choice. We weren't entirely sure he'd say yes, you know. We were quite chuffed actually."

Ed continues "He was playing a bit of a different style of music at the time, and we weren't entirely sure he'd be up for what we were doing. But he was."

"Exactly" concludes Toby. "I enjoy swimming in Lake Rock. Having a good paddle."

As the interview draws to an end Dan has a few closing words:

"Don't forget to pick up the album when it's out in the summer" says Dan. "And of course the EP. And, er... hello mum!"

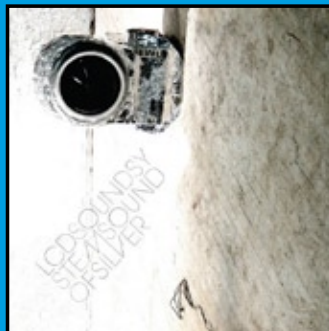
Stone Gods debut EP *Burn The Witch* is out on February 25th. See our review of their Norwich show, and plenty more photos, on our blog: <http://disposablemedia.blogspot.com>

2007: THE VERY BEST OF

WORDS: IAN MORENO-MELGAR
DESIGN: ANDREW REVELL

THERE COULD HAVE BEEN 10 OR MORE ALBUMS WHICH JUSTIFIED INCLUSION IN THE CLASS OF 2007. BUT IF AN ALBUM TRULY RANKS AS GREAT, IT DESERVES MORE THAN A SINGLE LINE EXPLAINING THE REASON WHY WE LOVED IT SO MUCH. AND IF YOU REALLY WANT MORE, THERE'S ALWAYS THE DM BLOG.

IN THE MEANTIME, DISPOSABLE MEDIA HAS TARGETED THOSE GEMS THAT DESERVE TO BE REMEMBERED, BUT THAT HAVEN'T PREVIOUSLY FEATURED. THESE ARE THE ALBUMS THAT GROW ON YOU AND BECOME PART OF THE FAMILY. THE ALBUMS YOU MIGHT PLAY FOR PEOPLE BUT NEVER LEND. AND THE ALBUMS YOU'LL ALWAYS KEEP OUTSIDE OF THE ALPHABETICAL FILING SYSTEM. THEY'LL ALWAYS BE CLOSE TO YOUR TURNTABLE OR CD PLAYER, AND HERE'S WHY.



LCD SOUNDSYSTEM - SOUNDS OF SILVER

The first time you listen to Sounds of Silver you may find yourself asking where the singles are? From the get-go, it's clear this album is about more than a collection of singles – it's a classic LP celebration of songwriting and musicianship. And the more you listen, the less you'll care about the lack of top-40 fodder.

It's too hard to classify, anyway. It isn't a rock, indie, grindie, big-beat or hardcore album. It isn't even trying to be too different.

Which leaves Sounds of Silver as an album for music fans, whether they're grown-ups or kids. It's an album so immaculately conceived and produced that at times it defies belief that something from 2007 can sound so perfectly now, and yet so utterly timeless. It's practically perfect, practically the best LP released in 2007, and in years to come it'll stand out as a highlight of the decade. It really is that accomplished.

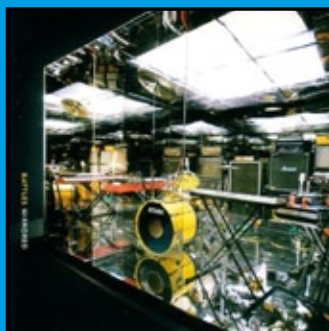


JUSTICE - CROSS

Sometimes, just sometimes, you really can judge a record by its cover. Cross is one of those albums – dark, a touch menacing, effortlessly cool – the cover art is a wondrous thing and sets the tone for the music it contains.

And what is kept locked inside is so loud that at times it barely makes sense. Comprising of combinations of drum beats and feedback for large sections, it would be easy to dismiss Cross as an overly simplistic

dance album with no real musicianship involved. But that would miss the fact that every single sound is full of purpose, and that purpose is to thrust itself into your body and consciousness. And the way it happens is the way each element is layered and structured like chain metal, woven with some very heavy drum beats. The Daft Punk comparisons are lazy – this is dance-metal and it is immense.




BATTLES - MIRRORED

Just how does the Battles LP work? At times it tries too hard, and at others it seems as though it's not trying at all. Beneath the obvious math-rock influences and initially bewildering Tortoise-like jazz guitar noodling is an album of melody, pop sensibility and a modern day understanding of how music can affect by effect. It's full of clever dynamics between rhythm and power, it's dense with tight and intricate structures, and it's rammed full of clever ideas. It sounds like nothing

else this year – and that makes it the perfect partner for LCD Soundsystem.

Both are trying for the same target by different methods, and this is a more modern and noisy take on dance rock. Somehow, even with all the intricacy, it never feels like the product of a grand plan, and as far as we can tell, it's how the music organically leaked from their brains and fingers. It's new, it's unique, and By God, how we love it!



the twilight sad

TWILIGHT SAD - 14 AUTUMS AND 15 WINTERS

Sonic majesty. Barrage of noise. Wall of feedback. You could use any number of clichés to try and describe how Twilight sound, but imagine layers of guitar that sound as though they've been ripped from the deepest depths of a sleeping dragon. Imagine a more majestic, powerful, and Scottish, Explosions in the Sky, to get some idea of just how wonderful this album is. Twilight Sad's debut album is stuffed full of sentiment

and anger, poignancy and vague ideals, and it's almost impenetrable at times.

There are waves of accent and noise, feedback and cymbals thrown at your face like a rough Highland wind, but if you persevere, you'll find an album of fierce beauty that begs for repeated listening and your undivided loyalty.

FOURTEEN AUTUMNS & FIFTEEN WINTERS



MINUS THE BEAR - PLANET ICE

The last album by Minus the Bear, Menos el oso, was a summer record. The cover looked like summer, the music sounded like summer, and some of the lyrics were even about summer. But now comes Planet Ice – the winter album. It still keeps the incredible finger tapping, 'dance-prog' structures and knowing lyrics/titles, but Planet of Ice is a slightly more grown up affair, with much more emphasis on the prog.

Don't be too afraid – it's hugely inviting, asking you to explore the layers and depth behind the clever pop-infused melodies that MtB have always had a canny knack for. It's just much more subtle than their previous effort, managing to be complex, without alienating anyone. Just listen on a wintery night and be sucked into the majesty.



LOW - DRUMS AND GUNS

Criminally overlooked in the end of the 2007 polls, Low's latest effort is once again a brooding affair, but now it broods over added drum loops. Enchanting and bewitching, it once again raises Low back up to the level of Things We Lost. After three albums which certainly weren't bad by any means, Low have found yet another sound.


But this one embraces their pedigree with fresh flecks on inspiration. Comparisons with Arab Strap are well founded, but Drums manages a lightness, and an infusion of pop to match the wit. The title may be bombastic, but Low have never truly dealt in noise and won't start now. Instead, it's a call to arms for themselves and their audience. And who could ignore the sound of drums and guns.

ALMOST... ALBUMS THAT CAME VERY NEAR



DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN - IRE WORKS

A brutal album that shows DEP get a bit rockier and a bit more electronic, but still instantly recognisable as those crazy metalcore kids.



RICHARD HAWLEY - LADY'S BRIDGE

Score two great albums in a row for Sheffield's finest. Still edging close to easy listening, but much too musically capable for us to care.




BAT FOR LASHES - FUR AND GOLD

Fantastic debut from Britain's newest songstress, good enough to be compared to Kate Bush. Melodic, fascinating and incredibly individual.



FEIST - THE REMINDER

Sure, the ipod advert. But beyond that lays an album of consistently high quality French-sounding-folky-pop that is incredibly easy on the ears.



PHAROAEH MONCH - DESIRE

Inspirational and uplifting music mixes with great, angry lyrics making an album full of heart. One of the hip-hop highlights of the year.

DISPOSABLE MEDIA DOESN'T TAKE THE PRESSURE OF SINGLING OUT AN ALBUM OF THE YEAR LIGHTLY. IF IT WAS FOR DISCUSSION ALONE, THE CHOICE WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY. BUT FOR THE MUSIC? THAT WAS HARDER...

When it was agreed that Disposable Media would nominate an album of the year for this page, In Rainbows hadn't been released. There were already enough great albums already to make a choice difficult, but then Radiohead stole it at the last whilst creating furious debate. Do you think it should have? Has 2007 been a vintage year for music? We'd love to know, so visit our forum and tell us:

www.disposablemedia.co.uk/forum

IN / RAINBOWS
IN RAIN/BOWS
IN RAINBOW/S
IN RAINBOWS/
IN RAIN_BOWS
RADIOHEAD
ALBUM_OF_
THE YEAR /

On a Friday back in October, DM held a pre-production meeting for issue 10. We discussed the Good/Bad column and a few ideas got thrown about, many got chucked out and when all seemed lost, Radiohead began to post interesting cryptic messages on their website.

When a countdown began at radioheadp7.com, things went from interesting to fascinating. But, after years of waiting, nothing came. Quickly dismissed by the band, the countdown timer expired and revealed nothing; as quickly as the fervour had started, it fizzled out, leaving fans empty.

Further still, the messages on Radiohead's website were ambiguous in creation and meaning, and ultimately revealed nothing other than that Radiohead were still alive. Good and Bad had seemingly written itself: Radiohead are brilliant, if painfully self aware and, possibly, possibly out of touch.

With no new material for four years, whispers of stagnation from the band and no record deal, there was an element of doubt about The Greatest Band in the World. Their back catalogue speaks for itself, (Good) but with the new album seemingly In Limbo, an early 2008 release was rumoured, we felt somewhat cheated by the lack of transparency. (Bad).

Then, on October 1st, a new message appeared on the Radiohead website reading as follows: "Hello everyone. Well, the new album is finished, and it's coming out in 10 days; We've called it In Rainbows. Love from us all. Jonny"

10 days until the new Radiohead album? And it had a name. In Rainbows. And soon it was revealed the buyer would choose how much to pay for it. In one swift move, Radiohead had literally flipped the long established model for the music industry on its head.

Ten days passed, and the Radiohead site crumbled, seemingly unable to cope when faced with a reported 1.2million downloads

music/album of the year

of the album. The Disposable Media team downloaded with joy, frustration and surprise – and we listened. We complained about the bit-rate, about the cost of the special box version and about the lack of artwork, but then we listened again. And again, and again and again.

We discussed and argued, debated and agreed; *In Rainbows* is a classic Radiohead LP. Full of tender beauty, structured anger and pointed musicianship. It has moments of the brave originality that we've come to expect over the last three LPs, but there was a welcoming, confident atmosphere to the LP somewhat akin to the tracks on *Amnesiac* that carried a strong guitar element, something that apparently everyone wishes they'd stuck to.

When the album finishes, the most striking element is that it sounds almost normal. There are no alien electro tracks, there are no instrumental interludes. This is an album that is almost perfectly conventional - it has ten tracks and each lasts around four minutes. After the last three albums, it's almost a disappointment to find Radiohead's latest is incredibly normal, despite its unconventional distribution model.

The recent release of the album, from XL Recordings on December 31st, offered more intrigue into the initial move of offering the album as download-only. With the 'leaking' of albums before release becoming commonplace, it could be argued the digital release of the LP was the band pre-empting the album finding its own way onto the net. By charging for the pleasure and making it available only through their own website, Radiohead made a profit, kept a tighter control of the album's movement and did nothing to prevent a physical release at a later date.

With the physical album now out, it's difficult not to feel slightly short-changed if you were one of the many to pay for the download. For a start, the digital release of the album was encoded at such a low bit-rate that some aspects of the album, such as the bass and deep production, suffered. With no confirmed release date,

IT'S UP TO YOU



HOME

VIEW BASKET

**WE DISCUSSED, ARGUED AND AGREED;
IN RAINBOWS IS A CLASSIC RADIOHEAD LP**

or even artwork, the digital format seemed almost acceptable. But would so many have paid for it if they knew the more traditional release was going to come before the end of the year?

Thankfully, *In Rainbows* rises above all such issues. After listening and discussing, this isn't an album of gimmicks and headlines suited to Good or Bad status, but one of genuine warmth, artistry and simply spectacular songs. Radiohead have simply made the best LP they could, and in turn 2007's musical highlight. *In Rainbows* is Disposable Media's album of the year. No other LP has come close to generating the discussion, fervent debate and impassioned vitriol that *In Rainbows* has. Perhaps the initial delivery system of the album overshadowed the music itself, but within time everyone is realising just how exceptional the album truly is. From the glitchy, distorted thumps that open the album with *15 Steps*, to the beautifully delicate guitar on *Faust Arp*, the vital pace of the rhythm section on *Jigsaw* falling into place and the hugely insistent drums on *Reckoner*, here is an LP that redefines Radiohead as musicians once again.

The title of the album suggests a comfortable, happy state of being and it seeps into the lyrics of the album as well. Since the success of *OK Computer*, Yorke's lyrics had become full of personal paranoia, oblique references to social collapse. They were often delivered through tight, almost repetitive instructions; thoughts stuck in Yorke's head pulsed and gushed headlong into the music. But with *In Rainbows*, the lyrics become slightly less personal, a little more self-aware, a touch more optimistic and perhaps even tinged with a little romance. Don't be misled; this isn't an album of stirring sentiment, but it is one with a knowing softness to the worry and anguish: Yorke is seemingly content to welcome his dark streak, but it is now shared for all to see as well. It is less cathartic, but more enveloping for the listener. *In Rainbows* is still dark but it is not uninviting, it welcomes but does not embrace. It's Disposable Media's album of 2007.

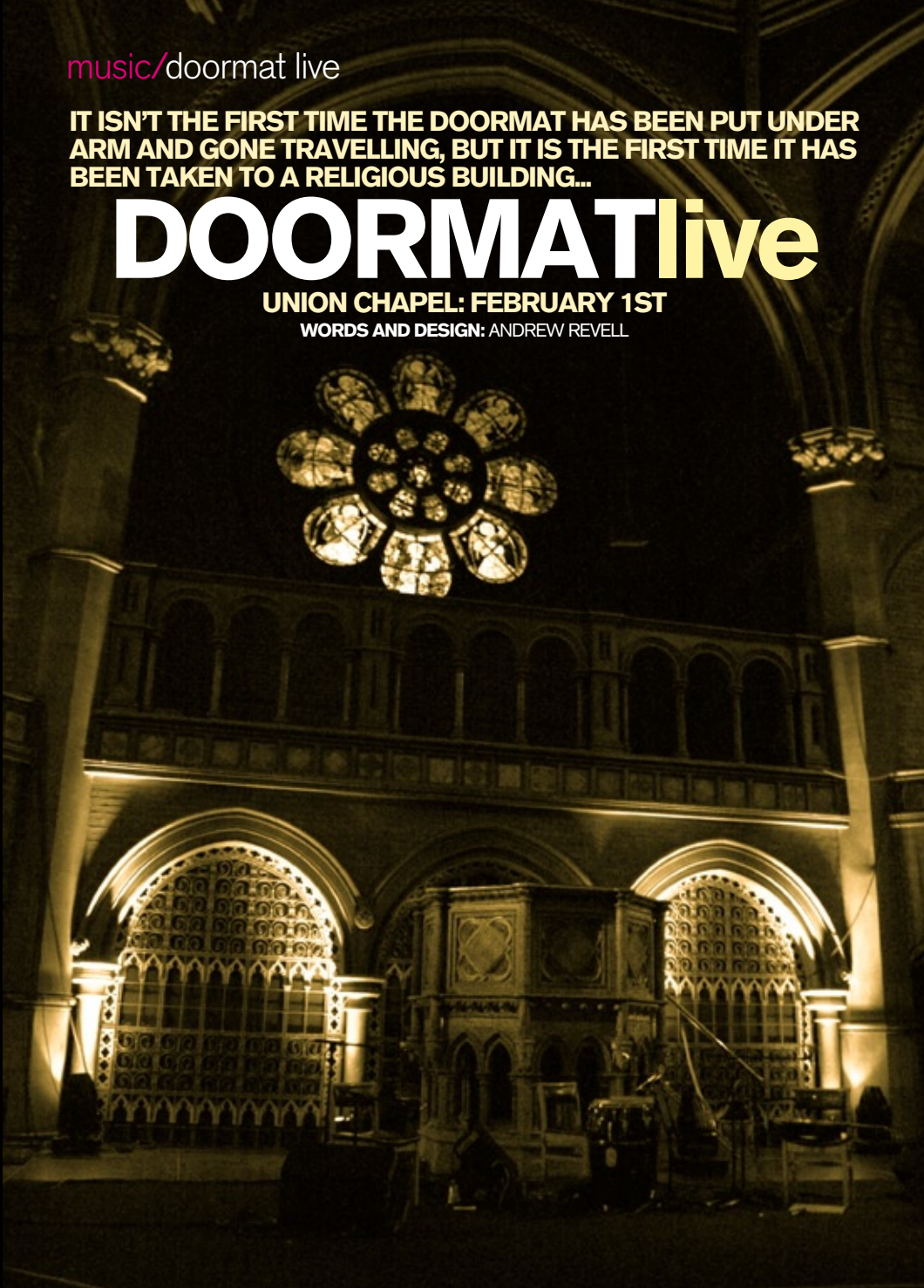
music/doormat live

IT ISN'T THE FIRST TIME THE DOORMAT HAS BEEN PUT UNDER ARM AND GONE TRAVELLING, BUT IT IS THE FIRST TIME IT HAS BEEN TAKEN TO A RELIGIOUS BUILDING...

DOORMATlive

UNION CHAPEL: FEBRUARY 1ST

WORDS AND DESIGN: ANDREW REVELL



When you go into a gig and they cross your name off a list rather than giving you a ticket beforehand, you know you're somewhere small. Add in a huge domed ceiling, a gorgeous stained glass window and flickering candles and it is already impressive, but consider that part of the original design was to make the impressive organ sound perfect and you're suddenly in a venue more impressive than any tent or theatre falling into disrepair.

Opening the night was **MARY HAMPTON** a young folk songstress from presumably a quiet corner of Brighton. On stage alone and immediately welcoming comparison to Joan Baez and Kate Rusby, Mary Hampton played music with a traditional sound that felt perfectly suited to the surroundings. Deserving of attention from anyone with an interest in the recent surge of folk musicians.

From nothing more than a flash of bright red hair it was possible to guess that **GABBY YOUNG AND OTHER ANIMALS** were going to sound a little different. As the stage filled with a backing band that wouldn't be out of place in a jazz brunch (trumpets, double bass and all). Just to keep it interesting, there was also an accordion filling the room with the sound of a busker on Le Metro. If that all sounds wacky, it's extremely pleasing to say that the music wasn't. It was just really good. Beyond good use of all the instruments on stage, the most important aspect was Gabby Young herself who can really, really sing and when combined with the amazing venue provided an awe-inspiring set. Just because someone can sing and lets themselves go a bit doesn't mean you should just throw the name Jeff Buckley at the page, but this time it feels well deserved. Add in Muse's trick of bringing songs to a cacophonous conclusion, red hair being tossed around whilst accordians are mashed that left listeners feeling thoroughly exhausted and from the raucous approval it left them quite delighted as well. Recommended.

Following it wouldn't be that easy, but **SAM BEER**, a folky musician complete with an acoustic guitar, a mouth organ and a beard,

didn't seem even slightly fazed. He might not turn heads like a red-haired female Jeff Buckley but it was very good. stuff For the third time in the evening it was relaxing to find another talented singer capable of doing the venue justice and one that knew exactly what he was doing. Storytelling folk, with tales of London, girls and whiskey that you'd swear should have come from America despite sounding thoroughly English. Perhaps the most obvious comparison from recent years is Willy Mason, sharing a knack for grabbing and keeping attention with generally understated music. If the thought of an acoustic guitar and a beard doesn't put you off, check him out.

And finally, **REVERE**. I've reviewed them before, and said that I like them and described them as "Grand stuff - Radiohead without numerous electronic gizmos". Little has changed - I still like them and in this venue their full-bodied sound is a perfect fit. It's catchy and singalong indie created with proper instruments with a folkish song-writing flair that when put together sounds like it is made by grown-ups rather than the latest new kid on the block. This is a very good thing. They've clearly spent plenty of time on a stage too, putting together a well co-ordinated live act that meant their place at the top of this fantastic bill is thoroughly deserved.

In an incredibly depressing fact, not one of these bands is signed to a proper record label, although they have managed to get CDs out all of which I thoroughly recommend you purchase. None of them sound like Take That or Fall Out Boy...but if you think that is a bad thing, get out. Also, this is what churches should be for and if I ever see a church complaining about lack of funds I'm going to flip out like Jesus in a temple, because this is a great way of making money that would work for many. And yes, I did have to end on a biblical reference.

Actually, no, I don't need to end like that. I have to end saying I left with a massive, massive grin. It was awesome.



KYLIE MINOGUE
X

You know you're onto a good thing when a pop record plays out like a Greatest Hits package. Kylie's tenth studio album – the appropriately titled *X* – is not outshone by its predecessors in that respect. While '2 Hearts' perhaps represents the singer's bravest (and arguably best) single for almost a decade, *X* is stacked full of Minogue in more typical form.

Standout tracks include disco-epic 'The One', co-written with The Freemasons, electro-pop perfection Wow and Calvin Harris' summer-hit-in-the-making 'In My Arms' - all of

which leave the Scotman's other much-hyped collaboration 'Heart Beat Rock' wanting.

X's main flaw, however, is that it isn't quite as brave as '2 Hearts' suggests it might be. A collection of multifaceted pop rather than a bold step forward, fans might have expected something wilder for a comeback record, though rival artistes will still be watching with envy.

Keith Andrew



"YOU KNOW YOU'RE ONTO A GOOD THING WHEN A POP RECORD PLAYS OUT LIKE A GREATEST HITS PACKAGE."



GOLDFRAPP
SEVENTH TREE

Goldfrapp's forth album is something of a return to their roots (if you'll excuse the tree pun). Dropping the electro-pop styling of 2005's *Supernature*, this effort is far closer in tone to their debut.

That's not to say they're simply retreading old ground though. *Seventh Tree* is reminiscent of a 60's psychedelic folk record, taking some dreamy-soundscapes and mixing in a few trippy little ditties along the way.

Fans who got into the band with their later albums may find the change in sound a little jarring at

first. You might find yourself wondering if you've put in the right disc when the first track starts, but once the shock subsides, you'll find it's an album you fall in love with. And it gets even better with repeated listening.

It's ludicrously early to say this, but there won't be many challengers to *Seventh Tree* for album of the year.

Tim Cheeseman



"THERE WON'T BE MANY CHALLENGERS TO SEVENTH TREE FOR ALBUM OF THE YEAR."



THE HEAVENS
DEVILS
KINGS AND
KILLERS

From the land of Edam, Radar Love and Van Gogh comes the kind of unashamed classic rock band that only our European neighbours are available to produce without irony. The six-track CD kicks off with 'House of Love', an ode to "Hot Women" and "Hot Night's". And the staple themes of gambling (Pokerface), and drugs (Love Drug), also get a mention.

Probably the most fashionable of the tunes is the Strokesian indie tune 'The Trap', yet 'House of Love', 'The Trap' and finale 'Life



"IF YOU FANCY SOME STRAIGHT-AHEAD ROCK, IT'S DEFINITELY WORTH A LISTEN."

Dan Thornton



POINT 7
PISTOL
POINT 7
PISTOL

Coming from East Anglia, which has a certain 'redneck' reputation, it's perhaps no surprise that this Peterborough-based band channel Lynyrd Skynyrd, via Temple of the Dog and some more modern rock influences.

What's more surprising is that they're able to rise above the local studio production to show talent which could see them breaking out of the local area. Singer James Doherty's talents are best displayed on the louder tracks and rousing choruses, backed by some great harmonies, particularly on tracks like



"IT'S PERHAPS NO SURPRISE THAT POINT 7 PISTOL CHANNEL LYNYRD SKYNYRD AND SOME MORE MODERN ROCK INFLUENCES."

'Return' and 'Relentless'. The majority of tracks help him along with some powerful and energetic drumming, and good solid guitar sound as the band straddle the gap between rock and metal, with a hint of early 90's grunge, and a definite Alice in Chains approach to post-production effects on the vocals. Only 'Slow' does as the title suggests, and in 12 tracks, only one, 'Sterilise' fails to excite.

Dan Thornton



It might look like the Comics section is a bit on the short side this issue, but considering we're introducing a large proportion of our readership to an entire genre of comics issue by issue, there should be more than enough inspiration to keep you going.

For instance, Disposable Media newcomer Colm Wood takes a detailed look at Manhwa - an entire genre no less - focussing on stand-out example *Shaman Warrior*.

And just to placate Western populist tastes, we've also got a retrospective look at what happens when a film director starts messing with the mind of an iconic superhero. Strangely enough, it's probably the most mature work Kevin Smith has yet to produce - and some of his best.

It's in this celebratory spirit that - much like in all the other sections - DM also reveals its comic of the year. Disagree with our choice? My email address is right below. See you in my inbox.

Dan Thornton
Editor

dan.thornton@disposablemedia.co.uk

currently reading ...

getting into comics / shaman warrior / shadowpact / daredevil: guardian angel





Getting on the road to falling in love with comics isn't actually that easy. The most logical place to start, the comic book shop, isn't often that helpful. It is unlikely to acknowledge that light is a useful tool for looking at words and pictures and instead instill a permanent dusk. Filing systems based around publisher, publication date and a casual understanding of the alphabet make looking for a specific title near-impossible. Especially as hundreds of titles are crammed into space that would be insufficient for half that number. So

DO NOT: Read Movie Spin-Offs

An increasing number of films are released with film tie-ins - such as the X-Men films to Transformers. In many ways, the movie tie-in is the exact opposite of Watchmen. The characters are known and they're simple to read. In reality, working on movie tie-ins tends to be the comic equivalent of doing pantomime. A collection of talented people and almost-famous putting together work poorer than they are capable of because they know their regular fans, their bread and butter, won't read it. There are, of course, exceptions (there are a number of decent Star Wars spin-offs, for starters) but the chances of picking a good one at random are slim.

START HERE



ANDREW REVELL LOOKS AT THE VARIOUS BAD WAYS YOU CAN START READING COMICS.

START HERE TWO: STARTING.

people tend to rely on one of three methods of getting started, none of which are great. Three bad ways to get into comics:

DO NOT: Read Watchmen

Like everything, comics have their own masterpieces that people are desperate to recommend and Watchmen is that title. But as a starting point? That is almost akin to recommending Canterbury Tales as a first book to read. Even on its simplest level, Watchmen is a satire of superhero comics a new reader has never read. Alan Moore spent more words composing the first panel of Watchmen than there are in this entire column, but that depth is as likely to put off a new reader as impress them. Watchmen is better being read (and re-read) once an understanding of the medium has been developed.

“RECOMMENDING WATCHMEN IS ALMOST AKIN TO RECOMMENDING THE CANTERBURY TALES AS A FIRST BOOK”

DO NOT: Just pick up a random comic

Picking up a random comic and hoping for it to convert you to them is almost impossible. Picked at random, the chances are it will feature super-heroes, which despite frequent exceptions regularly rely on

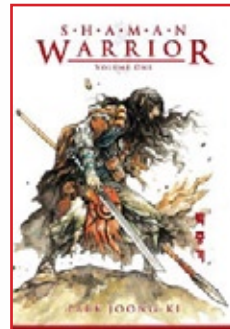
knowledge of obscure characters due to cross-pollination verging on incest. Stick with them and you'll develop that obscure knowledge, but it isn't a particularly rapid process. Even if you land on a good one you'll not know what happened previously and if you've picked an old comic finding out what happens next is depressingly unlikely which is incredibly unsatisfying.

The lessons learned? It can't be too uninviting however good, it has to be created specifically to be a comic and it has to offer a satisfyingly complete story. So what fits the bill? On the super-hero side of things, the Ultimate line, specifically Ultimates is not only well crafted but it was created as a self-contained starting point. For younger readers, Brian K. Vaughn's Runaways serves just as good a purpose, welcoming, friendly and brilliant. And if you're not interested in super-heroes, go for the journalistic Palestine by Joe Sacco good enough to make you forget you're not reading a newspaper. And for something a little lighter than that, try the fantastic (in both senses) Fables by Bill Willingham.

That might not be an innovative list, but it was never meant to be. The important thing is that it avoids the potential pitfalls. And if you like those, you can start listening to recommendations and even picking out things that also seem to appeal as you're well on the way.



MANHWA



WORDS: COLM WOOD
DESIGN: KEITH ANDREW

WITH THE INFLUX OF EASTERN CULTURE INTO THE MAINSTREAM, EVEN YOUR GRANDPARENTS KNOW ABOUT MANGA COMICS. BUT AS **SHAMAN WARRIOR** SHOWS, EAST ASIA CONSISTS OF MORE THAN JUST JAPAN OR CHINA.

THE F**K?

To the uninitiated, the term 'Manhwa' may look like a typo, but it refers to the comic art of Korea, and in particular South Korea, rather than Japan or China (see later for more explanation of Manhwa).

Many of the titles chosen for English-translation are those aimed at teenage girls. Thankfully *Shaman Warrior* is a more macho example of the quality comics hitting our shores.

The story begins in the aftermath of a war in which individual Shamans stood out as fierce enemies capable of superhuman abilities. But after the fighting has finished, these warriors are seen as liabilities, and are slowly hunted, one by one. The first volume introduces us to one such, Shaman, named Yarong, and his local bodyguard 'Batu'. Although initially focused on the pursuit of the duo by unnamed henchman across a barren wasteland, the plot starts to develop a political tone as more information on their world becomes available, interspersed with our heroes defending themselves.

“THE DEPICTION OF MOVEMENT IS INCREDIBLE AND EMOTIVE, WITH EVERY PAGE FULL OF VIBRANCY.”

Despite the title, it's the exploits of Batu, the bodyguard, which forms the centre of the story, rather than his Shaman master, which allows us to see the world in a more personal way that might have been possible with his master. The sincerity we see in this towering 'man tank' (or 'mank') allows us to sympathise with his situation. And, as revealed in the 'Author's Note', it's a representation of the sincerity of the artist, Park Joong-Ki, himself.

The story is very fast paced, and develops into a deeper serialisation, meaning that once you're hooked, you'll need to keep up-to-date. It also means that if you pick up a later issue, it's best to keep it safe until you can start from volume 1. But the fast-paced episodic nature makes it great entertainment for a short break from the real world.

The main selling point of this title is the artwork. Similar in many respects to the more familiar Manga style, the main difference is in the design of the characters (Manhwa creations are generally less cute and rounded than their Japanese or Chinese counterparts).

“IT’S THE REALISM THAT SEPARATES MANHWA FROM MANGA, AND SHAMAN WARRIOR FROM MANY OTHERS.”

The depiction of movement is incredible and emotive, with every page full of vibrancy. The still images almost leap off each page, giving a real feel of kinetic movement, and shows a depth of understanding about dynamics of movement and the structure of the body, to enhance the realism.

And initially it is the artwork that holds the title together. Although the story is compelling from the start, the plot development comes in later volumes and an increasing cast list. Initially the hook is from the fast-paced battle scenes and incredibly detailed full page illustrations. Sometimes the action moves so fast it can be hard to understand who is winning – which is usually true in the heat of a battle. The personality of the characters comes from their facial features and expressions, despite cartoonish body proportions, and it’s this realism that separates Manhwa from Manga, and *Shaman Warrior* from many other titles.

MANHWA EXPLAINED...

MANHWA IS THE name given for Korean comics (although within Korea it usually refers to South Korean work). The confusion with Manga comes from style similarities and befuddled marketing and retailers, although one big difference is that Manhwa is read left-to-right.

Unless you recognise Korean names and sound effects, the main way to spot mislabelled Manhwa is by examining the art. Korean characters are generally more realistic and less cartoon-like, with far more realistic hair, and more obvious signs of Asian ethnicity.

In the past, the sudden popularity of Manga in the West saw many publishers and importers pushing out quantity rather than quality, in order to cash in before any downturn. Yet some titles (for instance, the iconic *Akira*), continue to stand out as stunning examples of the genre. By the same token, within confused marketing and retailers who are as likely to file it under Manga as Manhwa, the care and quality of Park Joong-Ki and *Shaman Warrior* marks it out as a shining example of the genre that is an essential reference point for any fan or aspiring comic book artist.



A number of publishers have started to specialise in Manhwa translations, which may also be filed under 'Original Korean-Language manga'. One of these companies is Dark Horse, publisher of *Shaman Warrior*. Check out the DM website at www.disposablemedia.co.uk for some links to the more popular Manhwa specialists.

AS ALWAYS, 2007 HAS BEEN A BUSY YEAR FOR COMICS, INCLUDING PLENTY OF FANTASTIC ONES. BUT WHEN THE DISPOSABLE MEDIA COMICS EDITOR WAS ASKED TO PICK A FAVOURITE, THE CHOICE WAS SUPRISINGLY EASY....

Shadowpact

Of course, there were plenty to choose from. DC has continued its resurgence with each new series and little spin-off consistently impressing more than they have any right to. Meanwhile, Marvel has been hitting its own vein of form and captured the headlines by killing off Captain America whilst indie comics too are continuing to offer fresh tastes. The UK has managed to create the wonderful Image series *Phonogram*, a late contender for comic of the year in Alan Moore's *Black Dossier* and a resurgent 2000AD that is the best it has been in years.

In such a year, an individual choice is the only way to get an answer without getting trapped in arguments that will last long into 2008. But we're keen to hear which comic you think should have been on this page, so visit disposablemedia.co.uk/forum and have your say. Here's to a 2008 as good as this year.

WORDS AND DESIGN: ANDREW REVELL



If *Shadowpact* had been conceived in a vortex, a land without a hundred and one different super-hero titles each trying to capture the public's attention, it might not have been the best comic of the year. It would certainly have been enjoyed, but the almost satire, almost parody and totally tongue-in-cheek approach wouldn't have had any effect. Because *Shadowpact* emerged, like almost all recent titles, as a spin-off from a major comics event it's approach gives it a feeling of being something a little different and something a bit special.

Unlike other titles with similar backgrounds, *Shadowpact* has a card up its sleeve that few other titles have - it's writer. Or more specifically, the fact that its writer and creator is so ideally suited to the project. If you were commissioning a comic about a team of super-heroes whose powers are all based around magic and are based in another dimension, there are a couple of names that come to mind. The obvious one if you want a deadly serious title is Neil Gaiman from his work on *Sandman*, but if you want something a bit more relaxed and want the team to work out of a bar then Bill Willingham fresh from his work on the wondrous *Fables* is an ideal choice. And that is exactly who it got.

Bill Willingham gives everything the feeling that it has been thought about thoroughly, that each aspect of the team has been put there for a fully considered reason. Take the base of operations being in a bar, as an example. Elsewhere the decision to base a team in a drinking hole might be taken for a chance to dive at faux-maturity as it was in *Warriors*. Here it is used as a gentle metaphor for the creation of the team and the disorganisation that they never lost. The *Shadowpact* team don't have a Bruce Wayne or a Tony Stark to fund the creation of a moonbase but they do have a guy who runs a bar. So where else could they be based? When an early storyline sees them disappear for a year (during DC's messy One Year Later event) sees the owner disappear for a year he loses ownership. Rather than being an excuse to move out, they simply rent out a backroom. It'd all sound a bit too pathetic were it not for the fact it is an

comics/comic of the year

inter-dimensional bar that is visited only by highly powerful magicians. The aspects combined define the team, well-meaning and clever enough to make use of their surroundings but still disorganised enough to emphasise the point that this isn't a traditional, earnest super-hero team that always do everything perfectly. That mix ensures that readers will pay attention.

The same kind of consideration has gone into the cast. Whilst the DC universe has a plethora of magical characters there are a few obvious choices for who should have been included. Famous characters like Captain Marvel or any of his extended family, Zatanna or Zachary Zatanna and Etrigan the Demon are nowhere to be seen in the regular cast even if most of them appeared sooner or later as supporting characters.



making him super-intelligent and ever young - it is fair to say that his isn't the most tragic of origin stories.

This group of characters provides an interesting base, but the work put on them since is what defines them and *Shadowpact*. Each character's traits are maintained throughout and it gives the book some of the most developed characters around. With characters regularly given their own stories to expand, be it Ragman getting to meet the people inside his suit or Blue Devil hiring a lawyer to go into hell. But for the most part, the key stories are treated with the utmost seriousness. They might not be the most innovative tales, typical super-villain fare for the most part, but the way each is tackled is where the pleasure comes from. And seeing the team retire to their backroom to work on



Despite those characters not being chosen, this isn't a cast of complete nobodies, either. Anyone who has been reading comics for a good few years should recognise at least most of the team from guest appearances and failed titles. The only thing that seems to link the chosen characters is a sense of tragedy that compels them to join a team whose future immediately looked unlikely to be illustrious - or even very long. Both team leader Jim "Nightmaster" Rook and Rory "Ragman" Reagan both had to lose their fathers before receiving their powers whilst Eve "Nightshade" Eden lost her mother before discovering her powers. Blue Devil went one step further and sold all his families souls in exchange for the chance to become a movie star but in the process became a demon. Enchantress frequently used her ability as a powerful sorceress for evil before joining the team. And the Detective Chimp is an ape that fell in the fountain of youth,



tactics and creating the first 3 law's of being a super-hero (with more than a passing resemblance to Asimov's robot laws) is a joy. It's simply more interesting to spend time with a super-hero team that is allowed to fail.

Truth be told, the last few issues have been a little rougher with Matthew Sturgess taking over whilst Willingham works on the (really quite good) *Salvation Run*. Partly it suffers just because of the excellent work already created, partly because he simply doesn't seem as familiar with the characters. Although as the series hits 2008 it has seen a slight retron to form and still worth appearing in anyones stack of comics.

For anyone wanting to get started, the *Day of Vengeance* trade paperback is the place to start, followed by the start of *Shadowpact* proper in *The Pentacle Plot* and then *Cursed*. After that, you're on to the issues themselves. Enjoy.

DAREDEVIL: GUARDIAN DEVIL

EVERYONE CAN FIND THEMSELVES QUESTIONING THEIR FAITH, THEIR SELF BELIEF AND THEIR SANITY - BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY'RE A SUPERHERO?

WORDS: DAN THORNTON
DESIGN: KEITH ANDREW

comic love is as famed as his efforts to outdo *Clerks* are overlooked), and the plot itself tails off as it brings itself to resolution.

Fortunately, I'd rather choose to fill this page with the even easier task of persuading you why you really should read it; it's definitely a title which will inspire you to find out more about the character if you're not already a fan, and will get you back up to speed – or even re-read the Frank Miller era - if you already follow the life and loves of Matt Murdock.

Blinded as a boy, skilled as a fighter, and splitting his life between lawyer and superhero, Murdock walks the line between civilian and hero in a manner akin to Spiderman. But *Daredevil* is a far darker title, with the hero choosing to focus his heroic efforts on making the less-than-delightful Hell's Kitchen a safer place to be for the poor unfortunates who dwell there. Abandonment by his mother, the murder of his father, and regular dichotomies between the role of the lawyer and hero are all pent up within the calm and quiet blind man of Catholic faith.

And it's this faith that Kevin Smith brings into question, armed only with a small baby. But first, Murdock's long-term lover Karen Page decides to leave Hells Kitchen, despite their survival of countless traumas together, and Murdock's acceptance of a less than glorious part of Page's life as a drug addict and porn star.

The discovery of a baby, apparently the product of a virgin birth, and either the

saviour of mankind or the antichrist, brings more confusion to the red devil, as does the urge to call old flame Natasha Romanov - also known as the Black Widow. As Murdock finds himself torn between

in her opening letter to Matt Murdock, as she explains the reasons for her departure. Romanov is also well-handled (sorry!), particularly when literally left holding the baby: "Good God – I was an Avenger!"

counsels advising him to protect the baby or kill it (protecting people from the curse that it will bring upon anyone it comes into contact with), his friend Foggy Nelson is accused of murder. And Karen reappears with the shock that she's HIV Positive.

Without revealing too much, the matters do come to a conclusion, albeit a tragic one. But even though the plot moves along at a movie-like pace, packed with big

“WHAT SHINES IS THE WARMTH AND KNOWLEDGE SMITH HAS FOR DAREDEVIL.”

revelations, what really shines through is the warmth and knowledge Smith has for the character. In-jokes, references to both Daredevil's past life and loves, and even Smith's career, are blended together with a real love; doubtless emphasised by the shared Catholic upbringing of both writer and character.

Rarely has comic art been quite so warm and vibrant, with the pencils of Joe Quesada and inks of Jimmy Palmiotti, and a team of colorists consistently on the money. As weird as it may be, I have to admit that the Black Widow has rarely looked sexier than on these pages. (ahem).

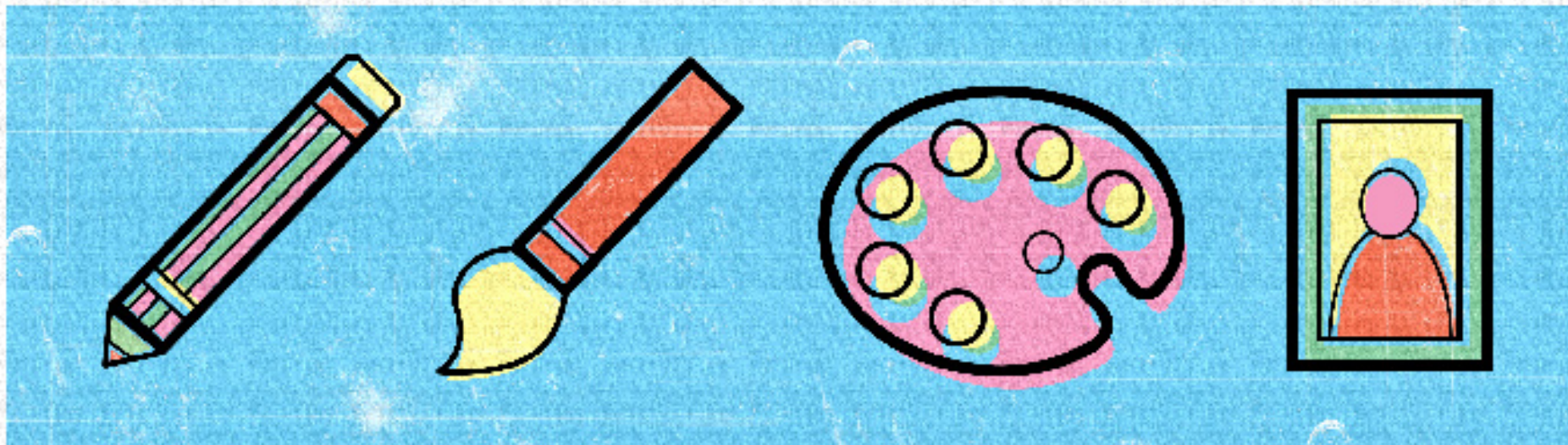
It's easy to imagine the dialogue of the book resembling Smith's cinematic fanboy exchanges, but he shows an immense skill in adopting the tone and emotions of several characters – particularly Karen Page

Daredevil's history has always been dominated by the death of his boxer father, so it's a change for Smith - via Romanov - to point to the issues that Daredevil and Murdock have encountered with the deadlier sex. A list including Karen, the murdered Elektra, the murderous Typhoid Mary and more reveals more about Daredevil than a list of his foes.

Guardian Devil typically demonstrates a cinematic approach to comics. The angles and flow of the artwork, the pace of the script, and the emotional rollercoaster the cast and audience ride are such that it's a surprise that this tale wasn't adapted for the DD debut on film. The plot may drop slightly below the initial promise, but the art and dialogue hold it together without difficulty – even after slightly more epilogues than you'd generally consider necessary. And since then, Smith's further forays into comic book writing have only improved. If only he had quit making films, and instead focused his energies on Daredevil and Natasha Romanov, or, as did happen, switch companies to DC and turn his hand to another of my favourite characters, *Green Arrow*.

If you do pick up a copy of *Guardian Devil*, or already know the extent of the plot, feel free to come and chat about it on the DM forums. Just promise to mark it as a 'Spoiler'...

“MR MURCOCK THE ANGEL TOLD ME YOU'RE DAREDEVIL.”

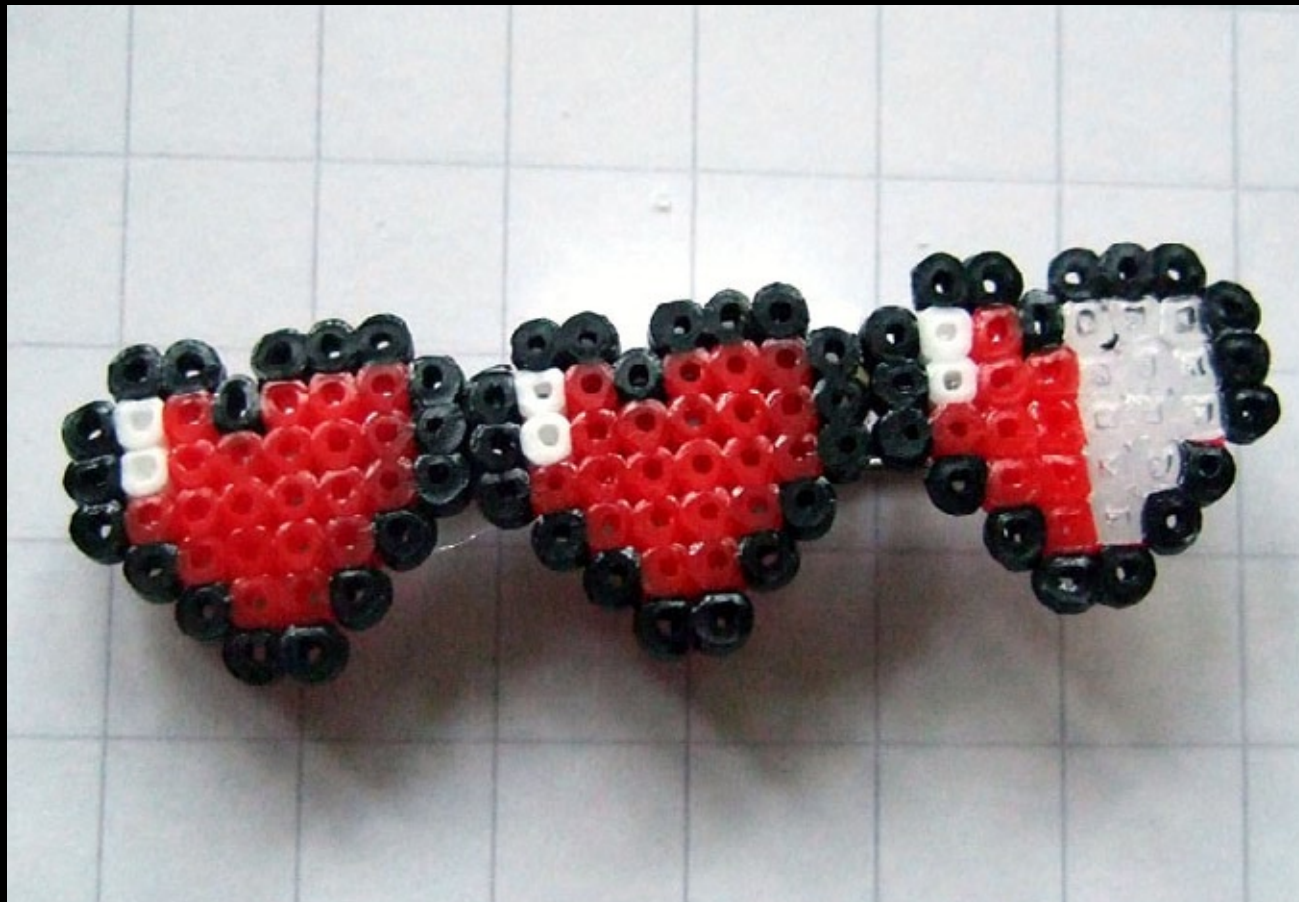


gallery

welcome to the disposable media gallery...

here at DM we believe in good art. every issue we aim to bring you the best





WHAT: HANDMADE 8-BIT PIXEL JEWELLERY, GEEKERY & FANZINES
WHO: SPUGMEISTRESS
WHERE: [HTTP://SPUGMEISTRESS.ETSY.COM](http://spugmeistress.etsy.com)
& [HTTP://OMEGAZOID.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://omegazoid.blogspot.com)

omegazoid

dm10/gallery



christian atkin

WHAT:
WHO:
WHERE:

MARCH OF THE INNOCENTS
CHRISTIAN ATKIN
LAZYGUNN.DEVIANTART.COM



WHAT: AN ESTEEMED GUEST
WHO: CHRISTIAN ATKIN
WHERE: LAZYGUNN.DEVIANTART.COM

christianatkin

christian atkin



WHAT:
WHO:
WHERE:

COMPLICITY
CHRISTIAN ATKIN
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11

Change is afoot...

...but one thing is certain: the artist formally known as **Mr. Biffo** will be back in **DM11**.

Talking exclusively to Disposable Media, **Paul Rose** will reveal all about **Digitiser**, five years since the magazine closed its digital doors.

“I have become a bloated, self-obsessed, egomaniac, drunk on the giddy elixir that drools from the ripe, veiny teats of self-satisfaction. You’d hate me.”

Coming soon.

X
MR. Biffo