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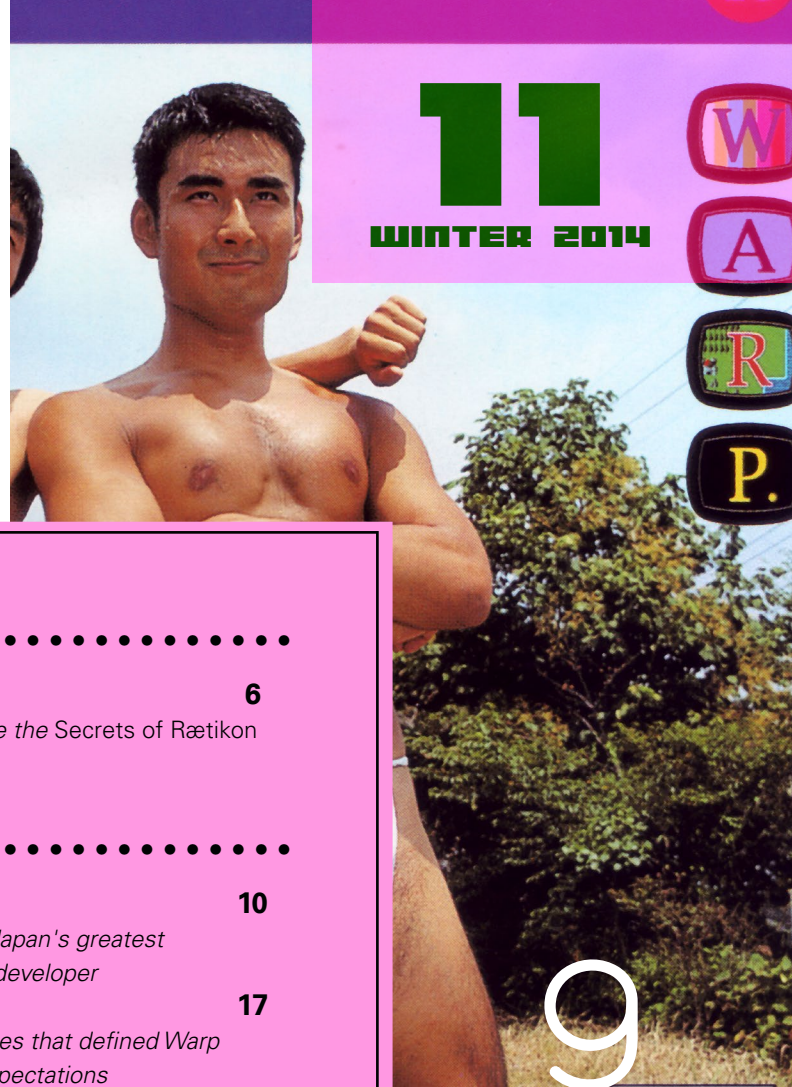
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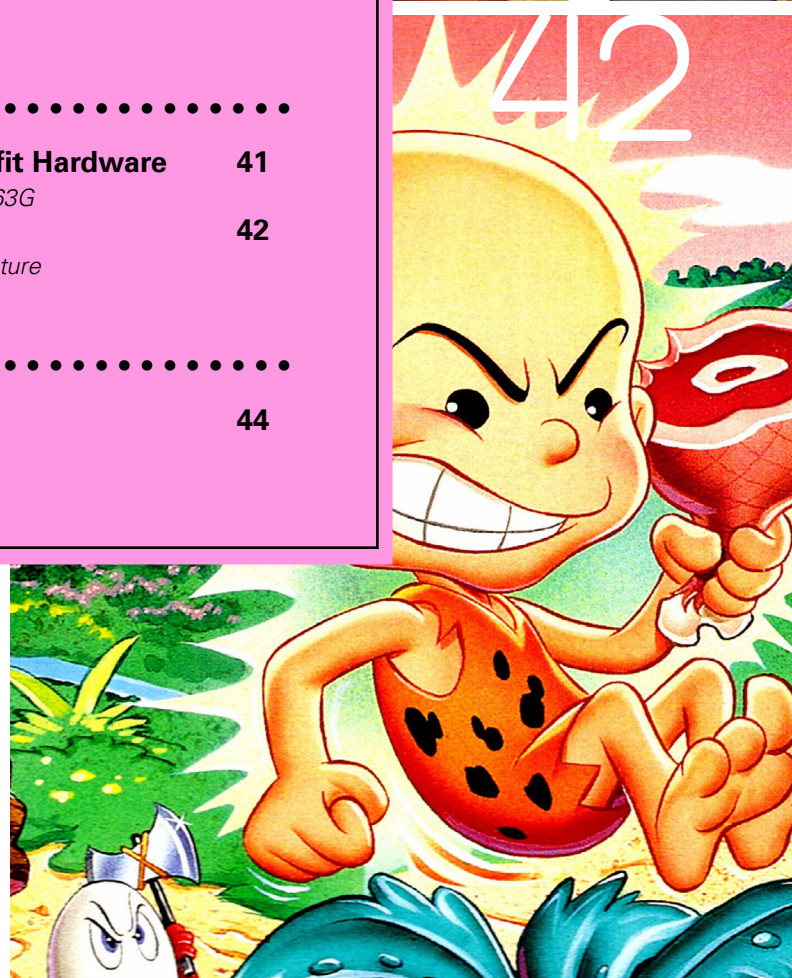
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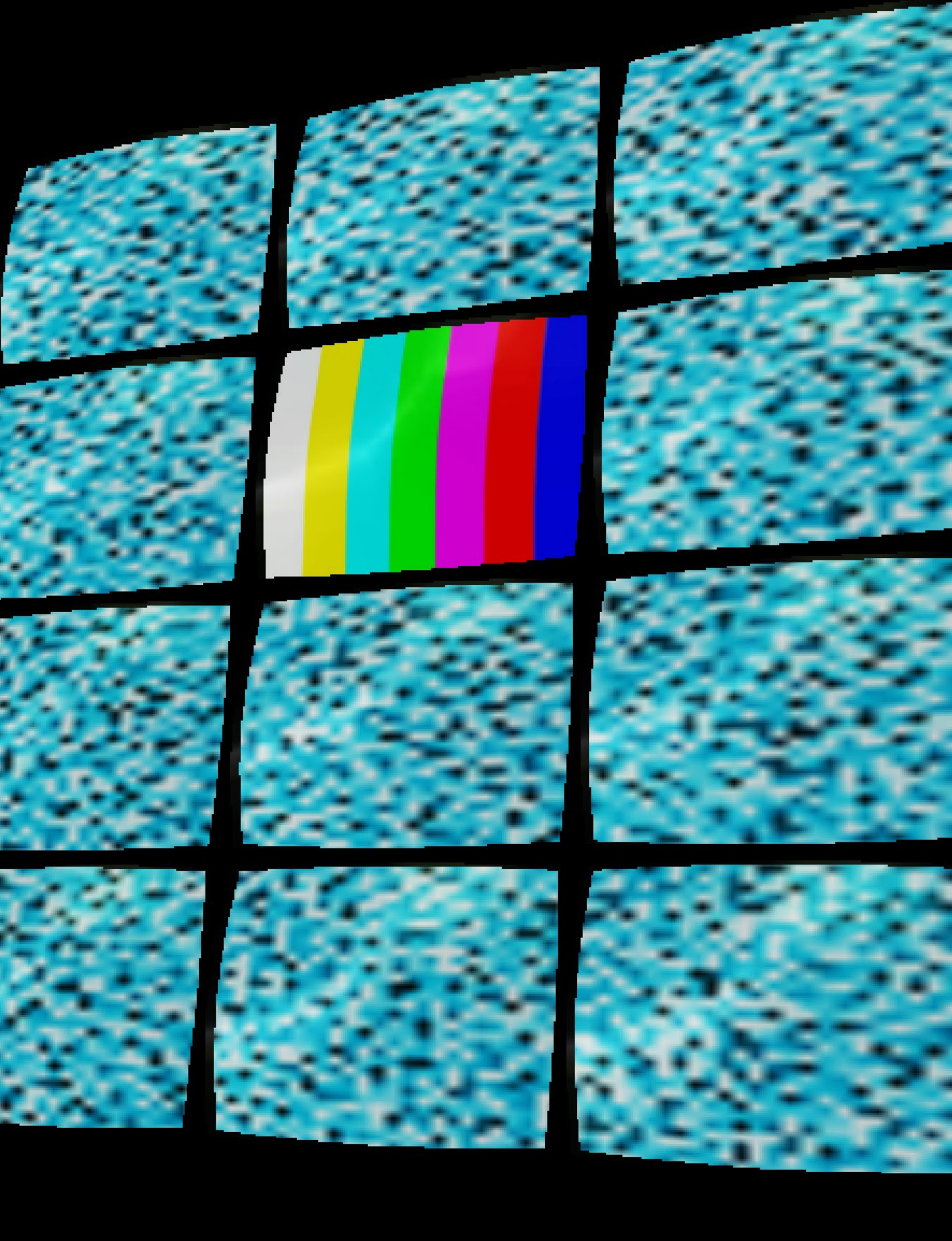
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If you've played the Wii U action game *Chasing Aurora*, then you already know the potential of *Secrets of Rætikon*: audiovisual harmony with a game feel that treats birdlike flight as naturally as a Mario brother jumps.

The developers at Broken Rules start with a simple tale: a lone, presumably divine bird tumbles from the sky onto earth, and finds itself in an unending forest of mysticism, replete with the indigenous prey, predators and companions of the animal kingdom. Their world is a section of the Alps, composed in triangles of many sizes and shades; a geometric wonderland that will no doubt give you the feeling of gliding through a chilly Nordic forest.

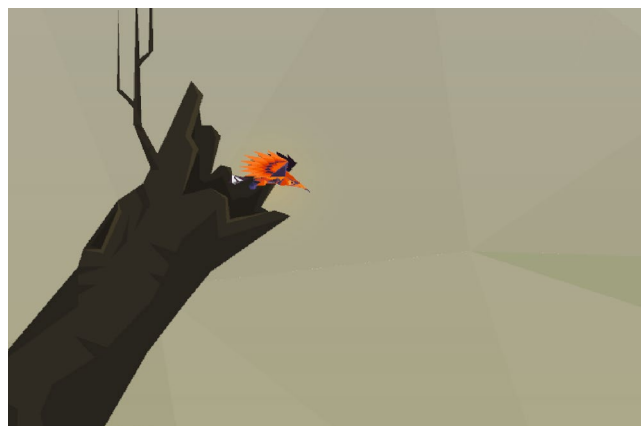
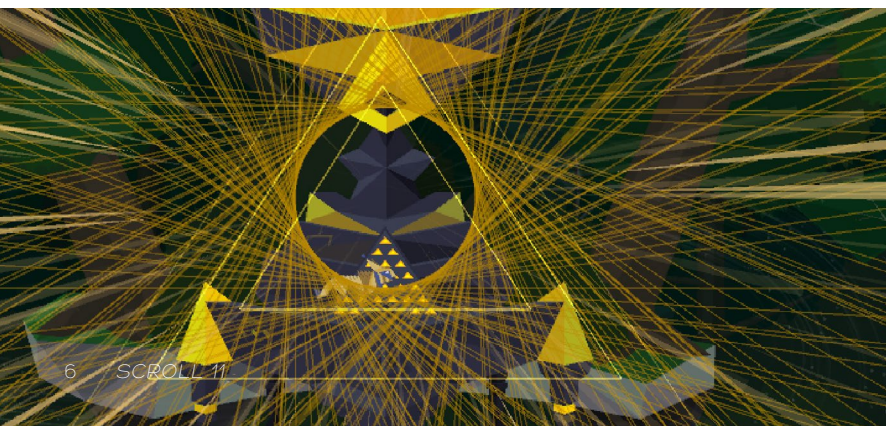
Talking about a flight-focused game like *Rætikon* invites a dozen different puns, so here's just one: playing it is a breeze. As in *Aurora*, controlling the bird is in line with how it would fly in real life: flapping to move low and in tight spaces, gliding on currents of wind, and diving fast to evade predators or just assist in getting around faster. Superhuman (superbird?) feats also factor in, such as grabbing and pulling large rocks or other obstacles to clear a path.

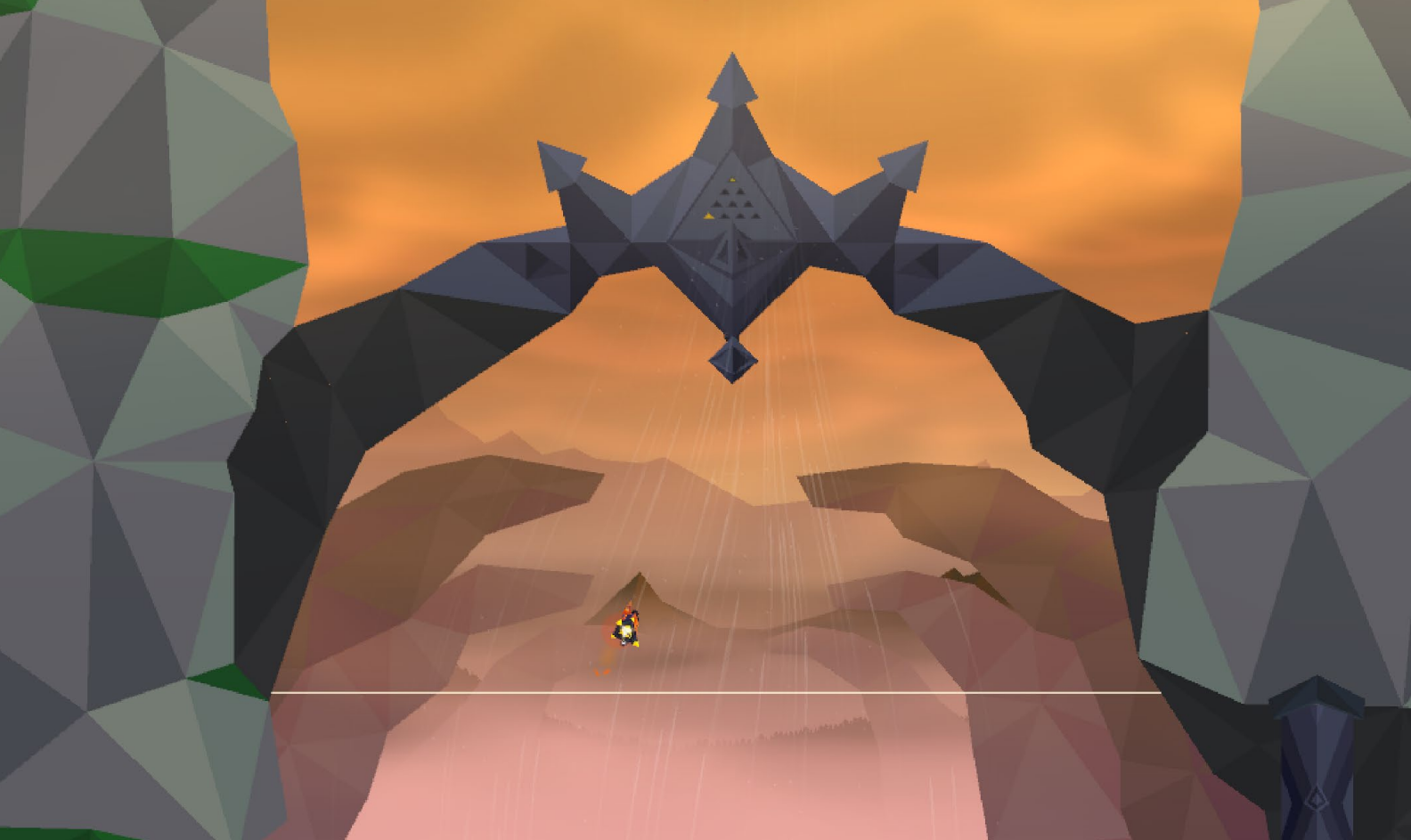
Generally speaking, *Rætikon* is a metroidvania that stays true to the category by keeping exposition at a minimum in the interests of self-discovery. At the beginning, you're taught all you need to know, and after that, all the things you need to pay attention to are obvious when they need to be. Just a few minutes of exploration will teach you to search for the magic shards that are hidden throughout the land, and bring them back to the giant central monument that will, indeed, reveal the secrets of the land. And every new area brings with it a wonderfully lush environment where the puzzles may get trickier, but the desire to see more just gets greater.

Now available as an Early Access game on Steam, *Secrets of Rætikon* receives regular updates, the developers pushing on to finish the game as the community gives feedback. It's no secret that the finished product could be one of the artistic standouts of the year.

NO BIG SECRET

THE FLIGHTS AND THE FANCY OF *SECRETS OF RÆTIKON*





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「D2は他に移植しないでね」

COVER

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The story of a creatively disruptive game studio from

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the 20th century and the man who stood in the center

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It is the 1990s!



Entertainment technology has moved forward to the point where the lines between different kinds of software are blurring. Personal computers are growing in popularity, and electronics and media companies, both driven by the CD-ROM, are saying things are going to change.

They did; just not in the way they wanted.

The word to learn was "multimedia," which in this context meant a convergence of entertainment technology—music, movies, video, games, and computer graphics—in a single unit or platform. CD-ROM and its data storage could offer all that on a single disc, so it was heralded by many as the ticket out of the analog era.

But the technical advantages of the CD quickly ran up against the lofty ambitions of multimedia proponents. Most of what was labeled "multimedia" consisted of canned audio and tiny video clips running on an inelegantly designed desktop computer. It was fun and interesting to turn an encyclopedia into a flashy quest for knowledge, but few other subjects were properly harnessed by software makers. And this desire for convergence came at a time when the sectors of the electronics business were rather disconnected from one another. On the other hand, the computer platforms were inherently open, and multimedia invited a bigger horde of people with a sparkle in their eye, though realizing their dreams was maybe too easy—many multimedia titles were made using drag-and-drop development tools that may have done more harm than help to the medium's image.

Ultimately, corporate hubris slowly submerged the multimedia concept, and what further undermined it was the same thing that had grown so much of the computer business to begin with: games. The most prominent and best-selling CD-ROMs were titles like *Myst* and *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego*; adventure games that integrated fancy music and enhanced animation and video, but on static, predictable screens. There was a way forward, but technological limits put up too many roadblocks.

Because of the marriage of media offered by this new technology, new forms of art—and

artist—were being created under our noses. Graphic designers, illustrators, storytellers, musicians, visionaries, counterculture crusaders, and plain weirdos, all mixing together and creating a baseline for digital creative expression. It wasn't all brilliant, and in truth, the vast majority of it was disposable and unmarketable, but the nails that stuck up would later serve as examples of a small-scale renaissance.

Without a doubt, Kenji Eno was part of that renaissance.

Born in 1970, Kenji Eno (Iino) was demonstrably brilliant from a young age, with a natural talent for music. Like many of his generation, Eno was entranced by *Space Invaders* and other early video games that reached Japan—the primitive electronic sounds and visuals were like windows into another world. After entering elementary school, Eno's mother disappeared, leaving him and his father, though he did not speak much about the incident. As years went on, the Eno household eventually acquired a personal computer, and it was then that young Kenji could not just step into but construct his own windows into the digital world. He took to the computer immediately, and by his last years in elementary school, had submitted to and won a game design contest with an adventure game, *The Lake Towada Serial Murders*.

At the tail end of high school, at 17, Eno dropped out, apparently to no great consternation of his father, with whom Eno says he maintained a good relationship. He doubtlessly felt restricted in traditional school, and spent the next year unproductive. Whether by parental goading or epiphany, Eno went looking for jobs one day, got fired from the first two, and the third was for a small game company called Interlink. He applied as a programmer, though he hadn't done much since his winning adventure game. He got the job and floundered, yet stayed at the company as a sound composer.

Interlink was a contract developer for other publishers, mainly working on the Famicom, and their output was often substandard (including an amusingly hampered version of Sega's *Altered Beast*, which Eno

provided sound for). The combination of bad games and a dearth of passion drove Eno to quit Interlink about a year later. His desire to create original games without the mandates of big brand licenses naturally led to a point in 1989 when Eno founded a new contract developer called EIM (Entertainment Imagination and Magnificence).

Though they made some enjoyable games, on the face of it, EIM wasn't much different from Interlink—by Eno's design, it seemed, and with some naivety. To be sure, their games were proportionally better (*Panic Restaurant*, for instance), but their prospects were disappointing at best. EIM was only producing Famicom games in the system's twilight years, so original titles from a fairly ripe developer were likely not being considered. Eventually, EIM agreed to make a *Superman* game for Sunsoft, but that was retooled into non-specific superhero *Sunman*, and still fell through in the end. And for Eno himself, running a company and managing game development that still wasn't meeting his ideals was a recipe for immense stress, especially at such a young age. EIM crumbled around an emotionally beaten Eno; the company closed shortly after its last games in 1992.

It was then that Eno stopped working in the game business, and all things considered, it was the smart thing to do. He was once again a kid looking for a job. Eno's next position was not as company president, but as a consultant for a magazine; about as far from games or computers as you could get. And yet, there was a digital publishing revolution beginning to rear its head, and it was that magazine job that brought Eno to the Macworld Expo in January 1994.

Apple was a struggling company then, but it was early enough in the decline that fanatical Macintosh users were keeping the dream alive, so to speak. In addition, the latest Macs being sold at the time were multimedia-friendly, both in consumption and creation. A new world of software, creative businesses, and a little bit of recreational drug use made Eno's trip revelatory. On the way back home, he told his travel partner, the magazine's editor, of his desire to get back into the game industry—a desire fueled by the prospects of this new wave of digital media.

On March 1, 1994, with encouragement and generous capital from the magazine publisher, Eno founded Warp at the age of 23. Come hell or high water, he was going to get something out of it.



In 1993, Trip Hawkins and his shiny new company 3DO had attempted to bring the next evolution of multimedia to homes. Like VHS and Compact Disc, 3DO was a standard that could be licensed, and 3DO

consoles could support photo CDs and MPEG video, but they were rarely seen as anything other than video game systems—later models stopped trying to pretend they were anything else. 3DO's attempt to gain a foothold in the industry was riddled with roadblocks and mistakes, but their relative advantage was that they were a new video game company, established in America, that acted against the best practices of Nintendo and Sega by opening up the platform to almost anyone who could afford to get onboard. Furthermore, the only 3DO consoles released were from Japanese and Korean companies—ones who would invite domestic creators onto the platform. 3DO had a presence in Japan virtually by the beginning, and welcomed Japanese software.

Likewise, Warp was not going to be operating like the traditional companies Eno was involved in, and San-Ei Shobo Publishing, makers of that car magazine that kickstarted them, never released a video game before. Warp could have easily made games for PC or Mac and call it a day, but there was a certain prestige, especially back then, in getting your game on a TV console. But the manufacturing demands of Nintendo and Sega would have priced Warp out of the market, and the cheaper formats of the PlayStation and Saturn were still months away. 3DO, with a less restrictive business model, CD format, and a company thrust under the spotlight by media hype before its product shipped, was the most logical choice. Warp and San-Ei were signed up and got to work.

The first 3DO console, Panasonic's R.E.A.L., was released in America in the fall of 1993, then in Japan in March 1994. Warp had been hard at work in the interim, and eventually released their first title, *Flopon the Space Mutant*, the following summer. (San-Ei Shobo only published *Flopon* and *D* while Warp self-published in Japan for the rest of their time in business.) Warp was real, and they had a home. But the work was just beginning.

The most passed-around stories of Kenji Eno paint him as outspoken, insistent, subversive, and table-turning; ultimately, a troublemaker. But these stories belie the real qualities that kept Warp surviving as long as they could have: his intelligence and talent. Eno had the look of the quintessential "sheltered nerd" stereotype—tall, long-haired, and overweight—but he wasn't one to adhere to it. Despite his maverick style, Eno understood how to operate in a restrictive commercial business like the game industry while maintaining a "never sit still" attitude with Warp—like any entertainment business, games are about grabbing an audience and selling, selling, selling.

From moment one, Warp's games were visibly different from most everything else in the mainstream, if not one another. That the dark adventure of *D* followed the cartoony surrealism of *Flopon-kun* was no accident—it was exactly what Eno wanted: to defy expectations and not be pigeonholed. But sometimes artistic

integrity is overshadowed by popularity. If you were a hardcore Japanese gamer, you knew Warp as the makers of mostly colorful, off-the-wall games, and early adopters of the 3DO in Japan were likely more attuned to that to begin with. But on the other side of the world, only a few Warp games were localized, and mostly their dark, dramatic adventures. The landscape of games was changing, but it's one thing to be a "wild" developer of games in Japan, and another to get those games out of the country. However, what stands the test of time is that there may have been games by Warp, but you could barely say there was anything like a "Warp game."

D was in production not long after Warp set up shop. It was a supernatural adventure game dreamed up entirely by Eno—it was his take on the "interactive movie," and was the hat he tossed into the arena of the multimedia revolution. At the time, Cyan's *Myst* was the golden



child: a meticulously crafted puzzle-based adventure game that inspired a wave of contemporaries all over the world. *D* followed a similar path as *Myst* in that it was ported to several different platforms, but Warp had only a faint chance to score as big—*D* shared several elements with *Myst*, but its tone, production quality and punishing gameplay (a two-hour time limit, for one thing) was not going to help it reach the same audience. Nevertheless, Warp's insistence to create "beyond the bounds" made them nearly as notable as Cyan and *Myst* in the so-called new wave of computer game development. In the end, *D* sold around 800,000 copies worldwide, and won a Multimedia Grand Prix award shortly after its release in 1995.

Seemingly knowing the uphill battle for prominence they faced, along with knowing the niche audience they'd foster, Warp self-promoted from day one: almost all of their games featured trailers or demos

of future products, included photos of the staff to go with their names in the credits, and game manuals and packaging were doused in irreverent humor. These things made a Warp release seem like a digital magazine rather than a simple video game. Their 3DO titles also often went against the "point" of packaging—most of the jewel case spines have their proper names printed in English, but the Japanese sides, the ones that naturally faced outward, were the names of completely unrelated music albums. Eno and Warp were never shy about who they were and what they were working on, and they delivered on most of it. But that would soon change.

After the success of *D*, Warp was presented with a number of opportunities of increasing importance: one, that Warp could extend its reach beyond Japan; two, that Eno could improve his talents on a sequel; and three, that Warp could be one of the first developers for the next-generation 3DO system, known as M2.

Though 3DO had largely failed in the game industry, Matsushita (Panasonic) took the reins of the M2 project, and helped architect a system well beyond the capabilities of the current competition. With *D* one of the Japanese highlights of the 3DO library, it seemed natural to grow it into a franchise on the platform.

And so, Eno and Warp got to work on *D2*. Taking place a year after the events of the original *D*, *D2* again featured heroine Laura Harris, now pregnant, and encountering a new supernatural nightmare. During a plane flight, a bizarre storm strikes the plane and kills Laura. At that point, Laura's unborn son is somehow removed and transported back in time several centuries. And that's just the opening. Laura's son would be the hero, now teenaged and fighting in medieval times. And pre-rendered graphics were no longer part of the gameplay—*D2* would be a real-time 3D action-adventure. Warp met some criticism for its relatively simple games up to that point, but *D2* had the potential to legitimize them as a developer that could stand with the best.

Furthermore, *D2* was one of the few actual games for the M2 upon its reveal, and many thought it could be its killer app. The nature of it being a 3D adventure game brought nothing but comparisons to the *Legend of Zelda* series, and the M2's graphic fidelity was beyond any other console game at the time, causing people to keep their eye on new developments. Graphic techniques that now seem primitive were highlighted in *D2*—rooms with fully-modeled furniture, mood-appropriate lighting, and realistic fog, back when fog was a necessary evil.

Warp continued to produce trailers and other advertising for *D2* and keep it known amongst fans and anyone else waiting for

the M2, but months of promises were turning into years. There were problems on all sides: For one, *D2* was an entirely new undertaking for Warp—they went from those simple, often pre-rendered games straight into a complete real-time adventure on hardware that was far from done. It's a fair assumption that the couple of CGI trailer scenes and a few minutes of technical demos represented the sum total of *D2*'s finished content.

But that situation could have turned around. The M2 itself had a more certain fate—progress was stalling regularly, and though the hardware was reaching a finalized state, the game industry was never one where more than a few competitors could survive equally, so for those and no doubt many other reasons, Matsushita got cold feet and canceled the entire rollout in 1997. M2 was dead, and *D2* was now an orphan. On the flip side, the M2 did live on in a handful of Konami arcade games, but *D2* was no arcade game, and would have to find a new home or be scrapped. Actually, it got both, but that part of the story begins elsewhere.



As the original *D2* was being made, Warp was also working on *Enemy Zero*, a new horror adventure spiritually closer to *D* than even *D2*—a CGI-driven quest featuring invisible threats from all sides, but with a sci-fi bent. The protagonist was again a blonde woman named Laura, and while she looked very similar to the Laura from *D*, this was a different character—Eno stated his desire to make Laura his Tippi Hedren; an "actress" who would ideally appear in more of Warp's games.

Though *D2* would originally "stay home" in the 3DO world, *Enemy Zero* would be Warp's first original game for the Sony PlayStation. The move was seen as a big deal—Sony was the up-and-comer with great new creative games and providing formidable competition, and Warp could be the most perfect fit for the platform. Warp's final 3DO title, *Short Warp*, even had a small reference to the PlayStation *Enemy Zero* on the case. It seemed like the start of a beautiful friendship, but it would dissolve in a second.

The PlayStation version of *D* was released in Japan in December of 1995, one year after the system's launch, and was easily the best console version of the game, thanks to the PlayStation's improved video quality. Through publisher Acclaim Japan, Warp was set to sell at least 100,000 copies of the game thanks to advance retail orders, but some restrictive manufacturing

WHILE ENO WAS OUTSPOKEN, HE WAS NOT NECESSARILY A LOOSE CANNON

from Sony Computer Entertainment was holding that back. As Eno put it, Sony gave preferential treatment to their own games, and unfortunately, they reported that they only allocated 40,000 copies of *D*—which was upsetting enough, until it was revealed they actually printed half that. Eno was incensed and betrayed, not to mention facing a big loss as a business. That was enough to end the relationship with Sony, when it just barely got started.

But he wouldn't just close the door. He was upset, but for all Sony knew, Warp was still making *Enemy Zero*. The PlayStation *D* was eventually released, though in the following weeks, Eno began talking to Shoichiro Irimajiri, then vice president of Sega Enterprises. Warp could start making games exclusively for the competing Sega Saturn immediately if they wanted to, but Eno had another idea—if he was going to get back at Sony, he'd rather go about it in a way no other game developer would ever dare.



In what is without a doubt the story that would be forever synonymous with Kenji Eno, the Sony deal was broken off in front of a live audience. On March 27, 1996, the first day of the Sony-led PlayStation Expo trade show, Eno took the podium to confirm the existence of *Enemy Zero* exclusively for PlayStation. Warp prepared a trailer of sorts, which naturally ended with a shot of the PlayStation logo—that then "morphed" into the Sega Saturn logo. *Enemy Zero* was now a Sega Saturn exclusive rather than a PlayStation one, and Eno broke the news to everyone at once.

A hypothetical Hollywood dramatization of this scene might make it into a more intense high-energy sequence of events than might be necessary, but in reality, there was only confusion on all sides. Eno, meanwhile, was amused, because he made his point and never looked back. But while he had been outspoken before and after then, and was self-admittedly going through mental distress at the time, he was not necessarily a loose cannon. It took

a break of trust to completely unfurl Eno's wrath, if not his pranking prowess. He was someone who spoke his mind, and appreciated others who did. But in cases like this, the gall was bolstered by the experience of being an independent game maker. And for what it's worth, he already had a Plan B in place.

Almost 20 years later, Eno's side of this story has been the only one told. It's not clear why Sony printed a fraction of the original order for *D*—perhaps it was just favoritism, as the game was a port from another system, and didn't take advantage of realtime graphics—but the damage had been done, and everyone learned that *Enemy Zero* was headed straight for Saturn. Furthermore, Sega would be the safe haven for Warp for the rest of their life in the business.

The events of 1996 contributed to Warp's output becoming significantly slower and narrowed. Losing *D2* led to a closer focus on *Enemy Zero*, but Warp did produce a second game for Saturn: *Real Sound: The Wind's Regret*. It was a total one-eighty from anything Warp (or indeed, much of the game industry) had done: a visual novel without visuals. Intended as a game for the blind, *Regret* presented a dramatic adventure only through voice and sound, like a radio play—the game was a persistent black screen otherwise. Among the kooky and moody games Warp was known for, *Regret*'s story was down-to-earth and beautiful. It also encouraged Eno to make a deal with Sega to donate a thousand Saturns with copies of the game to organizations for the blind.

Warp's safe haven was turning out well, though their two Saturn games would be the only ones for the system, and Sega would have trouble selling Saturn worldwide after just a couple of years. By 1998, Sega was getting ready to launch its next system, the Dreamcast. Revealed to the public in May 1998, Dreamcast represented a Sega learning from its past mistakes and leaping into the next generation of game technology. Warp was onboard from the beginning, of course. And they were bringing back *D2*, the first Dreamcast game announced.

From the ashes of the M2 and the unfulfillment of the "multimedia" generation rose a retooled *D2* for the Dreamcast, which once again was set to be Warp's biggest and best project to date. Though called "*D2*" in name, virtually everything about the story of the original *D2* was eliminated, even the protagonist, to some degree—Laura Parton was a blonde woman, but no longer Laura Harris from the first game. And though much of the game included similar "exploration" scenes as in *D* and *Enemy Zero*, *D2* also featured enemy battles as first-person-shooting sequences. It marked a sort of maturation for Warp, where ambition and budgets were better aligned than they were years ago, and they were viewed as one of Sega's best advantages.

But like the previous incarnation of *D2*, the Dreamcast game was running into delays. First

announced as a 1999 release (it was one of the earliest Dreamcast games in production before the system's 1998 Japanese launch), it was expected that fall, then delayed to December, with the American release not showing up until August 2000. In Japan, Warp produced a demo disc included with the Dreamcast port of *Kaze no Regret*—its only other Dreamcast release—as a preview and arguable mea culpa of sorts. Nevertheless, the game was certainly on its way to getting done, and fortunately Warp got in under the wire before Sega discontinued the Dreamcast at the start of 2001.

However, while *D2* was the biggest and best game from Warp thus far, and should have signaled the next stage of the company as it moved into the 21st century, instead it signaled its last days.



Eno was becoming listless. Like most mavericks, after time, the wide open road in front of him eventually got shorter. With a lack of widespread international fame, a business changing in front of him, mounting emotional distress, and one or two burned bridges, he needed something else.

Perhaps Eno could work for Sega proper, or get another company to back a new game idea. But that wasn't Kenji Eno. Ever since leaving Interlink as a teenager, he created spaces for himself, never waiting to be given them. Warp could have been seen as his ultimate space, but Warp couldn't sit still, and despite the small, tight team it maintained, Warp was Eno.

It was April 2000, months before the American release of *D2*, when Warp transformed into Superwarp—the same company, yet different. While the CD-ROM inspired the formation of Warp, this time the internet was the catalyst. The concepts surrounding Superwarp were four different services leveraging internet technologies and entertainment: Hotcakes, their general-purpose internet content service; @tack, a platform for online gaming; Goodvibes, a forward-thinking music platform with distribution and social features, and Dreamap, an imprint for interactive DVD player software. Described by Eno at the time as a "blossoming" of Warp, Superwarp ultimately failed to reach their potential. It appeared that trying to set up the different services after such a hard shift away from games was somewhat insurmountable, and the company floundered for several years. Not to mention that it was difficult for Eno to keep focus when just the name of the company carried the vestiges of the "old" Warp. It was Eno's shortest-lived venture, barely lasting into 2001.

From the ashes of Warp and Superwarp came From Yellow to Orange, or "fyto;" Kenji Eno's last professional home. At first, fyto's ambitions were similar to Superwarp's—a

desire to work with new network technologies, but with a narrower focus on the mobile phone industry. With Eno at the helm, fyto developed the "Cmode" system for Coca-Cola, which enabled vending machines to accept electronic money cards and barcodes sent through cell phones. In time, fyto would become more of a wide-reaching firm, not unlike a smaller-scale Ideo, providing other mobile-focused platforms and services that went beyond the usual email newsletters. The company even dabbled in CD and DVD publishing.

fyto continued to operate for several years, and still does. During that time, Eno remained distant from the game industry, continuing to do under-the-radar, comparatively mundane work. However, he never remained silent. Since the earliest days of Warp's website, Eno had been writing op-eds in his own special little corners—he was blogging before there was blogging. Before long, he set up his own personal blog in 2002, and updated it for the next 10 years. And once Twitter rose in



prominence, Eno jumped on, finally lending his fans from all over the world a relatively instantaneous way to interact with the man. Luckily he knew some English.

Regardless, Eno spoke neutrally of his post-Warp life, as if he hadn't been as creative as he wanted. It was looking like Kenji Eno had become like so many other burnt-out game developers of the late '90s—going astray after their company didn't survive and couldn't give them lifetime careers, and attempting to find stability and happiness with other jobs. He and Warp, once joined at the hip, were seen as relics of another age.

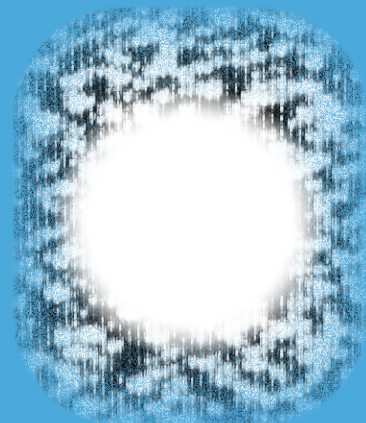
And yet while Eno was originally fired up to get back into the game business with Warp, music had always been his first love. Not only did he write most of Warp's game stories, he composed or otherwise produced their soundtracks, and music is a force that underlies all of Warp's work. One exception to in-house music was the *Enemy Zero* score, by minimalist composer Michael Nyman, who Eno allegedly sequestered in

HE CREATED SPACES FOR HIMSELF, NEVER WAITING TO BE GIVEN THEM

a hotel room until he agreed to provide the music. It was a striking string-driven score unique to the genre, and years later, parts of the score would reappear in other places, namely in Nyman's take on the famed silent movie *Man With a Movie Camera*. Music kept Eno grounded as best as possible, and for many years he released a steady stream of tracks on his blog, mostly remixes of Yellow Magic Orchestra songs. In his final years, he even started a band, Norway, along with a few musician friends.

Elsewhere, Eno continued to be opinionated, online and off. Though he had been part of a few books about himself, Warp, and video games in general, his last book, 2011's *Dear son*, was an illustrated open letter to his son, explaining his views on nuclear power following Japan's tsunami and nuclear disaster that year.

In 2009, Eno returned to game making. Inspired by the Wii since Nintendo's first reveal of the system and its motion controller, he began developing a game custom-made for Wii: *You, Me, and the Cubes*, a puzzle game where players balance giant cubes by tossing equal numbers of male and female avatars onto the cubes' surfaces. It was fyto's one and only video game, and published by Nintendo; a late if nonetheless nice bit of recognition for Eno from the kings of the Japanese game industry. In addition, Eno designed an early iOS game, *One-Dot Enemies*, where players must squash as many pixels as possible. Like the Wii game, Eno took the most appealing part of the hardware—in this case, the iPhone's multitouch screen—and set out to make a simple yet enjoyable game with it. These games were steps back from the big-budget, high-ambition grandeur of *D2*, and wouldn't jumpstart a hypothetical second coming of Warp, but they showed the work of a ten years' wiser Eno, who kept things lean and had a better idea of what people would be attracted to.





On February 20, 2013, Kenji Eno died of hypertensive heart failure, mere months before his 43rd birthday.

To family, friends and admirers, it was no less than devastating—especially when in recent years, following an earlier heart attack, Eno began shedding the weight that formed his unmistakable presence in his youth. But improved health presumably couldn't suppress the effects of all the incredible labor and stress he put upon himself at Warp; by his own admission, Eno's sanity was challenged multiple times in the process of creating games, along with the marketing and bureaucracy that went with it.

This look back at Eno's work may not be the kind of thing he would have liked to do on his own, as he stated his displeasure at looking back to the past for too long. But for the rest of us, Warp's games hold substantial importance. Not that it's black-and-white: while their games were seen as innovative for one or two key concepts, on the whole, they were not showstoppers. Rather, it's the ways they were created, the world they were created in, and the man who led them to completion.

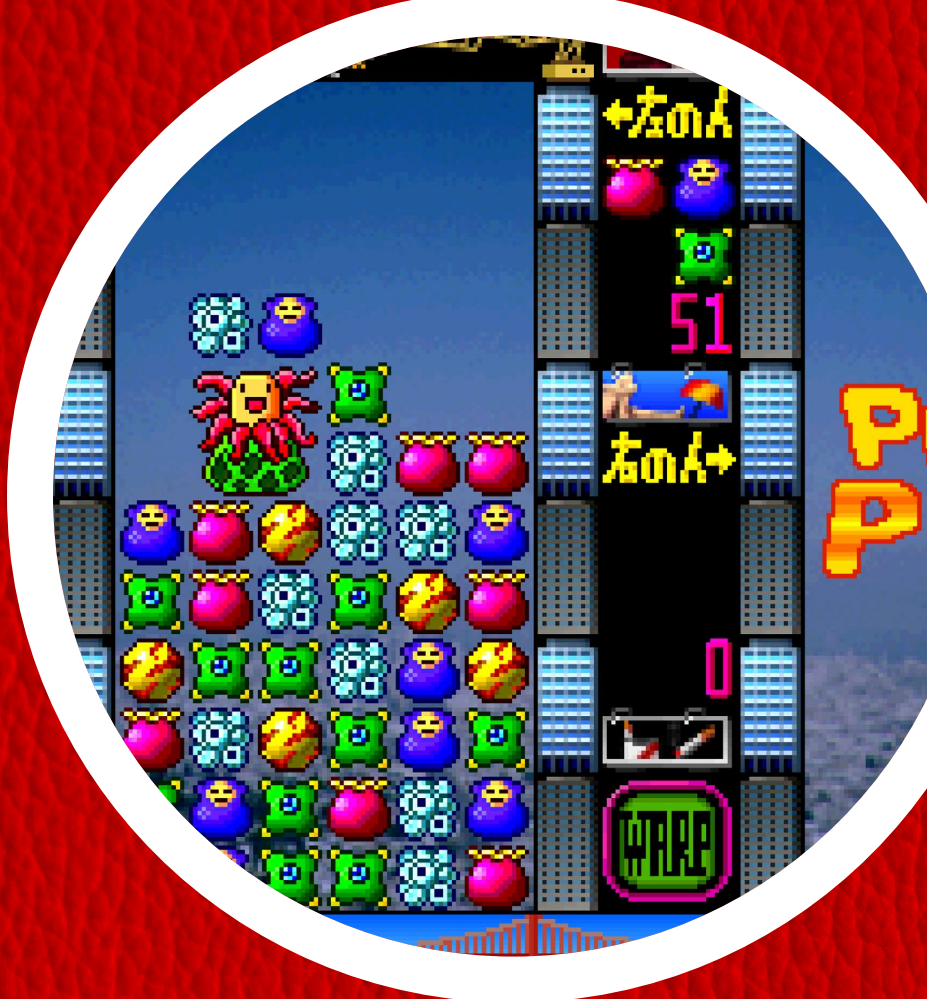
Many forward-thinking Japanese game designers were initially shackled to their corporate masters, then spent their later years bouncing from place to place. Kenji Eno, however, broke out on his own early on, quickly established himself in a changing landscape while dealing with the usual rank and file, and left behind several of the most unique and barely revisited game concepts of the past 20 years, warts and all. That is the Warp catalog, and it isn't worth forgetting. So here it is.



Flopon the Space Mutant



3DO
1994



For most

independent game companies,

starting with a puzzle game is practically

cliché. And even for Warp, with the reputation

they would gain, they too debuted with a simple

drop-and-match puzzle game: *Flopon the Space Mutant*.

Although, typical as puzzle games may be, Warp appeared to use *Flopon* as part thesis statement about the company as a whole: it was cute but bizarre; subdued but brash, and adhered to few rules.

The eponymous Flopon is a delightful yet off-putting creature; he resembles a *Dragon Quest* slime as envisioned by Lovecraft. His myriad mutant friends look similar; amoebic creepy crawlies that nonetheless have a tinge of cuteness to them, like Nekopun the cat-slash... slug? Their origin story is sparse—they're space mutants. Mutants from space. About the only thing that's obvious about them is that they can combine and grow, which is how the game is played.

Not that puzzle games need a dollop of "story" dropped onto them, but that *Flopon* appeared on the scene with little pretense from Warp screams the game's status as a freshman effort, one that put art before structure.

And you see that at first boot: after a short opening screen that presents an RPG called "Fantasy Quest" (complete with a petered-out version of the *Dragon Quest* theme), Flopon bursts onto the screen, and from there, the game's audiovisual design is a goopy, borderline psychedelic pile of mismatched colors and somewhat ill-fitting music. It is, like half of Warp's 3DO games, a clear indicator

that the company was full of young computer artists tossing whatever they could into the boiler.

With *Tetris* hard to copy for various creative and legal reasons, puzzle games in the '90s





found little competition to clone except Compile's *Puyo Puyo*. *Flopon* was certainly no exception: like in *Puyo Puyo*, you drop various formations of tiny colorful space mutants, which stick together and disappear in chains. Grouping the same mutants in two-by-two blocks transform them into larger, apparently "adult" versions that can boost points and take out distant like-colored pieces once they're cleared. Unlike *Puyo*, however, the three-piece formations don't rotate as a whole shape, but instead the outer pieces flip around the center piece as an axis. In practice, this adds a couple more presses of the rotate button than expected, which is tolerable at first, but annoying and disorienting when the pressure is on.

With humor and panache dictating how *Flopon* came out, we're left with the fact that it is a rather bare game. The mechanics take after *Puyo Puyo*, but even *Puyo Puyo* had a story mode—both the one- and two-player modes are pretty much endless. Sure, so is *Tetris*, but *Flopon* excels on the strength of its characters and little else. At a time in Japanese gaming when, for whatever reason, the match-three puzzle game was beginning to saturate every platform, *Flopon* had barely a leg to stand on in the genre.

But trying to mount this game on a pedestal

is futile, and its relative worth is moot, especially considering that it was a freshman effort and Warp rose above it. Speaking of Warp, *Flopon* also established who the company was outside the bounds of the main game. For starters, there's the staff reel included in the "Omake" menu, which introduces the principal employees of the company via a series of short introductory videos (an idea to be revisited in *Enemy Zero*). They're short and sweet, basically home movies, and offered a glimpse into the office life during Warp's first year. And then there's the "short games"—Warp's one-note, often one-button game concepts that predated the notion of indie developer "game jams"—they were examples of hastily-assembled little games that the staff worked on alongside the "big" project. First is *Dance Tengoku*, where you have an interactive beatbox that plays sounds and visuals depending on the buttons pressed and how many times—similar to something seen in *ToeJam and Earl*, but with greater breadth.



Then there's *Hata-age University*—"hata-age" being a word for launching or directing an army, which in this case means semaphore, and directing Nekopun to repeat the button commands told to you to successfully pull off the flag signals. Then, *Oyaji Hunter*, where you beat up a lecherous old man by



simply mashing the buttons to build strength, pressing one again to determine a multiplier, and repeat until the pervert's hit points are drained and he's reduced to a bloody pulp. There's literally nothing else to these games, but that's what makes them so amusing, and Warp would continue to include them in subsequent 3DO titles.

In time, Warp would be known for higher-grade games, but started off with something so low-grade as *Flopon*. They weren't alone, of course—3DO's open platform saw other small-time games from anyone who wanted a piece of it (within reason). *Flopon the Space Mutant* was a humble beginning, and certainly not the game Warp was remembered for, but it was more than acceptable as a calling card.





Kenji Eno's aspirations for Warp were big, and almost immediately realized: while the company could be a collective of creative minds throwing goo at the wall and seeing what sticks, it could also be a place for "real," bigger-budget titles. The latter kinds would be few far and between (and eventually all thematically similar), but they would, for better or worse, decide the public image of the company. And it all began with the moody adventure *D no Shokutaku* (lit. "D's Dining Table;" officially interpreted as "D's Diner"), or just *D* everywhere else in the world.

The story opens on a Victorian-style hospital somewhere in Los Angeles, where the esteemed doctor Richter Harris has gone berserk and opened gunfire in the halls of the facility. His daughter Laura hears the news and speeds to the scene from her home in San Francisco. Strangely, the hospital has maybe two police cars in front of it, and Laura is free to walk in by her lonesome—some curious hostage tactics, for sure. By means of a supernatural portal in the lobby, Laura is transported to a castle of some kind, far removed from L.A., if not the present day. Unable to leave, Laura is forced to find a way through as the ephemeral floating head of Richter tries to dissuade her from stopping him.

Because the story is introduced in full once the game boots up, it's not worth spending too much time on the set-up. When the player is given control, it's just after Laura is transported to the castle, facing a (presumably eponymous) dining table. And that... really is it for the introduction. If you ever saw *D* from afar—in reviews or advertisements—you might have thought there was more to the story, as you see the same few screenshots of Laura exploring the castle. But no, the intent of the game is to get you up to speed and start exploring as soon as possible, and with as little guidance as possible. Laura investigates strange furniture, encounters grotesque scenes, narrowly avoids deadly traps (including running from a boulder Indiana Jones-style), and literally starts putting pieces together, unlocking new sections of the castle in an attempt to reach her father. The player must keep track of the variables of each puzzle, and (slowly) walk back and forth between rooms to solve them all.

Like its genre compatriots, *D* transcends the graphics capabilities of the hardware it was on. The entire game is pre-rendered computer animation, produced on Amiga systems in the Warp office, though as an improvement on "slideshow"-style adventures, you could more clearly "move" through the world. The castle is made up of predetermined hotspots for Laura to move to, each one presented as a still frame, and when moving in a direction or making an action, it immediately shifts to a mini-movie of Laura acting on or walking to the next point. It's nearly seamless—video compression and color disparity don't make it perfect—but it works, and few other CD-ROM adventures tried it. And after you get used to it, you'll encounter the game's sole quick-time event, which involves dodging the sword of a sentient suit of armor working hard to kill Laura. She dodges the attacks and eventually leads the knight into the pit below, but Laura can also fall into the pit if a command is entered too early or late, then she has to climb back up and do it all over again. The leniency of this scene is slim, with the windows of time to press the buttons demanding not just memorization but reflexes to go with it. As such, even getting the hang of the pattern may not save Laura from falling a dozen or more times until the armor is subdued.

It's the only significant bit of "twitch" gameplay in *D*, but it's also a bit that can really mess up your progress. That's because *D*'s big challenge was its greatest point of contention: you have just two hours—until the in-game stroke of midnight—to get Laura through the castle and confront her father, lest she fail instantly. This was in stark contrast to most other adventure games, where "game over" didn't exist, unless you were really stuck. On the flip side, though Laura encounters many different traps in the castle, she doesn't die

from any of them; she can only avoid the same dangers again and again. In addition, you can't pause or save the game at all—a bold move in the 32-bit generation, where memory cards became the norm. *D* is an interactive movie with an emphasis on "movie," whether you like it or not. Of course, once you know the puzzle solutions, you can complete the game in a fraction of the time—unless that knight just gives you too hard of a time. But novice puzzle solvers are unlikely to enjoy themselves, especially with one more intentional limitation: the compact Laura uses to see hints about the next puzzle can only be used three times before it shatters.

As Laura explores more of the castle, getting past more traps and locked doors, one may wonder when the big reveal is coming up. The answers behind Richter's insanity, Laura's past, or even where the hell she is don't start flooding in until the last quarter of the game. The disingenuous nature of this is that to really figure out what's going on, you must happen upon four glowing scarab beetles that send Laura into a trance and display flashbacks to when she was a child. Up until the end of the game, these offer the only glimpses at backstory, slowly building the tale of how a younger Laura stabbed her mother and devoured her flesh, as her family's bloodline is that of the legendary Dracula, and curses father and daughter with a desire for human flesh. And indeed, the game depicts a flashback where Laura eats what can only be her mother's forearm.

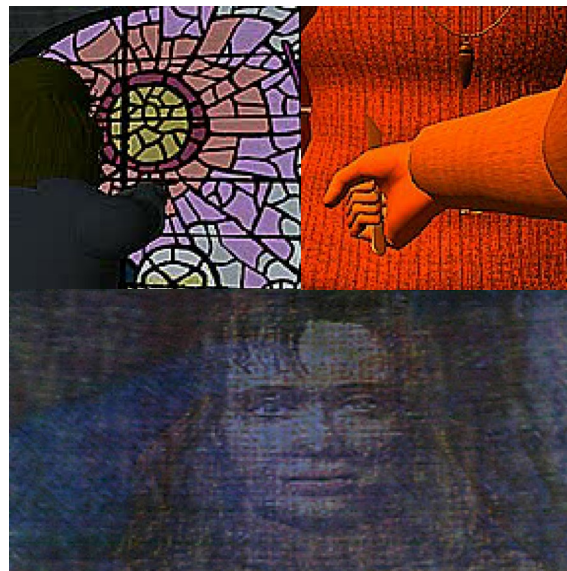
Heavy stuff. The other, more direct option is to have all of this told to you by Richter at the climax of the game before he turns into a demon. That's when Laura has only two choices left: kill her father or submit. The game offers endings for both, and naturally, the "good" ending has Richter killed, and Laura and his body returning to their own time.

D raises another question besides any concerning the story: does it accomplish being what everybody thinks it is—a scary game? The cannibalism scene is like a sucker punch, if you happen to see it, but beyond that, there are few jump scares or monster closets. To call it "psychological horror" is also a bit of a reach; Richter is certainly insane, and we get peeks into Laura's dark past, but those are all vignettes, and essentially shoehorn a vague entity called "story" underneath all the methodical puzzle-solving. So "scary" may not be the word, but gloomy? Absolutely. The feeling of isolation in being the only person exploring a castle that's dead quiet is what is really at play. Laura is isolated from the world she knows, her transformed father, and even herself. And it's a theme Eno would build upon in all of Warp's dramatic games—was it a mere fascination, or a reflection of the man? The questions seem to never cease.

Annoying as the vagueness of *D* is, it ended up working in its favor. But by Eno's own admission, the story was played by ear as the animators continued constructing scenes. Dracula didn't even factor into things until midway through, and that was when the name "D" was already decided. And the cannibalism scene, despite being easily separable from the rest of the story, was added as a last-ditch attempt to shock the audience. It's hard to determine what the vision behind *D* really was, because for all of Eno's intelligence, he was still young, and an inexperienced storyteller. Revelatory bits of narrative were tossed in while Eno was also trying to design the game in an adventure framework and run a company—no one would have it easy in that situation. Nevertheless, *D* was a crucial step towards *Enemy Zero* and *D2*, which improved upon exposition, dramatic tone, and better handled suspense.

Among all the puzzle adventures that followed *Myst* from 1993 to 1996, *D* is in the upper tier, but today, that certainly isn't saying much. The two-hour limit and lack of saving can be seen a necessary evil to more understanding, history-aware players today, but good luck trying to eke out a drop of appreciation from anyone else. (But don't say Eno didn't know exactly who he wanted playing it). And like so many games that used pre-rendered graphics of its time, *D*'s look has aged rapidly: environment detail is inconsistent, lighting is unrealistic, and the animations are laughably canned, even for being pre-rendered. Every time the camera looks at Laura or Richter, it's awfully silly seeing their mouths bob open—though to be fair to Warp, the original Japanese version wasn't voiced, and no one outside of ILM would be good at animating humans in CGI for several years.

D was how the rest of the world knew Warp, as it was the first of its games to be localized outside Japan. Panasonic published the Western 3DO release, but elsewhere it was Acclaim—who also published the console versions of *Myst* and *Riven*—and their marketing tried to apply a darker tone to the game, adding a woman's face crying blood to the box art, and flavor text describing a "descent into the dark pit of your soul." Well, not quite, but for Warp, *D* was an ascent towards the limelight.



3DO • 1995
PS1 • 1995
SEGA SATURN • 1995
PC • 1996





What's the one thread that runs through many Warp games yet is the least discussed? First-person views. *D* and the other adventure games had it; *Oyaji Hunter* had it; *Kaze no Regret* had it—narratively—but the one legitimate, definable first-person shooter in the bunch was *Totsugeki Karakuri: Megadas!!*, Warp's second 3DO release, the first published by themselves, and another bizarre little experiment before *D* shipped.

Megadas!! is best explained as a first-person arena deathmatch game. It's like *Faceball 2000* without the walls. You choose from a selection of battle-honed

robots, through they all look so bizarrely different from one another that they may as well be rejects from *Flopon the Space Mutant*. There's a googly-eyed television and an anthropomorphic Mt. Fuji, for starters. You know, *robots*.

These robots fight on square arenas, buzzing around the place trying to hit each other with their projectiles while trying not to get hit themselves. It's a simple concept with a simple win condition: whack the other robot enough times to push them out of the arena—best two out of three. The arenas are not large, either, making for some fast, cutthroat play each

and every time.

Controls are as simple as could be, though this is an early Japanese FPS, so the feel is a bit fiddly. The face buttons are used to move forward or backward, while the R button fires shots. The funny thing is that while you can turn in place, you can't backpedal—you must press the "forward" button to reach any point in the arena. And in a game where you absolutely must keep moving to survive, this can be quite dangerous—imagine needing to back away to avoid a shot, but instead going forward in a wide arc that will take you off the edge of the arena. Not good.

TOTSUGEKI KARAKURI

MEGADAS!!

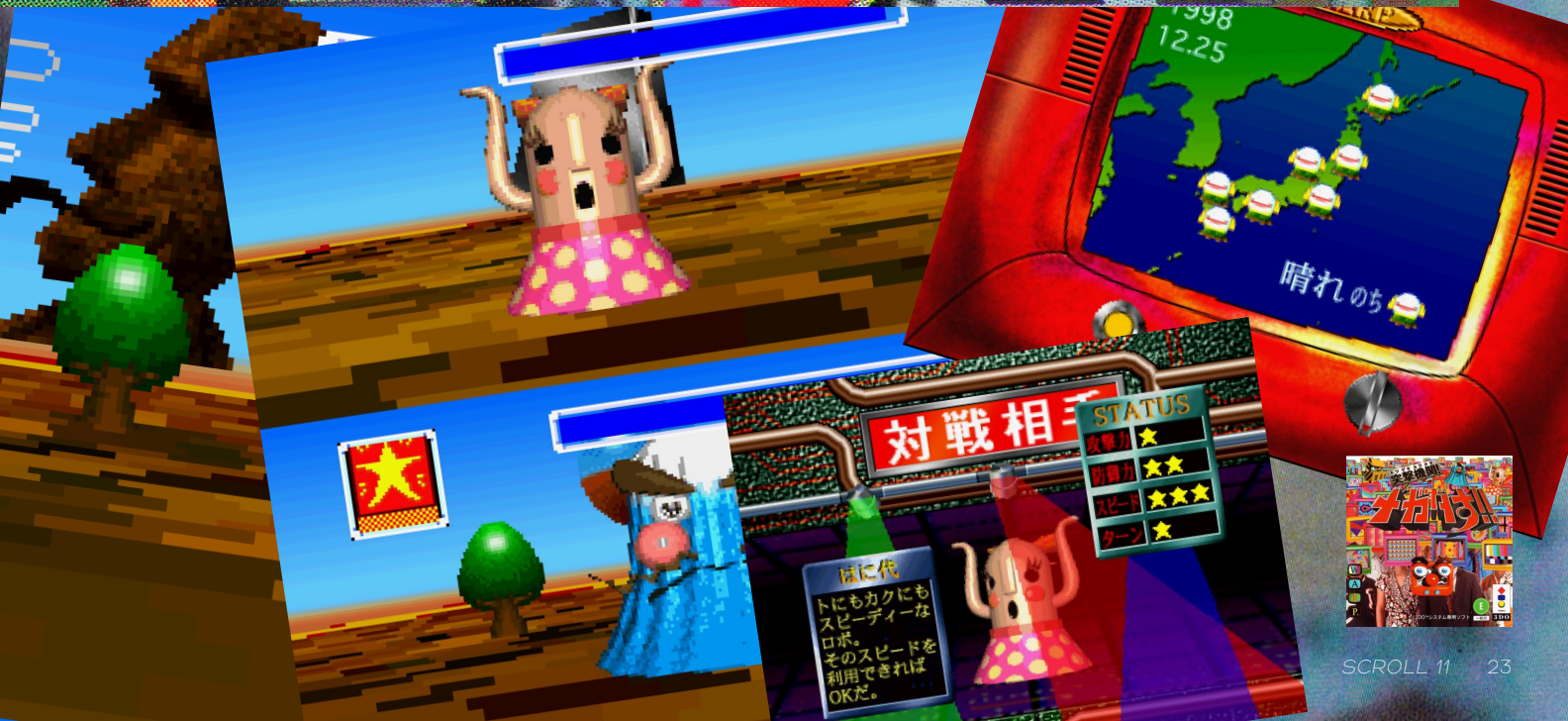
Along with *Flopon*, *Megadas!!* further establishes the look of early Warp, with every screen looking like a spraypainted, bubble-lettered mash of pop art that doesn't answer to the norm. It can be distracting, but to Warp's credit, they also took advantage of the 3DO's strengths: the arena is 3D and polygonal (granted, it consists of one large, flat square plus some obstacle sprites), and the robots are high-resolution CGI renders that fit in quite nicely.

But what *Megadas!!* boils down to, along with *Flopon*, is that it's still a fairly

rudimentary product. The main game is straightforward to its detriment, never wavering from the core concept, and the only other game mode, two-player versus, is just a reiteration (the game is always in split-screen, even when playing against the computer). Warp seemed to be conscious of this, however, as a trial version of *Megadas!!* would show up in nearly all the other Warp 3DO games, minus *D*, of course. The problem with its shallowness, though, falls only on single-player play. Along with *Flopon*, this was Warp's only other multiplayer game, and with another

player, *Megadas!!* is improved just by adding another human element. At first, you both futz with the controls, but as the understanding becomes greater, so too does the competitive streak. In time, you are gliding along the area, bumping into each other, accidentally killing yourselves, and swearing at each other until it's finally time to say "no more."

Call it an experiment, a way to pay the bills, or just a footnote—*Megadas!!* was just the next way people saw what Warp was capable of.





OYAJI HUNTER MAHJONG

3DO.1995

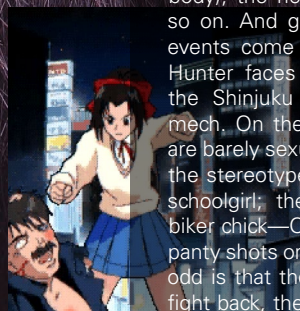
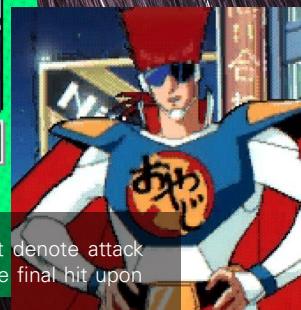
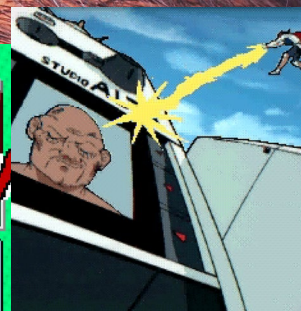
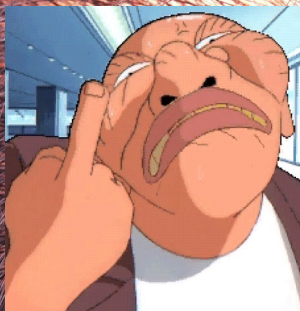


One may have thought, at the time, that if ever Warp were to take one of its short games from its other titles and turn it into a full-fledged game, *Oyaji Hunter* would be at the bottom of the list. Instead, it was the first one up. Chronologically, *Oyaji Hunter Mahjong* was Warp's next game after *D*, and those two best represented the multifaceted way Eno wanted to run Warp—a company that could go from serious and dark to goofy and bright at the drop of a hat, and back again.

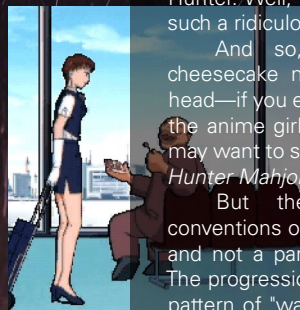
Mahjong is never thought of as a key part of the video game industry; it's a subgenre rarely discussed, if not swept under the rug. That's because mahjong games hold a largely negative reputation in and out of Japan: certainly, those who legitimately love the game can find the top-tier computer versions and be happy with them, but for the rest of us, they've been dismissed as basement-level crap. The equally dismal reputation of Japan's mahjong parlors doesn't help, but with video games, the pall is almost entirely over arcade mahjong games; the cheapest and trashiest of the bunch. They may have started out fine, but eventually companies realized

that the big money games involved playing against young women (photographed, cartoon or otherwise) and removing their clothes with each successful move. The market flooded and more or less stayed that way—mahjong games could easily be found in either the professional or sexy categories. And *Oyaji Hunter* took a swipe at the whole genre.

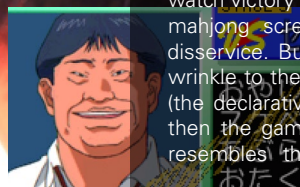
But first, how could we get this far without some etymology? "Oyaji" means "old man" in Japanese, but has a derogatory meaning in daily use—the unappealing middle-age-and-up men who embody the bullheaded company boss, the annoying grandpa, or worse, the groper on the train. In this game, they all fall under the same umbrella of creepazoids, and as in the original, it's all about defeating those who go a little too far. *Oyaji Hunter* now has a face—a spiky-haired, cheap-looking superhero who appears swiftly and out of nowhere whenever a woman cries for help after being accosted by one of the mental oyaji, who is then zapped by *Oyaji Hunter*'s electric whip, but not entirely dispatched, as they challenge *Oyaji Hunter* to a mahjong match before giving in.



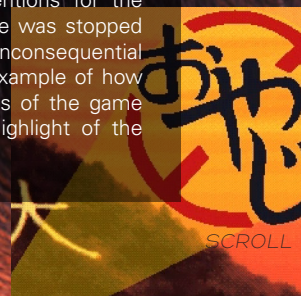
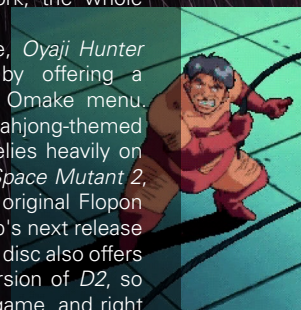
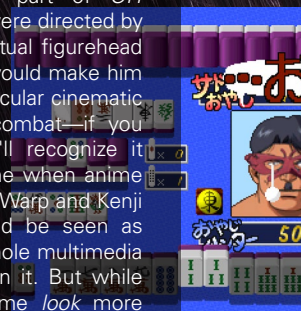
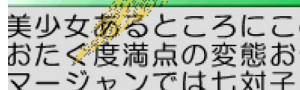
The oyaji are visibly disturbed individuals: the first is a moustached type who keeps a ream of cameras under his trenchcoat (plus his half-naked body); the next one a portly bondage freak, and so on. And given the over-the-top setting, when events come to a head in the final stage, Oyaji Hunter faces off against a tiny oyaji who turns the Shinjuku Alta building into a giant hulking mech. On the flip side, the women in the game are barely sexualized. Sure, they're cute and match the stereotypes of other mahjong game girls (the schoolgirl; the flight attendant; the geisha; the biker chick—OK, she is a bit more objectified), but panty shots or nipples won't be found here. What's odd is that though most of them do their best to fight back, they still need the intervention of Oyaji Hunter. Well, maybe you can't expect much from such a ridiculous concept.

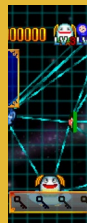
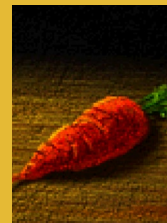
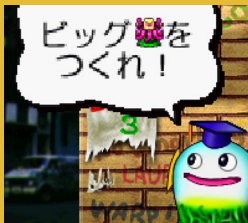


And so, the stereotype about Japan's cheesecake mahjong games was turned on its head—if you ever saw an oyaji hunched over ogling the anime girls in a strip mahjong game, you too may want to shock some sense into him, and *Oyaji Hunter Mahjong* gives you the chance. But the game is deceiving: flipped conventions or no, it really is just a mahjong game, and not a particularly innovative or polished one. The progression through all five stages is a simple pattern of "watch anime, play game until you win, watch victory anime, repeat," and the largely static mahjong screens do the whole presentation a disservice. But the stages do have some sort of wrinkle to them: If you or the oyaji scores a "riichi" (the declarative, often decisive move in a match), then the game shifts to an "attack" screen that resembles the original *Oyaji Hunter*: you pick from a shuffled hand of cards that denote attack multipliers, and that determines the final hit upon the oyaji's (or your) hit points.



About the only prestigious part of *OH Mahjong* is that its anime scenes were directed by Ichihiro Itano, an animator and eventual figurehead in the *Macross* series. His talent would make him known for the "Itano circus," a particular cinematic approach to animating airborne combat—if you watch enough mech anime, you'll recognize it before long. In the mid-'90s, a time when anime was at peak popularity, the likes of Warp and Kenji Eno collaborating with Itano could be seen as quite a get. Plus it tied into that whole multimedia thing, and Warp's leadership within it. But while the anime stylings made the game look more professional than Warp's prior work, the whole product feels like a lark. Though based on a minigame, *Oyaji Hunter Mahjong* continues the legacy by offering a couple of short games under an Omake menu. The first is *Mahjaris*, a fittingly mahjong-themed block-dropping puzzle game that relies heavily on chaining. Then there's *Flopon the Space Mutant 2*, a slightly enhanced version of the original Flopon game, but just as bare (though Warp's next release would remedy that). In addition, the disc also offers the first glimpse at the original version of *D2*, so soon after the release of the first game, and right when 3DO made clear their intentions for the M2. But for *Oyaji Hunter*, its future was stopped short here, with a goofy but inconsequential mahjong game. Look at it for an example of how Warp and Eno felt about the dregs of the game business at the time; not as a highlight of the genre it poked fun at.





Flopon the Space Mutant 2 was pretty much done already. The demo showed up in the Omake menu of *Oyaji Hunter Mahjong*, and would continue to show up afterward. But Flopon christened Warp on its maiden voyage—he deserved to come back bigger than ever. Enter *Flopon World*, which, unfortunately, marked both his return and his exit. And *Flopon 2* was only part of the "world"—the disc features four different *Flopon* games as a celebration of its weird cast of characters. Truthfully, you couldn't ask for a better send-off.

Again, as with the rest of Warp's 3DO lineup, *Flopon World* is a collection of different games, though all Flopon-related rather than within Warp's usual menagerie of weird short-form games and demos. *Flopon the Space Mutant 2* is, of course, the centerpiece. So, as a sequel that was banded about in other games as a demo, what crazy new stuff does it bring to the table? Honestly, not much. *Flopon 2* is a simple rehash of the original puzzle game with different background graphics. Too harsh, is it? Unfounded, even? Nah. But to throw it a bone, the original *Flopon* was kind of slapdash, so to see the same concept gussied up a little bit was nice to see. And it's not that the new



still create four-piece "big" aliens, which will clear like-colored pieces in the vicinity. But any big clear is met with just more aliens dropping in from the top until it's all tapped out.

Lastly, we have *Space Flopon*, which is far removed from the rest of the games. For the first time, Flopon and company exit the puzzle game realm and enter the field of arcade space shooters. You start by selecting stages from a star chart-as-world map, and can also choose your favorite alien buddy, be it Flopon, Isopin, Nekopun, Nicopen, or Medapan—their weapon types are different, so choose wisely! The gameplay is reminiscent of *Gyruss*—your chosen alien buddy moves left and right along an arc and shoots down the waves of enemies that come in. *Space Flopon* has surprising length to it, too—the number of stages is vast, you get access to a shop for power-ups, and the aliens can be leveled up as they continue to succeed. *Space Flopon* should have been the focus of *Flopon World* rather than *Flopon 2*, but with three puzzle games in the mix, it might have seemed disingenuous. Regardless, it's the highlight of the collection.

Trip'd, Warp's second ever American 3DO release, is often confused with the *Flopon* games. Indeed, it was a *Flopon*

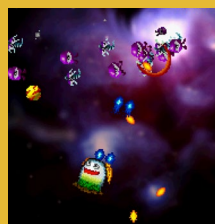
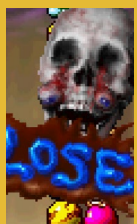
graphics aren't any less bizarre or creepy. Have a look at the 2P Vs. mode, with a demonic tree right in the center, or the Vs. CPU mode, where you select your opponents reflected in someone's eyeball. It's refinement over improvement.

It's what isn't a sequel that makes *Flopon World* fun. The next game in the bunch is *Nazopon-kun*, which is little more than the "puzzle" modes of puzzle games adapted to the Floponverse, with Nazopon (Flopon wearing a mortarboard) presenting you with a simple, different challenge for 100 stages, often involving the creation of "big" aliens or just clearing the whole screen in a few moves. For those who get extra far but lose or have to quit, the stages have associated passwords.

Following that is *Flopon-kun 3/2*, an elimination-type puzzle game akin to the "Same Game" or *Sega Swirl* formula. A screen full of random alien pieces must be cleared as best as possible, though you can only select and clear groups of pieces touching each other. By thinking a few moves ahead, you can strategize big chain combos, though for the rest of us, it's a step-by-step process that doesn't always end in success. However, the "Flopon-ness" factors in by the fact that you can

game, though it was only the "*Flopon 2*" portion of *Flopon World*. Granted, while the core of *Flopon* is a puzzle game, separating it from the extra games of *Flopon World* just makes *Trip'd* as bare as the first *Flopon* (though it did include a version of *Dance Heaven* called *Trip'Dance*). Still, the game kept its kooky graphics and sound, though with the aliens given and the lighthearted instruction manual, it gave the West the first real introduction to Warp's staff, showing that they weren't just the faceless people who made *D*.

Surprisingly, the next *Flopon* game would appear on the PlayStation. *Flopon the Space Mutant P!* was published and produced by Asmik, with seemingly zero involvement from Warp other than licensing, and maintains the weird character designs of the series. However, it tries to brighten things up in the design of the rest of its graphics. For a game that flew under the radar on 3DO, *Flopon* on PlayStation flew even further under, buried in the sea of puzzle games that rose from Japan in the mid-'90s. But for *Flopon World*, the little guy and his creepy friends had a home, and Warp made sure they made a graceful exit.



FLOPON the SPACEMUTANT

Rap & Lyrics: DAREK JACKSON
Music: KENJI ENO & KENICHI KIMURA
Vocal: KATIE

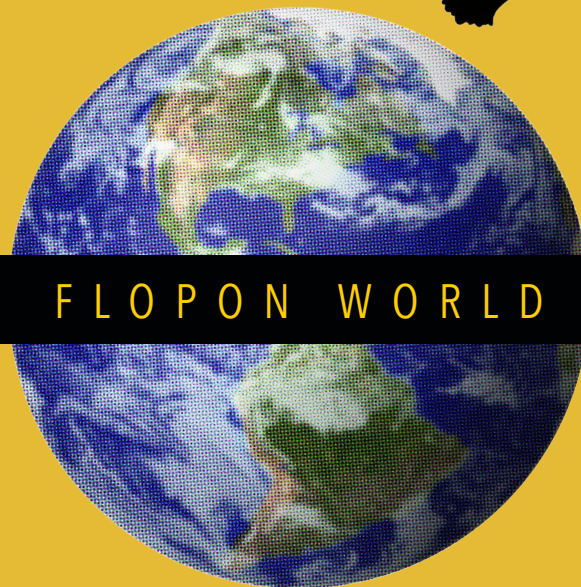
A mutant from far away,
has travelled the galaxy
to conquer the human race
You'd better get ready
cause it's really happening

His powerful mighty way now
is part of his cool disguise
Flopon is the name we gave him
A cyberspace mutant from the other side

You'll love him,
he's so funky and cute
Really turns me on, he's a hero.
Fighting strong, brave and true
Flopon

Incredible power
Mutant of the hour
So aggressive and
there's nothing
that can stop him now

You've got to get ready
His vision is steady
There is nothing
that can stop
those golden wings of
Flopon



FLOPON WORLD

3D0•1995

SHORT WARP

3DO • 1996

3332
1000

Short Warp was the least original title Warp ever released. By design, though — it was a compilation of every one of the company's "short games" that showed up in their prior 3DO releases. But it wasn't just a compilation; it was Warp's farewell to the 3DO; a last look back at what got them there and made them special before moving into the future.

Nine games made up Short Warp and that doesn't seem like a surprising number until you finally see them collected in such a way. It showed that Warp's "discography" was more than the few big games they were making, and, by the way, nine is also the number of retail games they released. And save for a few, they're all distinct ideas for games that, again, wouldn't be out of place in today's thriving indie scene. Or WarioWare.

Some of these have been touched on already — Hataraga University; Dance Tengoku; Oyaji Hunter — and Megadad, which had shown up as a demo in almost all the other games. The others haven't been discussed yet: Nobunaga no Nebou ("Nobunaga's Over-sleeping"), essentially a re-skin of Oyaji Hunter except you beat the heck out of a slumbering Nobunaga to try to wake him; Animalis, a mix between match-three puzzle games and Memory, where you match animal heads that clear the screen of blocks and keep the man on the side of the screen from falling from a helicopter into the jaws of a crocodile. Rounding out the lineup is Mahialis from Oyaji Hunter Mahjong, and Flopon-kun 2, again seen before.



However, Short Warp's ninth game was brand-new and easily the wackiest of the bunch. Called Hyper Comanchic, its execution, like the others, was dead simple: correctly enter the button combinations given to you as often as possible



with few screw-ups to make it to the next stage before time runs out. The point of all this, though, is to make ~~a~~ a musclebound dude (who resembles Richter Harris from D if you squint a little) perform a successful squat, while Warp's characteristic bizarre music and abstract graphics run underneath. And the concept isn't wasted: you can try the Vs. mode and pump with a friend, or play "Jumpin' Comanchi," where you mash a button to build up the man's jumping power on a trampoline and fly to the outer reaches of space. It truly must be seen to be believed, and there really was no better capstone on Warp's time on the 3DO.

Adding to that sentiment, Eno decided to make Short Warp extra special by printing just 10,000 copies, each one with a cardboard slip personally numbered and stamped by him. Unique packages were a Warp hallmark before this—they ~~were~~ quite literally encapsulated Eno's passion for design—and Short Warp was the best example by that point, with more irreverent imagery within the pages of the manual behind the disc, and elsewhere in the case.



In fact, Short Warp tends to be mentioned more for its packaging than its game content, for one particular reason. Acting as another move to increase its value, Short Warp had a message behind it. A portion of the money made off the title went to the Japanese Foundation for AIDS Prevention, and the instruction manual included facts on the disease in accordance with the foundation's "Stop AIDS" campaign. To drive it all home, every copy of Short Warp included a condom. This was not some limited-edition Warp-branded condom—just a garden-variety prophylactic from the store—but was inserted in a small paper slip with the broken English message "You Can Choose to Use This or Lose That." This forced Warp to package the game in a



jewel case a few millimeters thicker than the standard kind, increasing production cost, but nonetheless all for a good cause.

Though Short Warp was given the all-ages "E" rating for 3DO games, including the condom was like an official acknowledgment of who Warp's audience was: college-aged people who, other than being discerning game fans, could probably have benefited from learning about a widespread disease. However, with the added special-edition feel of Short Warp, it's presumed few players used the condom as intended—indeed, it was still in the copy acquired for this issue of SCROLL. Perhaps the message was enough.

Despite its unconventional package and bright presentation,

Short Warp came with some darkness.

Eno admitted his grip on sanity was being tested during its production, with the on-going development of Enemy Zero, and D2 meeting unexpected fates after Short Warp was released. In this sense, Short Warp is a symbol of the rough times at Warp as much as the good. Granted, things would look up for Eno and his staff, even if that time was a little short.



YOU CAN
CHOOSE

SHORT



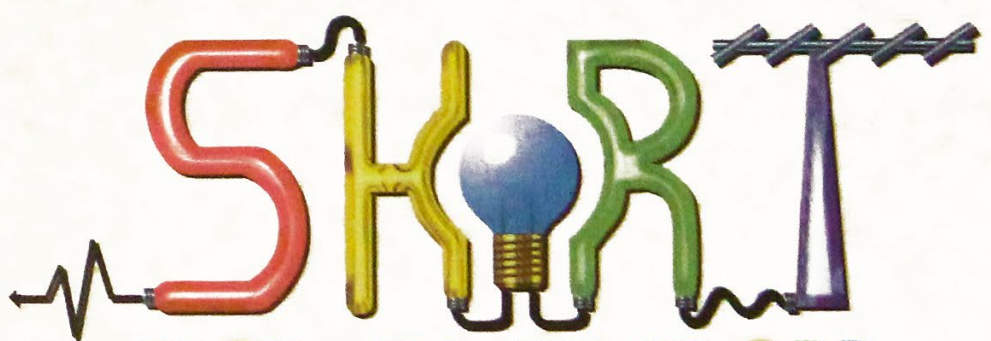
クックル料理長 (49才) のオビウラ・クッキング..... アナゴのにこごり

材料 アナゴ一尾/塩少々 醤油大さじ1
水・酒各カップ1/2 梅ゼラチン10g
みりん大さじ3 しょうがのせんざり一片分

- ① アナゴに塩をふり、もみ洗する。
- ② 水・酒で①を10分間煮たあと、みりん・醤油を加えて5分間煮て冷ます。③梅ゼラチンを水で戻し水を足した煮汁と一緒に火にかけ、ゼラチンが溶けたら冷まし、しょうがを加える。
- ④ 容器にアナゴを並べ、③を流し入れて冷やす。
- ⑤ 適当な大きさに切って皿に並べる。



WARP
WARP'S SHORT GAME COLLECTION
**TO USE THIS
OR
TO LOSE THAT**



WARP

WARP'S SHORT GAME COLLECTION





How could Warp top the likes of *D*? By 1996, *D2* was already a known entity, and that's what most people were waiting for. But *Enemy Zero* came first, and it sat neatly in between the two games. It blended the pre-rendered sequences with real-time action gameplay, but Warp still called it an "interactive movie." In fact, because of its various improvements in graphics and storytelling, *Enemy Zero* was indeed more cinematic in feel than *D*—probably for the better, as the public's expectations of Warp were growing. Yet Kenji Eno would always find a way to subvert them.

Again our hero is Laura, but this time it's Laura Lewis, and the time is far in the future, at the furthest reaches of space. The small crew of the research ship Aki has been in cryogenic sleep as it hurtles back toward Earth, but something has gone wrong: something has broken into the ship, wreaking havoc and killing at least some of the crew. Laura is the last to awake from cryo-sleep, thrust into the crisis and forced to regroup with the rest of the crew. The intruders on the ship are an alien species; ferocious killers who, by the time Laura wakes up, are already running rampant throughout the halls of the ship. They have no real name, though the others on the ship just call them "Enemies."

The game starts with the aforementioned pre-rendered sequences, with Laura exploring her quarters with the same on-rails movement as in *D*. Of course, the setting is much different from that game's creepy castle, but the perpetual silence and simmering fear is the same, if not heightened. Once Laura exits hers or any other room, the game switches to real-time polygons to depict the ship's mazelike corridors. Very few doors are clearly marked, so memorization becomes important as the player proceeds through the ship, though a room or elevator is not too far from any point.

These real-time segments include what would be *Enemy Zero*'s single greatest point of contention: the Enemies themselves. They're mindless predators, big as a human, and completely invisible—of all the murderous creatures to encounter on a spaceship, it has to be the invisible ones. Laura's sole way of detecting an Enemy is through the proximity indicator earpiece she acquires. When running through the halls, the device detects nearby aliens and gives aural feedback: the high-pitched tones note enemies in front of you; low tones, behind; midtones, to the left or right, and the faster their rate of pinging, the closer they are. If an Enemy is especially close, the game gives off a quick blare of a klaxon before Laura is either killed or fires her blaster gun to destroy the Enemy.

The gun is not the reliable element of self-defense one may think it is, either. As an energy-based blaster, it can only hold a certain amount of charge before being tapped out, and Laura can only successfully kill an Enemy with a fully-charged shot, which takes a few incredibly crucial moments, yet you can't hold a fully-charged shot for long before it fizzles out. On the bright side, you can save the game at pretty much any point thanks to Laura's portable memo recorder—on the not-so-bright side, it also has a finite charge, and once it's

Z E R
O
E N E M I E S



SEGA SATURN • 1996
PC • 1998

empty, no more saving for you.

All of this is as ingenious as it is devious; it's the constraints of *D* ratcheted to the next level. *Resident Evil* may have had a limited save system and weapon distribution, but no horror game before *Enemy Zero* would have invisible enemies; leave it to Eno to do what hadn't been done before. However, it is not insurmountable. It's easy to become acclimated to the proximity signals, and playing the game on its easiest setting isn't shameful—no content is kept from you, and you get a more generous helping of gun charges and save counts. The question is, would you want to go through it all again with a fraction of the assistance? Though the game's similarities to the movie *Alien* are rather blatant, *Enemy Zero* is nonetheless like being put in the shoes of a Nostromo crew member.

While the real-time parts of *Enemy Zero* are rather drab, the "graphics" of the CGI portions are markedly improved over *D*. Lighting is suitably dim and more effectively used when needed, and the little futuristic details on things like control panels, shelves and Laura's holographic plants give the proper mood and cinematic feel. In some cases, though, animation tends to be slower, perhaps because Laura is naturally cautious. She can run through the corridors, but in rooms, she's more methodical. But the enhanced CGI lent more than just lighting. Despite Laura's mostly-silent presence, her body language is much more realistic than the stiff and slow Laura of *D*. Laura Harris *occasionally* showed emotion, but Laura Lewis observes and reacts like you would expect—perhaps not ultra-realistically, but sensibly. When she's in fear, she cowers; when listening to Kimberly, she nods and observes. Inconsequential in today's games, but it showed that Warp was conscious of the "interactive movie" stigma, and wanted to put some weight behind improving it.

As mentioned, Laura tries to reunite with her crewmates in the other "tower" of the Aki. The first is Kimberly, the only other woman onboard and Laura's best friend. Kimberly has a better grip on the situation than Laura does, but doesn't necessarily have an easier time—beyond keeping her and Laura safe, Kimberly is also trying to locate her boyfriend Parker. By the same token, Laura has David, a British researcher, to look forward to seeing again. There's also George, the Japanese computer engineer who may have some additional answers about the Enemies, and a way out.

But with two crew members known to be dead at that point, the bad news continues to mount. Laura and Kimberly patch into the video link to Parker's room, and discover that he, too, has been killed. Kimberly is shocked, and Laura holds her in comfort. A vengeful Kimberly soon goes off on her own, leaving Laura alone once again. Laura proceeds to the Aki's "Summer" tower where the rest of the crew's quarters are. She enters the room of the now-killed captain, Ronny, and by poking around to find the password to his computer, discovers records that show that the Aki was not necessarily invaded by the Enemies, but that the ship was always intended to capture and bring them back for research, without consideration for the lives of the crew. The revelation is too much for Laura to bear, as she falls to her knees distraught. But, knowing that she yet has friends alive on the ship, she pushes on.

In a bittersweet moment for Laura, David

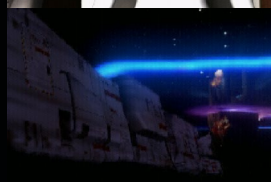
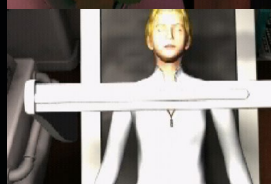
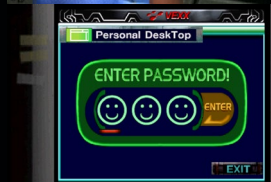
is safe, and the two share a passionate kiss (which lingers a bit too long, but such was the hey-look-what-we-can-do nature of cinematic games). However, it's brief, as when Laura steps into another room, David goes on ahead to find more resources. She searches for him, finding him in the basement level, where he has unfortunately been attacked by an Enemy. He's not yet dead, but he is also shockingly revealed to be an android. As he expends his last energy, the couple share a tearful goodbye.

And here the *Alien* references pile on. Laura later returns to David's room, but is ambushed by an Enemy. She's saved by George, but his loyalties lie with the research company and the Aki's true mission, encouraging Laura to stop trying to get rid of the Enemy. Later, Laura decides to lay in Ronny's body-scanning machine, where it's revealed that she, too, is an android. Perhaps worse, she has an Enemy fetus in her neck deposited from the prior attack. She reunites once more with Kimberly, only to have her run off to Parker's room. Laura follows, only to discover that Kimberly has shot herself, and lying next to Parker's corpse. Laura is now utterly alone, and though it seems like she has no more reasons to go on living, she decides to do what is right and eradicate the aliens once and for all. Laura proceeds deep into the heart of the ship, through the source of the Enemy colony, and enacts the self-destruct sequence. She makes it to the escape pod bay, and jets through the escape shaft as the Aki blows up behind her.

Enemy Zero has several layers to it, helped simply by the increased length offered by being a video game. What is ostensibly a suspense movie is underlaid with emotion, with a hero experiencing a rapid succession of revelation, tremendous loss, and extreme hopelessness. There isn't a whole lot of time in *Alien* to get deep into Ellen Ripley's psyche, but with Laura Lewis, we're there every step of the way, wanting to get past all the bad things and find solace, even if it does come at a big cost.

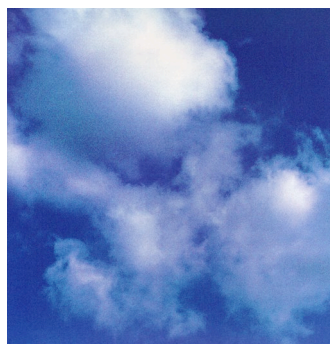
For Eno, Warp was an opportunity to make as well as advertise games the way he wanted, and *Enemy Zero* was one of the more unique approaches. Its pre-release hype went in a slightly different direction than *D2*'s—for one thing, nothing about *E0* showed up in their previous games. Instead, marketing was simply mass-market print and television ads. In fact, few people would know what *Enemy Zero* actually was until the fateful PlayStation Expo incident, and only then did the excitement stay at a high level until its eventual Saturn release. At the game's release, this culminated in a special edition beyond the scope of most other games. Eno's desire for unique packaging was taken to its limit with the *Enemy Zero* special edition, a roughly-\$2,000 package with the game in a crate full of related goodies, included but not limited to stickers, a t-shirt, models of a blaster gun and the Enemy fetus, the *Enemy Zero* booth girl costume from Tokyo Game Show, and a pile of other merchandise. Only 20 crates were produced, and those with the money to burn would get more than a thank-you—Eno packed each one into a truck and personally drove to the recipients' homes, hand-delivering the special editions and, of course, snapping a couple of photos. It cleared the fog of drama that hung over *Enemy Zero* for a year, and it showed that Kenji Eno was not going to let the business get the best of him.

ENEMY ZERO
WILL
BECOME
A MORE
MOVIE-ORIENTED
TITLE,
WITH
LAURA
AS
AN ACTRESS.
THE MAIN
STAGE
OF
THE WORK
WILL
BE
THE SPACE
ITSELF.
BUT
ENEMY ZERO
WILL
HAVE
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OF
AMUSEMENT
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"DIGITAL SADNESS"
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AND
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SUCH
CONTINGENCY
RISKS
IN
THE DIGITAL
WORLD
OF
THE MODERN
TIMES.





REAL SOUND



The Wind's Regret



Sega Saturn • 1997
Dreamcast • 1999



The voice Warp established in the industry was certainly unique, but no fan of the company could expect what came after *Enemy Zero*. *Real Sound: Kaze no Regret* ("The Wind's Regret") was a bundle of Warp opposites: it was soft, somber, beautiful, and genuinely appropriate for all ages. Not to mention, of course, it's the opposite of Warp's reputation for computer graphics-driven games. Basically, it's the most curious title from a company that so often engendered curiosity.

The genesis of *Real Sound* came from Kenji Eno hearing from blind video game fans—to some, that may sound paradoxical, but they do exist, and coming after *Enemy Zero*, a game with those people in mind seemed like a comparatively road to travel. The recent partnership with Sega itself made a nice opportunity: Eno agreed to keep the game under Sega's umbrella if they donated a thousand Saturns to the blind, with a thousand copies of the game provided by Warp. Apparently, it worked, and before long, Warp had *Kaze no Regret*.

As one might expect, a love story is at the center of *Kaze no Regret*. Hiroshi Nonomura and Izumi Sakurai were once grade school sweethearts. At the cusp of summer break one year, Hiroshi invited Izumi to the nearby clock tower, with the intent of confessing his (puppy) love. Izumi doesn't show, summer vacation begins, and she ends up moving to a different town. 10 years later, Hiroshi is a university student in the city, and ends up interviewing for a job at the company Izumi now works for. A latent childhood romance bubbles back to

the surface as Hiroshi and Izumi reconnect and see if they still have feelings for one another, amidst a burgeoning love triangle. In the world of Japanese drama, *Kaze no Regret* is far from original, but the story isn't what makes it special, anyway.

The original Saturn version of *Kaze no Regret* was literally all audio; an empty black screen was all you would ever see after booting the game. At least a player with sight wouldn't miss much, and might even save a bit of electricity if they hooked up the Saturn to a stereo system instead. The 1999 Dreamcast version changed this by offering a "visual mode" alongside the original black-screen mode. It had a title screen, yet still did not have on-screen text. What it did have was a persistent slideshow of scenic photographs, in the spirit of the cloud photos on the box art and manual—forests, fields, roads, hills, and so on. The slideshow was not timed to any part of the story, so in the reverse situation, blind players wouldn't miss much, either.

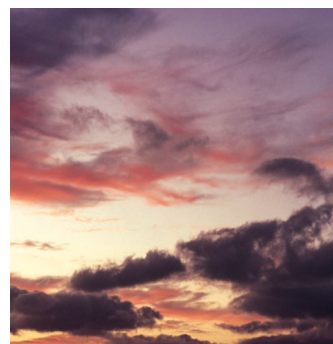
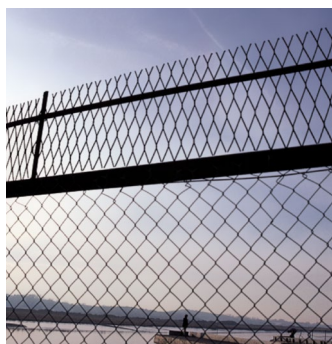
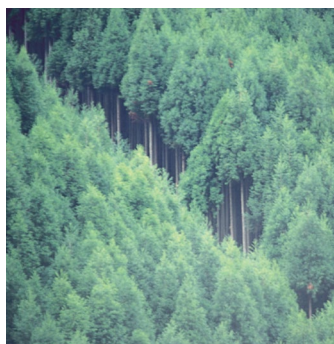
The gameplay in *Kaze no Regret*, such as it is, works identical to visual novels: you listen to the story as it plays, and at various points, you'll be prompted with a dialogue choice—a chime sounds, and using the controller's D-pad, you select the responses. Unsurprisingly, this leads to a number of different endings that fall on different points on the happiness scale, so you can choose to play it as a traditional love story, or send it all crashing down.

As with *Oyaji Hunter Mahjong*, Eno gathered a small but impressive group of outside talent, including popular voice actors

and accomplished radio producers of the time. In addition, he enlisted the help of Keiichi Suzuki, celebrated composer of film and anime scores, along with video games such as *EarthBound*. Suzuki's acoustic soundtrack is a natural fit for *Kaze no Regret*, with the guitar taking the spotlight. Eno wrote at least one of the songs, and the soundtrack album is worth seeking out.

"Real Sound" was to be an imprint for Warp, with at least two other games in the series: one a horror story, the other a supposed espionage tale. *Kaze no Regret* even included a card calling for voice actor auditions for the next game. It isn't known exactly why they never came to fruition—one rumor stated problems with audio compression, though it's more likely Warp was just getting too much on its plate, what with the need to retool and finish *D2* for Sega's next system. Nevertheless, *Kaze no Regret* is the most intriguing point on the Warp timeline, and the most incontrovertible proof that Eno had no intent of being a one-note developer.

And yet it doesn't quite feel right saying that it's "for" the blind. Being audio-only with a high production quality, *Kaze no Regret* is a radio drama at best, and can be enjoyed by anyone just as a visual novel game could be a book (coincidentally, an edited version was broadcast on Tokyo FM a couple of months after the game's release). Ironically, with Chunsoft co-opting the term "sound novel" for their original novel games, it's even trickier to place *Kaze no Regret* in a single box. Put that way, it fits perfectly in the Warp family after all.



Warp's final game was a testament to everything they went through in their half decade. After every previous game; every high and low point; every headline; every tease, they emerged from the darkness with *D no Shokutaku 2*.

After the downfall of the M2 took the original *D2* with it, Eno and his team saw it as an opportunity to begin rebuilding the game. And everything would be rebuilt, that much was sure. A company outing to New Zealand in the fall of 1997 would provide the inspiration, where vast and lonely snow-capped hills formed the stage, fabricated by Sega's then-embryonic Dreamcast. And Laura would again be the muse. Gone was the medieval setting, Dracula, and especially the pretense of the first *D*—*D2* would be a real horror adventure. Inspirations notwithstanding, once again Eno could not help but cherry-pick from the best of Hollywood. If *Enemy Zero* is doomed to be compared to *Alien*, then *D2* has shades of *The Thing*, what with its isolated, snowy setting and body-snatching monsters that can only be fought with lots of gunfire. In truth, as the game's story unfolds, the fewer direct correlations it has to any one film.

Actually, one part was kept the same from the original *D2* concept: a doomed plane flight. A young woman named Laura Parton is one of the passengers, struggling to stay awake moments before a pair of gun-toting terrorists enter the scene. Minutes into the ensuing panic, a meteor strikes the plane, sending it careening into a mountain range somewhere in Canada. Days later, Laura wakes in a cabin and is greeted by Kimberly, another woman trying to find help and track down another crash survivor, a small girl named Jannie. Most of the plane passengers are dead or missing, and for the two women, survival is being tested frequently, as the mountains have been overrun with grotesque, plant-based mutants; infected ("blossomed") humans turned into creatures attacking any fresh meat in their path. After being ambushed by one of the monsters in the cabin, Laura and Kimberly are saved by Parker, fellow survivor and CETI researcher. Laura sets out to find a way back to society, acquiring weapons and shooting a lot of monsters along the way.

At the same time this is happening, the mountains are being traversed by a strange sorcerer, Norex. He was also on the fated plane flight, the terrorists under his control. Norex seeks to release the Shadow, a pure manifestation of evil that was awoken by the meteor and lies encased in the highest mountain peak in the area. He seems

Taking after *D* and *Enemy Zero*, *D2* also features first-person "exploration" scenes, where Laura can walk around a building/cave/et cetera as a secondary method of progression. The difference being, of course, that it's in real-time graphics this time. To be sure, these parts specifically take after the earlier games in that you can only move on predetermined paths and only investigate objects you're allowed to. Most of the time this doesn't matter, because what you need or where you need to go is pretty obvious at first glance. However, as if to taunt you, first-aid sprays or other items are frequently lying around, and you can't pick them up, just because.

From off-rails to on-rails, RPG to FPS, it's obvious that *D2* was meant to be a melting pot of game genres and styles. And that was pretty notable, even in 2000, when so many games still had delineated lines between them. Eno seemed to want to include every part of games that interested him, then see if it all held together. In some respects it does, as it wasn't long before many more games tried to

only partially connected to the roaming monsters—the source of the problem is related to a research facility in the nearby area, involving a plant-based pharmaceutical called Linda that Kimberly becomes dependent on, and may well be spreading infection among the populace. Naturally, the plot thickens as Laura comes upon a series of creepy characters and successive mysteries, even ones involving her own past, revealing that she has been "brought" to the Canadian mountains for a reason.

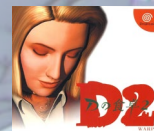
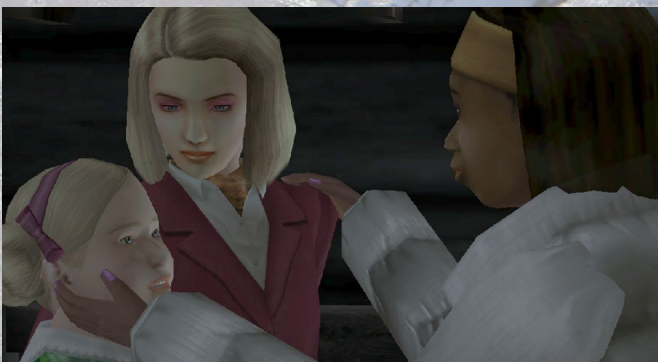
The primary method of play in *D2* is when Laura is outside, freely plodding around, seeking the next location to move the story along while filling plant monsters with bullets. Interestingly, enemy encounters are random battles, just like in a good old-fashioned role-playing game: Laura will be minding her own business, when all of a sudden the scene shifts to a group of monsters popping out of the ground. This is when *D2* turns into a first-person shooter—sort of. Laura stays put in the spot the battle started, while the enemies encroach on her. Turning is done with the face buttons, with icons alerting you to enemies out of view range, or when they're about to strike. Laura also gains experience points like in an RPG and boosts her maximum health. Several progressively powerful weapons are available, though the submachine gun, acquired early on, curiously has unlimited ammo; the only sticking point is the magazine reload time. Outside of battle, Laura can use a rifle to hunt the wildlife that randomly appear in the snow, instantly earning meat that provides added health boosts. It can be difficult to shoot a rabbit that's far away and won't sit still, but the effort is worth it, as a backup health source is always welcome.

integrate "RPG-style" elements among other approaches. In others, it doesn't; at some point the game becomes a jack-of-all-trades, master of none, as no aspect of the game feels tight enough to be satisfying, and you just want to get through the plot.

If the other characters sound familiar, they should—Laura was not the only "actress" Eno re-used for *D2*, as most of the supporting characters from *Enemy Zero*—Kimberly, Parker, David—are also here, and with similar romantic links. David only appears in the opening movie, as he's dying after the plane crash. His last thoughts are heard in between the game's chapters; his last messages to Laura in the period of time she's forgotten before waking up in the cabin.

Laura's short-term memory is not all that's cloudy. After killing bosses, she blacks out and either wakes back up in the cabin, or is magically transported to another remote site. Later, Laura finds the nearby Lucy Parton Laboratory, named for her mother, who lives on as an AI computer of sorts. Through it, the clouds in Laura's mind dissipate; she learns she was conceived from her mother and the DNA of a fossilized winged humanoid from the time of the dinosaurs, granting her the supernatural connection. Soon, Norex unearths the Shadow, becoming one with it and opening a cave into a netherrealm. Laura makes her way up the mountain to face the Shadow, and in defeating it, acquires a higher power that sends the planet back in time about a year, where she meets David again, for the first time, and essentially, the story ends with "happily ever after."

After the surprising cannibalism scene in *D*, *D2* pushes more unsettling imagery. At the beginning of the game, a monster enters the cabin and ensnares Kimberly, eventually orally violating her—de rigeur for certain corners of the anime industry, but ridiculous for a mass market console game, and by the time of the American release, Sega



D2

DREAMCAST • 1999

had the scene's camera angle adjusted to be a little less suggestive. Likewise, a blossomed Kimberly clone later on wears nothing but a towel and is fully nude before long; the creature this time emerging from her genitals. And in the final parts of the game, the power of the awakened Shadow engulfs the land in a red haze, killing Jannie as Laura helplessly watches her fold and melt into the floor, her last link to humanity gone. If that weren't enough, when Laura faces the Shadow up close, the ghostly, unearthly being tests the woman's courage by removing her hearing and then her sight, placing the last part of the final boss battle in terrifying silent darkness.

Horror films have done more with less, but not always with such vigor, and in the case of Jannie, almost never with child characters. Eno tested the boundaries simply by having all this in a video game, which, if you know anything about its cultural vilification, probably could have turned a few heads. Not to mention that horror games in particular were a market that didn't deal with the psychological all that much—D2 was like an Argento film following 20 years of costumed monster movies.

D2 was Warp's attempt at real-time realism. It's one thing to pre-animate characters with emotion in CGI; it's another to keep that up with technology that's already behind that standard, and sold for much less money. The spooky scenes do have a certain visceral quality because of them moving at full clip in-engine, but facial expressions and other movements come off rigid, compared to the slow, painful parts of *Enemy Zero*, for instance. It was also an attempt to be more than the sum of its parts—but with RPG mechanics, it unfortunately has old RPG problems. The random battles get grating and repetitive, and should be startling but are instead far too predictable. And to compound that, D2 is fairly easy, not just because one of Laura's guns has infinite ammo. Warp hadn't made a proper action game since 1994, so it's understandable that Eno and the development team weren't trying to make a hardcore survival horror bloodbath. Lastly, true to the spirit of the original, D2 leaves many questions unanswered. Several are, at least by the last disc of the game, but many characters' backgrounds or motives are left by the wayside, and even the best explanation of Laura's origin needs a reiteration or two before the dots start connecting.

After the ending sequence, D2 presents the player with a series of postscripts displaying facts about the world at the end of the 20th century. Poverty, chemical manufacturing, AIDS, death—a somber reflection on humanity that ties in however tightly to the game's story. Having the faintest idea of Eno's worldview, it's clear that the future was always on his mind, and that he wanted to weave a tale about the fate of the planet underneath the surface of D2.

In an interview at the end of Famitsu's D2 strategy guide, Eno described the theme of the game in one word: "independence." Independence is what Laura seeks after learning about her shocking origin. Kimberly wishes to be free from her past as well, fighting it with the wrong attitude. Independence gives the player of D2 the freedom to level up before taking on the next boss fight. And independence drove Kenji Eno to form his own company with games that broke free from all sorts of conventions when the medium was still so young.

After the postscript and the credit roll, a countdown clock appears. If it happens to be just before January 1, 2000, a message appears, welcoming you to the 21st century. If only Warp was around long enough to celebrate it.

A F T E R W A R P .

ONE-DOT ENEMIES

IOS • 2008

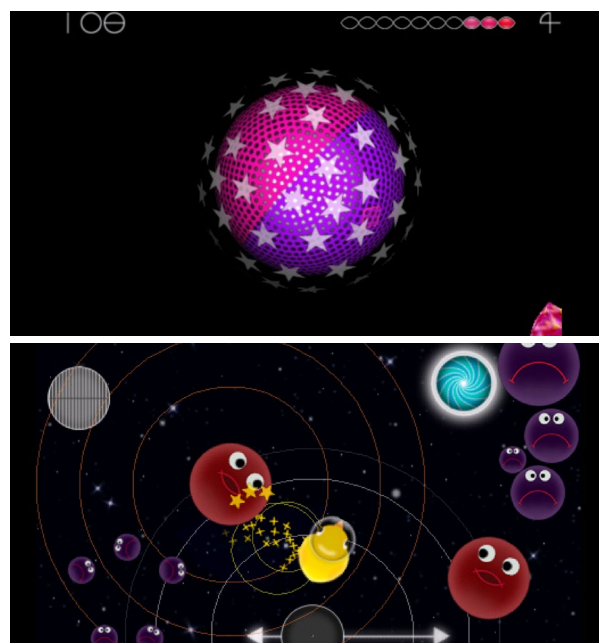
Kenji Eno's return to game design was nowhere near the scale that fans ever expected—but in hindsight, that's no surprise. One-Dot Enemies is the most literal of Eno's games: pixel-sized enemies scurry across the touch screen, and all you do is touch to kill them. Keep it up, and you can score combos, and random special enemies to boost scores further (including ones that seem to enjoy the punishment). Released in early days of the iPhone App Store, when tiny ideas were still the norm for "phone games," One-Dot Enemies showed that Eno could still take advantage of a platform's technology in ways no one else did at the time.



NEWTONICA SERIES

IOS • 2008-2009

Though Eno did not design the *newtonica* games—that credit goes to Kenichi Nishi, formerly of Love-de-lia—he did create the music for them, and in fact inspired Nishi to make the first game thanks to a custom-made iPhone wallpaper that resembled what you see in the game. The first *newtonica* (a portmanteau of "Newton" and "electronica") is a twitch puzzler wherein you rotate a dual-colored sphere to collect like-colored meteors approaching from all sides. This was quickly followed up by *newtonica 2*, a physics-based puzzle game featuring a cartoon bird floating through space and (ultimately) into portals with the help of the obstacles on each stage. Nishi, himself an underrated talent, became one of the last and more notable Eno collaborators.



YOU, ME AND THE CUBES

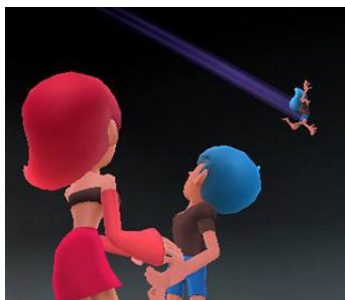
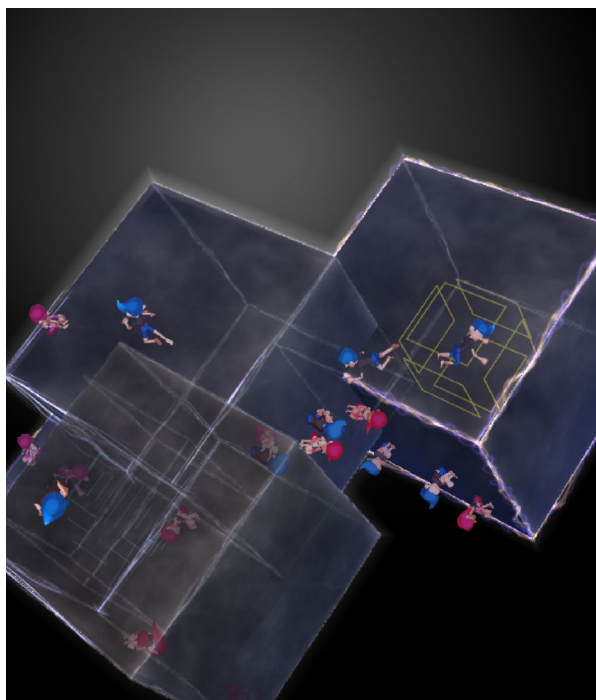
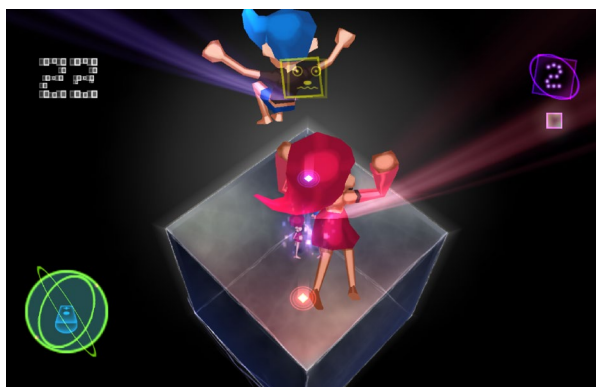
WII • 2009

Kenji Eno's return to console games after 10 years was under the umbrella of a company that would have been one of Warp's most unlikely partners: Nintendo. By 2009, though, Nintendo was a known supporter of developers and games that were a bit "outside the box," so Eno—rather, From Yellow to Orange—made a fine fit regardless.

The first reveal of the Wii remote enchanted Eno so much that he had made and started carrying a paper model of the remote as a sort of divining rod for creativity. In the several-year stretch of dominance enjoyed by the Wii, most software that harnessed the motion controls of the remote fell into the sports genre. To little surprise, by Eno's guiding hand, his team at fyto made a game that no one else was—or would. *You, Me and the Cubes* transformed the Wii remote from tennis racquet to a vessel of summoning in a cute but challenging action puzzle game.

Every stage is a black void presenting you with at least one giant free-floating cube. As the game puts it, your Wii remote holds a number of little male and female humanoid creatures called Fallos. You shake the remote to summon the little beings, then aim and fling them onto the sides of the cubes. They're tiny but heavy, and can send the cube swaying if their placements aren't properly balanced. Your goal is to get them to all land safely and remain on the cube for a set number of seconds. Should you succeed, the cube sprouts other cubes connected to it, exponentially growing the better you get, and later stages add more wrinkles in the form of dangerous or slipper surfaces that you must avoid. Send too many Fallos off the edge, and it's game over. But somehow, with the mix of spacey backgrounds, cool colors and soothing music, the desire to keep trying and keep the Fallos happy makes *You, Me and the Cubes* immediately infectious. Nintendo sensibility with an Eno touch; there's nothing finer.

Eno's closing quote from a Nintendo-published developer interview for *You, Me and the Cubes* encapsulates his approach from the earliest days of Warp until the end: "I want to make the best out of the entire process. Not just the game, but the process—from hearing about it to buying it. I want players to feel that joy and excitement of going over to a friend's house to play it. Those are the kinds of video games I want to make."





The ISLAND of Misfit Hardware



ARTIFACT #EPCMTG813

NEC PC-KD863G Monitor

Turbo tube

It's rudimentary knowledge that NEC manufactured the PC Engine, a game console designed by Hudson Soft but taking the namesake of NEC's market-leading "PC" computer line (PC-8801, PC-9801, etc.). The PC Engine was the little brother; the palm-sized munchkin that provided accessible console-level gaming to the masses, while the hardcore slaved away on adventure games and RPGs of the computer realm. And history, as they say, does tend to repeat itself.

But among the PC Engine lineup, NEC's hardware rivaled only SNK's in terms of bubble-era bullheadedness. Elaborate configurations of the platform, CD-ROM included, were sold for tens of thousands of yen for years after the original system launched—some practical, like the Duo, and others absurd, like the PC Engine LT. And for what? An untapped market? Supply fulfilling demand? Or just the good old-fashioned hell of it? Regardless, when you bring that hubris back into the bigger-ticket world of personal computers, especially back then, you may as well hear nothing but the *chunk-a-chunk* of a manual credit card reader until the end of your days.

Likewise, the late '80s and early '90s also played host to a menagerie of game console combination machines—Nintendo systems built into Sharp TVs, at least two different Mega Drive computer combos, and both Sega and NEC shoeorning their products into a LaserDisc player (*chunk-a-chunk*). But those things were huge and unwieldy; meant to stay in a TV cabinet. Even the consoles by themselves were a little too oddly-shaped to be traveling around the house.

Ah, but NEC had something special with the PC Engine. An extra-diminutive game system with card-sized software—it could fit anywhere! Indeed, that's what drove most of the weird PCE variations, including one of the weirdest yet most desirable of them all, 1988's NEC PC-KD863G monitor, released not long after the PC Engine itself.

On the face, it's a regular monitor. Compatible with a PC, 15-inch display, and the added luxury of having a built-in speaker system. But down below, just under the screen, sit the guts of a PC Engine, complete with controller port and game card slot. It offered the easiest, most convenient way to enjoy PC Engine games alongside the vast world of NEC PC software.

What is at first just a novelty accessory for a PC gamer is actually quite a prestigious item for a console fan. By being a PC monitor, the KD863G output an analog RGB signal,

NEC パーソナルコンピュータ

15インチカラーディスプレイ

PC-KD863G

PCエンジンゲーム機能内蔵で、楽しさ倍増。

● PC Engineゲーム機能を内蔵

● アナログRGB専用ディスプレイ

● マルチシンク2モード(13.98kHz/24.83kHz)自動切替え

● 音声出力5W (2.5W + 2.5W) 省電式スピーカ標準装備

● ステレオ2ch再生可能

● 情報処理装置等電波障害自主規制協議会(VCCI)基準適合

● 専用回転台付

標準価格 138,000円

arcade-gear.com

Though the PC Engine was related to NEC's "PC" computer line in name only, the PC-KD863G finally brought the baby home. The PC-compatible monitor had a fully-functional PC Engine built into it, turning a hardcore gamer's desk into a software paradise. Now, if only it was compatible with the CD-ROM...

thereby granting the PC Engine the sharpest picture one could get without tricky hardware modding. Even Sharp's X1 Twin, a PC Engine combination PC (of course there was one) hard-switched between PCE and PC functionality and could only provide as good as a composite video signal.

As mentioned, NEC would find ways to top the KD863G in terms of absurdity, but few other products would match its price tag (a hefty ¥138,000, or roughly \$1,400 at the time). Cash-strapped game fans would end up abandoning their dreams of owning the monitor, leaving its posthumous career in the hands of maniacal collectors. *Chunk-a-chunk.*

BONK'S ADVENTURE

HUDSON • NES • 1993

Like many game consoles of the time, the PC Engine had no choice but to try to compete with the Famicom. That became a begrudging, soul-sucking practice when the PCE became the TurboGrafx-16 and tried to compete in multiple countries. The games were great, but they needed reach. Nintendo kids were obsessed with Mario and an embarrassment of riches in the RPG genre—NEC had some sweet shoot-em-ups and a couple of neat action-adventures. Different strokes for different folks, of course, but there had to be something on the system more appealing to everyone. Enter Hudson and Red's little caveman creation, Bonk, and his first game, *Bonk's Adventure* (PC Genjin).

It was a highlight of the platform at the time; a bright and funny "mascot" platformer that the media attached to the TurboGrafx and treated as its only line of defense against the likes of Mario and Sonic. Bonk wasn't *that* great, but he filled a void in the TurboGrafx library. But then a few years later, Hudson decided Bonk wasn't good enough for one platform, and started to migrate him to the world of Nintendo. The one with all the *other* mascot platforms? Say it ain't so!

But so it was, and in time, *Bonk's Adventure* reached the NES in 1993. Generally speaking, the Nintendo version of *Bonk's Adventure* is as fine a game as the original, though it barely had to reach back that far. The TG's biggest advantage was visual; the rest of the system's architecture had more in common with Nintendo's system that it didn't. Despite the loss of around 420 colors, *Bonk's Adventure* retains all the important details of the Turbo version, particularly the large, goofy bosses and supporting characters that pop up in certain stages. The iconic giant dinosaur is there, ready for Bonk to step inside his intestinal tract; the goggle-wearing plesiosaur is there, too.

Was it a case of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em?" The evidence sure tells a story: there were more than twice the *Bonk/Genjin* games produced for all the Nintendo systems than the PC Engine (excluding the *Air Zonk* games)—the numbers don't lie. However, the real story may not be so clear-cut: Hudson were the owners of Bonk, and could do what they wanted with him. He certainly had a *je ne sais quois* about him,

with that big goofy head and even goofier reactions to the giant meat and other power-ups that crossed his path. On the other hand, the PC Engine, despite all its strengths, could not break free from the niche games it so relied on. Hardship would strike the product line sooner or later, and with Nintendo still at the top of the heap and Hudson still on good terms, it seemed natural to bring Bonk to a place he could potentially thrive.

The only problem is that he arrived so late. 1993 began the countdown clock on the NES and Famicom's life, and an increasing number of high-quality but bound to be obscure games were being pushed out the door, especially by Hudson, with *Bonk's Adventure* among them. Two *Bonk* sequels were already on PC Engine, so any envy from Nintendo fans was directed more at the new and improved games than the comparatively rusty original. But it wasn't long before Bonk made it to the Super NES and Game Boy, too, but by then, his appeal was fading, as the headbutt-heavy gameplay and progressively sprawling levels did little to bring him back to the spotlight. But for a moment, he played well for the other team.





If

Kenji Eno had gotten his way, would games form deeper bonds with us faster? A young man with the persuasive power to form his own commercial video game company, no matter who he is, will try to cultivate some big ideas, and Eno was in a prime position and point in history—arguably the best of the past 30 years—to bring forth a wave of creators like him.

And yet sometimes he was his own worst enemy. While respected for his smarts, Eno seemed to always run Warp like it was the hottest thing going. For a while, it probably was, but a string of obtuse, low-selling games, delayed projects, and the public break-up with Sony ran in contrast to what he thought of the game industry and where it could be going.

Little by little, though, he was getting there. Warp's interactive movies were tackling emotional scenarios that other games have only begun to explore in the past few years, and even then, many are awash in faux-retro stylings that are like anathema the mass market. But those games are getting there, too. And it's not like Warp made it easy for themselves; probably all of their games put up some form of mental roadblock for many people—how many could say they got through even half of *Enemy Zero* when it came out?—but they were found and appreciated by the right people. Sometimes that's enough, but creators often feel it's not.

On paper, it sounds like Eno ruled with total control, from deciding every last part of a game right on down to the packaging. In reality, he gave his teams a voice, every day, whenever necessary. All because he wanted us to have a deeper bond with the product to where it stopped being a product. He was aware a game was not just programming, but an experience felt from the opening of the jewel case to the credits roll that brings you back to the title screen. He knew the product could be art. He chased it for years.

This has been said in different ways since his death, but it bears repeating: video games need more people like Kenji Eno. Specifically, people who can see talent where recruiters don't; who can see an audience no one else does; who welcome an open dialogue from everyone up and down the ranks; who have the capacity to play nice with a corporate overlord up until the point they know they're getting fucked with. We also need more people better than Kenji Eno, and I mean that in the best way possible—the ones who can make, collaborate and ship their work multiple times to attain long-time, well-earned success. To attain the bond. Geniuses. Mavericks. Creators.

His is not a legacy to be lived up to. It's one to carry on.

rdb



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