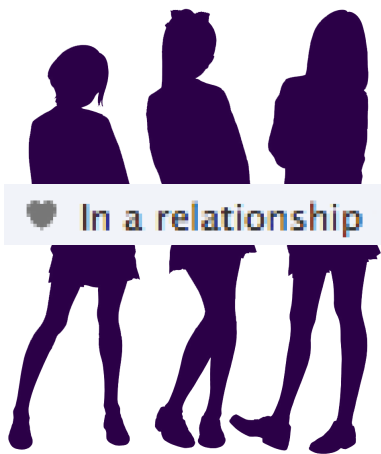


LOVE

IS ALL

AROUND



CONTENTS



MARCH 2012

BLITTER

- City of Dragons* 6
Old meeting new in Sega's 7th Dragon 2020

COVER

Love is All Around

The whirlwind romance that is *Love Plus*

- The National Girlfriend* 10
Love's Not Blind 16
The Girl in the Machine 22

SCANLINE

- The Island of Misfit Hardware* 31
Genesis Does 32
Fullscreen 38

CLOSING TEXT

- Love/hate* 40



とまゆと

SCA

forever



ALL

with you

BLITTER

CITY OF DRAGONS

FIGHTING RAMPANT EVIL IN A NEAR-FUTURE TOKYO MAY BE OLD HAT, BUT IN 7TH DRAGON 2020, IT'S NEVER BEEN MORE ENJOYABLE

BY ALEX FRAIOLI

DRAGONS—WE ALL HATE 'EM. BUT IN THE YEAR 2020, THEY'RE TOKYO'S PROBLEM.

Seven emperor dragons descend on the world in a flurry of noxious orange flowers (the “Flowaro”) with the intent of snacking on humans. Those familiar with the original *7th Dragon* on Nintendo DS will recognize that plot setup, but virtually nothing else from the PSP sequel, *7th Dragon 2020*.

Dragon-slaying organization Murakumo establishes a base in Tokyo’s iconic capitol building, and dispatches the newly-formed Squad 13 to various dragon-infested areas. Rescuing NPCs in the wild and recruiting them into the squad opens up new quests, and ganking wyrms nets you “Dz,” a necessary element for expanding and renovating your headquarters to unlock more quests and receive various items. The game’s structure has a mild *Suikoden* vibe to it, and often invites the player to chill out and explore HQ for a while between missions to shop, meet some of the people who have joined up, enjoy a sound test, or take a dip in the baths.

The core production team from the first *7th Dragon* returns for *2020*, with Kazuya Niinou, creator of *Etrian Odyssey*, once again directing. And his love of dystopian futures is more evident than ever: Tokyo has not just been overrun with Flowaro, but has been almost completely abandoned, with the streets and buildings deteriorating. Producer Rieko Kodama is back as well, again proving to be a deft hand for no-nonsense, classic JRPG design as she was with *Phantasy Star* and *Skies of Arcadia*. And *2020*’s pulse-pounding battles are thanks in part to Yuzo Koshiro’s signature musical style, in particular the tracks for dragon/boss battles, which evolve into more intense tracks halfway through the game.

Despite a seemingly broader scope and beefier presentation, the game’s scale is more confined than that of the original. *2020*’s derelict, monster-infested areas seem grand in comparison to the dungeons of the DS original, but a three-member party (instead of four), five available job classes (instead of seven), and 200 dragons to be retired (versus a whopping 666) make for a less substantive experience. Developer Imageepoch successfully adapted the basic gameplay of *7th Dragon* for a “hipper” PSP audience at the cost of its predecessor’s depth, and it worked—*2020* has already outsold the first *7th Dragon* by about 25,000 copies since its release last November. Gone is the mythical land of Eden, replaced by a futuristic Tokyo and an atmosphere more fanservice than fantasy. Rescuing virtual idol Hatsune Miku from a dragon attack, for example, unlocks a Vocaloid soundtrack option. The meek maid, the scrappy nekomimi girl, the brassy tactical commander... they’re all here, and all comically busty, too.

The designs of the dragons themselves fill the scale from plain to insane, with several breeds

appearing normal from the neck down but with a giant, featureless hammer or mace for a head. One of the cuter dragons is the diminutive “Dog Drag,” which constantly hops up and down as if it’s an excited corgi. The titular seven dragons are suitably colossal and nightmarish, including a rather pointy metal one, and a behemoth in the sewers that takes three consecutive fights to fell.

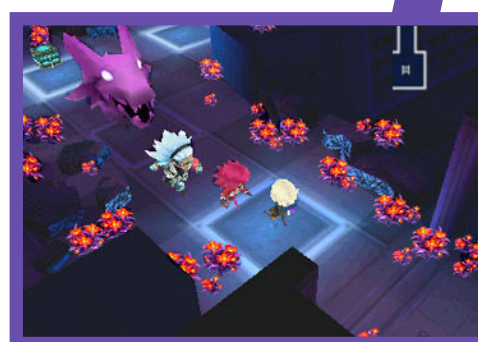
After that comes the tirade about power and ascension to godhood and how humans are insects, a speech lifted verbatim from “*A Villain Prepares: 50 Menacing Monologues for Beginners*.” But for every RPG plot contrivance, there’s always something barreling in from left field to help balance it out: for example, a scene in the Oval Office in which the president consults an agent named “MacGyver” for advice in slaying the remaining dragons. *2020* is loaded with the JRPG trappings that the genre just can’t seem to escape, but also finds ways to have a little fun when the focus group isn’t looking.

Viewed side-by-side, the two games in the *7th Dragon* series can both represent a fundamental



shift in JRPGs. The first was simple; classically designed with a sprawling overworld, charming music, and bulbous character heads bobbing as they traverse the top-down, 2D world. The difficulty was brutal, but what is the JRPG if not a lesson in perseverance? In comparison, *2020*’s overworld is nothing but a map screen with just the dungeons and Murakumo HQ. In addition, characters are burly, sassy, and sometimes tattooed. As for the difficulty, it’s greatly reduced overall. *2020* is still a worthy follow-up, but it’s enough of a departure from the original that the lone link between the two—the aforementioned dragon/Flowaro mythology—feels kind of tenuous.

But little of that actually matters when you play it. *2020* simply takes the basic framework of the first game and does its own thing with it. If you played the original *7th Dragon* for its pastel charm and steep challenge, the sequel won’t engage you in quite the same way. On the other hand, if you dug the party customization and quest system, *2020* is a fun, if loud and caffeinated, cousin.



L O V E



/ S

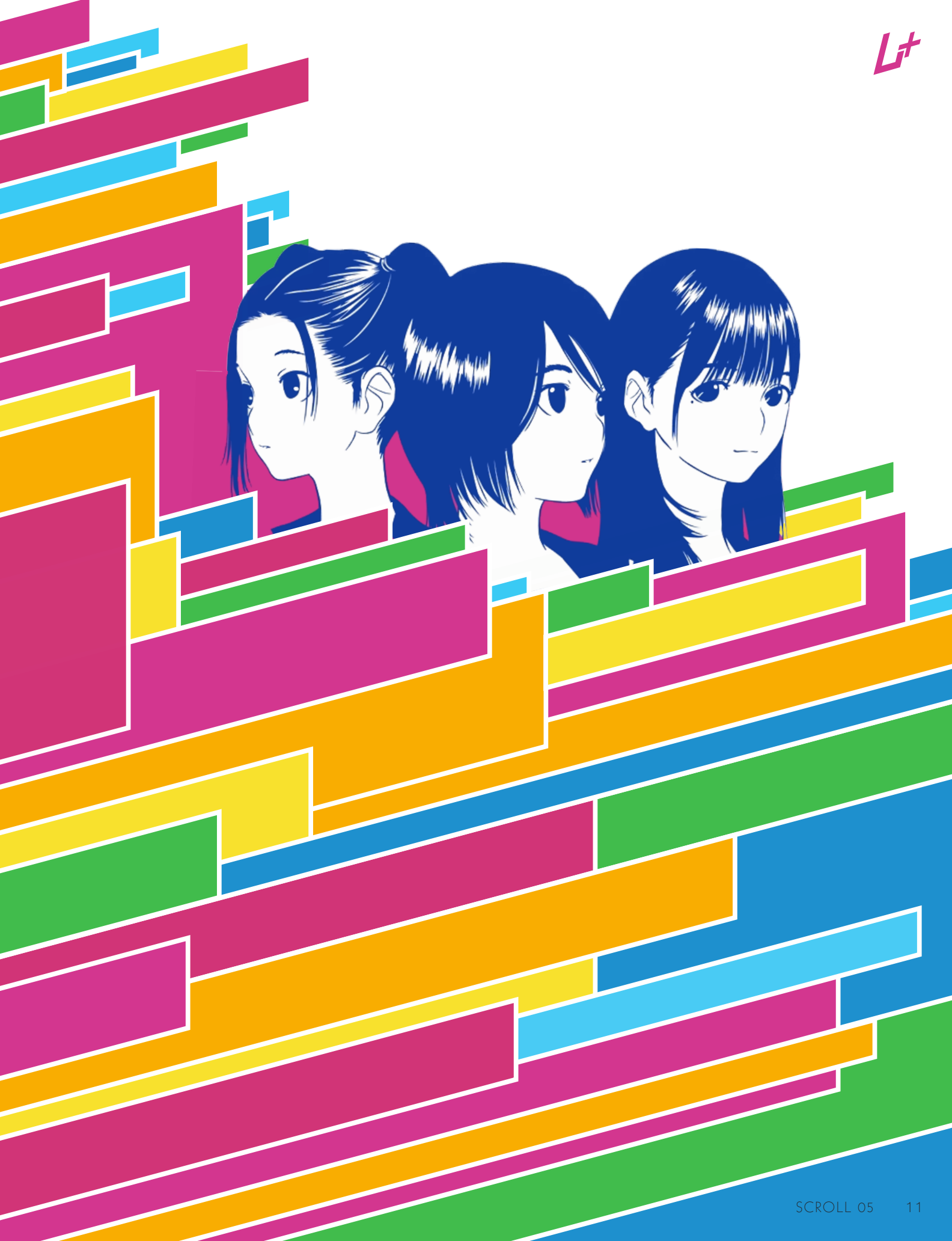
A L L



A R O U N D

THEY'RE YOUNG, ATTRACTIVE, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE DATING SIM IS HEADED TO THE NEXT LEVEL

THE NATIONAL GIRLFRIEND



It's a chilly Sunday in February, but the sky is fairly clear, and that's good enough for me. It's downright lucky, actually, seeing as I have a date this afternoon. I have this new girlfriend, you see.

She's in high school, but that's OK, so am I—within the confines of the game, that is.

On Valentine's Day of 2012, Konami released *New Love Plus*, the Nintendo 3DS sequel to the original DS game, in Japan. It marks almost three years of the *Love Plus* series, a still rather new yet immensely popular property that's held steady due to constant, almost devious marketing and a healthy number of obsessed fans (who may not all be healthy themselves), but its appeal is just as much about real innovation within a uniquely Japanese game genre, one that needed a kick in the pants as badly as any of the others.

And it's simply being part of that genre that has given *Love Plus* a ton of attention, both good and bad. The "dating sim" may be one of the most consistently derided kinds of video game there is, especially in the West. It's a special brand of adventure game—called "gal games," or "galge" in Japan—focused on snaring fictional romantic prospects that has long been associated with shut-in nerds who fawn over impossibly cute cartoon girls and spend their salaries on piles of games that are virtually indistinguishable from one another, aside from some that straddle the line of ethics more than others. Even games that possess only shades of the genre—such as the "social links" in *Persona 3* and *4*—are pegged as part-dating sim, sometimes when another term can't be found, or sometimes just to dismiss the whole thing.

Love Plus isn't much different. It's about romancing teenage girls, but in terms of where it stands in the dating sim universe, it has unique selling points that pushed the genre forward in the direction it probably should have gone years ago, and from that, its prominence has made it the most popular dating sim series in a long time. And not solely because of those aforementioned nerds, either. In some respects, it's transcended stereotypes, making a mark on the zeitgeist while simultaneously becoming a Japanese game franchise that's worth keeping an eye on; one that possesses a certain allure made up of a combination of technologies that sets off the sensors among idealists and skeptics alike.

The funny thing is that we have Konami to thank for it. Not because no one thought they had it in them; rather, they did. It was Konami that made dating sims a big deal once before, and no doubt contributed to coining the term, but they hadn't repeated that in quite some time. In 1994, they released *Tokimeki Memorial: Forever With You*, an anime-style adventure where players strive to balance and ultimately win the affections of several female classmates. But Konami wasn't the inventor. The first appearance and popularization of what you could call the unofficially adopted standard for a dating sim was in 1992, with Elf's *Doukyuusei*, a high-school based adventure that had the same focus on getting the girl, but relied more on timed events (e.g., making sure you're at place "X" in time to meet the girl you want to see) rather than picking menu selections and watching events happen more or less automatically.

But, again, it was really *Tokimeki Memorial* ("Tokimemo" for short) that you can blame for all of this. It debuted in 1994, just a little bit after *Doukyuusei*, on the PC Engine. Like in *Doukyuusei*, you play a high school kid—specifically "the new kid," beginning the rest of his teenage life at Kirameki High School. Through the help of your new friend Yoshio (who basically attaches himself to you), you get the telephone numbers and basic information about the girls you run into in the halls, and from there you start dialing and dating, more or less through the rest of high school. A dozen different girls particularly catch the player's eye, though the overarching narrative really wants you to end up with Shiori, the magenta-haired "princess" of the school. As ▶



DATING HISTORY



The dating sim roots of *Love Plus* reach back 20 years, from the earliest PC romance adventures to its direct descendant, *Tokimeki Memorial*. Though *Love Plus* rules the roost these days, *Tokimemo* still lives—the fourth game in the series came out for PSP after *Love Plus*, and the gentlemen of the *Girl's Side* series have always happily sat alongside the LP trio.

one might expect, winning her affections is especially challenging, but getting any of the girls to stick with you is a fairly laborious and inexact process: during each in-game day, your choice of activities will determine your strengths in a number of categories, from athleticism to booksmarts to style and charm, all affecting how the girls see you. And when you're talking to them, choosing the right responses to what they say will have an even greater bearing on your chances with them. Will a snarky or lecherous comment be taken in stride, or visibly offend them?

The first *Tokimeki Memorial* arrived just in time for the 32-bit generation, and was ported to every other system of the time (including the Super Famicom and Game Boy Color), ensuring that no matter which console you had, you had a way to see what all the fuss was about. With many new players popping up, and many of them becoming new fans of the series, it wasn't long before Konami started to really reel them in. The *Tokimemo* merchandising machine was running at full capacity for the rest of the '90s, churning out soundtrack albums, spin-off quiz and puzzle games, digital art gallery discs, a direct-to-video anime feature, and plenty of non-software toys and trinkets to fill one's bedroom with. Much of it was standard operating procedure with any high-profile video game, but Konami's approach with *Tokimeki Memorial* was somewhat unseen in the market, with their concentrated effort to place fans in the sweet and touching world of *Tokimemo* and make the girls seem as real as possible. Its clear anime-influenced visual style and setting gave it just the right kind of allure for a romantic fantasy.

However, the franchise didn't start to get carried away until the arrival of *Tokimeki Memorial 2* in 1999, which was fundamentally similar, but was given more spin-offs—a "Substories" series focusing on three of the girls per disc, another puzzle game, a variation of Dance Dance Revolution, a PC typing game, and so on. For once, it all started to feel a little long in the tooth. But even that feeling didn't really hit home until *Tokimeki Memorial 3* for PlayStation 2, which was supposed to be quite a turning point for the series. However, Konami didn't want to simply drum up the budget for it themselves, so they went to the people. In 2000, they established the "Game Fund: *Tokimeki Memorial*," a corporate trust set up by Konami to receive funding for the next *Tokimemo* game by way of outside investment. It was sort of a precursor to the steady rise of games funded through Kickstarter, though much more formal and regulated, and for a dating sim of all things. Nor was it cheap—interested parties had to pony up hundreds of thousands of yen to be sure the effort would make a difference, and those who had their money cleared and put into the Fund got their name in the game's end credits.

Fortunately for Konami and the fans, *Tokimemo 3* made it out the door just fine, though the game was a little too early in the PS2's life to be that impressive. The cel-shaded 3D girl characters were a definite step up from the old static 2D portraits, but perhaps due to the system's limitations at that time, all the girls had similar round,

bangs-y haircuts, as well as unappealing beige school uniforms that did nothing but make the characters—and, in turn, the whole game—rather boring. After the not-quite-blockbuster success of the third game, *Tokimeki Memorial* lost its luster, and the series as many had known it submerged. Taking its place was another *Tokimemo*, one that was the second project of the Game Fund, though it had one big difference. *Tokimeki Memorial: Girl's Side* was a new series that flipped the roles—the player was now a high school girl, looking to land a bevy of tall and handsome young men, with gameplay that was familiar but had a decidedly feminine twist (such as a greater focus on customizing outfits and hanging out with other girls). But like the original, it wasn't a pioneer, as Koei's *Angelique* series had given way to the male dating sim ("otome game") revolution years before.

Nevertheless, it was with the gender-swapped *Tokimemo* where *Love Plus* had its relatively unlikely start. Konami's showrunner for most of the *Girl's Side* series was Akari Uchida, who joined the company as a programmer in the early '90s before moving on to write and direct the first *Girl's Side*, and continuing to have a key

role in every sequel since. In between all that, Uchida took a sharp left turn to head up producing *Rumble Roses*, the all-female wrestling game that appreciates young women in a very different way than *Tokimemo* or *Love Plus* do.

Uchida himself said as much in interviews, but even with an angle that might appeal to a more male consumers, *Rumble Roses* didn't survive—it was a sleeper hit at best, only to be followed by a panned Xbox 360 sequel—and

Uchida went back to focus on the *Girl's Side* games, pushing forward with the concept that would become *Love Plus* (which, by the way, has a couple of subtle references to *Rumble Roses*). And as Uchida is considered the father of *Love Plus*, the fans have acknowledged it by giving him the nickname "Dad."

RECIPE FOR A LOVE STORY



Using the better parts of the *Tokimeki Memorial* games as a foundation, *Love Plus* adds real-time events, evolving conversation, and the never-ending "responsibility" of *Animal Crossing* and other real-time games to draw in the player and encourage them to maintain a healthy romantic relationship with their digital girlfriend.

Any good father wants to be proud of their kids, and in the case of Uchida and *Love Plus*, the newborn was much more clever than its older sibling. The key differentiation between *Love Plus* and *Tokimeki Memorial* is that it doesn't end when the school year does; in *Tokimemo*, that's when you find out if you live "happily ever after" or not. Though at first, *Love Plus* is all too familiar: as you more frequently interact with a girl, talking and getting to know her for a couple of in-game months, she'll take you aside, clearly nervous, but needing to tell you something: she's falling for you. But rather than watch the credits roll, you have the option of reciprocating, and assuming you do, you and the girl are officially an item, and from there, you can begin dating indefinitely. In other words, it's not *Tokimeki Memorial* all over again—it's that plus an actual relationship.

"Actual" in relative terms, of course, because this is still just a game, and there are plenty of unrealistic aspects to it. But damn if it doesn't try not to be. In the post-confession "Real-Time" mode, the game follows the DS system calendar, so if you have a date on, let's say, that chilly Sunday afternoon in February, you'd better make

LOVE IS THE DRUG



Contributor Janine Dong on the potential mental benefits of Love Plus

+ + +

The *Love Plus* series isn't really as creepy as you might think. In fact, it's probably even revolutionary.

Konami has created a game that attempts to emulate what a relationship with a young Japanese high school girl might be, and while the concept of a likely-adult player being maybe-too-interested in dating a digital high school girl is indeed unsettling, I'd like to ask you to look beyond the superficial.

In a time and society where behavioral issues and cases of autism have become increasingly common and given more attention, I believe the technology within *Love Plus* is a fountain of untapped therapeutic potential. Imagine people afflicted with social anxieties using *Love Plus* as a way to break out of their shells and gain the confidence needed to make relating with others easier.

Would not the hopeless romantic in us agree that everyone deserves the chance to feel love and what it's like to be loved? Whether genuine or simulated, many people in this world may not have the chance to experience such a desired emotion if not for the existence of *Love Plus*.

Perhaps in an alternate but not out-of-reach reality, playing *Love Plus* has the potential to create Casanovas out of otherwise shy guys. Consider being one of the new who sees it as a misunderstood tool that opens doors, instead of an unhealthy interest that closes them. Look closely, and you'll see it's already changing lives.

Rinko



sure you have your system with you, open and ready, lest you stand up your sweetheart. She might not exactly hate you afterwards, but it will still take some working on your particulars and keeping in constant contact to get back in her good graces. But if you can't commit to that, you can choose "Skip" mode, where the game plays out in the same day-by-day structure as it did before you and the girl hooked up, so you don't need to wait as long for the next date. Fortunately for night owls and the simply impatient, the game allows you to flip between the two modes at will.

What also makes *Love Plus* different from *Tokimemo* is the removal of excess. Before, you had to keep track of over a dozen little personal-ity stats for yourself and figure out which daily activities would boost them, but in *Love Plus*, that's pared down to just a few key variables (fitness, intelligence, style, and charm) with a pre-set number of activities, such as focusing on science class, going to work after school, or just staying in and doing some push-ups. And, of course, the number of prospects is smaller. Whereas most dating sims and similarly-focused games give you double-digit numbers of girls (or boys) to choose from, *Love Plus* focuses on only three girls: Manaka, the sheltered, traditional type who's the same age as the player character; Rinko, the younger, sharp-tongued troublemaker with a punk rock streak; and Nene, the easygoing yet mature older girl. Maybe it was simply easier to keep track of only three, or if the developers boiled down the nature of high school girls to three basic types, but whatever the case may be, *Love Plus* and its success showed that less is more.

When the original *Love Plus* was released in 2009, it was not a million-selling blockbuster right out of the gate. It took a few months, but eventually, as word of mouth spread, the obsession started to manifest itself in a few different ways. On the original game's box, Konami referred to the girls as "National Girlfriend(s)," which turned out to have some truth in it. As the fanbase grew, so did some of those fans' attachments to the girls. In November 2009, one such player took it to an unprecedented extreme: a 27 year-old man known only by his Internet handle "SALgooo," who took his DS, *Love Plus*, and his chosen girlfriend Nene on a trip to Guam, where he claimed to have married "her," and later orchestrated a wedding ceremony. The livestream video was a hit (yes, it was livestreamed), and photos of SAL and his unknowing bride spread like wildfire, along with quotes declaring his love for Nene and what made her so special. In probably the least shocking development, the story gained a huge head of steam internationally, as blogs and newswires presented readers with the story of what amounted to "check out another crazy Japanese thing!" All the same, most laughed it off, and some called it a Konami publicity stunt (though Konami never pitched *Love Plus* as a game with a "goal" like marriage, least of all a real marriage in a remote island nation). What was usually missed in the various reports was that the marriage wasn't actually made legal, and that SAL was quick to admit he knew it was just a game and a fictional character he claimed he was in love with. By that token, it's entirely possible that if it wasn't a PR conspiracy, it could have just been a satirical hoax. Nevertheless, SAL became "the guy who married a video game," and the world got quite the first impression of *Love Plus*—for better or worse.

Even if that story had gone unnoticed, it's understandable that in Japan, with the way *Love Plus* is merchandised, many would think it's just another vapid, otaku-baiting girlie game. There aren't many SALgoos jetting off to Micronesia with a separate seat for their DS, but there is a sizeable number of obsessed individuals collecting the merchandise, going to fan events, blogging about the daily evolution of their digital relationships, celebrating the girls' birthdays by getting real cakes, and getting in to Konami's yearly Christmas-themed event called "Merry Plusmas," featuring a state-of-the-union address from Uchida and video greetings from the girls (in cute Santa costumes, of course). It's this aspect of *Love Plus* that's seen the most by people on the outside of the bubble; the ones who aren't interested enough ▶

to pick up and play the game, but are quite happy to tell you that these fans are insane and devoted to what looks like the creepiest video game ever made. While it's true that more than a few of the series' biggest fans should probably evaluate their lives, *Love Plus* is not the only culprit, and as the simple portable love adventure it's supposed to be, it isn't the creepy one in this relationship. You do get to lovingly touch and kiss the girls, but it's all so gamelike and inherently limited that no rational person could take it seriously (who can imagine a stylus as their mouth, anyway?). And regardless of where your mind might be going when you play it, it's barely sexualized: innuendo is nowhere to be found, and even if something was interpreted in a suggestive way, it's still not as blatant as some of its contemporaries. If anything, it's just plain sweet.

Still, that sweetness and its subsequent enchantment has brought the biggest criticisms of *Love Plus* in Japan, and much has been made of the depressed 20-and-up male who forgoes real women for the doe-eyed, low-resolution ones on his DS. But, again, that can't realistically speak for all *Love Plus* players, who inevitably continued spreading the allure of dating sims out from the introverted world of game nerds and into the lives of the average Nintendo DS player—people who aren't all hardcore gamers, and certainly not all male. Indeed, one of the big things that drove the initial popularity of *Love Plus* was crossover appeal. While some real girls with real boyfriends may wonder what the big deal is, others can and have ended up as taken with *Love Plus* as the men are, and for many of the same reasons: a sense of communication, intimacy, and just trying to get someone to like you—and as entertainment, not enrichment. Whatever your gender, *Love Plus* is, like the dating sims before it, an idealized representation of Japanese high school life, where innocence gradually fades into adulthood and romance is fickle, but often looked back on fondly.

Essentially, the addictive quality of *Love Plus* isn't too different from games like Nintendo's *Animal Crossing*, but by simply presenting a human(-oid) girl who speaks with a real voice and displays affection for the player, the emotional hook becomes so much stronger (not to mention the punishments are similar—restart the game without saving and your girlfriend will demand an apology before letting you get back to the game... with depleted stats). And after spending all that time to get to the confession and begin dating, it's easy to get that little pang of wanting to see her again, to catch anything new she says, or to see a new outfit or haircut she debuts in



The *Love Plus* franchise runs an impressive gamut beyond the games themselves. Marvel at Konami's unending parade of merchandise: figures, art books and strategy guides, collectible magazines, iOS apps, two different arcade games (*Love Plus Arcade*, a minigame-focused jaunt where the girls are in HD and you can print full-size photos of them, and *Love Plus Medal*, which is a board game that's faster and more friendly to fans of all ages), five different manga series, DS accessories, DS systems, USB battery chargers, a tie-in with Halls cough drops (because Nene enjoys munching on cough drops), and a bonafide Visa card. For starters.

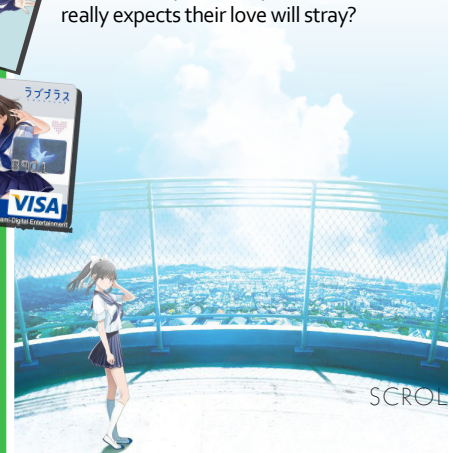
front of you. And of course, you want to keep her happy—continue going out on dates, don't touch her when it's not the right time, and generally keep things interesting, just like the basics of any good (and, er, real) romance. Plus, really, when you can input your name and have the girl call you by that name—there's a lot of voice work—well, who couldn't be even a little affected by that? And how many other "normal" video games have stirred up the same feelings in us, only with different coats of paint on the outside?


A year after the original *Love Plus*, Konami followed it up with *Love Plus Plus*: essentially the same game, but with a pile of new content and features that fleshed out the real-time dating experience even more. It wasn't a leap forward, but even a non-sequel was all Konami needed—*Love Plus* ruled Japan for another year, and got at least one thing *Tokimeki Memorial* never did: a promotion. In 2010, Konami formally established Love Plus Production, which moved the *Love Plus* series, along with *Tokimemo Girl's Side* and the *Magician's Quest* series, under its umbrella. And so, much like Konami's Kojima Productions studio, the company has made *Love Plus* Production the home for all things Uchida.

But still, reliably and understandably, gamers on every side of the globe enjoy reading and writing about *Love Plus* with sniggering and scoffing and dismissing the game as "creepy." And now, with *New Love Plus* for 3DS, the same sniggering and scoffing has come back stronger than before, thanks to the sequel's new features like being able to peer around the girls with the 3DS motion sensor, attempting (but rarely succeeding, mind you) to get a glimpse of their underwear. You can also insert the girls into photos you take, with the ability to indicate foreground objects so that they can lean against a pillar or sit down on a bench. Not to mention simple facial recognition that "locks" your save file and causes your girlfriend to light up when she sees you. And then there's the Internet features, and all the new story sequences, and, well... just try to remember it's making strides in the genre.

Believe it or not, even with all the merchandise and general fervor about *Love Plus*, it stands to reason that compared to *Tokimeki Memorial*, it's so far stayed on a straight and narrow path.

No multi-platform ports, no gender-flipped spin-offs, no puzzle games, and no more than the same three girls we've known for a few years now. And Uchida and Konami intend for it to stay that way, because after all, who really expects their love will stray?



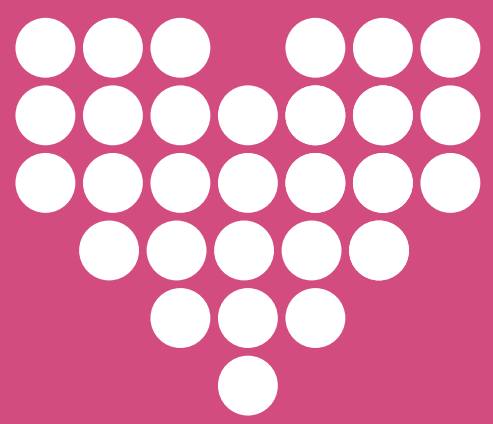
The image features a solid pink background. In the center is a large white circle. Surrounding this circle is a dense, irregular cluster of black plus signs (+) of varying sizes, creating a starburst or explosion effect. The text is centered within the white circle.

A formal introduction
to the teenage trio that
defines *Love Plus*



L+

*LOVE'S
NOT
BLIND*





MANAKA TAKANE

2ND YEAR STUDENT,
TOWANO PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL

Birthday: Oct. 5

Blood type: A

Favorite animal: Rabbit

The girl seen sweeping up the Towano High tennis courts all by herself is Manaka, one of the top players of the school's tennis club, and a demure young woman whose beauty and reticence make her one the most talked-about yet least talked-to girls on campus.

Some of that can be traced to her background. Manaka's home life is as idealistic as it gets: both her parents are intelligent and wealthy, with her father in particular being a doctor-slash-martial arts master. Needless to say, their values are a bit more rigid than most parents', and in raising (and protecting) their only daughter, they've ended up keeping her from experiencing a lot of things "normal" kids do in this day and age. So much so that she barely knows how to order at a fast food restaurant.

But with Manaka staying on the straight and narrow for as long as she can remember, she appreciates the finer things in life more than any other teenager—or adult. Not just tennis,



but classical pianists and timeless literature, her favorite books being *Sherlock Holmes* stories.

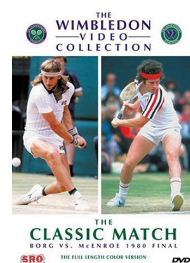
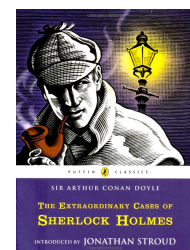
Going by her upbringing and interests, it would be easy to peg Manaka as the stuck-up debutante type, but in truth, she's as kind and caring as can be. She's not one to complain, and simply stays focused on improving her tennis prowess. The other students haven't quite caught on to that, though, because Manaka stays fairly quiet off the courts, and that's kept her from coming out of her comfort zone and socializing with her clubmates. It's not that she *can't* be fun-loving or silly, it's that she doesn't know where to begin.

Naturally, Manaka's all-encompassing purity led to a naïve view of romance. She doesn't know quite what to expect, and may take a little while to get used to even holding hands in public, but soon enough she'll be hooked.

In the real world...

Manaka's no-nonsense, middle-of-the-road sensibilities can appeal to players not looking for a challenge so much as a perfectly normal yet still ideal teenage coupling. After all, her naïveté can only make her cuter.

INFLUENCE





RINKO KOBAYAKAWA

1ST YEAR STUDENT,
TOWANO PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL

Birthday: Aug. 17

Blood type: B

Favorite animal: Cat

Rinko entered high school with a chip on her shoulder. Curt and cold, she went from normal middle schooler to off-putting high schooler. Needing a club to join at school, she went with the Library Committee, because she does like to read. Sort of. That's pretty much all she does, though, and that's not *really* a club responsibility.

Rinko's less-than-outgoing personality can be partly explained by a recent change at home: her dad has remarried, and didn't really consult her too much beforehand. Her mother passed on when she was little, so the sudden shift left her slighted. As a result, she just went further into her shell, and quite often stays out after school as long as she can, just to avoid going home.

On campus and around town, Rinko is usually seen with a music player around her neck and earbuds seemingly fused to her head. Her music of choice is exclusively punk rock, especially the London bands that gave rise to it, though she's the biggest fan of



the Killer Bambies. One of her regular after-school activities is hanging out at the arcade, playing (and dominating) one of her favorite fighting games.

Rinko's tough exterior only protects a softness underneath. She's immediately disarmed by cute animals, so a trip to the zoo can melt her cynicism in minutes. Likewise, in spite of the family tension, she wants to do good by her stepbrother Kai who, fortunately, worships the ground she walks on. And though she's not one to believe the tales of white knights and true love in some of the novels she combs through at the library, it's possible that a certain someone who isn't quick to back down in the face of her negativity can show her that choosing to be alone may not always be wise, especially when there are people around who truly care for you.

In the real world...

Rinko's tomboyish nature and snippy attitude draws immediate attention from anyone into *tsundere* types; the girl who says she's grossed out by you, yet can't stop hanging around. Once you start dating, she'll drop the attitude, for the most part, anyway—she may still playfully call you an idiot or give you a light kick now and again.

INFLUENCE





NENE ANEGASAKI

3RD YEAR STUDENT,
TOWANO PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL

Birthday: Apr. 20

Blood type: O

Favorite animal: Raccoon

Nene is, in so few words, the personification of warmth. As she's rarely without a smile on her face, it's remarkably easy to gravitate towards her without even thinking about it.

That kind of magnetism only serves to keep her busy in any and all social interactions. When not at school, Nene works hard as a waitress at Dixies, the local family restaurant, where you've recently got a job, too. She's been there long enough to know the ins and outs of every little function of the job, and the other servers—sometimes even the manager—come to her asking questions or to put out a proverbial fire every now and then. And since you're the newest recruit, she makes sure to reassure you until you don't need her guidance quite so much. (She'll still happily advise you on almost anything else.) As she says herself, she doesn't mind being relied on, but wants a little more from life than just that. Chalk it up to the perils of a kid being mature for her age.



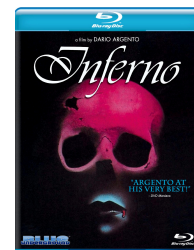
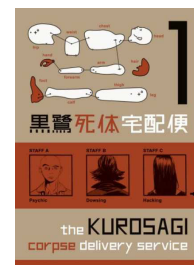
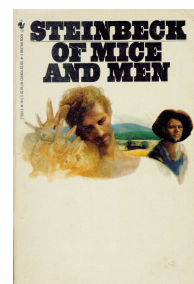
A bit of a movie buff—to put it lightly—Nene has a particular affinity towards horror films, and greatly appreciates the celebrated masters of the genre. She has a pretty encyclopedic knowledge of movies in general, so it's natural to assume she enjoys frequent trips to the multiplex.

Nene isn't without her quirks: she can have fleeting moments of clumsiness or outright airheadedness that may have you wondering if she's as mature as she seems, but whatever causes it, she tends to shrug it off so quickly that you can't help but do the same.

In the real world...

Nene is supposed to be only a year older than the player, but that's enough to paint her as a "big sister" figure on top of her somewhat doting personality. It's also made her the unofficial *Love Plus* mascot, not just because of that SAL9000 marriage fiasco, but because of many Japanese players gravitating towards her more than the others. It may also have something to do with her being the tallest girl with the largest bust. Well, sometimes it's just obvious.

INFLUENCE



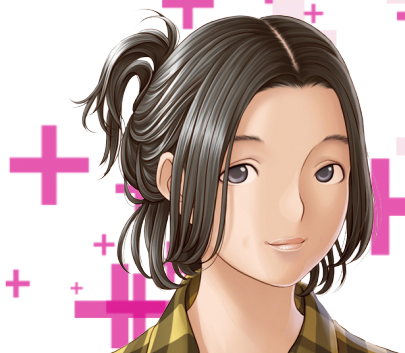
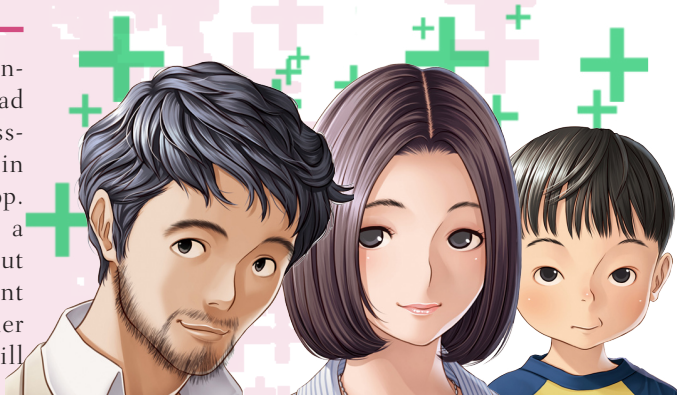
MEET THE PARENTS

In *New Love Plus*, the girls' families make appearances for the first time in new story sequences. Don't forget your manners.



Manaka lives in a model family, to a fault. Her father, **Hitoshi**, is a doctor who also ranks high in judo and kendo, so it's probably no surprise that his own disciplines make him immensely protective of Manaka, and generally cuts an intimidating figure. Her mother **Sumi** is a traditional housewife, but also pretty smart. She often follows her husband's lead, but she's more understanding of where Manaka's life is heading at this point; that the ups and downs of being a teenage girl are practically universal in this day and age.

Rinko's life in the past couple of years has been confusing at best. For years, she lived with her young dad **Hyosuke**, a TV show producer, after the untimely passing of her mother. Eventually, Hyosuke met and fell in love with **Kiyomi**, a woman working at a bento shop. She, too, is a single parent—raising her son, **Kai**, a rambunctious little boy who had no misgivings about his mom marrying Hyosuke, especially when it meant getting a stepsister as cool as Rinko. However, whether or not Rinko will stop avoiding her new family is still a looming question.



It's easy to see where Nene's hardworking nature comes from when you meet her mother. **Nanako Anegasaki** also works in food service, at a supermarket deli counter. She respects her daughter's independence and own work-focused spirit, but at the same time can't help worry about her, just like a mom. That starts to recede, however, once she sees Nene's new beau and comes close to treating *you* like one of the family.





THE GIRL IN THE MACHINE

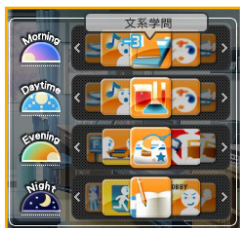
THE HOPELESS ROMANTIC'S
INTRODUCTION TO **NEW LOVE PLUS**



FIRST STEPS

You're a new third-year transfer student at Towano Private High School. It's a little scary, but exciting, mostly because you get your own little apartment. After choosing which kind of dwelling you'll be in (from the simple to the stylish), school begins, and within a few days, you'll cross paths with three captivating girls. When you join the school's library committee, you meet the frigid Rinko; When you start your new job at the Dixies restaurant, you meet calm and collected Nene, and in

the tennis club, you're introduced to Manaka. You have 100 (in-game) days to become close enough with one of these girls that they eventually confess their love to you before you get a chance to, and if you accept (and why wouldn't you?), you'll begin dating. Stay on their radar early and often, though, and you can be on the road to romance in less than half that time. But there's still work to be done during it, and not a lot of wiggle room in the path to the next level.



A DAY AT A TIME

Every day in *New Love Plus* begins with setting your schedule; selecting four activities to do at each point of time in the day. In the mornings and afternoons, you choose which classes to focus on, and later in the day, you can choose whether to stay out, or go home and concentrate on homework, exercising, your hobbies, or your wardrobe (and on Sundays, you don't have to worry about class). Every activity affects your levels of Fitness, Intelligence, Style and Charm, which when filled will earn you a heart point to use later in dates. If an activity has an icon of one of the girls' faces on it, you can catch them at the location and get some crucial interaction time. On that note, finding an activity that a girl appreciates can quickly put you on her good side.



KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

How you perform in your daily concentrations nets you immediate feedback by the girls' miniature cartoon avatars, who give their reactions from the best (a flowery scribble) to the worst (a big blue "X"). You do better with activities that align with their interests (especially the clubs), but don't fret if you hear the disappointing buzz of receiving an "X," because it's a very temporary setback that won't make a dent in a girl's personality. Focus on filling the meters and picking activities where you can meet a girl more frequently.



AT FIRST SIGHT

As mentioned at the top, your first interactions with the girls happen almost immediately, and will give you a decent first impression of them. Maybe not a perfectly fantastic impression (ahem, Rinko), but enough to give you a sense that will help you build a friendship or, ultimately, something much more. You can either choose to go straight for them by manually selecting the restaurant, library or tennis court, or you can wait for the game to introduce you to them within several days.



WALK OF LOVE

As time goes on, you'll more frequently notice one of the girls heading out of school for the day, and can choose whether or not to say hi and ask if they'd like to walk home with you. And as your friendship grows, they'll more frequently agree to tag along.

The ensuing walk-and-talks are great for finding out how their day/week at school is going, or anything else that's going on in their lives. Pretty soon, the one you spend the most time with will find you in the morning and ask you to join her for a walk.



IT'S ON THE LIST

New for *New Love Plus* are "To-Dos," little "missions" that the girls bring up every so often with the intent of getting you to help out. For the most part, you don't have to freak out about them—most boil down to just showing up at a certain place for a number of days, and don't have a heavy bearing on what a girl thinks of you down the road. But don't forget that every little bit helps.



TIME FOR TEXTS

During the course of one after-school conversation, a girl may give you her cell phone number as a friendly gesture—without question, your first "in." But like true modern teens, text messages are preferred over voice calls, so expect to get quite a few messages from a girl each week. You choose replies based on tone (from "half-heartedly" to "with feeling"), but you can compose your own friendly "good morning" or "good night" messages every day, and that is a big part of putting you on the fast track to datesville.

Though you may receive more than one message per morning and evening, you can only *send* one, so if you're juggling interactions with multiple girls, you may want to just concentrate on one of them (or go ahead and start a new game on another save file).



THE PRE-DATE

When your friendship with a girl reaches a certain, far-along point, she'll ask you to tag along one weekend to a certain location and activity (for example, Nene's been chosen to check out other restaurants' menus for inspiration). She tries to bring it up nonchalantly, because it's fairly clear what she's trying to say.

That said, it's not a *date* date, but it is a key point in the progression of the relationship, and the experience will give you a taste of what to expect later: the meeting up, the going on the date, and a chance to keep things going by heading to somewhere else afterward.



ON THE PRECIPICE

After many texts, walks home, emotional events, and heart-to-heart conversations, the time will come for The Confession. And though you'll no doubt notice many signals in the lead-up, in terms of actual game progression, you don't get a lot of direct indication of when the day will come. Rather, you'll know exactly what to expect the night before, when you have a vivid dream about the girl—a very nice and romantic dream about the future, when you're a tried and true couple. After you wake up the following morning, your day will go along as normal, that is until Manaka, Nene, or Rinko pulls you aside just before classes are over...

After the confession, you'll both walk home again, and you'll be asked to go on a date soon, and also if she can keep calling you by your first name. Should you reject her confession, however, the game continues along as normal, and you'll either get a confession from one of the other girls, or continue alone until day 100, when the game starts all over. But of course, choosing love is when things get interesting.

LOVE BEGINS

After a girl confesses her love for you, and you accept, things in *New Love Plus* start getting serious—both for your relationship and for the game itself. A lot of new features are introduced to you that can make the whole thing seem rather daunting, but the game is now in perpetual motion, so you can take your time as long as you keep in contact with your sweetheart.

What also happens at this point is that the game divides itself into two modes that offer different ways of interacting with your “girlfriend:” Real-Time and Skip. When at your apartment, you can simply tap a button to switch between the modes, but keep in mind that they have their own pros and cons. A brief introduction to these play modes follows, and some dating fundamentals can be found on the next page.

▶ REAL-TIME MODE



Like it says, Real-Time mode follows the date and time you set on your 3DS. Don't expect constant excitement, though—much like the pre-confession gameplay, most of Monday to Saturday is for classes, with evenings open to whatever you want, and then at 9:00 PM, it's bedtime. Be smart and choose your activities in the morning, then come back to the game a few times a day at most.

Real-Time mode's greatest advantage is special dates and other events. By checking the events calendar, you can plan ahead and look for things that your girlfriend will likely be interested in, and then get some major karma if she enjoys the date. But of course, you need to be playing the game exactly when you say you will, or else you risk standing up your girl, which can really knock down her opinion of you. But don't worry: stay apologetic and she'll eventually understand. Besides, you have to *really* neglect the game to get her to disappear and force you to restart the whole thing.

Real-Time mode also works on the basis of “action points,” a numerical value that's depleted when you choose almost every command in the game, including daily activities and sending texts. Your points naturally replenish as days go on, but also have a set maximum. You can spend them freely, but don't go crazy if you have a date coming up. All in all, this is the central play mode for all the *Love Plus* games, and is what keeps players hooked for months on end.

▶▶ SKIP MODE



Skip mode plays the same as before the love confession: there is no real-time clock, so you can play through events whenever you want since it continues progressing through in-game days. This means that you can blow through daily activities, set up a date, then go on that date all in less than an hour, and continue doing so as long as you want. Because of this, you don't have to deal with action points. It's also the best way to quickly “grind” your attributes and earn more hearts if you want more successful dates (see next page).

The downside is, well, it plays the same as before the love confession. Even if things go faster than in Real-Time, it's still repetitive, and isn't as rewarding in the long run: for example, while you still can look at the events calendar, the dates listed apply to Real-Time. That's why switching between modes often and when needed is the most effective way to get a rewarding experience from *New Love Plus*.

Again, you can freely switch between Real-Time and Skip mode any time you're at your apartment, unless you have a date scheduled in Skip, in which case you'll have to go off and complete it before switching back. When reloading your save file after quitting, the game defaults to Real-Time, just in case you have a date scheduled and need to hop back into action.

THE CALL



It's a tried-and-true method: call up a girl, ask her out on a date, and with any luck, she'll accept. Luckily, you're already a couple, so your girlfriend will jump at the chance more often than not. Once you pick up the phone, you can choose whether to ask her out for a weekend date or one on that day, the latter being a little harder to pull off, especially during school.

But you're not done yet: you have to pick a date spot to suggest to her; an entire city's worth! Keep her personality in mind when selecting a spot—Manaka may not be so willing to go to karaoke, and Rinko probably won't find the art gallery exciting. Even so, she won't agree to every place in town, but you can usually get a second chance to pick. As in reality, this is the hard part, but after that, it's pretty smooth sailing.

STREET SMART



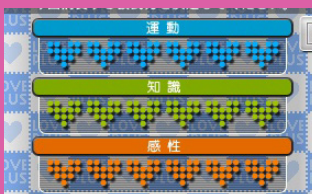
Your in-game web browser is one of the better tools in your relationship. By touching the Information folder and logging on to Towano.net, you can access a list of recommended date spots, entertainment events, weather forecasts, or your own personal horoscope. Keeping abreast of date spots and events is most important, as they'll give you new ideas for dates that hopefully will be right up your girlfriend's alley.

SCOUTING



The town map can be useful at a glance, but you can't really get a feel for a place without going there. Now, when you choose to leave the apartment, you also have to pick somewhere in town to go. It's good for checking a place out before a date, and if it's a store, it's doubly good for buying a gift for your significant other. If the gift can be worn, you just might see her with it on next time.

FOLLOW YOUR HEART(S)

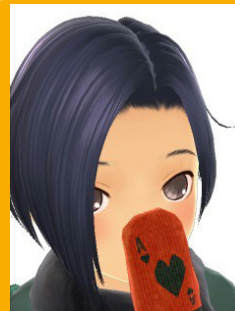


Before dating, your daily activities earned you a number of colored hearts, which at that point couldn't really be used for anything. But now that you're going on dates, it's time to put them to use. The hearts are basically tokens that you "spend" just before dates begin to affect their outcome.



Depending on how many hearts you have and how many you allot to the date, you can build an array of little activities that guarantee more that will happen besides the date itself. Grabbing coffee, stopping for a chat, kissing, walking home... the more, the merrier.

SKINSHIP



The most infamous feature of the *Love Plus* games is "skinship," which describes the point in a relationship where it moves beyond puppy love and into more affectionate touching and, yes, kissing. You're given a tutorial on the basics of skinship just after the love confession, but that doesn't mean you'll be smooching up a storm right away—your girl may be a bit resistant to even the most simplest of love pats, which usually depends on the visibility factor (the pair-of-eyes icon in the corner of the screen).

If you desire her to be more receptive, then you'll need to keep going on dates. A truly wonderful date with a lot of hearts put into it will more likely lead to a kissing session at some point, and ultimately more happiness towards holding hands and all that good stuff. And don't worry about your own reactions to this; it's perfectly natural to question your well-being after tapping on the tiny mouth of a polygonal girl. At least there's no tongue.

HAVE FUN!



First times shouldn't get caught up in the minutiae of the game—just enjoy the relative goofiness, and maybe you'll learn a thing or two.

LOVE EVERLASTING

New *Love Plus* has more features carried over from the last game, but piles on more content, too, from date activities, improvements, and miscellaneous diversions.

LOVE+ MODE



This eponymous mode sounds like it's substantial, but is really just a simple way to interact with your girlfriend whenever you want. It's instantly accessible from your apartment at any time, and transports you to a white void with your girl front and center. Here, you can have very simple question-and-answer conversations (via speaking or by touching word bubbles), set an alarm for a personal wake-up call, or play rock-paper-scissors with her. If in Real-Time mode, you can catch your girl in her sleepwear at night, or perhaps in an odd costume around holidays. At any rate, if you're not hopelessly obsessed with the game already, you probably won't be trying Love+ mode too often.

DREAM EVENTS



The dream that you had just before the love confession was not the last weird fantasy you can have. Throughout your dating life, you can experience other "dream events" that occur usually after going on dates to certain spots repeatedly (like talking Rinko to the arcade often), but also on certain days or after certain conversations. These dreams, like all other special illustrations and events, can be viewed later in the game's Gallery option.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The in-game camera is a big part of *New Love Plus*: you can snap a screenshot anytime you're with your girlfriend. You can also turn on gyroscope movement for some (limited) angles. In addition, any photo can be used as your in-game phone wallpaper, or exported to the SD card to be your real phone wallpaper, too. Because what kind of lovesick boyfriend wouldn't have his girlfriend as his wallpaper?

BOYFRIEND LOCK

If you're concerned about your save file(s) being tampered with, you have the option of turning on the lock feature, which uses the 3DS inner camera to recognize your face, and can then be used as the "key" to unlock your save when you start the game again. As an added bonus (depending on how you view it), your girlfriend greets you right afterward, audibly recognizing her special someone.

EXPANDED STORIES



The girls will usually keep you updated on goings-on in their lives during the walks to and from school, but in *New Love Plus*, you get to be a part of three new week-long scenarios. For Manaka, she and the tennis club face the wrath of a hard-assed new coach; Rinko tries to form a band, and Nene goes up against the manager of a rival restaurant. They're all part of the "Seishun no 1-Page" mode, which shows up at some point during Real-Time but is so far fairly indeterminate (fans have placed it around mid-March, but that may only apply to after the game's launch on Feb. 14). Nevertheless, it's a decent addition to the story part of the game, which is mostly a remake of the previous *Love Plus* games to begin with.

DOKODEMO DATE



New Love Plus doesn't have an explicit AR mode, but it does have Dokodemo Date; a way to place your girl in your own photos and pretend that she really is with you on a trip, rather than being stuck in the game world. It starts by taking a picture, then selecting from a variety of different poses the girl can make in the photo, plus the option of using a pen tool to paint a "mask" where the girl will be obscured, if need be. You can then use your photos to assemble a "date course," where pictures are organized in a venerable slideshow that functions as a "date" would in the real game. Your girlfriend travels through the scenes, and then thanks you for a wonderful time at the end. Dokodemo Date is a wholly separate mode that has no bearing on your actual game file, so it's more of a cute novelty than anything.

DRESS-UP



Based on the answers you give her during conversations, your girlfriend will often debut new hairstyles or outfits as time goes on. If you don't like it, you can be honest, and she'll go back to how it was, or you can roll with it. She'll also show off new outfits, and you can help expand her wardrobe by buying accessories to give as gifts. After a while, she can look like a completely different person, with virtually any color of hair or any manner of weekend outfits.

BOOK CLUB

Along with Dokodemo Date, *New Love Plus* has another way of bleeding into reality: on a chance trip to the library or bookstore, your girl will get a particular popular novel and ask you to read it along with her, talking about the story when you see each other again the next several times. Nene likes horror mystery *The Mouryou Box*; Rinko will pick up *My Measuring Spoon*, a suspense novel, and Manaka will begin reading the international classic *Anne of Green Gables*. In Japan, *New Love Plus* tie-in editions of the books (below) were released alongside the game—though they're unchanged besides the themed covers that depict the girls as part of the stories. Well, it's certainly one way to get people to appreciate literature, and, in a certain light, not all that unsettling for *Love Plus* in general.



MINIGAMES



In another attempt to make sure *New Love Plus* never leaves your 3DS, the game offers a selection of a few different Konami classics once you begin dating. With Manaka, you get access to *Taisen Puzzle Dama*, a simple *Puyo Puyo* clone featuring several Konami cameos, including Manaka herself and Hikari from *Tokimeki Memorial 2*. Being with Rinko unlocks the classic fighting game *Yie-Ar Kung Fu*, and Nene grants access to a version of cutesy shoot-em-up *TwinBee*.

With at least a year's worth of stuff to do in your relationship, there's much more to experience beyond these pages. *New Love Plus* is packed to the brim with all sorts of little modes and activities that aim to give you something new every week, month, or season. Keep up the good work... oh, and don't forget your anniversary.



The of Misfit Hardware



ARTIFACT #PVC97H

PlayStation SCPH-5903

Whitewashing

The market streets of Hong Kong are—and perhaps always will be—a great place to find some movies to buy for not much money. But unlike Walmart, those movies aren't exactly neatly organized on shelves, and hardly ever the genuine article. Not to mention that it was only within the last few years that DVDs started to become more prominent at those streetside shops, because it was barely 15 years ago when the dominant format was the Video CD.

Philips, Sony, Matsushita and JVC jointly developed the VCD standard in the early '90s, and it was an incredibly viable platform in greater Asia, where the populations are drastically high and the income drastically low. Videotapes were comparatively unwieldy and pricier to distribute, so the VCD was widely adopted in a short amount of time. It was stupid *not* to: a VCD is little more than an MPEG-1 file slapped onto a garden variety CD-ROM—not exactly rocket science, which is exactly what made producing, playing and copying VCDs a viable business for manufacturers and peddlers. The quality of many VCDs was below average, and feature-length films had to be split among two or more discs, but for the average family, a VCD was the best bang for your buck.

It's no surprise, then, that the VCD exploded in popularity throughout Asia. In the late '90s, when the format was at its peak, millions of VCD players were sold, along with millions more titles. This was also the time of 32-bit game consoles, and they just happened to use CDs, and could play video, too. The Sega Saturn could support VCDs thanks to official expansion cards from Sega and Victor, but Sony didn't offer a solution for the PlayStation. That left unlicensed manufacturers to pick up the slack by making bulky, unlicensed add-ons that enabled VCD playback.

Sony eventually addressed this little issue in 1997 when they released the SCPH-5903 PlayStation, exclusively in the Asian countries where VCD penetration was high (not Japan and Korea; they adopted DVDs around the same time the West did). Internally, it was more or less the same PlayStation as always, with the same old BIOS menu, except that it played VCDs after you popped one in, just as if it were a game disc. And with the PlayStation having pretty good video decoding already, its playback quality easily put it on par with the run-of-the-mill VCD players found in an electronics shop.

On the outside, the new model had a white casing as opposed to the original PlayStation's grayish coloring, and



By supporting East Asia's digital video format of choice, Sony's VCD-playing PlayStation could have cornered the market much like the PS2 did with DVDs, but its timing was a little off when it was released in a highly saturated VCD market.

as any hardcore gamer worth their salt knows, a PlayStation that wasn't gray is an instant collector's item. And curiously enough, the SCPH-5903 had three separate RCA jacks on the rear, a blast from the past after Sony replaced those inputs in the regular unit in favor of the proprietary PlayStation A/V plug.

Considering the worldwide popularity of the PlayStation at that time, this one-of-a-kind PS1 could have boosted Sony's dominance in Asia, but it didn't quite take off. Sony didn't seem to promote the model especially hard, effectively making it just another PlayStation in the product line. Plus, it was released in the middle of the pan-Asian VCD boom, so there were already tons of people with VCD players, game consoles, or both. So the unique system didn't end up flying off the shelves, and inevitably became a collector's item regardless of its special color, but its historical value remains.

GENE

RETRO GAME BARS AREN'T JUST FOR TOKYOITES ANYMORE—
INSIDE CENTRAL JAPAN'S NEWEST NOSTALGIA HOUSE

THE DOSES

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ALEX FRAIOLI





Kouhei Tsuchimoto, proprietor of retro game bar Genesis, is a man with a pierced lip and wearing a skull-and-bones Sonic the Hedgehog shirt. Today, he's crouched in front a shelf of Sega Saturn games. "Here it is," he says, pulling a game case from the bottom row and presenting it on the counter with a smile. It's *Death Crimson*, his favorite kusoge.

Tsuchimoto pops the game disc in his Saturn—twice, until the system recognizes it. "It's a pretty legendary shooter among kusoge fans," he says as he's introducing it. "Used copies go for about 4,000 to 5,000 yen, but as soon as you start playing you think 'I wouldn't pay 100 yen for this!' Here, watch ... the opening movie kind of makes it look cool, but it's really just a disaster."

Though it's filled with video games, Genesis adopts a low-key, almost intimate approach. Instead of trying to look and feel like someone's living room, it embraces the Japanese maxim "simple is best" with a traditional bar atmosphere. No space for tables, and no themed drinks—just a guy surrounded by his bar and his game collection, making the place less like a stereotypical "video game bar" and more like a nice bar with a bunch of video games in it. Tsuchimoto keeps his two favorite game music artists, Yuzo Koshiro and Kenji Ito, in heavy rotation except on rainy days, when he plays *Final Fantasy VI*'s "Slam Shuffle" on a continuous loop.

Luckily, the atmosphere is somewhat inherited. The space Genesis occupies used to be a Western-style bar with a modern Japanese feel, though it's not exactly spacious. The narrow room has a heavy wood-grain countertop and a pattern of wooden posts lining the rear wall, all lit by the soft glow of a single light fixture on the wall, with a Power Glove mounted

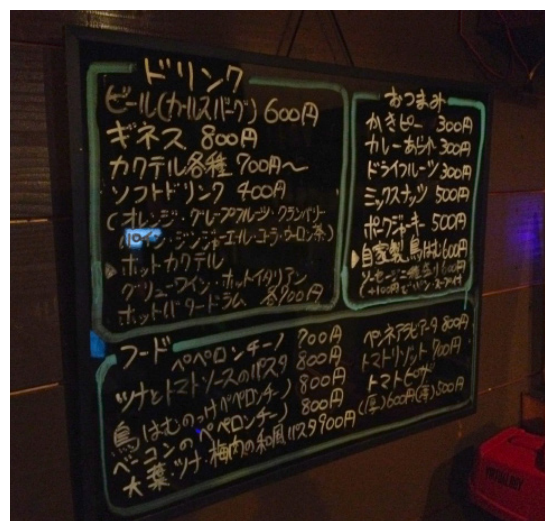
below it.

Tsuchimoto got serious about games when he was 22 and self-employed as an eBay seller. His online shop specialized in Sega games, and the curious entrepreneur would often play many of the games that came into his possession before selling them. Naturally, when he was ready to open Genesis, he already had 90 percent of the games he wanted for it. "With the exception of the Famicom and Super Famicom stuff, all of this was my own personal collection," he says, motioning to the walls of boxes and jewel cases. "To get that last 10 percent, I would often go out and buy boxes of Famicom and Super Famicom games; about a hundred or so a time."

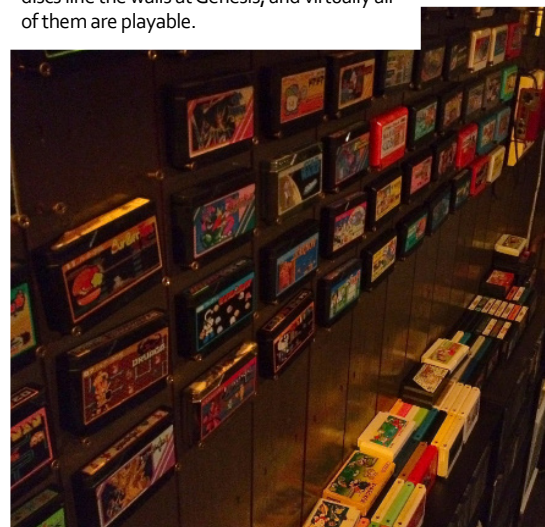
The idea for Genesis came when Tsuchimoto tried to find a retro game bar in nearby Nagoya, the largest metropolitan area in Japan's Chubu region. The Google Maps results don't lie: virtually all like-minded game bars are halfway across the country in Tokyo, putting a severe, if temporary, damper on Tsuchimoto's plan to combine his appreciation of games and alcohol.

"There just wasn't anything in Nagoya at the time," he recalls. "I thought, 'Well, I guess it's up to me then!'" He quit his job as an eBay seller and took an office job at mobile phone giant Softbank in order to raise the necessary capital for a game bar of his own.

If you're wondering why Tsuchimoto named his bar the America-friendly "Genesis" instead of "Mega Drive," he says there were two big reasons. "First of all, Japanese gamers would think the name 'Mega Drive' is kind of transparent. 'Genesis,' on the other hand, has that one extra layer of 'oh hey, that's what the Mega Drive is called in America, isn't it?' and would pique the interest of the people who might like a place like this."



Multiple generations of game cartridges and discs line the walls at Genesis, and virtually all of them are playable.



“THERE JUST WASN'T ANYTHING IN NAGOYA AT THE TIME, [SO] I THOUGHT, 'WELL, I GUESS IT'S UP TO ME THEN'”



Sword of Sodor and Death Crimson (above) are well-"appreciated" kusoge to many Japanese gamers, with Tsuchimoto no exception.



With the second reason, Tsuchimoto draws the understandable conclusion that Sega's legal department might have been on him before the paint on the sign dried. "It happened just recently to a place in Shibuya called 'Famicom City,'" he says warily. "Nintendo must have sent them a cease-and-desist, because the place suddenly closed down and reopened in August with the name 'Albatross.' It's a shame; the interior had this neat red-and-white Famicom color scheme, but I suppose that wasn't helping them legally."

Since opening last June, Tsuchimoto has been doing well for himself as the only game in town. Word of mouth has been a big help, pulling the gamers of Ichinomiya and Nagoya out of the woodwork to stop in for a visit. The tricky part is getting enough of them to become regulars. "Someone can come in here, have a good time, exclaim, 'oh wow, how nostalgic!' and then never come back," Tsuchimoto says on the subject. "It doesn't help that some customers are simply too young to even have that feeling of nostalgia to begin with. I'm 28, for example, but a customer who's 25 may not remember *Xenious*. And nostalgia can't just be explained—it doesn't do me any good for me to tell him about all these old games and consoles. It's a perfect case of 'you just had to be there.'"

But this pushes Tsuchimoto to work harder to keep the nostalgic ones from getting away. "When the atmosphere clicks with a customer—the drinks, the games, the music—it becomes a memorable experience. I'm happy to see people enjoy themselves here. I want people to go home thinking, 'That was so much fun, I want to go there again.'"

Tsuchimoto has big plans for the little bar. "If I make enough money," he says, picking up the Saturn controller, "I'd love to do the place up in a Mega Drive motif, with everything completely black except for a few neon lights and a huge '16-BIT' sign in gold lights." He pushes the Start button and finally begins playing *Death Crimson*. The first level loads, and its shoddiness is worthy of a spit take. "Ahh, maybe someday..."



== NOSTALGIA
CAN'T
JUST BE
EXPLAINED ==

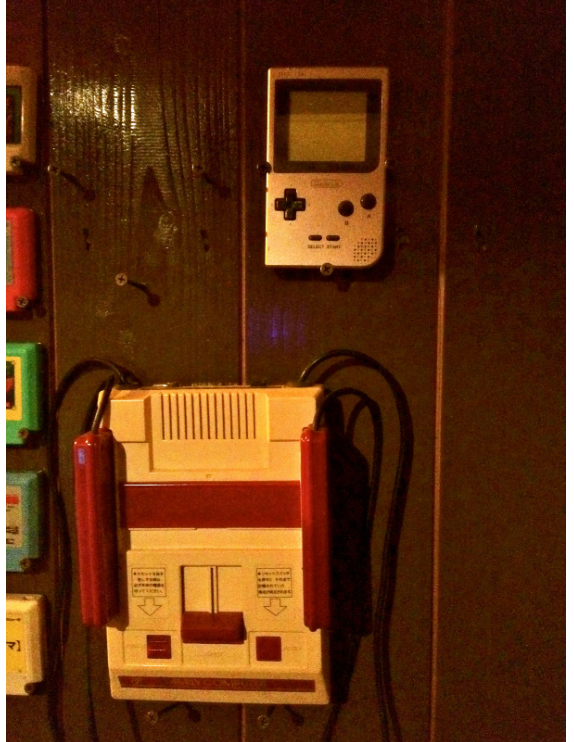


GENESIS

Oe 3-chome 13-18
Aichi-ken, Ichinomiya-shi

Open: 7:00 PM - 3:00 AM

Twitter: @rgb_genesis



COOL BOARDERS

SONY • PLAYSTATION • 1996

The transition to polygon graphics in the 32-bit age was initially an uncertain time. Many developers struggled to find something interesting to do in 3D spaces within the confines of the genres they knew so well. Some kinds of games adapted better than others—specifically sports and racing games, where realism is always at the forefront. Racing games constantly aspired to be 3D, as programmers had been pairing driving with false 3D perspectives since the earliest years of the medium.

This quickly-advancing 3D world kick-started the rise of snowboarding games, a sport that had spotty coverage in 2D gaming beforehand. But that rise wasn't entirely because of new technology; snowboarding was a leading "extreme sport" in the '90s, and in the 32-bit era, it was just a few years away from a debut at the winter Olympics. The opportunity was simply great.

But who jumped at it? Not America, and not Europe—Japan gave us 3D snowboarding games, and UEP Systems was there first, in 1996, with *Cool Boarders* for PS1.

Cool Boarders had a clear arcade racing influence—loud sounds, loud visual design, awful announcer voice—an approach that not only helped it stand out, but helped push the idea of PlayStation as the place to go for hip 'n' edgy games. The courses were short and focused on straight downhill rides that encouraged jumping off ramps and ledges, tricking to your hearts' content. However, being that it was an early PS1 game from a new developer, there's a lot in the game that feels merely serviceable, like the pitch black select screens, and that didn't change much in the sequel.

Regardless, *Cool Boarders* sold incredibly well worldwide, and gave way to healthy competition like *Steep Slope Sliders* on Saturn

and *1080 Snowboarding* on Nintendo 64, the latter easily winning the battle for quality. And yet, it didn't exactly make superstars of UEP. After the release of *Cool Boarders 2*, the developer let Sony take the series' Western rights, and had 989 Studios make three more *Cool Boarders* games of their own, each progressively less extreme. UEP, meanwhile, was only slightly more prolific in Japan, producing *Cool Boarders Arcade Jam* (a port of *CB 2*), *Cool Boarders Burrrm (Rippin' Riders)* for Dreamcast, *Cool Boarders: Code Alien* for PS2, and *Cool Boarders Pocket* for NeoGeo Pocket; an ironic 2D edition. Unfortunately, that's pretty much *all* they produced, and without a clear way to break out of the box, UEP didn't survive. In subsequent generations, EA and *SSX* took the throne with few challengers. But if remembering UEP for giving new life to a subgenre is all that's left, well, that's pretty cool.



Love/hate

If you made it this far in the issue, congrats—I wasn't sure many would after seeing what the cover story was this time. I kid of course, but there's a bit of truth there. Trying to sell people on specific retro game topics is challenging enough, but contemporary dating sims? Why don't I just set up a table at Otakon and be done with it?

As I write this, there's been a lot of arguing amongst gamers about misogyny in games and game culture, and otherwise questionable depictions of women. Japan gets most of the flak for that, "thanks" to an insane concentration on "moe" characters and excessive sexualization at every turn. It definitely doesn't make visiting game forums any more comfortable when the latest RPG from NIS is released. Compared to the anime industry, games aren't nearly as saturated with T&A, but that is proportional, and games are a worldwide product. Regardless, the noticeably marginalized approach to female characters is a legitimate concern in every form of entertainment, and hopefully we know to set our sights on the right targets.

When *Tokimeki Memorial* was released, there wasn't half as much contention or controversy around it. *Love Plus*, on the other hand, entered a very different environment of Japanese games and other entertainment, and soon found itself on a global stage receiving not-so-constructive criticism from people who barely understood video games in the first place. As this issue's cover story already says, *Love Plus* is far from being the worst offender, but it's undeniable that Konami's promotions of it made its situation worse. What people see the most are the illustrations of the game's girls in swimsuits, or the videos about Dokodemo Date, or the hopeless nerds that celebrate Nene's birthday. That all makes for great blog posts and a consistent stream of comments of the "lol wut" variety, but it doesn't do much for the *game*.

At the risk of sounding defensive, this issue is not about getting you to like *Love Plus*, but to understand it, which is the aim of every issue of *SCROLL* and its topics. I laugh and shake my head at it as much as the most cynical of observers, but there's also that part of me that just wants to see what the big deal is, and appreciate the game for what it does and not what it represents—with no urges to literally kiss, coo at, or marry my 3DS.

Unless that's what Manaka wants.

rdb

EDITOR

Ray Barnholt

ray@scroll.vg

CONTRIBUTORS

Janine Dong

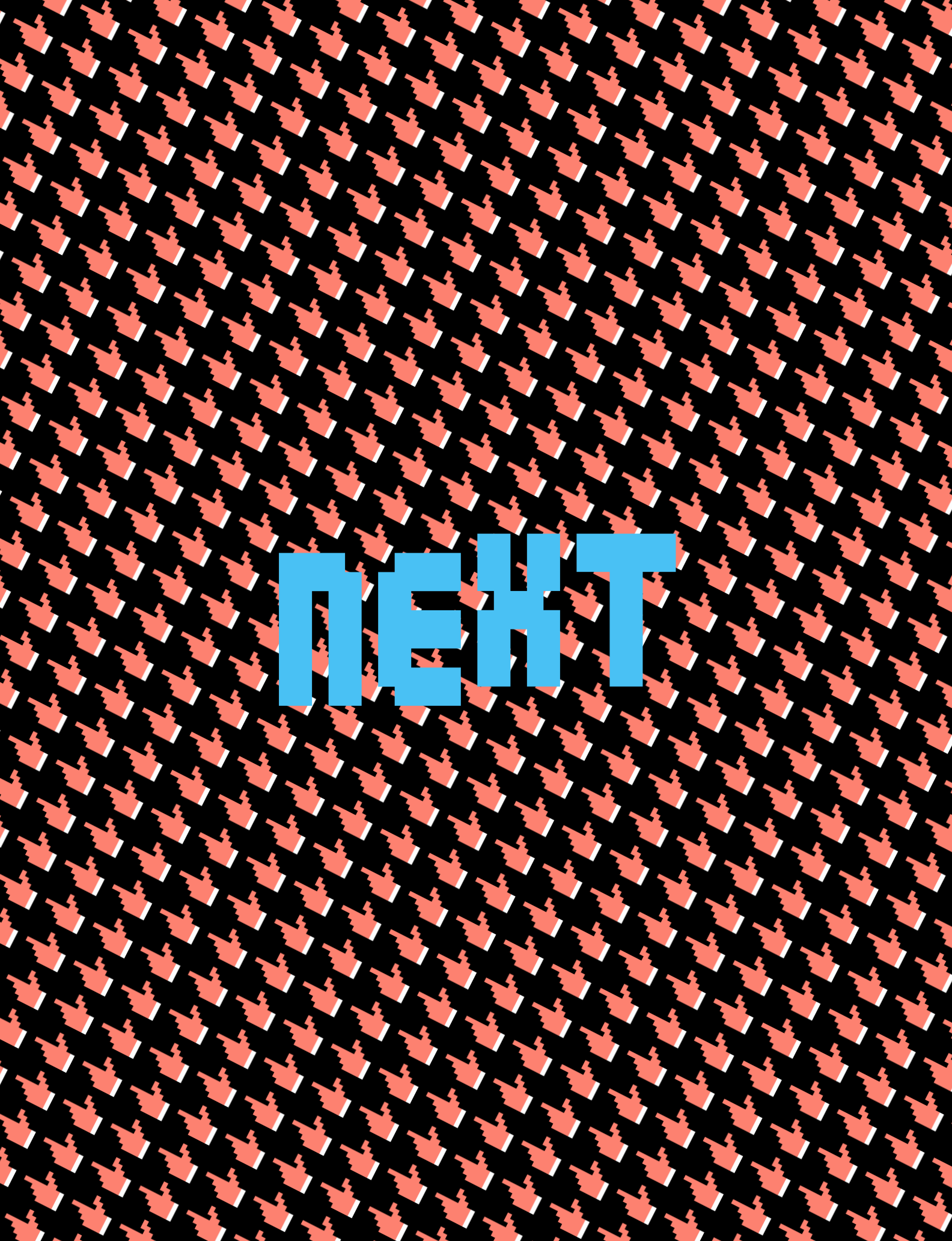
Alex Fraioli

ONLINE

The *SCROLL* web site is scroll.vg. Find out about old (or new!) issues there, and check out whatever things I find on the internet that are germane to the whole *SCROLL*... thing.

You can also follow the *SCROLL* Twitter account, [@scroll_vg](https://twitter.com/scroll_vg), but it's not too thrilling. However, it's good for an instantaneous alert as to when something new is published.





next



