

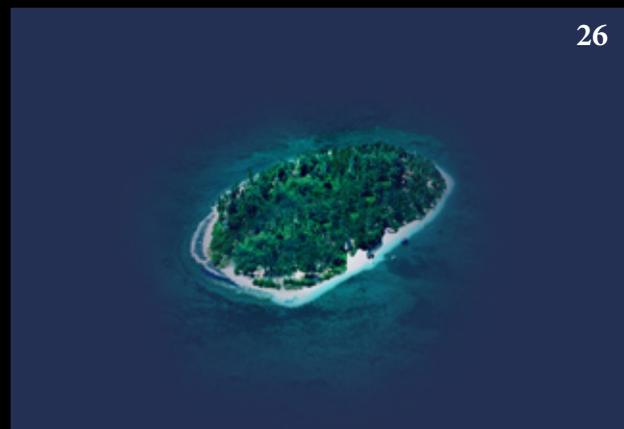
DISPOSABLE MEDIA

issue two



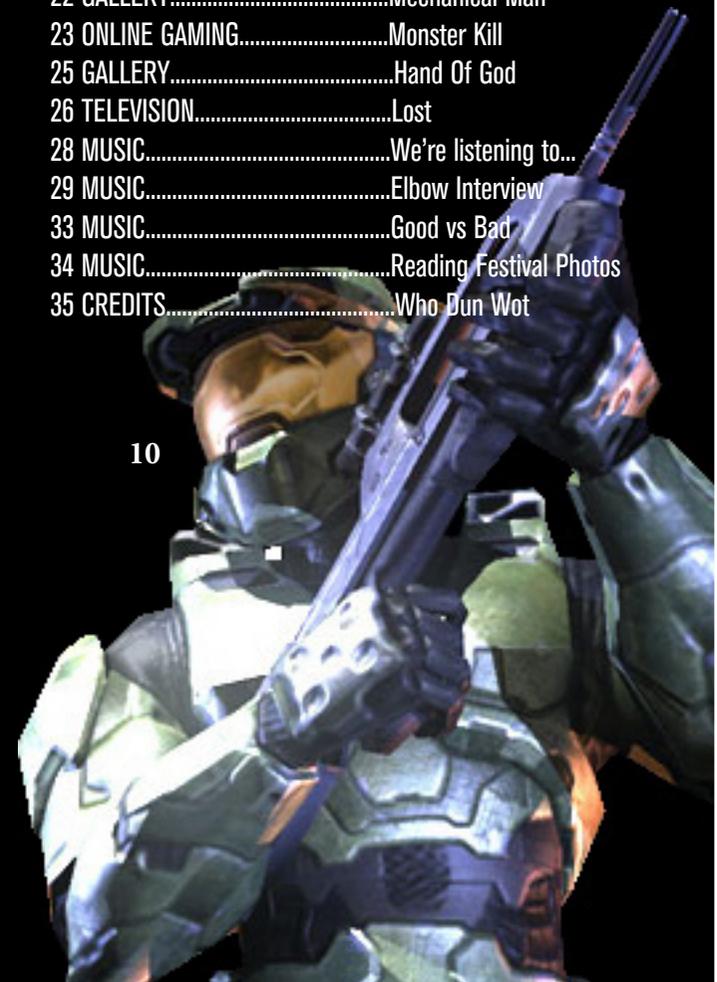
**ART.
MUSIC.
GAMES.
LIFE.**

Issue Two



ISSUE 02 // September 2005

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Good day to you kind sirs, and welcome to Issue Two of the fine and upstanding publication that is Disposable Media. We're bigger, better and with even more.... things. Oh yes.

Our crack team of award winning journalists* have been quite literally chained to their desks all month to bring you a delectable cavalcade of tasty treats for your eyes and brains (though probably not really edible, unless your monitor is made of Fox's Glacier Mints. And people don't generally eat with their eyes, so... well, you get the idea).

This issue the theme is 'community', which has largely ended up equalling online gaming, in all it's various forms - though we do have a few tricks up our twisted sleeves....

On the games front we have all the regular features (at least as regular as they can be after two issues), an interview with Tim Wright, the force behind the classic game music of such titles as *Lemmings* and *Wipeout*, and a fantabulous multi-person analysis/discussion/review of *Halo 2*.



There's also enough art in the gallery pages to make Tony Hart weep with joy, a feature on hit tv series *Lost* and an interview with Elbow, complete with exclusive pictures from their recent comeback show at Koko in London.

Hopefully you'll all enjoy this as much, no, make that more, than Issue One. It was certainly well received, other than the complaints about the numerous typos after we foolishly decided 'people can put up with a few mistakes rather than have us launch even later'. Oh what fools we were. You pedantic bastards.

Mr. Ed(itor)

*most of them have the odd swimming certificate at least

BOTS BY REV

**EIGHT OF THEM-TOO MANY
TO TAKE AT ONCE.
GET BETWEEN THEM.
SHOOT TWO IN THE FACE.
SPIN. GRENADE LAUNCHER-
ANOTHER TWO DOWN.
CHASE THE TWO THAT
WENT THE OTHER WAY.
SPRAY BULLETS INTO
THEIR BACKS.
TWO LEFT. SHOOT.
SPIN.
ONE DEAD. ONE MORE.
LOOK THROUGH THE WALL.
FIND HIM. HEAD SHOT.
EIGHT KILLS.
IMPRESSIVE.**

It's not as impressive as it sounds - it was against MeatSims. They walk into walls. They fire bullets at random intervals and at random ceilings and floors. Which is why they are great - they're useless at Perfect Dark. What they are useful for is racing - you and a couple of friends see who can kill fifty of them first.

Making bots is an odd process at best as rather than simulating people as normal game AI tries to do, bots should try and simulate people playing the game they are in - which not many people have played when the bots are being made. On top of that you are making something that the people probably won't appreciate hugely even if you do a great job of it and so it won't sell more copies of the game.

Back to Perfect Dark. If you got bored of the race to kill MeatSims there were more options. Best of all, create teams of bots with different odd behaviours team up with your friends and watch some bots run at you throwing grenades from inches away while another team finds a small corner to hide in and stays there for as long as possible. Fun. Of course you could also fight against bots that were an extremely tough opposition due to their ability to cheat. Less fun.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. Firstly, Perfect Dark in multiplayer was the most fun a juddering mess has ever been. Secondly, Bots can be great. In the days of online gaming, communities, clans and omni-present pre-pubescent Americans people have started saying that bots are even less necessary than they used to be. Wrong. Bots should be there to supplement online play as Perfect Dark used them to supplement split-screen play. Some people don't understand that.

Bungie for example. We really tried to put in bots honest, the staff at Bungie cried. Right. So what is the end result for the majority of people who weren't interested in lugging their Xbox around? Two people strolling around a map the size of Ipswich town centre and twice as dull. One kills the other and then back to hiking. Rubbish. Then Halo 2 does the same again except this time with online play. We really did try to put Bots in this time, the Bungie staff sob. Multiplayer games are only fun if you have multiple players - something which meant Halo was pretty rubbish unless the conditions were just right.

Another example. Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy was polite enough to include bots in it's LAN multiplayer modes which is a good thing considering the rise in two PC homes. Unfortunately they are completely useless and not in the fun MeatSim way. Teams on the hardest difficulty end up on minus numbers on any

level with a hole in the floor. They are still better than nothing though and are fun in a point and laugh way. If only because you get to say "Silly Jedi" like a Hutt.

Bots should be a plaything. They aren't expected to realistically simulate people playing the game so they shouldn't try. In fact anything beyond identifying who they should be shooting at and falling down holes isn't really needed. They should just be made to be entertainment to be used when sixteen players aren't poised and waiting because they give the option for two player games to be different and more importantly, more fun - which is what we all play for anyway.

**BOTS SHOULD BE
THERE TO
SUPPLEMENT ONLINE
PLAY AS PERFECT
DARK USED THEM TO
SUPPLEMENT
SPLIT-SCREEN PLAY.**

Gold!

A gamer's diary

A reuniting of university friends for a hot summers day, we're packed into the car and heading out of sweaty central London towards the greener suburbs. Football – check, Baseball Bat – check, Frisbee – check, Unicycle... eh? Awesome! The afternoon's sun is thoroughly absorbed amid a flurry of simultaneous throwing and kicking of various sports equipment followed by a stand off between two groups using fallen crab apples in the back garden. After the activities our bodies are nourished on overdone burgers, sausages via the outdoor barbecue-gas-kitchenette-grill-and-god-knows-what-else machine all made healthy via copious amounts of dubiously dressed salads. Everyone retires into the front room and we ponder what to do next.

'You've got Singstar haven't you Nathan?'

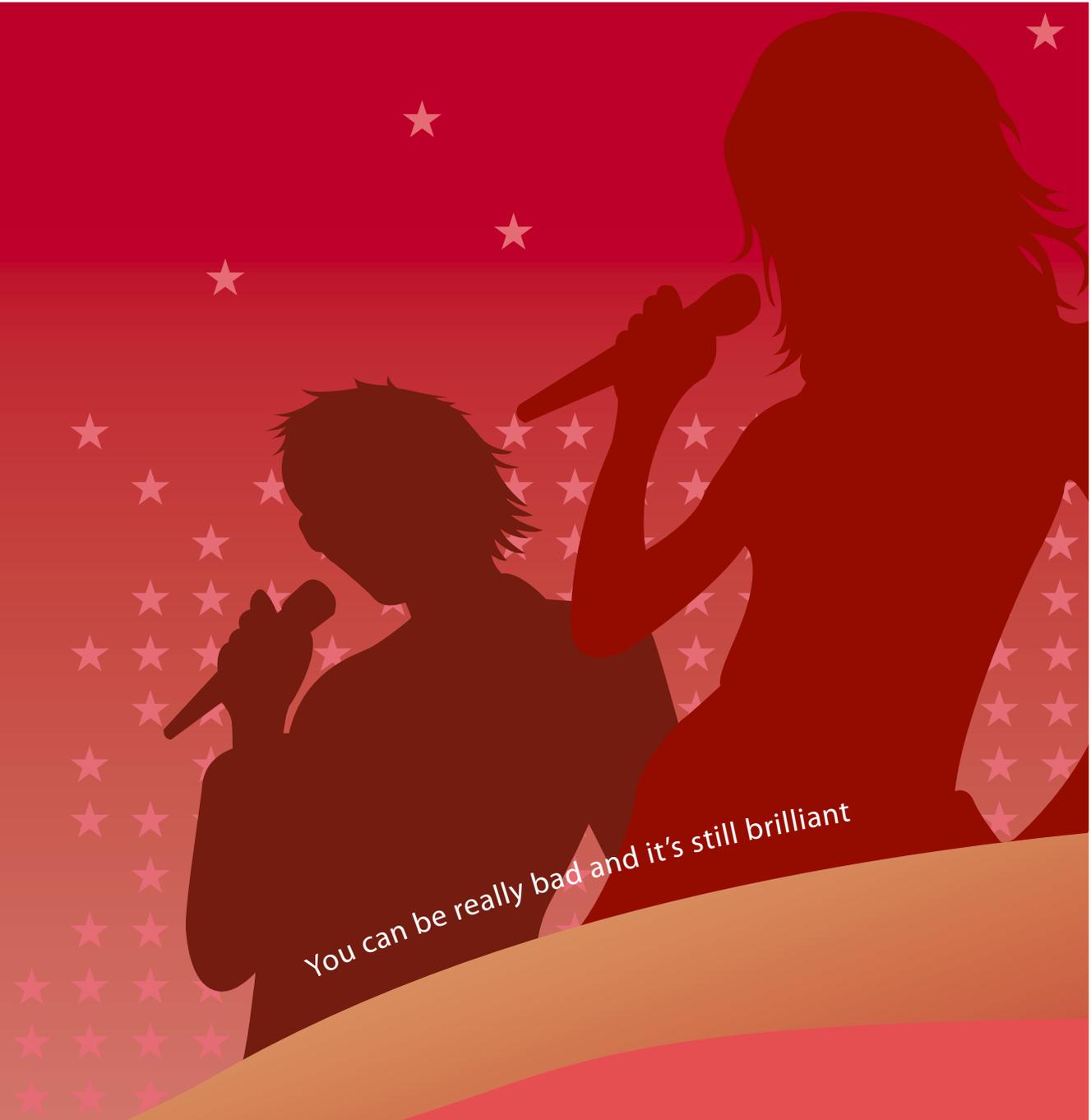
'Indeed I have', we're in.

Red team versus Blue team, three guys and one girl per team. First up it's Nathan and Kris performing a duet, they strut up to the mic, grasp it with all their manly might and the song title rolls up on screen 'Tiffany – I think we're alone now'. Nice.

It's such a magical thing Karaoke, it breaks through all those barriers of self-consciousness,

you can be really bad and it's still brilliant. It's the perfect accompaniment to a few drinks, add a scoring system and those that can sing, can put it to the test. Head to heads include straight points battles, endurance (keeping your note hitting above a standard) and pass the team work. Once they had the pitch reading technology in place it was a no-brainer for Sony, just whack a bunch of songs on a disc, solos, duets, allow groups to compete and you're away. How can that go wrong? Well somehow it did, the classic error made in party games is that if it's turn based, you need to rotate who goes first. You're supposed to be competing on a level playing field yet one person will be performing a song they've just heard courtesy of the other team. A ridiculous oversight, especially given this is the second iteration of the game. Luckily this isn't what the game is about.

Back to Nathan and Kris however and it's beautiful, two heterosexual guys thinking they're alone now, ahhhhh. The line up involves a spot of Pink, Jamiroquai, and the Beautiful South. It'd be a great summer soundtrack, but combine that with the voices of your friends and it's very special. The Red Team smash the Blues to pieces, the final nail in the coffin being bonus points provided by a magical rendition of Spandau Ballet's finest.



You can be really bad and it's still brilliant

Whether through microphone, using my actual voice, or through a keyboard, I don't care, but I want to have a conversation with an NPC. I don't want to do it with a real person online, having to decipher the inevitable spelling mistakes, or abhorrent accent, nor do I want to experience the horrific role-play guilt that would ensue; I want to do it, single-player.

It doesn't have to be great immediately, I expect there to be flaws, but I just want some attempt to get this concept off the ground.

Why? Because it's the natural evolution of gaming, is why. What's the closest example in gaming today? Approaching an NPC and pressing 'A' then reading what they have to say. Where's the personal input? Ok, there's some fun to be had, but it's barely differs from reading a book: an activity that has been enjoyable for hundreds of years. But now we have the ability to take it to the next level.

We've had conversation trees of various forms with varying levels of quality, but they only offer distinctly black and white choices, and do not deviate heavily from the designers' whims. The future is about making your own story, taking the world and making it your own, installing yourself as it's God. I want that future today.

Some people bemoaned the alternate endings in *Deus Ex*. I don't think that's because they would have preferred a



wish one:

I want to hold an actual conversation with an NPC

singular ending – perhaps in the essentially choice-limited form the game was in it would have been more befitting, but if a greater level of choice permeated the whole experience, then a wild diversity of endings would be expected.

"It's just like reading a book: an activity that has been enjoyable for hundreds of years. But now we have the ability to take it to the next level"

The more you converse with your NPCs, the more knowledgeable they could become. There have been instances of this in the past with *Animal Crossing* and

Seaman, but they haven't received the mass appeal they deserve. Is this because the games were not given enough marketing? Was their USP not marketed clearly enough? I don't know. But I know that people want this. They just don't know it yet.

Imagine it: your own personal Jesus. He lives on your desktop, knows your likes and dislikes, and entertains you accordingly.

He is the mirror image of you, if you so wish. Affirming your miserable, pathetic, worthless life by aiding your every whim,

by being everything you say. He is your best friend.

He could be the resource to all of the information on the web, like a Google that speaks to you.

He could be tied in with an online retailer to drop little purchasing decisions into conversation. In this sense, he could be released for free. The ultimate tool of capitalism is just waiting to be made. The potential for such an entity is undeniable, and if the people with all the money really thought about what this could achieve, it would be made tomorrow.

As was mused by the ingenious Morpheus AI in *Deus Ex*, perhaps this is the next stage of religion:

"The need to be watched and understood was once satisfied by God. Now we can implement the same functionality with data-mining algorithms."

"The human organism always worships. First it was the Gods, then it was fame (the observation and judgement of others), next it will be the self-aware systems you have built to realise truly omnipresent observation and judgement."

"You will soon have your God, and you will make it with your own hands."

Title: Free Style
Developer: CleverMedia
Publisher: Online distribution
URL: <http://clevermedia.com/game.php?freestyle&2>

Free style

FREEWARE
GAME OF THE
MONTH



Every issue or so, Disposable Media will scour the internet for fun free games – be they by professional studios or lowly bedroom coders, online Shockwave titles or downloadable content - so that when you're bored at work you can simply fire up your favourite browser and indulge in some gaming within minutes. Our writer Qazimod has one of the slowest PCs in the world, a PIII 450Mhz dinosaur, and so this may be a measure for the performance of the game on your machine should it come with no specifications in the documentation.

Disposable Media enjoys making music as much as listening to it and both pastimes are at least as enjoyable as indulging in electronic entertainment. So when a game comes along that tries to bridge the gap between the seemingly distant pastimes of games playing and making music, our interest is piqued. From the early 8-bit days of Ghetoblaster, gaming has toyed with the concepts of music creation and the web plays host to a few fine specimens.

Other than this title, there are music games to be found at <http://www.shockwave.com> – the DJ Fu series puts you in the role of a DJ collecting tracks to mix together, all the while affecting the accompanying BGM. However, neither DJ Fu's side-scrolling collecting up with fighting and

gameplay nor its weird dance beats, chilled synths and bouncy bass musical style will appeal to everybody. A seemingly futile Google search for similar games, with terms as abstract as "online music maker game", ended with the discovery of Free Style. Best described as an arcade-style puzzle game that mixes Bounder, One-Line-Puzzle/Polarium and a ridiculous random jazz solo being produced by hitting random piano keys.

The game sees you using your cursor keys to control a bouncy ball that traverses across rows of tiles. These tiles are red, green or grey and whilst the grey tiles have no effect on the game when bounced on the red and green tiles switch colour when they are bounced upon. It's your job to make sure that there are no red tiles on the row you are

grinding on and when that is fulfilled a bridge appears to take you to the next row. To make matters more difficult, a black cross also inhabits each row, threatening to end the game if your ball bounces on it.

Every time your ball moves to a tile, the black cross teleports randomly to another unoccupied tile unless you move to the square the black cross is currently in. If so, the game ends. Clear as mud? Well, Free Style is one of those games that could be described in hundreds of words and still not be fully understood by a reader, yet a handful of seconds of play are all that are needed in order to understand how the game works. It's when you do begin to play that you realise how interesting a concept it is but also how potentially frustrating it can be.

You see, in some games, random elements are welcome; if every game of Tetris played out with the blocks arriving in the same order then eventually strategies could be devised and the

game would lose its lasting value. In Free Style however, the random element can cause frustration. It's not unfair, the cross only moves to a new position once the player has landed safely on another block and it means deaths are due to the player but becomes frustrating more due to the player's own desire to keep a steady piano melody going along to the beat.

There are some gripes though; some might say there's not enough actual game and it will be true to some – not helped by the fact that some might think that it's a game of chance, which it isn't. Played carefully it can be completed reasonably easily and the first completion left Disposable Media reasonably high on the online high-score table. It is a browser game though and consequentially is not really designed with lengthy play in mind but still the placement of tiles is different every time to allow some replay value.

If you can get into it, the desire to make a flawless melody makes the game very addictive. Spreading the word led to new players becoming hooked, comparing scores and progress with one another. It's just one of those games, unsophisticated yet highly addictive puzzler. Whilst not for everyone, it is worth a look if only as a means of seeing the kind of diverse entertainment provided by browser-based games.

a community has slowly built up to bridge the gap between the European and Japanese game markets and it's easy to see why as well. Too often the Europeans are left feeling a little hard done by for the simple reason that some games are never released here. One example that springs to mind is the Wario Ware series. A series simple enough to appeal to everyone, whatever their tastes thanks to it's easy to pick up micro-games that are intuitive enough to master within moments. The series has gone on to sell enough copies to have become another great exclusive series for Nintendo. However, the Wario Ware series could quite possibly have never made it to these shores for the simple reason that they, and other games like them, are often considered "too Japanese" for western mindsets.

Another example. Utter the words "Katamari Damacy" to most gamers in Europe it's quite likely you'll receive a blank look in return. Katamari Damacy, and its recent sequel Katamari Damacy Minna Daisuki (translated as "We Love Katamari Damacy"), have breathed new life into the world of games. Instead of relying on a trusted formula Namco decided to come up with their own genre entirely, which can only be described as the roll 'em up. It's been met with a fantastic response in Japan and has sold incredibly well to both the Japanese market and to keen eyed importers who managed to spot the title from afar. It's these importers that spread the word to the general gaming public on European shores, and for the first time in a long while, it seems that gamer pressure could pay off, with Namco scheduling the release of a PAL version of the game early last month. EA have also within the last few weeks agreed to publish and market the sequel "We Love Katamari Damacy" on UK shores. Yet this is so rarely the case with games that are "supposedly" too risky to release upon the European markets.

Over the years, the PAL gamer has missed out on a huge array of cracking titles, simply because a few suited men sitting around the boardroom tables of major publishers deemed that the games would not appeal to a broad enough market. There is, of course, a hardcore of importers who haven't missed out, importing frequently and paying almost twice the normal retail value for a game, just so that they can enjoy the games their fellow gamers around the world are playing. The Pop 'n' Music series, despite enough popularity to reach an eleventh installment is another group of titles that European gamers will likely never have seen. The game is played with a separate controller, with large coloured buttons that must be hit in time with on screen commands to produce musical chords, drum patterns or sound effects to form a tune. While music loving importers have been enjoying the games for a while it seems ludicrous that the game has never seen the light of day in Europe considering its long lasting appeal in Eastern territories.

The launch of the Nintendo DS, and the warmth with which it was received on these shores, shows how wrong many of these companies are with their decisions to not export games which don't have a popular existing fan base already. It was seen as too quirky, too clumsy and too unique for European gamers to tackle, yet it has already sold over a million units here. The fact that there is no region coding on any of the games also allows for novice importers to try their hand at Japanese titles despite Nintendo's wishes.

As if importers are not already faced with a daunting enough challenge, with import taxes, modified consoles and reams of Japanese text preventing them from playing these gaming masterpieces, more difficulty is being added by publishers and heavyweight manufacturers such as Nintendo and Sony now doing everything in their power to stop local independent retailers and online importers shipping these goods in the first place. Sony recently took exporters www.lik-sang.com to court over the sale of all Asian and North American PSP consoles and games to European customers. The question you have to ask is, why?

While blocking the import of games may increase local sales figures it seems short sighted to push people down other avenues. Illegal downloading and copying of games has rapidly increased over the last few years due to the internet's growing accessibility and leaps in speed. A huge percentage of these downloads though are import titles, simply because many gamers feel that it is becoming impossible to play them using any other means. Even for games scheduled to come out in Europe, the Japanese games market sees them release up to three or four months earlier.

So will it ever change? Will publishing houses realise the errors of their ways, and allow series such as Katamari Damacy, Pop 'n' Music, Chibi Robo and other successful titles to see the light of day in Western homes? That remains to be seen, but the fact that European gamers seem to have won the battle with Namco over the release of Katamari Damacy, shows that, slowly, things are beginning to swing the gamer's way. At present, we rely on gaming forums, chat rooms and the few magazines that offer import reviews, to provide us with news of these games and how and where gamers can import them. Europeans are hopeful however that slowly, the tide will turn, and they too can enjoy these hidden gems, that would otherwise be left undiscovered by such a huge portion of the gaming community.

an obsession...



You only have to look at sites such as www.evo-web.co.uk or www.pesinsight.com to see the length some fans will go to, to enjoy the games at the same time as their Japanese counterparts. Patches and fixes have been made to translate all Japanese text and menus into English, so that European football lovers can play the Pro Evolution Soccer series (Winning Eleven in Japan) before they are officially released over here. It is also worth mentioning that those who do import very often buy the English version as well when it finally hits Europe some months later, in essence, doubling the profitability of the same game for the publishers.



import community
words - Chris Cohen
pictures - Steven Pick



JASON ROBBINS

OCCUPATION-ANIMATOR LOCATION-LONDON
NOW PLAYING-WINDJAMMERS.MARIO BROS 3 (PSP)
CREATED IN-STUDIO MAX INSPIRED BY-RAINBOW ISLANDS
NOKIA SHORTS ENTRY-<http://www.onlinestorage.biz/users/Members/Cheeko/Gone15Seconds.divx>

XBOX
2004



HALO 2

We don't much like reviews.

That's one of the first things the DM team decided when the mag was just a twinkle in our eyes (or more accurately, a reflection of the computer screen). Not to say we don't like reviews, of course (despite that being what we said), just that we feel that this isn't the place for them.

What with lacking any kind of pre-release access to games and a lengthy gap between issues, by the time our faithful readers get to see our thoughts on a game, they've probably already bought it, played it and sold it on eBay. So a traditional review will just be wasted megabytes. But, like women and cheap whiskey, we just can't live without them. So we're trying something crazy and new (unless it's been done before) to make our reviews a bit more interesting than most.

The idea is that each month, we'll compile a team of world renowned gaming experts (or a few of us lot) and choose a 'classic' that every gamer worth his salt has played to death, then dissect it like a dead mouse in a Year 7 Biology lesson. That analogy is important, because this could be a great success, or by the time the bell rings the class could be flinging severed tails about the room, and Smith has been sent to the Headmaster's office for rubbing rodent guns in Johnson's face.

Anyway, the more observant amongst you may have guessed this month's game is Halo 2, so let's kick things off by meeting the team...

MJOLNIR MARK VI ARMOUR SPARTAN-117 UNIT



THE TEAM

REV

SP Started playing more or less at release and swiftly completed the game in co-op. Although I'd read spoilers before so I didn't need to complete it quickly. Recently I've started playing it through again on Legendary but it isn't high on my to-do list.

1

MP I went on Live about a month after it came out and somehow ended up taking over the management of a huge clan – the Rllmuk Nubes. Since then I played it most nights, generally with clan members. Just before the Map Disk was released when I moved away from Broadband and I've not been able to get back yet.

STEPHEN

SP Started it almost straight away but never actually got around to finishing it as I just lost interest, probably around two thirds of the way in.

2

MP I got chucked off Live in the pre-Halo 2 cull they did of modded Xbox's, but have played a little on Xbconnect/Xlink. Mostly sniper games that seem popular on there.

DAN

SP I got it with a newly purchased Xbox around Christmas and completed it – before playing Halo 1. Replayed a few bits of it but not really since completing Halo 1.

3

MP Just split screen experiences with people who had played the game since release and who had probably already mastered Halo 1 as well.

PREACHER

SP I pre-ordered and picked it up at midnight. With 3 other people. I started work on the single player and finished it not long afterwards since I'd been avoiding spoilers.

4

MP From November 11th onwards, I played on Live every night right up until Christmas but I slowed down for quite a while when cheating got too bad. I still play it, but nowhere near as much.

“Betcha can’t stick it...”
Master Chief in the E3
2004 Teaser



“The cliffhanger was abrupt though; it was like a big game was cut in half.”

XBOX
2004



SINGLE PLAYER

[REV]: We’ll start with the big thing. Two characters in the single player - good idea or bad idea?

[PREACHER]: The problem is this - In Halo, you WERE Master Chief and the game seemed almost emergent to an extent, like Deus Ex or something. With the introduction of a second character came the need for many, many cut scenes that kept stopping the game. From a storytelling perspective, it doesn’t seem like a wise move. In fact it seemed like a big step backwards.

[REV]: I didn’t mind it really - it seemed...odd. But the arbiter seemed to have more fun levels so it balanced out.

[DAN]: It was...interesting. Although to be honest, I didn’t know if it was a new feature, having not played Halo 1 at the time. Halo 2’s story was a big bunch of shit though. It was like Star Wars Episode 2, full of political nonsense,

emphasis on the relationship between Elites and Prophets.

[REV]: I must admit - I can’t even remember it now.

[DAN]: Oh, it was all nonsense that was too dull to be taken on board.

[STEPHEN]: I often keep playing a game because a story is making me want to know what happened. With Halo 2 I stopped about halfway through the game. The “ANOTHER HALO?!” moment stands out in the story for all the wrong reasons.

[PREACHER]: It was just so matter-of-fact “and oh, there’s another Halo”

[REV]: I was there for the shooting – but it did feel a bit like a con that I was shooting things on a Halo and not on earth, as advertised.

[PREACHER]: I think it’s telling that they left

things on such a huge cliff-hanger - it says a lot about how confident Microsoft and Bungie are with the franchise now.

[DAN]: The cliff-hanger was abrupt though; it was like a big game was cut it in half.

[DAN]: Can any of you name any particular chapters or moments in Halo 2 that you found stood out or were memorable? Like the silent cartographer was THE standout bit of Halo 1.

[STEPHEN]: The most memorable thing for me was jumping down onto the scarab thing. It just took a second to click that I would be able to do it, that’s what made it work.

[REV]: Sort of - I really enjoyed fighting in that courtyard just when you got down to earth. That was cool. And the big battle with the flood and covenant later on with the flood in tanks was fun too - but nothing that hugely stood out. And there are other odd bits I remember - like flying around that Bepin-like place in the banshee

– memorable but not much fun. Nothing like Silent Cartographer though.

[DAN]: There’s the Sacred Icon level – that was good because it starts off really depressing; lots of darkness and cramped flood encounters but then it thrusts you into the open with the section entitled “100’000 years war.” I am a sucker for games that keep you shut in small spaces then knock you back with impressive outdoor battlefields

[REV]: Apart from those little bits though – nothing really. It is a good game though.

[DAN]: Yes

[PREACHER]: Oh, it’s good.

[REV]: Just not an excellent game.

[STEPHEN]: It is a good game, but not by the standards it set itself - it’s like a new Michael Jackson album or something.

XBOX
2004



[REV]: What about the weapons? Like dual wielding? The new rifle and SMG?

[DAN]: I liked the SMG, but after Halo 1 it seemed a bit overpowered.

[PREACHER]: In one player dual wielding was a dream come true although I'm not so sure about the multiplayer. It completely changed Halo multiplayer for me and not necessarily for the better.

[DAN]: Compared with Halo 1 I found dual-wielding kind of took away the edge during Elite encounters...on Normal, anyway.

[REV]: I agree I suppose – the dual wielding ones were still a pain though. That said – I don't dual wield against them now. Playing on Live taught me that a charged Plasma Pistol and a few rounds from the Battle Rifle were the way to take them down. Dual wielding was cool as a last minute brute force thing though - but I only

ever started dual wielding when I was already in a mess.

[PREACHER]: Yeah, you were pretty much fucked if you pumped both clips into an enemy and they still weren't dead. That's the time to panic.

[DAN]: You can carry three weapons now as well can't you? Two dual wield and one backup.

[REV]: Yeah - I did that a lot. Carried an SMG as well as the Battle Rifle and Plasma Pistol usually but I don't think it was convenient enough to change the game really.



The soundtrack was a mix of compositions by Marty O'Donnell, as well as Incubus and Breaking Benjamin.

MUSIC

[STEPHEN]: What did you think of the music?

[DAN]: The music rarely felt inappropriate - It wasn't noticeably good but it wasn't obviously crap either. It was just there.

[STEPHEN]: When I heard the Incubus guitars coming in whilst whooshing around in my banshee, it was very special indeed.

[REV]: I think I preferred the old non-electric music but it certainly wasn't bad by a long shot. Just a personal preference thing.

[PREACHER]: It was very American which isn't to everybody's taste.

“The music was very American, which isn't to everybody's taste”



WEAPONRY



In the hands of the right Spartan (or Arbitor), the plasma sword dominates.





Red vs Blue - battling in the claustrophobic Lockout.

XBOX
2004



“For the first few months there was nothing - cheating became almost guaranteed.”

MULTIPLAYER

[PREACHER]: It's highs and lows. One night, Halo 2 online can be perfect. Literally, the perfect competitive game and the other, everything can seemed so stacked against you that you're left deriding the programmers for all the shitty spawn points and game modes they slapped in.

[REV]: I agree entirely - there are so many reasons why playing on Live is awful. But then again there are so many reasons it is ace too. So inconsistent though.

[STEPHEN]: In my limited experience I found myself somehow playing a lot of sniper games, and it was surprisingly forgiving. It certainly never made me feel that it was the game being unfair, just other people being better.

[REV]: I think that's true - although with enough play you do start to notice lag and latency problems stealing kills that would have been yours in a LAN game though. The actual game, apart from a few little problems but is very good - some of the maps are great and they are different enough to not get boring too quickly.

[PREACHER]: Apart from the fact that the new maps are shit, I agree with all that.

[DAN]: It's not my favourite multiplayer FPS but it is highly enjoyable and accessible though. Not that I've played it on Live. What does voice bring to games? All egos and bitching?

[REV]: If you're playing with people you know voices are the best thing ever. If you're playing with strangers then it can be awful.

[PREACHER]: Go into matchmaking and political correctness is right out the window. You're black, a paedophile, a homosexual and lots of graphic things about mothers. The lot.

[DAN]: Ah.

[STEPHEN]: That's a live issue though surely?

[REV]: Maybe. Although maybe not. In Halo 2 you get drawn with friendly people as the exception rather than the rule - on other games I've found it to be the opposite - generally people are friendly. Even similar FPS's aren't as bad.

[DAN]: How is moderation? Are servers policed or anything?

[REV]: Not even slightly

[DAN]: I thought...ah no, I'm thinking of an old J Allard speech at the advent of Live. Silly me.

[REV]: For the first few months there was nothing - cheating became almost guaranteed. Since then they've improved on getting rid of cheats but the people who are sexist/racist/etc. are perfectly allowed to be there. It's so bad Live games now have a warning at the start - not that it will help.

[REV]: Sometimes. I've had it happen certainly - but if they shoot their own team on purpose the person that gets killed only has to press X and the culprit is gone.

[DAN]: Ah, I see.

[REV]: The people who want to cause trouble though just keep knocking out your shields

though so it can still happen though.

[DAN]: Oh.

[REV]: Of course you don't have to play with strangers all the time - clans make that even less than it normally would be with just a friends list.

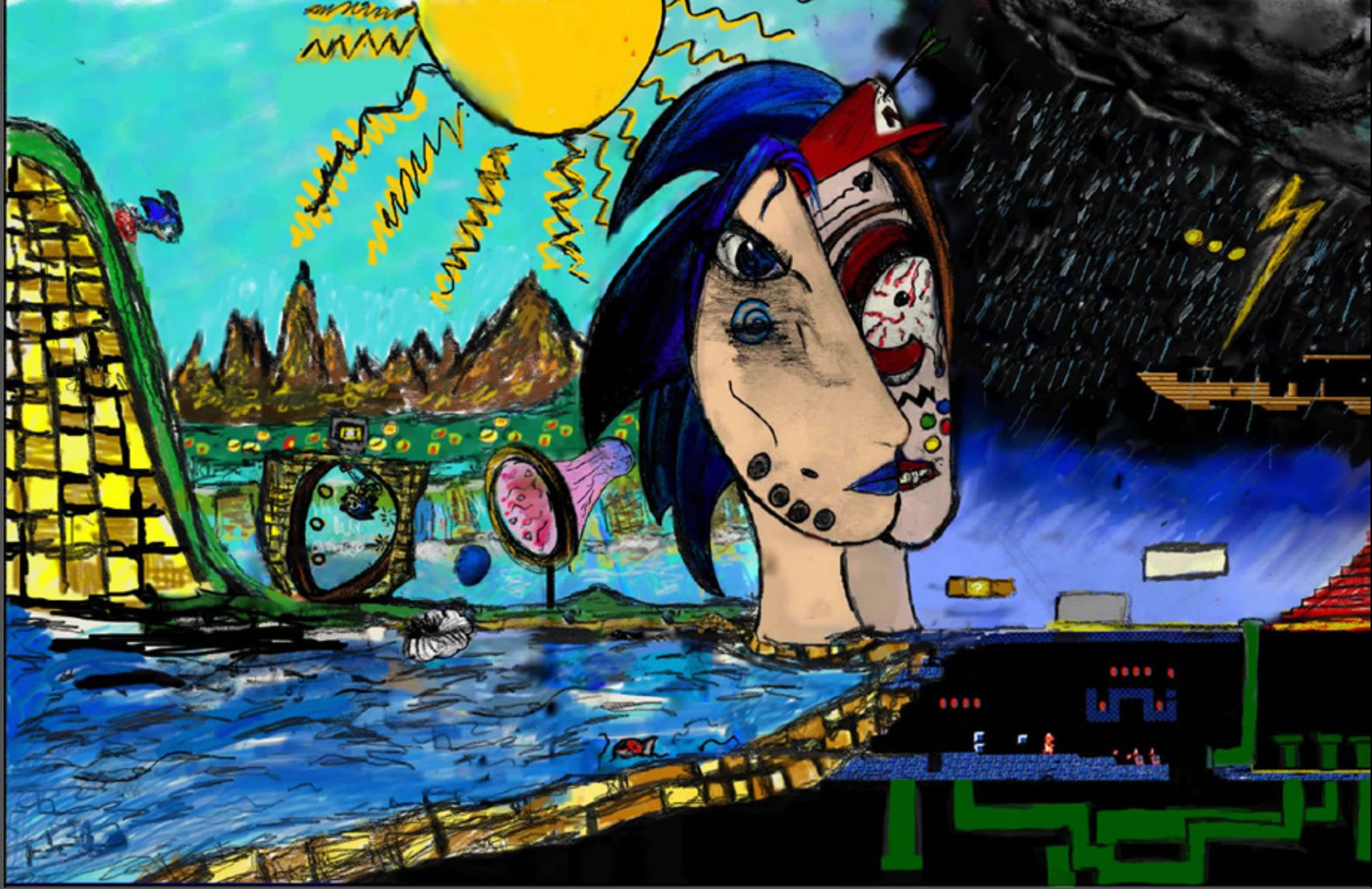
[DAN]: What are clans like in terms of setup/moderation?

[REV]: Clans are moderated by themselves. I managed one for ages and it's the easiest job in the world. And so worthwhile - clans are the best thing about Halo 2.

[DAN]: Nice.

[PREACHER]: They're the best attempt to make a community-within-a-community I've seen on Live.

[REV]: I love the clan I've been in charge of - a brilliant bunch of people and it meant that you didn't need to play alone against the Americans. It can even make it fun on a bad night.



SONIC MIRRORZ

1991

XBOX LIVE

For the last several years, online gaming has been the Next Big Thing. Has Microsoft finally made it all we ever wanted it to be?
Andrew Revell looks at the service.

The ill-fated Sega Dreamcast was a brave foray into the online gaming world and worked surprisingly well considering the low-speed connection. But ultimately, was not enough to tempt people into buying the console. Now though, both Sony and Microsoft are engaged in broadband-based online services. While the PS2 online service has been hampered by being over-complicated and almost entirely unsupported, Microsoft has been steadily building Xbox Live into a commercially successful, well received and well supported online service.

The major difference between playing multiplayer games on Xbox Live rather than playing most online PC games is the communicator headset that enables you to speak, rather than having to type, your thoughts. While it is a good idea for games that require team tactics, it comes into its own when you know the people you are playing with and can chat about anything and everything whilst playing. The headset may make you look like an air traffic controller and the thought of talking to a TV set may initially seem embarrassing, but you soon get used to the idea and it quickly becomes something that is difficult to go back from. A word of warning though, the Xbox communicator headset is flimsy. Very in fact. This is mostly due to its reliance on a tiny piece of plastic to hold it together.

[Outrun 2]

This title offers standard online features but it is one of few games that lag doesn't totally ruin. Very good fun when having regular matches but relatively dull against random people from around the world. Not a huge amount of players online at a time, either.



So how can i get Xbox Live?

Semi-regularly Microsoft have offered two month trials that allow you to play for free. If you want to take the plunge fully, Xbox Live is based around paying a subscription fee. The best option is to buy an Xbox Live starter kit for around £40 that contains a headset, demo disc and a 12 month Xbox Live subscription - which can also be used to extend your current subscription. Major Live compatible releases often offer the option of buying the game as well as the contents of a normal Starter Kit and typically sell for around £60, with examples including *Halo 2*, *FIFA 2005* and *Forza*. Technically, there is also the option of paying monthly but it works out to be more expensive than buying a starter kit and requires the purchase of a headset on top of the higher price. Beyond the subscription, you'll also need a credit card, the imagination to think up a gamertag, a fast broadband connection and the means to connect the Xbox to it.

To keep track of the people you like to play with there is the game-dependent Friends List which can hold the 'Gamertags' of up to a hundred players. People you have met through games can be added after you finish your game, or you can manually add

people to your list. All online multiplayer games allow access to this list that can show whether or not friends are online and if so what game they are playing. If you are playing the same game you can then generally use an option to join game, join your friend(s) game or create your own game and invite them to join you. Even if someone is in a different game you can still invite him or her to join you. *Halo 2* and *Forza* have also added a clan structure, (a second list allowing you to either have a 100 more friends in a group or a crack squad of players to take the world on with). Both mean you have less contact with the strangers that often seem to ruin Xbox Live.

Different games offer varying support for Xbox Live. It ranges from simple high-score tables that compile the top-scores people have achieved in a single player to full-on multiplayer team play with voice support. The two *Midway Arcade Collections* are packed full of games that offer compulsive opportunities to beat high scores, and prove your ability to the world. Other games allow for extra content to be downloaded to the Xbox hard drive to expand the single player or add more tracks or maps to the multiplayer game.

The games that are fully multiplayer generally work well. Even early games such as *Moto GP* work smoothly assuming they are connected to a fast enough broadband connection, but the problems of lag vary wildly depending on game. Certain games, such as *Halo 2* are just too complex to offer a perfectly level playing field and regularly favour the host and the people geographically nearer to them. It might only be microseconds but in a fast paced game it can be life and death and has people complaining. As a general rule, everyone can cope with four player games but often playing with more players can result in lag problems. It's not perfect but as time goes by, fewer games suffer such problems.

“ Certain games, such as Halo 2 are just too complicated to offer a perfectly level playing field and regularly favour the host and the people geographically nearer to them than people far away ”

Playing against strangers from around the world may sound exotic but it usually ends up with matches being played against young teenage American males who delight in using as much offensive language as they possibly can. Racism and homophobia are both unbelievably common and almost no official action is taken against the perpetrators. This leaves the option to either mute the offending players in game or to learn to ignore them, safe in the knowledge they will almost certainly grow up to be both obese and dim.

[Halo 2]

Currently the most popular game on Live and plenty of varied game types and recently extra maps have kept it fun. Includes a Clan system and level based matchmaking - but it is a game that punishes poor connections.



[Forza Motorsport]

A tough racing simulator that takes real practice to get used to. Use customisation options to decorate your car and show off your creations in online races. Due to the difficulty races tend to be quite spread out but tight races are great.

More official action would be appreciated by all though and an in-game warning screen is not enough. Oh, and there are people from other nations you won't be able to understand, but they tend to sound quite friendly.

One of the big problems Live creates is that it makes gaming seem random - one night you are having as much fun as you possibly can and the next you are having an awful gaming experience. Network conditions, players and the game types being chosen all affect whether you are having a good time or not and there is nothing that can be done about any of them. Whether the good nights are worth the bad nights is something everyone has to decide individually, but a run of bad sessions is enough to annoy even the calmest gamer. Usually though, perseverance pays off and the fun will come back.

But for all the problems encounters, there are always anecdotes that serve to illustrate just how great the service, and it's implementation is; an evening of racing on *Project Gotham 2*. Three regular players are racing and chatting. A new player joins - an American father. He explains that he has just got Xbox Live and is trying it out with his son and that they will alternate in play. Both turn out to be pretty good at the game and both are friendly and chat happily with the people

already racing and are willing to suggest races and play along with what others choose without a word of complaint. Others - including two Norwegian friends - join the game. Soon everyone is on first name terms and the racing is both friendly and competitive - as Live should be.

All in all, Live has been a successful first step for both online gaming and Microsoft. While the majority of games available are

“ Would the hassle of starting to police games be worth the possible increase in revenue for Microsoft? ”

still either shooting or driving, the amount of choice is slowly expanding and hopefully this trend will continue with the release of the Xbox 360. More variety should tempt a wider range of players online that will greatly improve online gaming for everyone. One problem for Microsoft though is that less hardened gamers may be put off by the unnerving amount of animosity shown by a large amount of the existing players. Would the hassle of starting to police games be worth the possible increase in revenue for Microsoft? For now, no-one knows but it is surely only a matter of time before the general press sits up and makes a scape-goat of online gaming and Microsoft may be better launching a pre-emptive strike. For now though, hopes are high for the Xbox 360 Live service to carry on the excellent progress already made.

[Pro Evolution Soccer 4]

One of the best off-line football games heads online. It has proven popular despite having an awful online implementation that only allows two players and suffers from lag even on the best connection.





TRACY-MARK GORGAS

MASTER CHIEF VERSUS THE ATARI JOYSTICK

ICE COLD

Tim "COLD STORAGE" Wright helped enrich your futuristic racing, shoved the Lemmings tune in your head and even let you have a go producing Music yourself. What next? Maybe a nice sit down? Illustration - Steve Pick

Steve : Why did you get involved in this business, Tim? You could of been a Postman.

Tim : I could have been a Doctor actually. So my biology teacher told me. But I wouldn't cut up rats in A level. So, the only other thing I was any good at was computer programming/ music. Bit of a no brainer therefore.

So you started programming early?

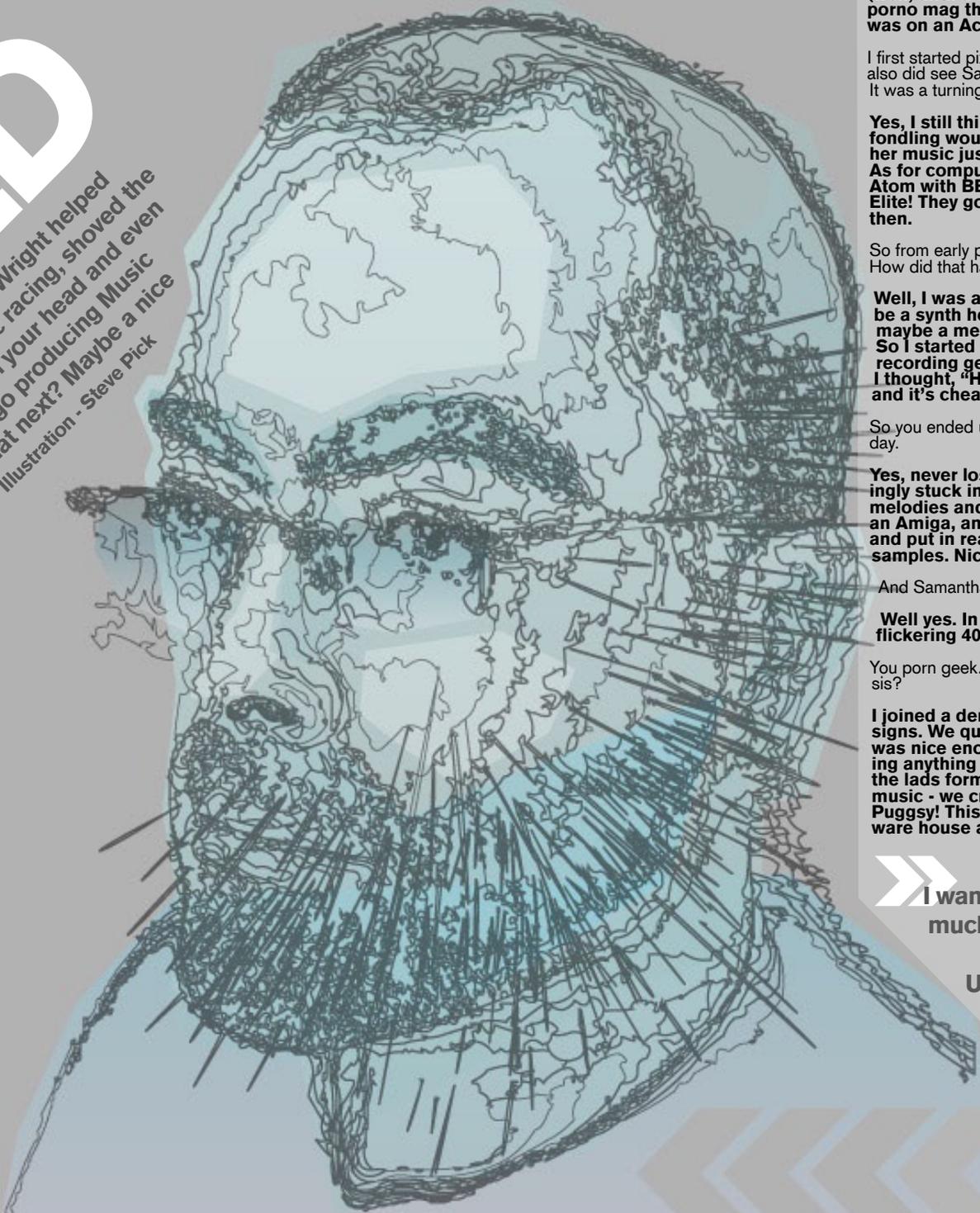
Although I have fixed video recorders and programmed databases. I started programming computers in school aged 11. So not that early... but if you cast your mind back to my childhood, they were still using slide rules and log tables, so I was pretty progressive.

Was I in your childhood? I would of remembered that.

Yes, you were the small stuffed sheep that smelt of kebab. I used to stroke you every night and wish for money.

Baaaa. What was the first computer you did start with?

Well, I drooled over the CBM Pet in pictures in magazines... I should have been thrashing my manhood over a picture of Samantha Fox, but no. Computers interested me more...



(well, until a 6th former showed me a porno mag that is). My first programming was on an Acorn Atom!

I first started pixelling on the trust BBC B, though I also did see Samantha Fox in ZX Spectrum-o-vision. It was a turning point.

Yes, I still think fondly of Sam Fox... well fondling would have been nice. I only liked her music just in case I was in with a chance. As for computers, our school rapidly replaced Atom with BBC Micro. Ah... fond memories of Elite! They got a CBM Pet, but I was over it by then.

So from early programming of computers to music. How did that happen? Magick?

Well, I was always writing music. I wanted to be a synth hero, much like Howard Jones or maybe a member of Ultravox or something. So I started saving up for synthesizers and recording gear. Then the C64 came along and I thought, "Hey this makes wibbly noises... and it's cheaper!"

So you ended up making wibbly noises to this very day.

Yes, never lost the desire to wibble. I am lovingly stuck in the 80's with a desire for catchy melodies and synthy wibbles and bleeps. I got an Amiga, and that was great! I could wibble and put in real bits too, like real drums and samples. Nice.

And Samantha Fox was in many coloured pixels.

Well yes. In HAM mode you could have her in flickering 4096 colours! Almost porn...

You porn geek. So what got you noticed by Psynosis?

I joined a demo crew called Mindpower Designs. We quickly decided the guy who ran it was nice enough, but really wasn't contributing anything apart from a meeting place. So the lads formed Dionusys and roped me in for music - we created the Pyggsy demo! Sorry, Puggsy! This was touted around many a software house at a London computer fair.

I wanted to be a synth hero, much like Howard Jones or maybe a member of Ultravox or something...



Orchestral Wipeout... now there's a thought. Better phone the Liverpool Philharmonic.

I was bloody chuffed. Over the moon. In fact, I thought I was going to be a millionaire. However, things didn't quite work out that way... I traded money for fun and games.

Your favourite game you worked on at Psygnosis? C'mon, it has to be Wipeout, right?

No, not Wipeout. My most favourite game to work on at Psygnosis was Shadow of the Beast 2. Because it was very exciting to finally be working on a very well known franchise for a top selling publisher. Wipeout was probably second.

I knew you'd go for the retro. Retro-er.

I hear what you're saying, but it's probably more to do with popping the cherry so to speak. Oh dear... what a horrible mental image.

You've associated a well-known retro Amiga classic with virginity. Well done!

Thank you. I do my best... Anyhow, most people indeed do know me for Wipeout, which is great. I'm sure I can trade on that for 50 years or so - watch me and see if I don't!

Well, your new-look website has many people downloading music. Mostly Wipeout tunes, I reckon.

Y'know... I checked out the download ratings, and the top track at the moment is Canada from Wipeout 2097, followed by Messij and Doh-T. These seem to be the top 3 faves. After that it's a chaotic shuffle for position, with the Amiga modules making a regular appearance. Around You which was written using one of the MUSIC products, that gets a lot of downloads too now.

You think people are chucking them onto their PSPs for Wipeout Pure? Can you do that? I should know really, but I couldn't find a PSP to buy, let alone need.

I'm not sure if they permit that. I know that they should be coming available for official download from the Wipeout Pure site soon. I re-mastered all the old tracks for the very purpose, so it'd be a bit of a downer if they never put them on the site.

We could talk about non-Wipeout stuff, though time and space is tight. So, last question. What of the future?

Well, there'll be more music until I die or go deaf. Even if I go deaf, I'll still be happy

Tim relaxing in his studio of the past at Psygnosis.



Tim all "suited and booted up" on the way to a trade show in 1987 under the guise of Jester Brothers.

Even if I go deaf, I'll still be happy to tarnish any reputation I have by guessing what stuff sounds like.

tarnish any reputation I have by guessing what stuff sounds like, just so I can go down in history as the 2nd deaf mad-man musician. But I really hope to be doing something I enjoy, and something that people will think of as innovative.

Like your upcoming new album which I'm plugging for you like a cheap whore.

Or my old album that's taken years to come out... It's been on the cards since 1998, but very on the cards in 2002, then a bit less cardy in 2003, then much more firm and card in 2004 and now... here in 2005, I have the masters and will be selling them as MP3's from my website. I may release as a proper CD later on.

So it's your first proper album then. I say "first", there's bound to be more...

I did think of registering CoLD StORAGE as a charity, but there's so much paperwork(!) But yes, it is the first 'real' album. The first time I've written a gang of tunes deliberately to just write the tunes. Not for any game, or video or anything. Purely for listening pleasure. And I hope it won't be the last!

So we can expect to see Wipeout Medley Vol 1?

Yes, I fancy doing "Wipeout Unplugged".

That actually sounds like an excellent idea. Acoustic Wipeout?

I know, I've copyrighted it already. But yes, acoustic Wipeout would be amusing. Orchestral Wipeout... now there's a thought. Better phone the Liverpool Philharmonic.

Why not? Some videogame music composers have managed to get orchestras to recreate their music.

Yes, there was a very good concert in the U.S. just some weeks back. It was attended by Frodo Baggins!

You mean Elijah Wood, don't you?

No, he used to be called that... but changed it by deed poll to make it easier on his fans.

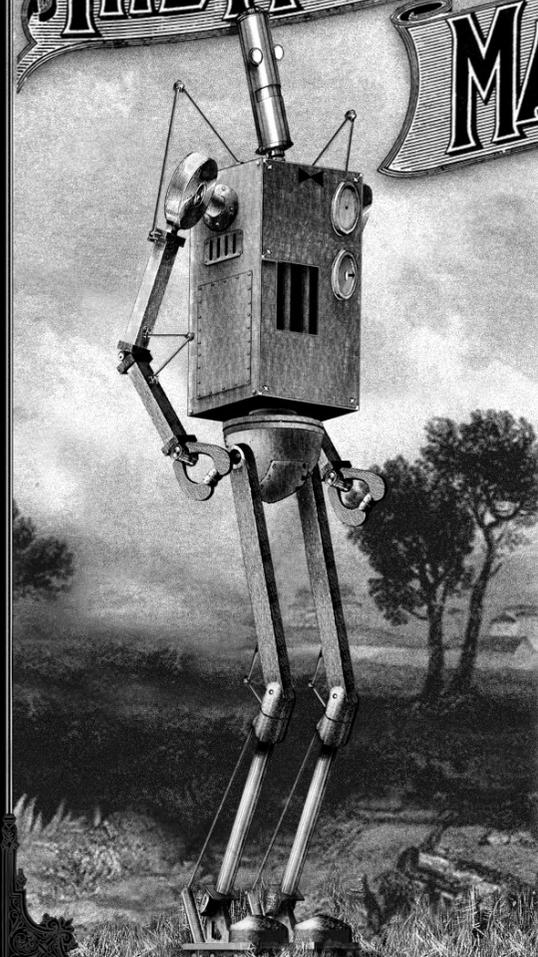
Thank you very much for your time, Tim.

Yes, thank me and thanks us each and every one.

Visit Tim online and download his music for free at coldstorage.org.uk. The Wipeout Pure soundtrack is out now on CD and download.



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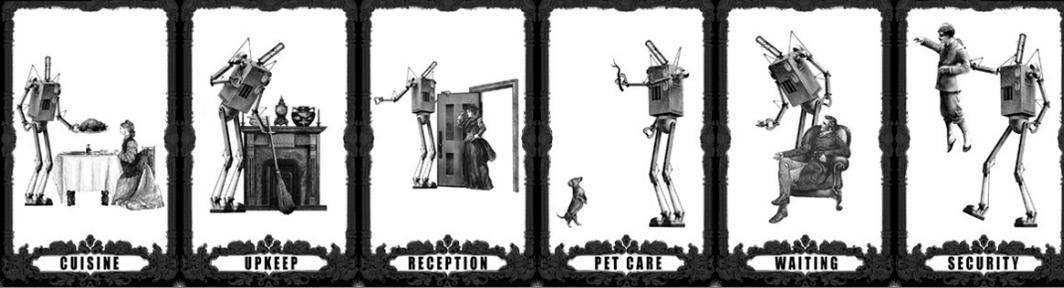
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As one of gaming's most eminent intellectuals (at least according to the Ph.D. certificate from the University Of South-East Scunthorpe he showed us briefly, which appeared to be printed on the back inside of a cornflakes box) we're proud to present this in-depth study by Professor Qazimod:



Monster Kill - exploring the enjoyment factor of online gaming

Now it's been quite a while since I have been absolutely hooked on an online game - be it due to lack of time or due to the fact that my PC's quite prehistoric - but even an avid gamer such as myself tends to enjoy keeping up-to-date with all developments of gaming, regardless of the subject. Sure, some developments have been fads, and so it is difficult to know which ones to be enthusiastic about some of the time, but other developments can become so successful that we can easily accept them as part of our gaming diet, even though we are still uncertain as to whether these new crazes will stand the test of time and mark another important chapter in the history of gaming. Which brings us to the online scene, an area of gaming which has been around for decades, with titles such as MUD being released at around 1978. Now, I am not about to deliver a history of online gaming here - partly because games such as MUD are older than even me - but it is worth recognising that online gaming could have easily become a fad, and that the past few decades could have been a lot different. All of this begs the question: where is the appeal in online gaming? How has it survived for so long? To answer this, I intend to speak to a few fans of online games in order to get an idea about how online gaming is enjoyable, how it differs in experience when compared to offline multiplayer games. First though, I'd like to offer my opinion.

Online gaming brings gamers into a world more believable than anything an offline game can manage. Whether a massively-multiplayer online RPG such as World of Warcraft or Everquest 2, or a simple first-person shooter like Halo 2, Unreal Tournament 2004 or Counter-Strike, we are given allies and opponents whose behaviour can be more unpredictable and impressive than anything the likes of Halo and Half-Life are able to offer. In a gaming climate where every developer is aiming for shinier graphics and more believable physics, we are continually

being thrust into more believable worlds. If gaming's future is online, human opposition could make the challenge of creating believable artificial intelligence irrelevant for developers, but this will depend on how easy it is to get online, and how much a user wants to get online. You see, one of the problems facing developers of online games is that they need to ensure that there is the equivalent of an offline game's learning curve, because when you log into a random server on an online game you have little idea about how strong the opposition is going to be. Thankfully, developments are being made which help players find opponents of a similar skill level to themselves, such as player profiles that gather game statistics and build a history for the player that will give potential opponents a chance to see how much of a challenge will be on their hands if they take this player on.

The believable nature of human opposition goes further in making them more desirable to A.I. opposition when you consider the advantages Earth has over a games machine. What do I mean? Well, when I play Quake III, I will create a new game, pick a map and throw in a number of bots, and continue to battle with them on the skill level I desire. When I finish, the bots do not remember how I was able to kill them, they are not able to develop tactics for the next match, tactics based on the match that they just lost. In online games we are able to come out of a battle scarred but wiser than before. Sometimes that wisdom will simply tell us that we should not log into a server labelled "PRO PLAYERS ONLY", but sometimes we can observe player behaviour, and see what works for them. Obviously, we are also able to learn from the mistakes that they make, ensuring that we do not attempt tactics that have proved unsuccessful for them. In Quake III's final map of the single-player campaign, there are a pair of blocks floating in part of the map, one above the other. A target in the sky can be shot which will make the blocks come together, crushing anyone standing on the lower block. However, many players still jump to that lower block, as it is home to the most powerful weapon on the map, the BFG 10'000. Offline, bots will be quite slow to react when you go for the weapon; online, most players will have an eye on the weapon, watching for players attempting to get it, making your chances of collecting said weapon very slim. Online, we learn from mistakes and come

away more experienced. We fight with players and discover how their skills stack up to our own. We are always able to play against the most believable opponents gaming has to offer, and this boosts a game's longevity immeasurably. Offline, games deliver different types of enemies with certain traits and, today, different AI that distinguishes them from one another. Online, sometimes we can play against players who have traits of their own and we are able to use that knowledge to our advantage, sometimes players are experienced all-rounders and we find them quite challenging as opponents, because we aren't able to find a weakness in their strategy. Is there a definitive strategy for being the best in an online game? Who knows? Who cares? Most players only play for fun, and they tend to shy away from expert players if they are nowhere near as good as the experts, because continually dying isn't fun. We know that from badly-designed single player games.

I don't have all the answers on how to get the most out of an online game, how to create a game that is inclusive to everyone, regardless of how experienced they are, how powerful their computer is, how much money they have, or which genres they like the most. I took a quick trip around





ForumPlanet's specialist forums to ask about some of the top games and what makes them so enjoyable, but I got few replies, bar the ones telling me that I was in the wrong place for that kind of discussion. Despite this, I was able to get a few responses from the Counter-Strike forum; and if ever a web phenomenon's success needed explaining, that's the one.

The first reply explaining why players play provided an intriguing insight into the mind of the Counter-Strike fan:



Hello. I am a contributor to a startup webzine known as Disposable Media. Every issue has a theme; this issue's theme is "Community." Regarding my contribution, I am working on an article that explores the enjoyment factor of online gaming, and during the conceptual stage of my article I considered diving into communities to ask them a few questions about what makes their game so enjoyable. Which is, hopefully, where you come in.

I am looking for a contribution I can use for the article, containing two things: a single line that covers what the game is about (hyperbolic entries are welcome, such as: the most accessible/most enjoyable/most tactical RPG/FPS/RTS available), and a brief explanation of why you play; in essence this is your chance to market the game to potential converts (my draft of this came to just over 100 words).

Evangelism, publicity, potential fame: you can't lose! All contributions would be much appreciated!

Thanks in advance
Professor Qazimod, Ph.D.

Could it be suggested that online gamers thrill in the acquisition of knowledge? It leads back to my suggestion that new players should stay away from servers labelled in such a way that experienced players are enticed and newcomers are dissuaded.

However, not all CS players are power-hungry maniacs:

"It's just something fun to pass the time. Not to mention you get to use sweet guns to blow dudes away."

Arguably, this doesn't tell us much about the enjoyment of being in an online game; the statement could be talking about any game, be it offline or online. However, just when I thought all hope of a well-rounded and sensible answer was lost, I came across this comment; surprisingly, it came from the newest forum member of the three who replied:

"When ur first playing yea its for "fun" something to like pass the time and stuff. But like all other online games, u eventually see that there are like other people playing the same game ur playing and have different skill levels. Yes, it takes skills. if u say it doesnt then either ur a noob who gets pwned up or just never played it for how its ment to be played.

Then u see someone like really PWN it up on a server and beating up on noobs - and then your like "WHolly- I want to be BETTER than that guy". Then you play until you feel and actually are a leeter pwner than that guy or anyone else u

see u think is better than you. Why? becuase ur a human - u have a desire to do better than that pwner and in fact - want to be able pwn them all for the recognition of peers (thats y clans form), fame, the high of pwning, and the improvement of urself (everyone wants to improve). But in the end you see past all of that because u will have the pwnage skills within you. Pwnaging in CS is just like riding a bike for you. You think about the days of pwnage and move on to the major games - life."

Whilst I was initially disappointed at having to decipher his comment, I found that he offered an interesting suggestion as to why players keep playing - the thrill of the chase. You do well, get beaten by someone better, and then force yourself to improve until you are up to their standard of playing. And then someone better still beats you. Slowly but surely, your repertoire of skills becomes more elaborate, and every death makes you wiser for the next time, and increases your bloodlust. This is just one explanation as to why online games are so addictive. Everyone has their own opinion as to why game x or craze y is so enjoyable: I think online gaming has maintained it's enjoyment factor because it brings a much-needed realistic edge to games, my fellow interviewee puts it down to an addictive nature borne from players continually wishing to improve and impress...the truth of the matter is that no-one has the magic formula for an online game that will be eternally enjoyable.

However, as I fire up another server on the LAN, I am happy to continue trying to find out.



SCOTT
CAKETT
WEBSITE-<http://www.scottcackett.co.uk/>

L O S T

The green woodland fades into a golden beach, which in turn gives way to still blue waters, the sound of water lapping against the shoreline duets with gentle birdsong. And a scream. Something is not right. A panoramic sweep of the beach gives way to a man in a suit - handsome, rugged, he is our hero, his Western dress interrupting the order of the island on which he finds himself. As we track him around a bend, his face changes from mere confusion to shock, and finally to a brief moment of fear...

The actual reveal of the crashed fuselage in the £7 million pilot episode of *Lost* takes a surprisingly long time to come. After Jack's initial surprise at what he sees, his attention turns to trying to help as many people as he can, and we see the crash site not from one well-framed establishing shot but in glimpses, a series of quick flashes as our protagonist rushes by. When *The Shot* does come, though, it pays off. The mess of metal and smoke are enough to make viewers genuinely consider taking a boat on their next holiday.

In many ways, these first five minutes are a metaphor for the programme on the whole. It is ambitious, blending big-budget action sequences seamlessly with small character stories, marrying enormous mysteries on the island with seemingly insignificant detail from lives before the crash. *Lost* is a show all about such juxtapositions, but ultimately all about character, about focusing on the small man and his mind, ignoring, albeit temporarily, the big picture around him.

Perhaps the most obvious way to put emphasis on the 'man and his mind' stories are flashbacks, with each episode after the first focusing on a particular character, peeling back layers of their history over the course of the series. There are several episodes for most of the 14 main characters, and the flashbacks are told out of chronology, so as to set up some assumptions - 'this is her crime'; 'this is why he was on the plane' - and then change how we understand the events, once we have been given context by earlier events. This creates a sense of distrust that drives the background story on - nothing is to be taken at face value and the motivation to keep watching is often to be able to understand what you have seen so far.





The fact that so much screen time is spent off of the island may come as something of a surprise. Where some may expect a tale of survival away from the outside world, this story is about why these people are on this island together, what twists of fate made them end up here, and what bigger forces are at work.

On the island itself, the biggest physical force at work is what is best described as a 'giant monster thing' that tears trees from their roots. Supposedly never seen by the islanders, nor the viewers, it remains a mystery in varying degrees for the entirety of season one. Maybe paranormal, maybe mechanical, it is, like all the best monsters, heard but not seen. Again, this isn't what one might expect from a quick TV-guide summary of the

show, and ultimately Lost doesn't do what 'survivors of a plane crash on an island' would lead you to believe. This seems to be the

explanation for the minority of negative comments the show has received.

Lucy Irvine, the author of *Castaway*, who spent one year on an uninhabited island in 1981, found herself "groaning in disbelief" at the "women's mascara and lip gloss" amongst other things. Whilst her comments are fair – there is, other than the crash itself, a lot of Hollywood shine on the series – the simple fact is that whilst being on a deserted island for a year may be a life-changing experience, it makes for pretty boring television. This is not

The motivation to keep watching is often to be able to understand what you have seen so far

a show that claims to replicate reality – it is a show more reminiscent of *The Twilight Zone* than *Survivor* – and for those who allow themselves to be taken by its bizarre logic, it is an extraordinary creation. Without these seemingly unrealistic sections, the show would be notably unoriginal – writer Anthony Spinner has already filed a lawsuit against the shows producers, claiming that he was commissioned in 1977 to write a show about plane crash survivors, named *Lost*. This is a telling example of just how obvious the concept would be were it not for its ambiguities - it is the sort of concept that has no doubt been pitched hundreds, if not thousands of times. This time, this *Lost* is clearly different.

The reception of the show has been phenomenal, with its heavily promoted UK premiere receiving a 26% share of the viewer share against strong UK competition such as *The Bill* (25%), and fan-sites such as <http://www.lostuk.net> quickly springing up to provide a

spoiler-free companion to American sites such as <http://www.thefuselage.com>. Predictably enough given the nature of the show, the number of theories on these sites as to what events mean are immense, varying from 'They are all dead' to 'They never got on the plane', from the so-ridiculous-it-may-be-true to the so-sensible-it-can't-be-right.

These theories all stand up to a lot of scrutiny, though, since the show has given very little in hard facts, even after the entire first season. Interestingly, the opening five minutes

are also a vision of the show's only major flaw - just as the grand shot of the crash was held back as long as possible, so it seems the secrets of the island and its inhabitants will be kept from viewers until the last possible moment. Like much American drama, there is a degree of worry that they're just making it up as they go along, something that is common practice in a system where shows can be pulled mid-series or commissioned for longer runs than foreseen. The writers, of course, claim to have it all planned out, with new writers allegedly being told all of the secrets when they join.

The first season sets up conundrums and puzzles, and tells lots of fascinating mini-stories without truly linking them together or filling in the numerous gaps. As the title thuds onto the screen at the end of the first season and the credits begin to roll, it is the viewer who feels most lost, unable to unravel everything and make something understandable and conclusive. Assuming the answers are there at all, though – assuming the pay-off will be satisfactory – the waiting is at times brilliant, the time taken to tell the story a refreshing change from most American TV product.

Promotion: The Light Side

Channel 4's promotion for *Lost* started around 6 weeks before the premiere, with anti-realistic cinema trailers, shot specifically for the UK airing. These trailers, showing the characters slow-motion dancing to Portishead, did a good job of preparing people for the fact that the show wasn't a simple survival story, but alienated some who thought it was for 'some sort of perfume'. The trailers soon made their way to TV, and were quickly followed by two additional trailers – one featuring mysterious 'One of us is a...' voice-overs, and one featuring actual clips from the series.

Promotion continues online, with a UK-only 'Lost Untold' Flash website, which is updated weekly, providing insights into the minds of each central character.

Promotion: The Dark Side

Even prior to the first showing of the premiere, tabloid newspapers had begun detailing key plot threads which are not introduced until the second half of the season. Even Channel 4 themselves could not avoid giving details away, with their *Lost Untold* website containing minor spoilers, and a making-of documentary, *Lost Revealed* revealing a lot of detailed character backgrounds just days after the first episode went out.

Fans reactions to this have been strong, with Channel 4's official *Lost* forum overrun by angry threads in the aftermath of the *Lost Revealed* airing, including comments such as 'Too late now. Millions of people spoiled. Good job E4.'

pretentious_helvetica

Super Furry Animals - "Love Kraft"

Some of the finest Furry works to date. Lovely stuff!

Elbow - "Leaders of the Free World"

Effortlessly brilliant. Genuinely touching at points.



Rev

Supergrass - "Road to Rouen"

Slightly different direction, but the same pop genius

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club - "Howl"

Old fashioned and occasionally brilliant.



Twinbee

Opeth - 'Ghost Reveries'

Stunning new album of Progressive Death Metal.

Screaming Trees - 'Sweet Oblivion'

A 1992 classic - bourbon-soaked songs of love and loss.



CURRENTLY LISTENING TO...

Qazimod

Lemonjelly - "lemonjelly.ky"

Blissful, fresh, and enjoyable chillout.

The Future Sound of London - "Accelerator"

Remixes that help add to the already brilliant "Papua New Guinea" track.

Stephen

Goldfrapp - "Supernature"

The pinnacle of what Goldfrapp should sound like

Kanye West - "Late Registration"

Songs start conventional and fall into electro experiments

shirubagan

Hiretsukan - "End States"

Screaming political noise from NYC. Awesome.

The Icarus Line - "Penance Soirée"

More pop than Mono with some great songs.

Cheeko

Nouvelle Vague - "Nouvelle Vague"

Gentle acoustic songs, covers of 80s tracks to soothe you.

Kaiser Chiefs - Employment

Get these hard hitting Britpop sounds in your ears!

Bastion Booger

Cephalic Carnage - "Exploiting Dysfunction"

Thunderous war-drums interspersed between ethereal musings. Glorious.

Bohren & Der Club Of Gore - "Black Earth"

Evil Jazz - an infusion of subtle percussion and chilled out bass grooves.

BlinkyBear

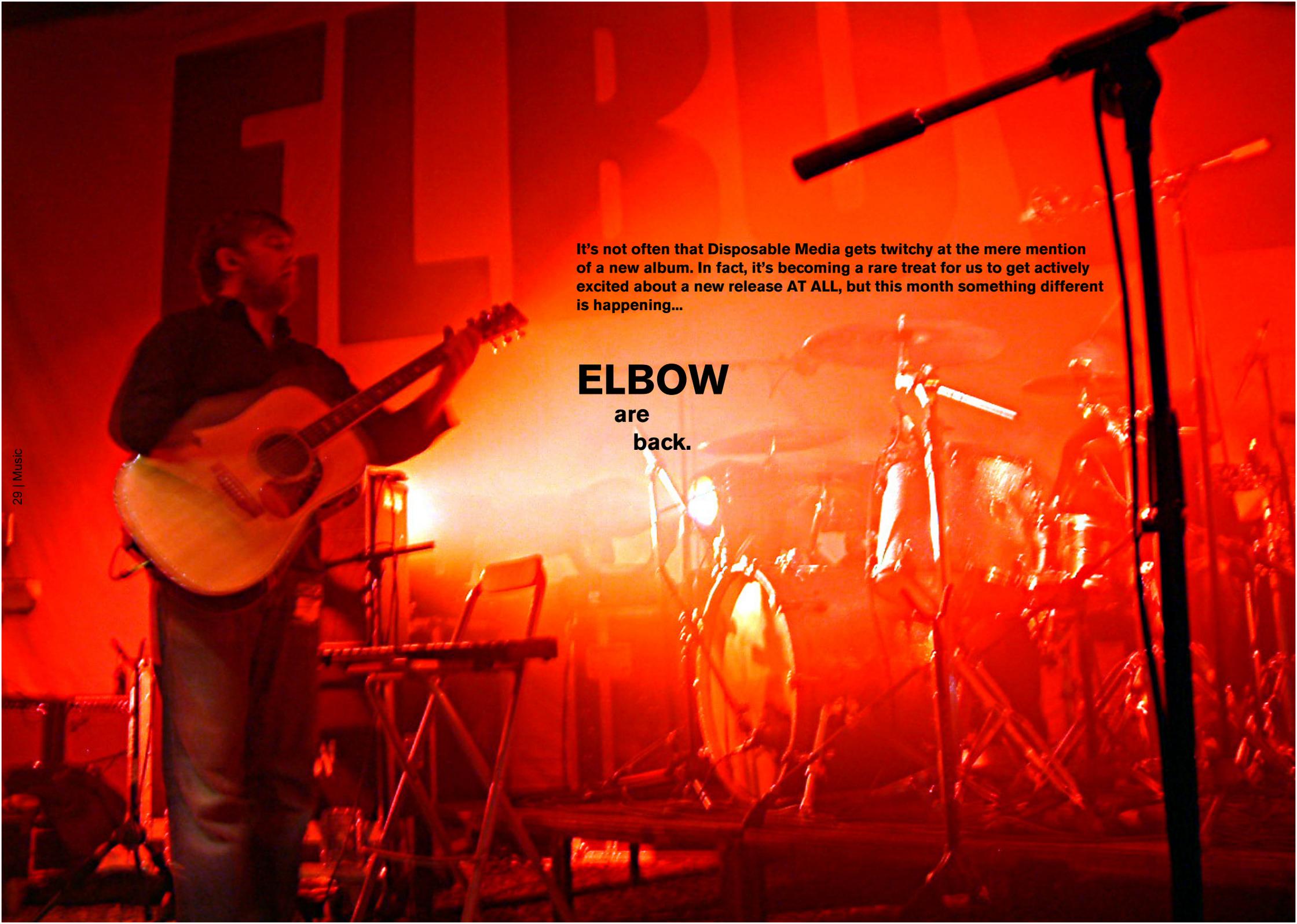
Madeline Peyroux - "Careless Love"

Unbelievably fresh sounding, stunningly beautiful catchy jazz.

Death Cab for Cutie - "The Photo Album"

Confident, intelligent and superbly memorable.





It's not often that Disposable Media gets twitchy at the mere mention of a new album. In fact, it's becoming a rare treat for us to get actively excited about a new release AT ALL, but this month something different is happening...

ELBOW
are
back.

“ELBOW’S NEW LONG-PLAYER, *LEADERS OF THE FREE WORLD*, FINALLY GETS A RELEASE ON SEPTEMBER 12, AND IS ONE OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL TITLES OF THE YEAR.”

This tends to happen with Elbow you see, a new album, and a new contender for album of the year. These boys are consistent.

The first album, *‘Asleep in the Back’* well and truly established the band as writer’s of brooding, hypnotic ballads; men who weren’t afraid to get funky, but also put hearts on sleeves. Sombre, stirring epics combine with beat-led ditty’s, wailing vocals, and tight arrangements, all wrapped up with masses of ambition, focus and desire.

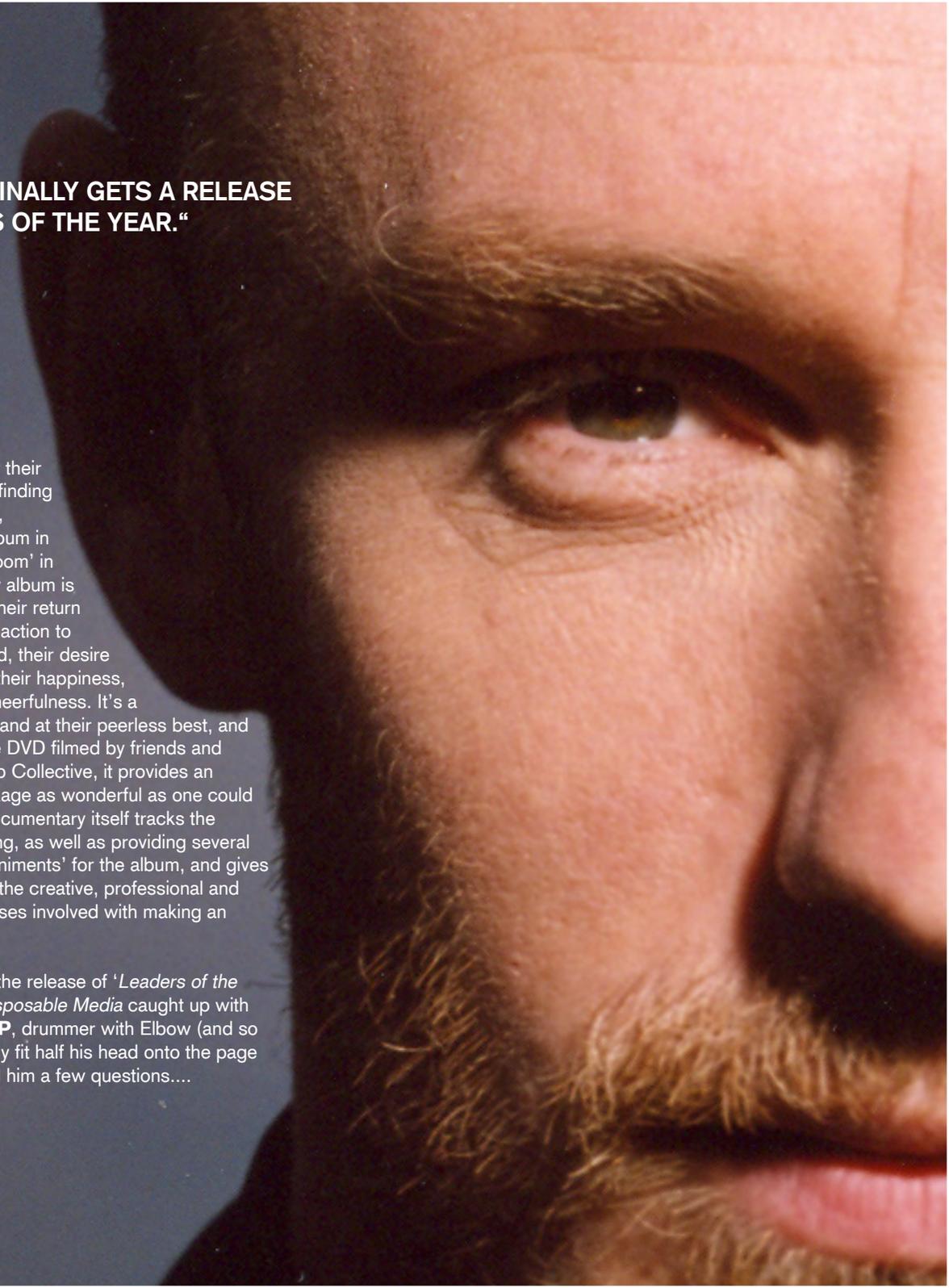
The follow up, *‘Cast of Thousands’* had a similar style; strings, organs and tales of love and death. It broke hearts, it nearly broke up the band, but it still remains a stupendous achievement, showing casing a band as tender and as genuine as any making music today.

And now they’re back.

Elbow are funkier, louder, more brash and ballsy than before, they stomp and crash all around your ears, whilst wrapping their selves around your heart - the new LP is astonishingly good. And we don’t mean that in a throw away manner.

This is a band at their most confident; finding their roots again, recording the album in their own ‘BigRoom’ in Salford, the new album is all about them, their return to home, their reaction to the outside world, their desire to make music, their happiness, tiredness and cheerfulness. It’s a document of a band at their peerless best, and coupled with the DVD filmed by friends and artists, The Soup Collective, it provides an audiovisual package as wonderful as one could hope for. The documentary itself tracks the album’s recording, as well as providing several ‘visual accompaniments’ for the album, and gives a rare insight to the creative, professional and personal processes involved with making an album.

In the run up to the release of *‘Leaders of the Free World’*, *Disposable Media* caught up with **RICHARD JUPP**, drummer with Elbow (and so big we could only fit half his head onto the page - Ed.) and asked him a few questions....



Disposable Media: *How was the process of making the album this time around, given previous experiences? Did producing it yourselves alleviate previous problems?*

Richard Jupp: The whole approach to recording the album was centred on finding a decent space in Manchester, one that could allow us to set up and play/record live. An old friend Tim Thomas ran a place called Blueprint Studios in Salford, and he introduced us to his "big room" which was perfect; big enough to set up live yet intimate enough to record in. To be honest it was an exciting time as we had been writing while touring Cast (of Thousands, the last LP) and we were all eager to get cracking, hunting and gathering gear to experiment and record with.

Setting the studio up was at times a little fraught but slowly it came together - Craig had already become a dab hand on pro tools, and the rest of us became engineers. The only real tension came at brew time! When we started the actual recording we aimed to get in for 11am and work till 5 then get back for seven and work through till 11, and for the most part we kept to those times. It was almost therapeutic to be able to work in a space like that and still be home for tea!

DM: *Having made the album by yourselves, why did you decide to get Tom Rothrock to produce a final mix?*

RJ: Having channelled over 30 ideas down to about 13 the decision was made to get some fresh ears in to mix. So we sent some mixes out and got together with Tom Rothrock. It was quite a strange time when Tom came over from L.A because we had been in this kind of bubble for the past 6 months and this was the first time anyone from the "outside" had heard the stuff. But we hit it off immediately and finished the record at Sunset Studios in L.A.

DM: *How did having (Filmmakers/Animators/Visual Artists) The Soup Collective around affect the recording process?*

RJ: The Soup Collective have been a big part of the live set up for a few years now and we had always toyed with the idea of getting them to document the recording of this album. So with this in mind we decided go one step further and give them complete artistic freedom - Mark



Thomas (Soup leader) installed CCTV cameras and bug cameras all over the studio.

Initially it was a bit daunting having your every move filmed but after a few days it became the norm. Also having known the Soup and toured with them there wasn't any awkwardness. In fact, as there was plenty of room, we kind of buzzed off each other, them listening to tracks evolve and us checking out animations, time-lapse photography, videos coming together and hearing something utterly foul we'd said the week before totally out of context! In the end, we really got that factory vibe we'd been hoping for.

For example, there were plenty of times when just the five of us would be there when suddenly Neil the animator would pop his head out from behind a curtain, frightening the shit out of us all.

DM: *Do you see yourselves developing more on the visual side?*

RJ: To be honest I'm not sure if we will do this again only because I don't know how we will be recording in the future or where y because I don't know how we will be recording in the future or where but both 'The



CLEARLY THRILLED TO BE BACK ON THE ROAD.



Leaders' and *'Cast...'* records have DVD's so we shall see what happens. Maybe we will get Soup to do a tour documentary, but I don't know.

DM: *Clearly your music has qualities that match well with film – have you ever been approached to/wanted to do a soundtrack?*

RJ: We would love to do a complete soundtrack, although we have done a track for "Inside I'm Dancing" and had a live track on "9 Songs". Anyone who reads this and wants to commission us please contact (band's label) V2.

DM: *You've built up quite a reputation for being both incredibly talented, and incredibly nice! How did your reputations and expectations influence the making of a new album?*

RJ: Initially we set out to create a semi-live album, in that we

would do masses of pre-production, get all the tracks done live then record them, but although we have come out with a much more confident and "louder" album, the logistics of doing it "live" kind of disappeared in the ether.

We would still like to do a more live recording but, this being our first home-grown effort, we had to find our feet. I think it all depends on where we record the next one. The change in style was not really a conscious effort, I think the tracks were a product of their surroundings - being in a room overlooking the city, close to home.

DM: *How did your early experience with record labels effect how you do things now? It would no-doubt be easier to make music to appease label execs, as opposed to putting so much time and energy into something different from the norm.*

RJ: The label have been incredibly supportive over the making of *Leaders* and left us alone for the majority of it. Having

been stung a couple of times in the past has made us wearier, and hardened our attitude in regard to selling our product on a market. Of course it would be easier on us all if we made nice, radio friendly rock, but it would not be half as rewarding. This also brings me back to the reason why we are so fucking proud of this record as we have never compromised; yet here we are recording our own third album.

DM: *And in the great Disposable Media tradition - what have you guys been listening to recently?*

RJ: We have been listening to a load of stuff recently; there is a lot of great new stuff coming out of Manchester at the minute, Liam Frost, Oceansize, Steven Fretwell, Pimhole Group, Indigo Jones, Alfie's new album and Cranebuilders from Liverpool.

'Leaders of the Free World' is out now.

If nothing else, the Mercury usually offers an opportunity for discussion and discovery. This year's winner, Antony and the Johnsons is a welcome winner, but not every album that made this year's shortlist meets the original idea of the Prize; to promote and honour challenging, original and engaging music. Here are two albums to consider.

The Go! Team

Good

See, now this is what British Music should be about. It's fun, original, inventive. It's fluent. It's cheeky. Polished, literate, hugely clever and just ace. The Mercury's are supposed to honour challenging and original music. That's The Go! Team in a sentence. Thunder Lightning Strike is one of the best albums of the year, never mind the best album on the Mercury shortlist. At first listen, it seems to adopt a kitchen sink approach to music making, every instrument under the bright shining sun seems to be used, complimenting, colliding and crashing together, a wall of noise that doesn't let you get into the album so much as drags you in. It resembles the Avalanches stupidly brilliant debut Since I Left You, all bright and smiles, a mish mash of samples and lyrics, but further listens deliver more than that. That almost everything is played live is staggering; trumpets, decks, pianos, harmonicas, guitars, drums, vocals all present on most tracks. That they compliment each other is even more impressive. But to keep the entire premise of the band and the music together in 4 minute pop sounds, topped off with a wonderfully cute vocal is quite frankly bewildering.

Obvious highlights include the truly delicious Bottle Rocket and the supremely noisy Junior Kickstart. The trumpets on the latter being choral, anthemic and stupidly fun all at once. And it's this kind of collective fun coupled with

a knowing smartness that mark the album out. The songs tend to be squeezed into 3 and half to 4 minutes but never feel too short or too truncated. There's a lot going on with most of the songs, and yet everything makes sense, everything has a purpose and the results are frivolous and joyful, but with a clear and obvious intelligence behind them. Album closer, Everyone's a VIP to Someone is an intelligent take on the Western theme tune. The plucky banjo joined with the swaying synths combine with the harmonica

to produce something that's sounds as fresh and new as it would have done 50 years ago in an epic Wayne and Ford film. Rarely are debut albums so tight and wonderfully realised as this and Thunder, Lightning Strike should be rewarded for it's dumb fun and challenging originality as much as anything else. But as part of the Mercury Shortlist, The Go! Team are one of the few acts

producing the sort of music that deserves the attention and praise that the winner usually garners, Stupendous stuff.



Kaiser Chiefs

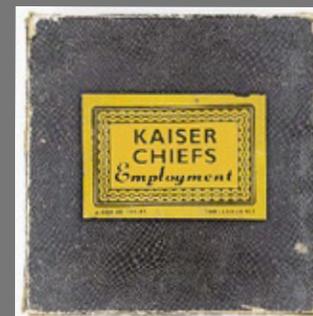
Bad

Firstly, the Kaiser Chiefs have never been particularly awful. Oh My God and I Predict a Riot are near faultless pop songs. The album remains a big let down in comparison to the promise of the early singles, and there are worse acts on the shortlist but there is no excuse for having them short-listed, let alone favourites. Firstly, Employment is not original. Nor challenging. It's been said before, and often, but it is an early Blur album. And not a very good one. The subject matter is static, sticking to the themes of I Predict and Oh My, the execution is limp wristed and lifeless, the production is dull and the entire band as a package is as believable as a chocolate rainbow. Handily, the story of the Kaiser Chiefs is one available for all, (google "Parva") and highlights the problem of the band. 4 wannabe full time musicians and 1 wannabe Heat front cover play various types of music until they fit in with a current scene, the result? A manufactured pop band. Which isn't necessarily a problem, Girls Aloud make decent pop songs effortlessly, well, Xenomania do and the girls mime. The problem with the Kaiser Chiefs is that it's all too fake, it's a bunch of 30 somethings in bad suits with bad music pretending to be spritely 20 somethings. The music fits

a demographic, it's written and performed to appeal directly to an audience who are more than happy to be spoon fed their 'alternative rock' diet. For the Mercury Judges to swallow the bait is just lazy. The Kaiser's try to create music that reflects modern British life, drinking, dancing and fighting. Wasn't this done already? From The Clash to The Streets, the subject matter has been done a thousand times before and better.

The Kaiser's unique spin being the quirky, eccentric British Boys doesn't wash when Ricky Kaiser famously said he'd wank off a tramp to be famous. Look, the point is this; The Mercury's should honour the vibrancy of British music, the originality, the stark individuality and identity of being British, the ability of talented musicians to challenge conventions and destroy boundaries. The Kaiser's do not do any of

this. Plenty of albums on the short list do. The Kaisers merely copy, pilfer and borrow original ideas, creative talent and unique music and pass them off as their own in the name of celebrity. The shits.



Disposable Media went to the Reading Festival.
Here's some pictures.



Pixies



"Trolley Trolley,
Trolley Trolley Trolley"



"Rarr! I'm A
Monster!"



NOFX



Dinosaur Jnr



Charlatans

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SUB-EDITOR: Freeware, Import Community, Currently Listening

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[SPECIAL THANKS]

Russell and Neil at V2
Richard Jupp
Anyone we've missed out! :S