PlayStation 3 Forever

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Team Update

Matt

Editor

Since Issue 4 I have primarily been playing Baldur's Gate 3 on the PlayStation 5 which is an absolute time sink but an amazing game. I've also managed a bit of time playing Ghost of Tsushima which I also need to finish. One I'm done with these modern titles I can finally get back to some PlayStation 3.

Alessio

JRPG Specialist

Since last issue I've been quite the busy boy. Lots of writing, filmmaking, and podcasting. A fun video game side project is coming along quite well. Oh, and definitely go check out Metal Gear Mondays, if you haven't!

I've been having a ton of fun with Elden Ring Nightreign. Small group of buddies over voice chat is the way to go. Tinkering with the PS3 got me back into tinkering with my PlayStation Vita, so I've also been replaying Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories with some minor modifications (higher resolution, updated textures, and second analogue stick functionality).

Kody

Guest Contributor

Hi I'm Kody, I have been a physical media freak and PlayStation fan since 1999, when I first played Tony Hawk's Pro Skater and I have never looked back. You can find me talking about video games daily on Instagram at @bullmoosegaming and on BlueSky, Twitter, Twitch, and YouTube under the same handle. I recently completed the Mass Effect trilogy for the first time, and I'm diving into the Dragon Age games on the PlayStation 3 alongside my usual diet of racing games like Gran Turismo and horror classics like Resident Evil 4.

Letter From The Editor

I may be sweating, but I am still gaming

Summer is finally upon us (at least in the Northern Hemisphere) so perhaps it's time to put down that controller and go outside and enjoy the sunshine... well maybe for a bit and then come back inside to play more games, although the PlayStation 3 can really chuck some heat out as it operates which makes for a very hot home office!

Firstly I want to thank Alessio and Kody for their fantastic contributions to this issue. I started PlayStation 3 Forever with the ambition of creating a community of PlayStation 3 fans so it's really great to get people involved. If you want to get involved or just follow what we are up to, check our socials above or email below - please get in touch!

This issue I finally got around to understanding the mysterious Cell Architecture, the thing that none of us could explain but used nonetheless as

a weapon of PlayStation 3 power over its rivals. Then I treated myself to a replay of the Uncharted series for a deep dive into that fantastic trilogy. Uncharted 2 in particular I was hooked on.

I am finding I am running out of low hanging fruit when it comes to platinuming games. The ones I have left are very hard and time consuming. This issue I worked on Beyond: Two Souls which was a bit of a chore towards the end.

I think this is our best issue yet with lots more in depth articles and the contributions from others adds some new perspectives. But as we know the PlayStation 3 catalog is extensive so we've still got plenty more to come.

So I hope you enjoy reading it and if you want to reach out and get involved please send a message to contact@playstation3forever.com.

UNCHARTED

The Classic PlayStation 3 Trilogy

It wasn't until 2008 when I finally bought my first PlayStation 3. It was a pre-owned 60 GB version from a UK chain of video game shops and their bundle allowed you to pick three pre-owned games. I picked Metal Gear Solid 4, Kane & Lynch and Uncharted: Drakes Fortune. I was immediately hooked with the first Uncharted game. It was very much a next-generation title with its gorgeous graphics, cinematic storytelling and all round polish. The Uncharted trilogy was a titan of the PlayStation 3 era, selling around 20 million copies over the three mainline titles and being PlayStation 3 exclusives probably added a lot to the console's eventual success. Uncharted's legacy continues today with another two games on the PlayStation 4 and even a spin-off movie.

It's almost hard to believe that Uncharted was created from the same developers as Crash Bandicoot. Naughty Dog was founded in 1984 and produced a handful of titles for home computers and other earlier systems but really rose to recognition with the first Crash Bandicoot title for the PlayStation.

They rounded off their PlayStation era development with another two Crash Bandicoot titles as well as Crash Team Racing which was also well received. When it came time to develop for the next generation, the PlayStation 2, they decided to depart ways with Universal, leaving Crash behind, and opted for a new IP of

their own, Jak & Daxter. Yet again they managed another trilogy of mainline Jak & Daxter games followed by a Jak & Daxter racing game. If it ain't broke - don't fix it, I guess. Replaying some of the Jak & Daxter games today you can more clearly see an evolution in platforming from Crash to Jak to Uncharted.
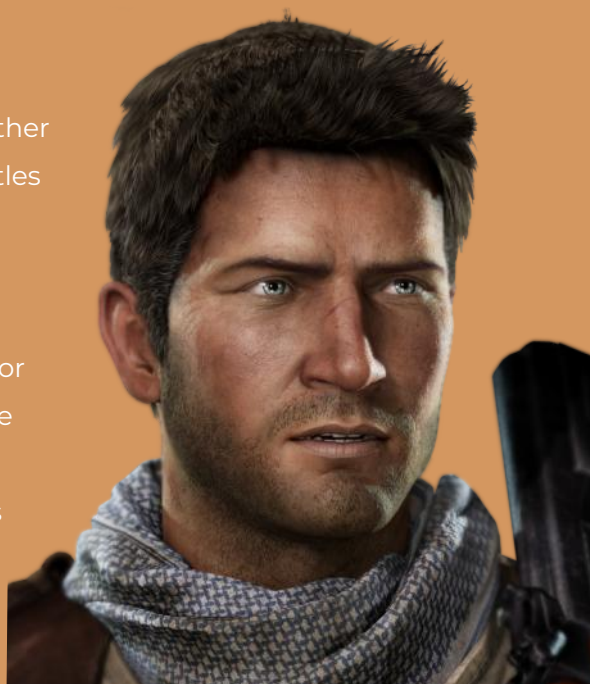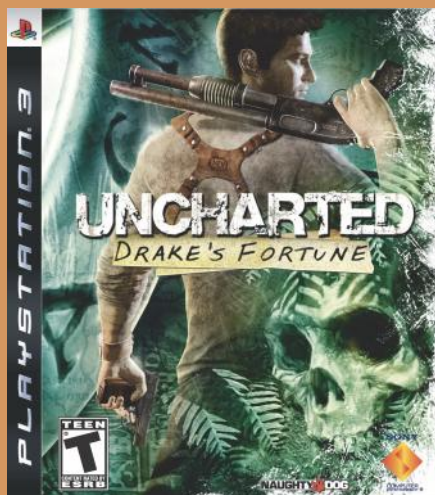
Early prototype images of what Jak & Daxter might look like on the PlayStation 3 show that the anthropomorphic animals just didn't look right in high fidelit, so it was time for another new franchise. Naughty Dog managed another trilogy of games with the Uncharted series but sadly no spin off racing this time.

Uncharted: Drakes Fortune

Released in 2007 came the first entry in the series. It blew away audiences with its high quality motion-capture and voice acting which led to excellent cinematic story telling. The characters are extremely likable, the dialogue is genuinely funny and the locations and environments used excite the imagination. Nathan Drake, the lead character, is a treasure hunter who claims he is an ancestor of the well-known explorer Sir Francis Drake. The
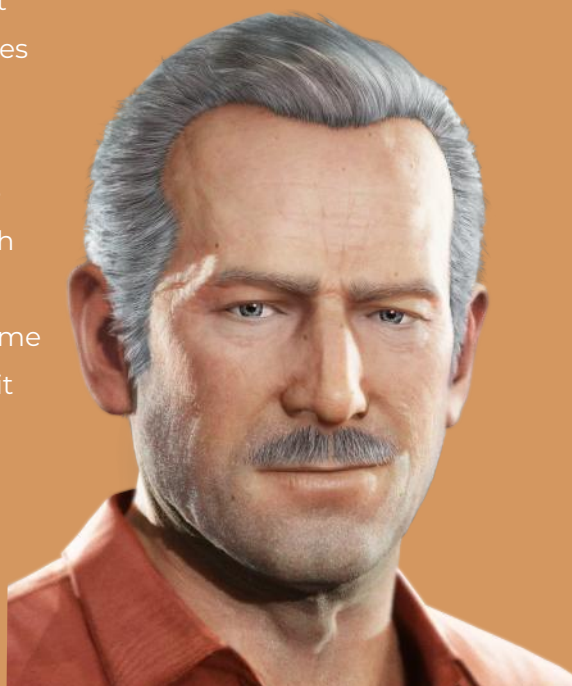
story is a typical treasure hunt type of affair filled with lots of double bluffs and back stabbings and of course a villain and his army of men who are on the hunt for the same treasure..

The gameplay is broken into three main sections. Platforming, Shooting and Puzzle-Solving. The platforming is very typical of the modern standard. Jumping by and large is quite magnetic and Drake will jump to the nearest grabbable object. Ledges and poles are well signposted and usually painted yellow or some other bright color which has gone on to spawn memes in the video game world. However, whilst it embraces the modern philosophy of platforming in a 3D world it is not as well polished and there are a few areas where you

don't jump where you intended leading Drake to jump to his death in an initially hilarious moment.

The shooting section is very typical of its era, it's the snap in cover like Gears of War. It's very noticeable when you walk into a large area and see lots of little waist high walls and the enemies all spawn in the distance. The shooting is probably the weakest from a modern perspective. It's fine, it

are better, the environments are bigger and the set pieces that made Uncharted unique are ramped up to 11. In the behind the scenes video the developers explain how they used the Cell processor to take the number of on screen objects from 150 in Uncharted to 500.

still works, but it's a bit basic and frustrating at times, especially on hard difficulty. One area the game is very good at is not letting you find one good place where you can camp and take out enemies. They keep you suppressed and in cover while other enemies move around to flank you and if all else fails you will find a grenade lands next to you forcing you to move out of cover for a moment.

The problem-solving is lightly sprinkled in. You can't be raiding tombs without solving a few basic puzzles along the way like lining up mirrors or moving statues. This part has always felt a bit weak for me. I felt like the puzzles were never puzzles as such, the solutions are in your handbook, it's more of an excuse for a cool-down between battles and more platforming. I don't think the developers intended them to be genuine puzzles so this is a

design choice, but I would have liked to do a bit more thinking. All three mechanics work together giving you brief respite from the other.

Upon replaying it today some of the cracks as mentioned above are noticeable, and overall the game is weaker than its sequels but that absolutely does not detract from what is a well made, highly exciting game.

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

This was the game. One of the most exciting and highly anticipated sequels of its day. The first Uncharted was a fantastic game, but like most games, when you are introducing a new IP, with a new engine on a new console, there is always room for improvement. Uncharted 2's graphics

The opening of the game is iconic. Drake awakens on a train covered in blood hanging over the edge of a cliff and you have to platform your way up and out of it. Every other move you make results in some change in the environment. A rock falls, the train falls more, a railing snaps off and changes your intended path. It is fantastic at creating tension and getting
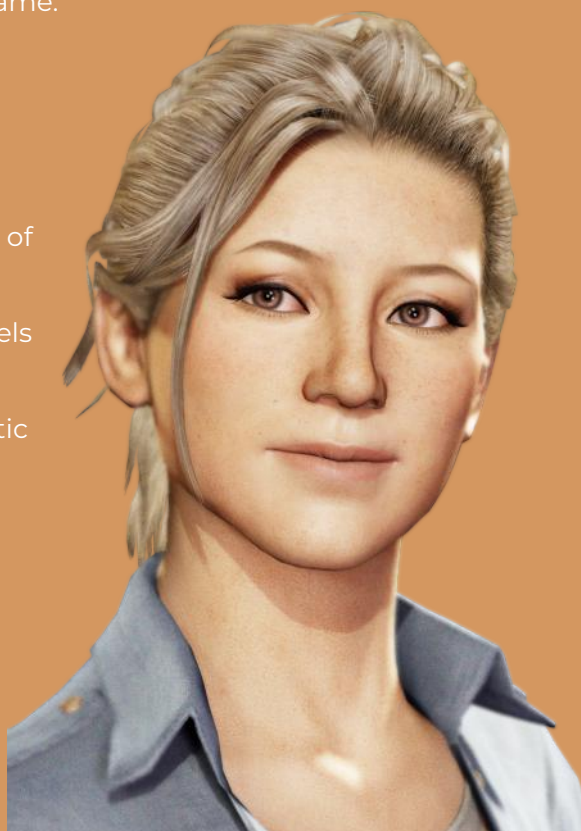
you set up for the game. I would argue that to this day, this is still one of the best openings in a video game.

Uncharted 2 is the highest rated of the PlayStation 3 trilogy on metacritic (A game rating aggregation site). With the first game sitting at a surprisingly low 88, Uncharted 2 at an incredible 96 and Uncharted 3 at 92, at the time of writing.

One thing I realised whilst playing Uncharted 2 again was just how colorful it was. The PlayStation 3 has this reputation for only being able to produce green and brown sludge colored games but in the Uncharted games the colors pop and the worlds feel lush and real.

By the time Uncharted 2 came along, multiplayer modes were almost mandatory in every type of game and this one would be no different. It was quite a

successful multiplayer game at the time, its modes were simple but the cover based mechanics along with platforming made for some entertaining multiplayer. Sadly though as is typical from this era, multiplayer modes come with multiplayer trophies and the servers have shut down. So a platinum trophy is no longer possible for this or Uncharted 3.

As well as the opening train sequence I have to point out the fantastic mid-game train sequence (Which is also the same train - it's complicated). Lots of games feature a level taking place on a moving train. I

think this one from Uncharted 2 is still one of the best. The train itself moves through jungle, across a lake, over bridges and finally into a snowy mountain. The game is still incredibly clever in the way it masks these transitions. It is still an absolute gem of a sequence. You are sometimes going through the carriage, then on top of the carriage, on cargo carriages, shooting helicopters, just utterly brilliant.

The platforming is a definite improvement on the first but still has challenges. I am in two minds about it. It certainly can be frustrating when you think you know where Drake needs to go and you jump and it doesn't go where you want and you die (It's still funny for a bit). But if the platforming was perfect and you always knew where to go then there would be no challenge at all. So in a weird way it kind of works because it keeps you engaged.

Uncharted 3: Drakes Deception

Uncharted 3 released in 2011, a mere two years after Uncharted 2 which is incredible to think about by today's standards, the game would again build on what came before it with even more elaborate and over the top action set pieces. Some of the basic mechanics have been fleshed out with better stealth and melee options, the re-introduction of puzzle solving and the game would also make use of the 3D function that the PlayStation 3 provided, but sadly I do not have the means to try that out.

The opening chapter of the game has you play as a young Nathan Drake and explores the relationship with Sully and how the two met and got involved with each other. The story is a big improvement on the first two titles and they take more time to explore characters and introduce new ones.

Uncharted 3 embraces its Indiana Jones inspiration and fulfills. Most of the game takes place in the middle-east, introducing new colors and terrain we have not yet seen and in the later part of the game there is even a fantastic chase with Drake riding a horse and shooting at people in a convoy of vehicles. The other really notable set piece for me was a shoot out in a mansion which eventually sets on fire. The physics and graphics of the fire are clearly something they were proud of as it features quite heavily in the game. The other set piece is of course the fight on the cargo plane which is another over-the-top James Bond style piece.

Uncharted's Legacy

One thing about Uncharted which has always made me laugh internally is the realism that the game is going for juxtaposed with the amount of killing. Drake and his friends gun down literally thousands of people and whilst we can consider them bad guys, there's this entertaining dissonance with the way he is portrayed in the cutscenes.

I think after Uncharted 3 a break was clearly needed. Naughty Dog had succeeded in three outstanding titles and raised the bar on the PlayStation 3's performance each time. These games are short but that is what makes them so replayable. They are unbelievably action packed with not a wasted moment. Uncharted 2 was the most fun to replay. I replayed the whole game on Hard (I only have two trophies left - beating the game on Hard and then on Crushing difficulty) and it took about 6 hours. It's a series you can come back to time and time again and just enjoy one of the best games to come out of the seventh generation.

Genji: Days of the Blade

A decent Samurai inspired launch title

HACK & SLASH	LAUNCH TITLE	EXCLUSIVE	RELEASED 2006

Genji: Days of the Blade was released in 2006 as one of the twelve launch titles for the console. It is a sequel to Genji: Dawn of the Samurai (or simply Genji in some parts of the world) released for the PlayStation 2 just one year earlier. Developing a new IP along with its sequel which you plan to launch on a new console just a year later seems like a really impressive feat to me.

Genji: Days of the Blade was the first title to be released with the newly created Japan Studio brand. (Read more about Japan Studio from our article in Issue 3 PlayStation 3, Japan Studio, and the Slow Death of Experimentation.)

Primarily Genji is hack and slash but with some interesting adventure elements that help to mix up the gameplay. I'd say it plays a lot like the Onimusha series as well as sharing the same Japanese samurai setting.

When starting up the game I really enjoyed the opening pre-rendered cutscene. It's pretty heavy in its exposition dump of the lore and the setting but graphically it is very strong. The first point to note is that you play as four different characters throughout the game but you can often switch between them at any time. The early game does a really good job of slowly introducing each character and giving you time to learn their unique styles. For example the game starts you with one,

Characters

Yoshitsune

Yoshitsune is the most middle-of-the-road of the characters. He is a fast, dual-wields swords and in my opinion is the most satisfying to battle with. His special features are... jumping (Yes not all characters can jump) and running across walls.
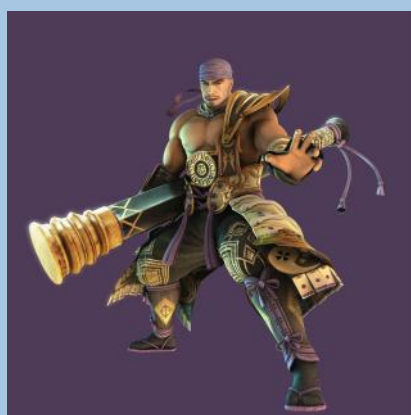
Benkei

Lord Benkei is your classic tank. Slow walking, slow attacking, but his attacks hit hard when they land. Initially he takes some getting used to but he can be incredibly satisfying to play as. When holding down triangle, you build up a big sweeping attack that can knock down huge groups of enemies. His special platforming ability is to knock down obstacles.

introduces a second and then removes one and introduces another new one at the same time, just to make sure you don't get overwhelmed too quickly.

### Four Playable Characters

The four different characters are Yoshitsune, Benkei, Shizuka and Buson and the game makes really good use of them. I've not had a great experience with games that feature multiple characters in this way, usually you end up favoring one and don't find much reason to

switch but here the characters unique abilities and attacks can massively change the direction of a battle.

In an early boss I attempted to use Shizuka, a weak character, who was killed in about two hits from this powerful boss. So I switched to Benkei, but then I found a group of archers on the edge of the battlefield were pummeling him because he is so slow, so I switched to Yoshitsune to quickly dispel them before returning to Benkei to tackle the main boss.

Not only do the different characters have completely different attack styles, they also have unique environmental abilities that create simple puzzles for you to solve such as knocking down barriers and swinging across gaps. In Genji you only ever see one of the four characters on screen at a time (discounting cutscenes) but it is implied they are with you in the journey, so it's kind of funny to me how Benkai cannot cross a chasm because he cannot jump, so you switch to Shizuka who can use her grappling hook and then you
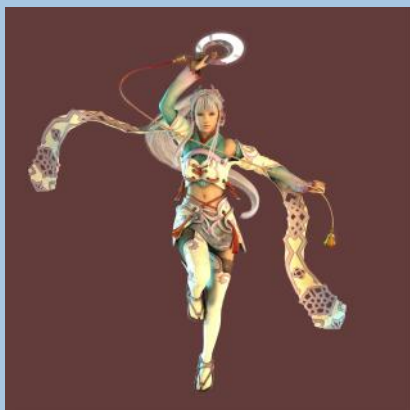
Shizuka

Combat with The Lady Shizuka was pretty disappointing. She has these blades and fans tethered to rope that allows you to attack enemies from distance and when playing as her it is essential that you do indeed keep enemies at a distance as she is incredibly weak compared to the other characters and can get absolutely demolished if you are not careful. Her special ability for platforming it to use her weapons as grappling hooks.

Buson

?

Buson is a fascinating character introduced later into the game. He was not that fun to use. His primary special attack is a large shockwave which has a cooldown and I had trouble using it effectively.

can switch to Benkai again when you are on the other side, It's like somehow he just made it over when you weren't looking.

I'd be remiss if I did not talk about the "Crab Meme". For some reason once you are through the opening chapter of the game you are introduced to enemies with far more unusual styles. During the E3 Presentation for the Launch of the PlayStation 3 there was a live gameplay of Genji. The executive producer of Genji 2, was explaining how Genji would feature "Real historical battles" followed shortly by "So here's this giant enemy crab".

I think Genji: Days of the Blade achieves a lot for being a launch title. Its graphics are pretty decent for the time and the performance is also decent. I think the game suffers from being a bit janky. Jumps quite often don't land leading to some tedious back tracking, and I'd have preferred a better lock-on system as I found attacks were slightly off or I was getting side swiped as my block was not connecting. I think it's a worthwhile addition to any collection as it is a launch title and it is still a PlayStation 3 exclusive but I think it lacks a bit of polish and something unique which stops it from being a hard recommendation.

Secrets of the Cell Processor

Was it really that powerful?

Many great claims were made of the Cell Broadband Engine chip, the CPU inside the PlayStation 3 - It would be the most powerful console of all time. But as time went by, many people felt that this claim had been oversold and that this unique architecture actually hindered the development of video games and in some titles actually made the performance worse. Was the Cell Processor really as powerful as it claimed? At the time the answer seemed to be "It depends".

We explored in a previous issue Ken Kutaragi's ambition for the PlayStation 3 to be all things home entertainment so during the design phase of the console it was clear the CPU would need to be capable of lots of functions. The Cell processor was designed to have the best of both worlds, a general purpose element to make it easy for regular applications to run, combined with some specialized functions for intense number crunching, the type that video games often needed to run and most

importantly, the architecture needed to allow these things to happen in parallel to maximize performance.

The Components

The CPU (Central Processing Unit) is the main part of a computer or console responsible for crunching numbers, controlling input and output (Such as taking input from the controller and then telling it to vibrate) and handling the information flow across the other components in the console.
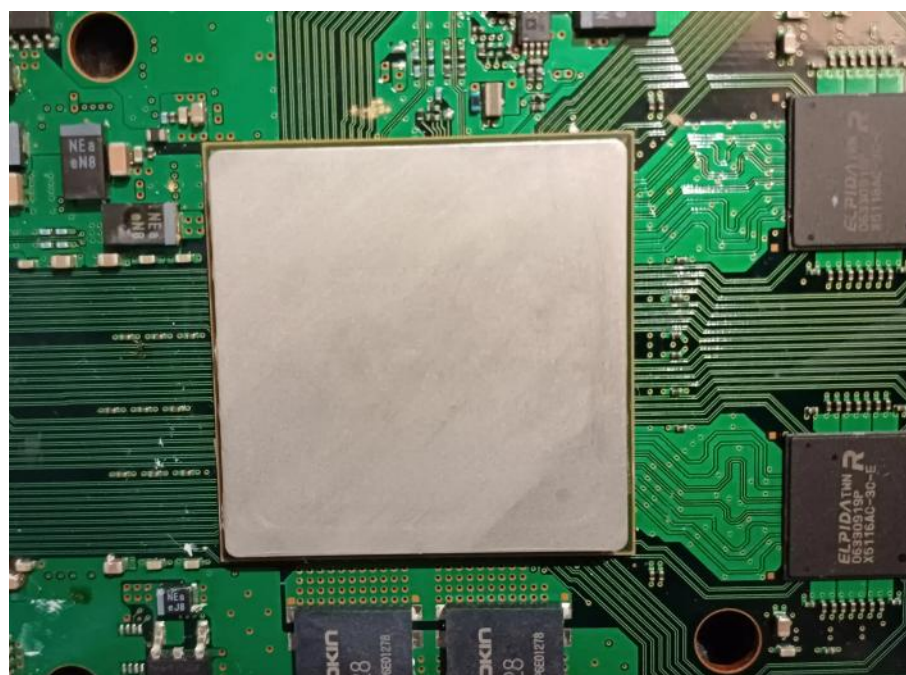
The Cell chip was split into nine parts: Eight of the parts were the Synergistic Processor Elements (We'll refer to them as SPUs without getting into the detail why), these were the part that really set the Cell processor apart from it's rivals. The ninth element was a single PowerPC Processor, the control center for the chip, responsible for delegating to and combining results from the 8 SPUs.

It is these SPUs that gave way to PlayStation 3's being used as a super computer. The US Air Force found that cost for cost it was cheaper to buy 1760 PlayStation 3's and connect them together to create a super computer to perform simulations. And as a bonus I guess they could play some games in their lunch break.

The SPUs were the key revolution. They are designed for single instruction operations i.e they were not general purpose, they were meant for number crunching, the type of number crunching used to manipulate graphics in games. However, for any software

The Xbox 360 had a 3 core PPE

engineer or video game developer, writing your application to utilize these SPUs to their full capability was extremely difficult and doesn't suit all tasks. You had to be extra careful to manage your memory across them and co-ordinate the delegation and reassembly of the processed data.

An Analogy

Let me explain - it's time for an analogy. Imagine you are a Chef responsible for creating lots of cakes. Our Chef is like the PowerPC Element (PPE), they are responsible for bringing together all the ingredients, mixing them together and putting them in the oven. They need to weigh the flour, sugar, butter and crack the eggs all by themself, as they can only do one thing at a time our Chef has to do each one in sequence. However, they could utilize their four line cooks to do that for them. The line cooks, or SPUs in the analogy, could each 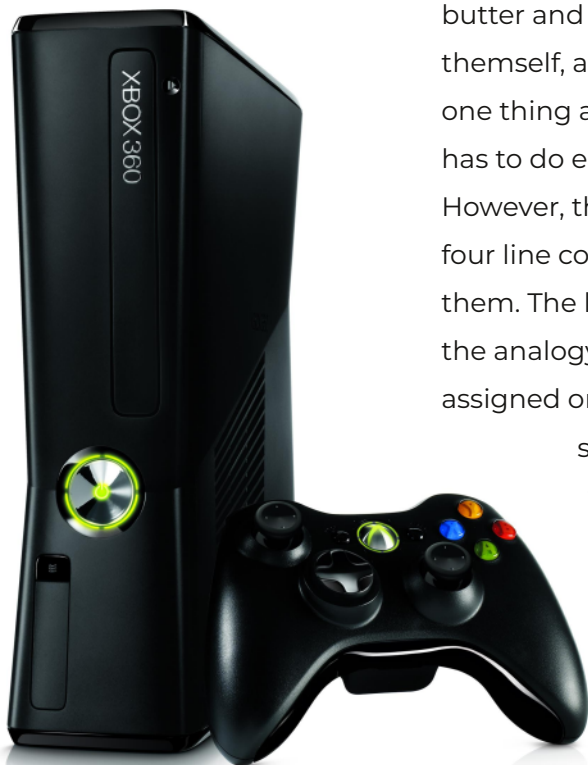be assigned one of those tasks separately. If you set the operation up correctly all four line cooks can weigh and prepare all four ingredients at the same time and give them

to you at the same time allowing you to prepare cakes much faster this way. Not only can they do it in parallel but as it is their only job they can do it faster than the general purpose Chef can.

The PPE inside the Cell Processor was a bit more than just a control center. It was a general purpose chip similar to what you get in a normal computer. When Microsoft was creating the Xbox 360, they also asked IBM for parts, who were busy working on the PPE for the Cell Broadband chip. They made a deal with Microsoft to provide a CPU for the Xbox 360 consisting of three PPEs very similar to the ones they were using in the Cell Processor. So the comparison landscape now looked more like this: 1 PPE + 8 SPUs in the PlayStation 3 versus 3 PPEs in the Xbox 360. (I must confess to simplifying here a bit.) So the real question was "Are the potential gains from having 8 SPUs worth it compared to simply having 3 general purpose PPEs?"

Some Games Perform Badly

As it turns out, the Xbox 360's design was more aligned to PC Gaming so this created a problem for a development company wishing to release

games on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PC. The PlayStation 3 architecture required you to do something special, you had to make sure your design was using the SPUs to the best of their ability but many of these games used off the shelf engines like Unreal Engine, which had been purchased and simply didn't make it easy to do customizations like this.

Releases like Skyrim launched on all three consoles but the PlayStation 3 version had not be modified to make good use of the SPUs meaning the technical comparison in performance of Skyrim became more like running the game on one PPE on PlayStation 3 versus running it on three on the Xbox 360, so it's no surprise that many games ran better out of the box on Xbox 360. Later patches would address some of this but there are still many games in the PlayStation 3 library which run poorly precisely because they did not have the time or money to optimize them for the console.

Difficult Design Choices

For a game to be effective on the PlayStation 3 it had to answer two questions. The first is: How do I approach the development of my game in

such a way that I can design different elements so I can offload processing to the SPUs and the second is: How much time am I going to spend on maximizing that to improve performance? Games like Uncharted, The Last of Us and Metal Gear Solid 4 all look and play amazing because they were PlayStation 3 exclusives, and always would be, they had more time to dedicate to utilizing the hardware effectively. Metal Gear Solid 4 was designed from the ground up with the console architecture in mind and how to make best use of it and in Uncharted 2, there is a behind the scenes video where the team explain that making a sequel gave them more time to experiment offloading functionality that the GPU would have traditionally done to the SPUs, like lighting effects, allowing the GPU to create higher fidelity graphics overall.

In hindsight the Cell Architecture seems doomed to fail. It was probably a relic from when the ambitions of the PlayStation 3 were even grander than they ended up realising. Asking developers to make complicated deep design choices based one one consoles particular architecture was a huge ask and something that

may not have been greatly considered until it was too late. I think PlayStation learnt from this and the PlayStation 4 used a much more typical PC architecture allowing games to be developed for all three platforms with ease and they realised that games were where it was at and their newer slogan "For the gamers" really encapsulates that whole journey.

This story is another reason why I love the PlayStation 3 and what it tried to achieve.

No facets remained unexplored when it came to try and revolutionise home entertainment and I don't think we will ever see a console get turned into a super computer again. So was the Cell Processor really that powerful? I'm afraid the answer is still "It depends".

If you want more technical insight I recommend the fantastic book Programming the Cell Processor by Matthew Scarpino.

Tophies Are Awesome
The Perfect Digital Collectable

The seventh generation was the first time this type of collectable was introduced. Xbox had their achievements, the Steam platform for PC gaming also had achievements and the PlayStation introduced trophies. Since they began the community's opinion on them has been divided. For some, hunting trophies is an obsession that transcends the games themselves and for others they simply couldn't care less about pointless digital relics.

I personally think trophies are excellent. I remember when they were introduced into the PlayStation 3. It is a shame that not all games support them as some earlier titles just missed out. Some of them received patches to add the support later, like Metal Gear Solid 4 but others still remain trophy-less.

I think PlayStation outdid Xbox here with the introduction of the Platinum trophy. On the Xbox the achievements are just a giant list, you can be awarded points based on the difficulty of the

achievement, a bit like PlayStations Bronze, Silver, Gold, but there is no outright extra for completing everything. But the Platinum Trophy is something unto itself. An easy marker to showcase your mastery.

What I like about them is that they provide another way to enjoy a game. They elevate the playing experience beyond just seeing the credits roll and give you some structure to explore content you might not have otherwise not have bothered to experience.

Well that is how it should be. I must confess that far too many games have trophies that are outright ridiculous, boring and are nothing but a waste of time. In the early days of the PlayStation 3, developers didn't approach trophies in a consistent way. Some games made it incredibly easy to complete the trophy list. The first platinum I ever got was for a game called WWE Legends of WrestleMania, I got it mostly by accident but my love of hunting platinum trophies was born. Other games seemed to use the trophy list as an excuse to keep people playing their online multiplayer modes for longer than they otherwise would have. Games like Quantum of Solace which I also really enjoyed had trophies for doing 100 online matches, which wouldn't be too bad if the multiplayer was fun and even a trophy for "Be a top player in an online match" which is
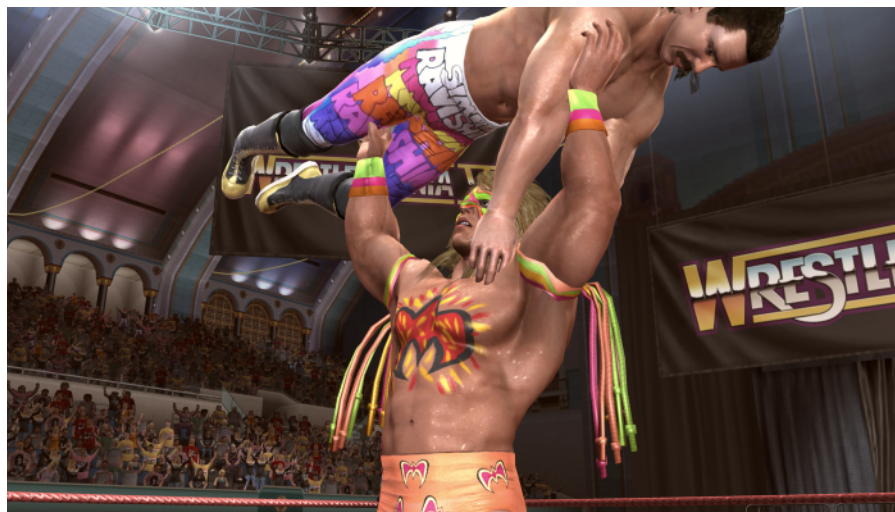
WWE Legends of Wrestlemania, the first game I Platinumed.

completely out of your control.

The other problem facing us PlayStation 3 trophy enthusiasts is the number of games whose trophies relied on online connectivity and the servers have now shut down. I used to love the game The Lord of the Rings: Conquest and I have every trophy except the online multiplayer ones, so I am forever locked out of the Platinum for this game.

I am still upset that the online trophies prevent me from the Platinum.

There are games which have good trophies and those that don't. In my view a good trophy list needs these things.

All trophies should be fun

I don't want to be grinding away at boring repetitive tasks for no reason.

Collection trophies should have trackers

If you are collecting or ticking something off, I shouldn't have to guess what I am missing. In L.A. Noire there is a trophy for using every weapon but the trophy is bugged and doesn't have a tracker, this lethal combination means you have to try everything again and again in the hope that it eventually clicks.

Trophies should be possible without internet guides

It is so much more satisfying when a trophy list lets you figure it out in game without having to look stuff up. This also means a mechanism in the game to find collectables.

Games should not have missable trophies

There are games whose main story is about 30 hours long and have trophies associated with a missiable event and leave you with no other option than starting a second play through just to get it. That's bad.

Online trophies should not block the platinum

If you want online trophies that is fine but they should be kept in a DLC pack so as not to block platinum trophy in the future.

A game like Skyrim has an excellent trophy list. The game has a number of interesting side quests and the trophies are built around you exploring all of those options, there are regretfully a few missable trophies but they can be looked up in advance without much spoilers.

I have 22 platinum trophies across my PlayStation 3 collection. Not a big number at all but I am quite picky when it comes to attempting them. I will only go for Platinum trophies if I genuinely enjoy the game, I'm not going to buy games with easy lists just for the sake of it. I also don't bother if the list has anything that requires a ridiculous grind. I'm willing to put up with some but when a list is going to take 60-100 hours where most of that isn't the core gameplay… I'm out.

Motorstorm

The future of racing games

By Kody

| RACING | RELEASED 2006 | EXCLUSIVE |

One of the pivotal moments around the PlayStation 3, a moment that said to me, "Wow, we're really in the future," was when I saw gameplay of Uncharted: Drake's Fortune. Nathan Drake, the titular hero, was moving through water, causing his clothes to appear wet. They would dry over time, which was not something I had any recollection of happening before. Not only did this signal that we were in the future, but it was proof positive of the immense power of the PlayStation 3 to be the home of beautiful graphics in beautifully made games. While I'm not here to focus on Uncharted, rather a game that's much more underrated, I think it's important to note that we knew what the console was capable of. MotorStorm is another game that takes advantage of the immense power of the system as you violently race through Monument Valley, Arizona.

The Graphics

Racing games are often some of the best-looking games on their respective consoles, and this is a very real instance of that. While MotorStorm would debut less than six months into the PlayStation 3's lifespan, it still looks incredible 18 years later. Like Nathan Drake's clothing soaking up the water he was walking through, the racetracks of Monument Valley, of which there are 9 in the base game, become actively

deformed as you race through them. The track deformation is a major component of how races play out in the second and third laps. While you may have been able to tear down the middle of the track during the first lap, the mud that appears in the second lap may make that task more difficult. This is also true of things like barrels and the husks of cars that litter the track, which will remain in the spot they're moved to until something else hits them. This is a really interesting way of utilizing the power of the system to keep races fresh.

As I mentioned earlier, violent racing is the key to everything here, something I've noticed much more with my recent replay of the game than I had in the past. I play a lot of Gran Turismo, which is a great counterpart as a Sony-published racing game, and that game prides itself and, in a way, forces the player to play nicely with the other racers. This is part of what makes MotorStorm stand out versus the other PlayStation-exclusive fare, and the AI racers are just as guilty as anyone you could potentially face online - they want to win. There were several instances of me flying down the track, and another racer would come alongside me and lock their wheels into mine and push me off the track or into various geographic features, which meant my buggie, rally car, truck, or motorcycle exploding in 9 out of 10 situations, and that's if my overuse of the boost feature didn't make me explode before that.

Such Unique Vehicles

The different vehicles are what give the game most of its diversity because you will find yourself racing those aforementioned nine tracks over and over. In total, there are seven different vehicle types: ATVs, dirtbikes, buggies, rally cars, racing trucks, mudpluggers, and big rigs. Each vehicle plays differently, coming with respective pros and cons. For example, the dirtbike is great for moving through racetracks swiftly, but comes at the cost of being the easiest for other racers to destroy. On the other hand, the big rig is the slowest vehicle, but allows you to burn through the mud without issue and destroy the other racers with ease. An interesting thing about this game is that it requires you

to utilize all the different vehicles. In other racing games, it's easy to find yourself in a vehicle niche, but in MotorStorm, that's just not possible. While any race could potentially be won with any of the vehicles in the game, the race tickets, which are the game's various events, can have up to four races in them, and each race could be on the same track, but with different vehicles.

In 2025, the game's multiplayer servers are dead, which is also true for both of MotorStorm's sequels, Pacific Rift and Apocalypse. The game would benefit from the online component, but I won't take that into account as it isn't the game's fault that the servers aren't alive anymore. The game does have some downloadable content, but the base game is what's important here. Nine tracks, 21 race tickets, and seven vehicle types do make for a pretty varied experience in the base game. Learning all the different vehicles and their strengths will keep you engaged, and the white-knuckle experience that comes with each race is something that needs to be experienced.

It's obvious that the game influenced other arcade racers, and the off-road focus feels fresh all these years later. I'd love to see this game make a comeback, or for the original PlayStation 3 trilogy to be re-released. With how popular the Forza Horizon series is, especially with its recent PlayStation 5 debut, MotorStorm is quietly waiting for its revival and subsequent time in the sun.

It's For Your Own Good: Installing Custom Firmware on the PlayStation 3

By Alessio

[Author's note: this article will go in-depth on PlayStation 3 homebrew, custom firmware (CFW), and more. This is legitimately about further preserving your system, backing up your games, and enabling more features. There will be no mention of piracy.]

I have a problem. It is very rare that I can own a game system (portable, home, or otherwise) without modifying it in some way. Whether this is a physical modification or a software-based alteration, it can sometimes (most times) be more fun and rewarding to me than actually playing any games.

As of a few months ago, the idea of modifying a PlayStation 3 sank its fangs into me. I hadn't realized how robust the homebrew, hardware mod, and custom firmware situation was, so the thought took over. I became overtaken by a compulsion to research and clean and tweak and monitor
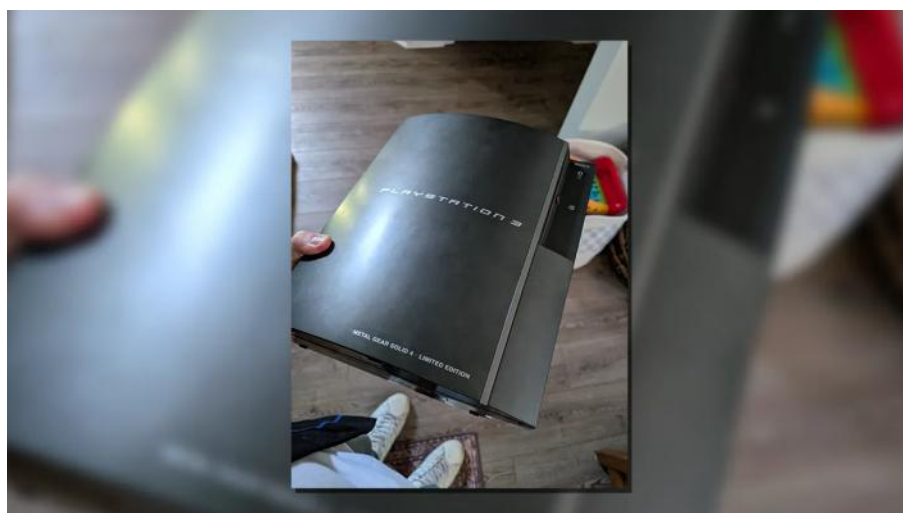
temperatures and listen to the fan and… you get the point.

Let's talk about it.

Home Who? Custom What Ware?

Here's a little background on me just to set the scene (and pad for time to keep you sitting on this page long enough for our SEO to see a nice boost).

I've been tinkering with PCs since around 1993. My father was taking basic computer courses at a local college and would bring home PCBs and floppy disks of rudimentary software. He'd show me how the circuits worked, software

sending signals to speakers, etc. Sure, I was really young, but I loved Wolfenstein 3D and I wanted to know how it worked. Long story short, I would go on to save every old family PC and eventually cannibalize them to build my own Frankenstein machine.

I stayed pretty far behind on the console side of things, in terms of current systems. My first console was a Sega Game Gear, likely kicking off my love affair with portable gaming. From there, my chronology was a Gameboy, Atari 2600, NES, Sega Genesis, Gameboy Pocket, Sony PlayStation, Dreamcast, Gameboy Advance, Xbox,

PlayStation 2, Nintendo Wii, and then the PlayStation 3 (to keep this list manageable), in that order. Hell, I remember mowing two dozen yards in my neighborhood to save money for the Xbox bundle with the Jet Set Radio Future / Sega GT pack-in.

When I found out that the PlayStation 2's expansion bay could be fitted with an HDD and that the system recognized PC peripherals via the front-facing USB ports, my eyes lit up. After exclusively using that functionality to play Final Fantasy XI for over a year, a friend of mine sent me a link to a website that contained information on how to use a specific Action Replay variant to trick the console into reading homebrew. I had a new mission.

If my memory serves me, you'd effectively have to use the USB thumb drive that came with the Action Replay to run a modified system configuration file while also having a modified save file for a specific game that would trigger some sort of reaction that cracked the console's restrictions wide open.

Now I say all of this for more than just nostalgia tripping and telling you how cool I was at thirteen years old. A lot of what this PlayStation 2 exploit would enable the system to do would be in the same vein of what I'll manage to get my PlayStation 3 to do in 2025. Here's a list in no particular order:

·Rip your PS1 and PS2 discs directly to the internal hard

drive.
·Disable region locks for DVDs or games.
·Run unsigned code to allow for ports, emulators, homebrew games, etc.
·The ability to run patched image files (think English fan translations).
·Enable your system to act as a developer kit.

Outside of the era's obsession with ripping CD collections obviously leading to some unsavory uses of the disc ripping feature, a lot of this enabled functionality would provide some really great quality of life changes to my media consumption. As a child of an immigrant, we'd always get a ton of PAL PS1 games and DVDs from my family abroad. Now, I could actually play those
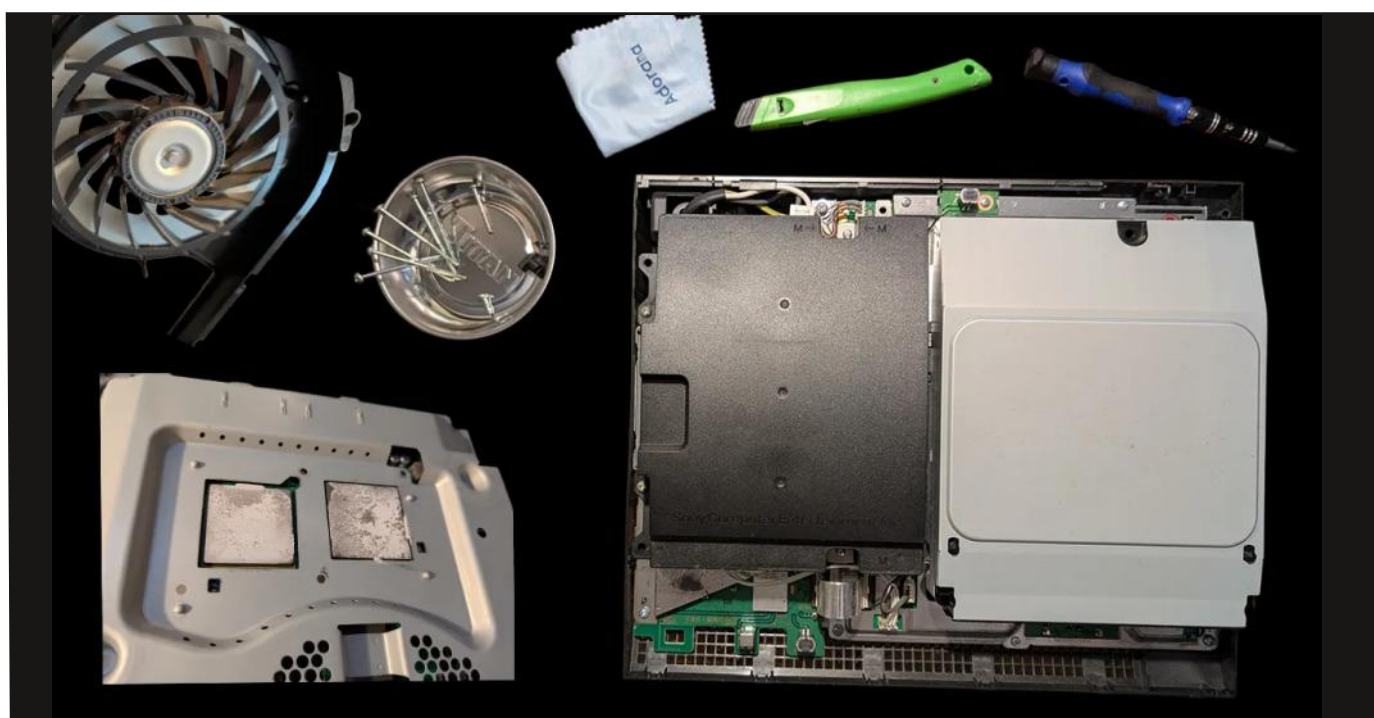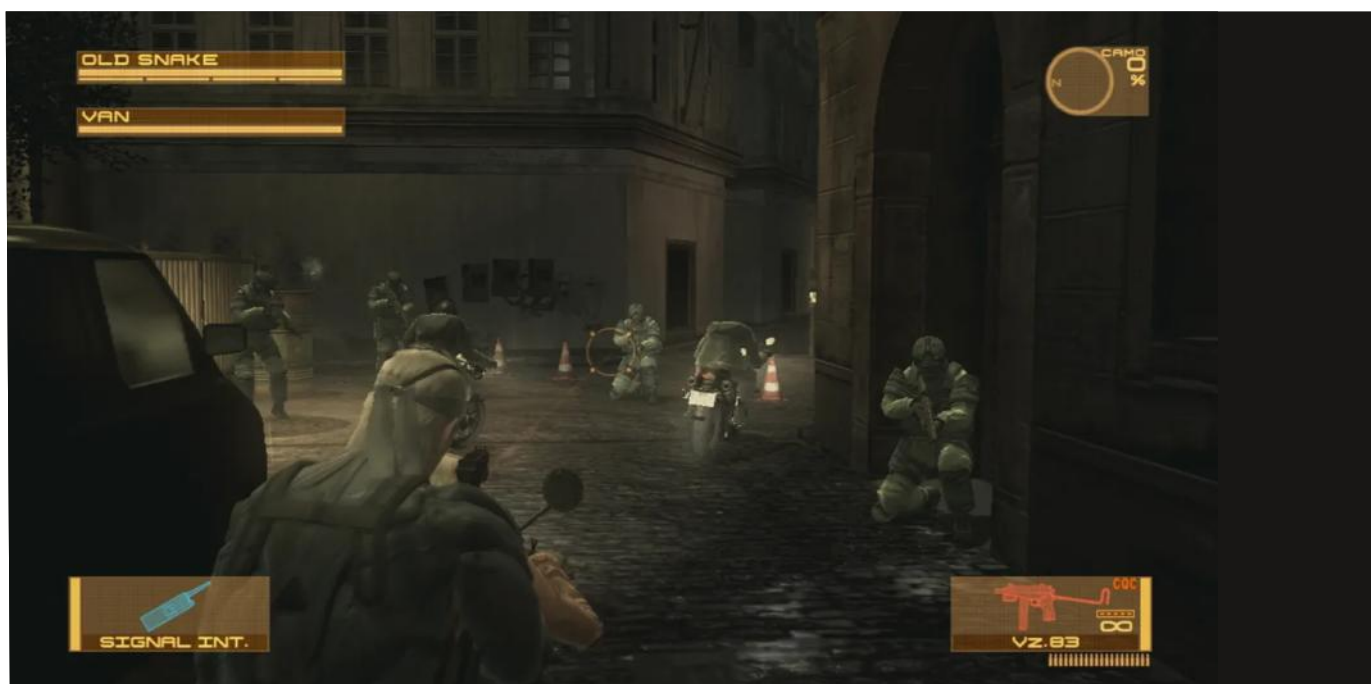
things. I could, over the local area network, now run media from my computer to the PlayStation 2 and watch my videos on my bulky CRT TV instead of my bulky CRT monitor at my desk. And, most importantly for the longevity of my fascination with this activity, I would open the door on playing game systems I never had in the form of emulation on the PS2.

Being able to play Super Nintendo games I'd only heard about in whispers on my actual TV and not on my computer with an oversized keyboard was huge. It would later lead me to using similar exploits for the original Xbox to turn my system into a media center and a way for me to play Super Smash Bros. or Final Fantasy VII in front of a captivated audience of my

grade school peers. I thought I was cool as hell.

So, that's what you can do with homebrew. How about we discuss the PlayStation 3?

It Came From Japan

I've previously owned fat launch models, the slim mid-life refresh, but never the super slim (Alessio: sorry, they always looked very cheap to me. Matt: They are... but I still have one as my daily driver. Slidey-lid anyone?). However, I haven't owned any version of the console since about 2019.

Generally speaking, I'd been keeping an eye on some of the really cool Japanese versions of the system that a favorite eBay seller of mine, Lucky8 Japan, would list. And, while I'd bought from them before (love my

Japanese "Happy Mario" anniversary Gameboy Micro), I'd not pulled the trigger on one of these PS3s. If we're being honest, it was mostly because of word around the web always stating that PS3s are all on the road to bricking, the cheap solder won't last, the systems aren't ventilated properly, they'll all crumble to pieces any day now, etc. But, I finally threw caution to the wind, partially because of this site, and pulled the trigger on a variant I'd found very appealing, the Metal Gear Solid 4 Hagane (Japanese for "steel") Edition PlayStation 3.

Now, I'd legitimately not known that this version of the system actually did ship in the United States, but from what I can tell, the number of units in the western market were far lower

than our eastern counterparts. You can see more information about both in this press release archived via PlayStation Generation.

These bad boys, specifically the large launch units, 40GB mid-cycle versions (like the Hagane), and whatever else pre-late-2008, require some TLC and prayers to keep that Yellow Light of Death at bay (See our article on The Yellow Light of Death). While some of the online discourse about bricking systems and losing PS3s left and right is outsized, these situations actually do happen to the larger model consoles far more frequently than the slimmer siblings. But, as I'll discuss, there are measures you can take to keep your system healthier and hopefully running longer.

But first, I had to see what I was working with.

What Goes On In That Chasis Of Yours?

What steps can I take to better preserve my PlayStation 3?

Thermals, thermals, thermals, are very important. This means the airflow needs to be unobstructed (though follow the intended flow through the system, so don't drill any holes
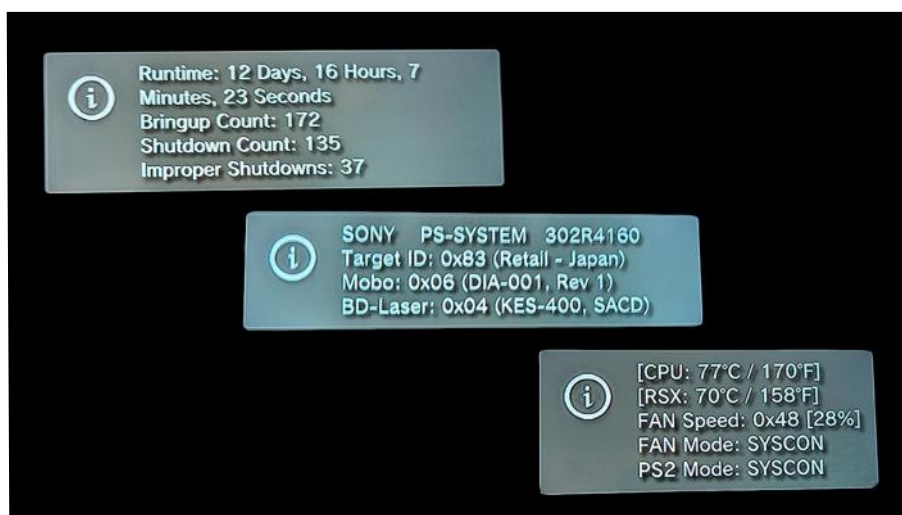
or cut anything open). This means dust has no home here. It also means that the 15+ year old thermal paste (God, I hate how old I am now) needs to go. This means you'll need to get comfortable with disassembling your PlayStation 3.

Now, there's some discourse online about how thermal paste manufacturing companies have created an overblown reliance on "reapply the thermal paste" as the end-all-be-all troubleshooting tip of Reddit and beyond, but it's also not incorrect to think the heat sink could use a little help after almost two decades. For scientific purposes, I'll show you the before and after of my testing:

My research tells me that a runtime of less than 100 days and a shutdown count of less than 1000 actually means this

system wasn't used very heavily. So, I kind of lucked out, and you'll see another reason why I think this vendor really treats their supply right momentarily.

In terms of CPU and RSX temperature values, ~65-68C is supposed to be about right for light use on a large model system, while ~70-72C is where a more demanding game may bring the system. Anything close to 80C is bad. That threshold is considered overheating by Sony's own standards. This can either happen due to airflow, the singular fan in the system not spinning as fast as it should, or because the heat of the chips isn't playing well with the sink the way it should be (hence the replacement paste). Now, you might be wondering how you can see those handy readings on your own system, well, that's where all the talk of jailbreaking, custom firmware,

and homebrew comes in.

There are a thousand flavors of how to best get custom firmware (CFW) on your system, many dependent on console model and your official firmware (OFW) version, but for this article, and my sanity, we're just going to look at the models released before the first slim redesign and using an actual CFW and not the exploits that must be reenabled every reboot like the newer systems require.

I'll try my best to link to all of the best resources I came across on my journey. Front and center, there are a lot of sites and videos that are of a variety of ages spouting conflicting things sometimes and it's very confusing, so hopefully I can take some of the hard parts out of this process for you. That being said, this isn't a step-by-step.

Kicking off, if you have a PlayStation 3 whose firmware is above 3.60 (I believe) then you'll need to do things differently, as covered in this wonderful video by Mr. Mario2011, a channel I definitely recommend for all console modding info. I was lucky enough that my system arrived with 3.55 OFW installed on it. What that meant was that I could load a CFW on a FAT32

formatted flash drive and update the system like you would for an official offline firmware update. The flavor I used was CFW 4.92 Evilnat. There are quite a lot of different CFWs, but this one was one that I saw recommended a lot and after reading the feature guide, I realized it was probably the most beginner friendly. It has a lot of great system-wide controls in easy to find places and feels like the product of a long-running fan community in the late stages of a passion project.

Also, I ran my CFW install at the same time that I replaced the internal hard drive of the system. In 2025, 40GBs (36, I believe, after system required space is accounted for) is not a lot. So, I went out and bought a 1TB SSD to use instead. You want to be sure that it's a 2.5 inch SSD. Anything larger won't fit in the system. Likewise, any drive sizes larger than 1TB can create some odd data overflow issues with the console's operating system that will lead to you running out of space and boot looping your console eventually. I believe the actual threshold is around 1.7TBs, but I wouldn't chance it and just stick to 1TB or smaller. This Instructables post breaks down the nitty gritty for you to follow

if you're doing this at home. And, once the drive is in and the system prompts you to format it on boot, you'll have the opportunity to upgrade the OFW from a flash device afterwards.

With all of that done, you can now access some pretty great system information by navigating to the Network portion of the XMB and scrolling to the top (if using the Evilnat version I mentioned), where it has a new folder filled with tools. You can monitor temps, adjust your fan speed dynamically, disable the system boot up beep, change O and X for confirming (if you want to flip a Japanese console, for instance), and more. I believe, in the parlance of the homebrew world, that these settings are all running via "Cobra", which appears to be some sort of functionality layer running atop the system OS. You can also do all of these things using webMAN, which is a homebrew multi-use application that allows you to back up your discs to your internal drive and enable more tools, including being able to monitor your console temperature, drive space, and more using a simple browser tab and your console's IP address. I find that PSX-Place is also a great resource for

questions.

Now, back to our thermals discussion. The system, arguably, underclocks the fan speeds because even when the fan hits 50% speed, it becomes quite loud. The default settings usually keep it around 28-32% I've noticed, which can be too low to help keep temps down. And rising temps are what? The enemy. Heat is the enemy of all electronics. You can set an automatic "dynamic" fan curve either using the Cobra tools or the webMAN ones. I set mine to automatically start adjusting its speeds once the system hits 70C and it seems to work great. Also, please don't put your system inside of an entertainment center or alcove or against a wall. You want this baby standing tall and in an open space for all that heat to not surround the system. It's all like a PC.

Alright, anyway, let's tear this sucker open. This RetroWolf video was really helpful to understand how the screws and components interact with one another, what order to pull things out to avoid issues, etc. Once you're in, you'll want to use some isopropyl alcohol and q-tips or cotton pads to clean your CPU and GPU so that there is no old paste present.

Same with the heat sink. Also, get rid of any and all dust. Again, I lucked out and found my system to be relatively clean. These folks really took care of this thing.

Now, let's see what my temperature readings were reporting after the process was complete.

A dismantled PS3 with a temperature reading of 40C Okay, that's wild. Also, this was taken pretty immediately after, so the average changed.

I Have Seen The Six-Cell Processor With My Own Eyes and Lived

Okay, so 40C is a pretty huge drop. Also, the readout is stating "SYSCON", or system controlled fan speed, because I was using webMAN for the adjustments and not Cobra, which provided the reading. A more realistic and in-use depiction of my heat on a daily basis is actually around 66-68C while in the middle of large set pieces in a Call of Duty or Grand Theft Auto. So, it's not 40, but it's certainly not 77C when sitting on the XMB. Fun fact: the XMB isn't a pre-recorded animation. The system is generating all of those particles in real time, which is neat, but also legitimately taxing on the

idle thermals.

But, that's all a testament to what a good cleaning and thermal paste reapplication can do. Even cutting my temps down by 10-15 degrees is huge and worth the effort. Especially because, and I didn't mention this before, when the PS3 runs digital PS2 titles, official Classics or personal backups, it pulls far higher temps than when running PS1 or PS3 titles. Apparently to run the built-in PS2 emulator (if you don't have a backwards compatible launch system) the OS boots into a super barebones version of itself, disabling a lot of functionality in the process, and something happens to how the system monitors its own temperature. So, definitely do these cleaning steps if you plan to play tons of PS2 games and be sure to manually set your custom temperature before booting a PS2 title. The dynamic curve won't work because it can't dynamically check anything while you're in PS2 "mode". I've seen the best results at holding a constant 40% fan speed. Not super loud and keeps temps down (I checked them for testing immediately after closing PS2 titles at their most intensive seeming parts and rushing to the temp check function as

soon as the XMB relaunched).

Another thing that will really help with heat is not having to use your disc drive anymore. You'll see faster load times and you'll have one less hardware process running. And, if you wanted, you could just FTP your backups using FileZilla and your system's IP address, so you wouldn't even necessarily need to use the disc drive to perform the backing up. CFW legitimately provides life to systems with damaged or nonfunctioning disc drives.

One quick note on disc backups. I ran tests with a PlayStation copy of Metal Gear Solid, because of course, a PlayStation 2 copy of MTV Music Generator 2, and a PlayStation 3 copy of Metal Gear Solid 4. Through my testing I found that when using multiMAN (another homebrew application that seemed to work better for me

for backups), it took roughly 2 minutes per gigabyte of data. So, expect something like MGS4 to take a little over an hour.

Okay, So Why?

I'm not quite sure why I felt so moved to write this article or spend the money and time to make this all happen. I think part of it was knowing that there was a system I hadn't cracked into before and the thought of a new conquest seemed like fun. Part of it was also wanting to share the process with other folks to

hopefully collect a few pieces of information that I'd found in various corners of the web to make things a bit easier for others. Ultimately, I think it was just about the feeling, the compulsion, and just the fun of doing something technical and with my hands.

Only time will tell if I'll actually play the system a ton, but I know I'll at least be revisiting Metal Gear Solid 4 on this baby for our remastered season of coverage on Metal Gear Mondays next year.

I hope that this was helpful to someone in some way and I hope that for all the console modding vultures with keen eyes and sharp claws that I didn't say too many incorrect or misinformed statements and that you'll spare my life this one time.

BEYOND
T W O S O U L S™

Trophy Guide

Beyond: Two Souls is an interactive cinematic game released by Quantic Dream in 2013 following the same distinct style as their previous titles: Heavy Rain, Fahrenheit and more recently Detroit: Become Human.

This game has been on my list to go back and platinum for quite some time, but I have long since lost my original game save and quite a few of the trophies I have left require a full playthrough so I kept putting it off. It's also one of those where you need to spend a bit of time up front to work out what trophies you already have and how to make the best use of your time.

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I wrote out all the trophies and ticked off the ones that I already had. I then split them into chapter specific trophies, those which can be obtained for doing a specific activity in a specific chapter, these are less important in the overall plan as you can use the chapter select to get these. The other trophies are the ones where you need to do a series of actions in one playthrough in order to get it. I needed to plan out the first playthrough to get as many of these as I could in one go.

Playthrough 1

My first playthrough would focus on getting all the collectables, taking every opportunity to do evil actions, finish the game in two player
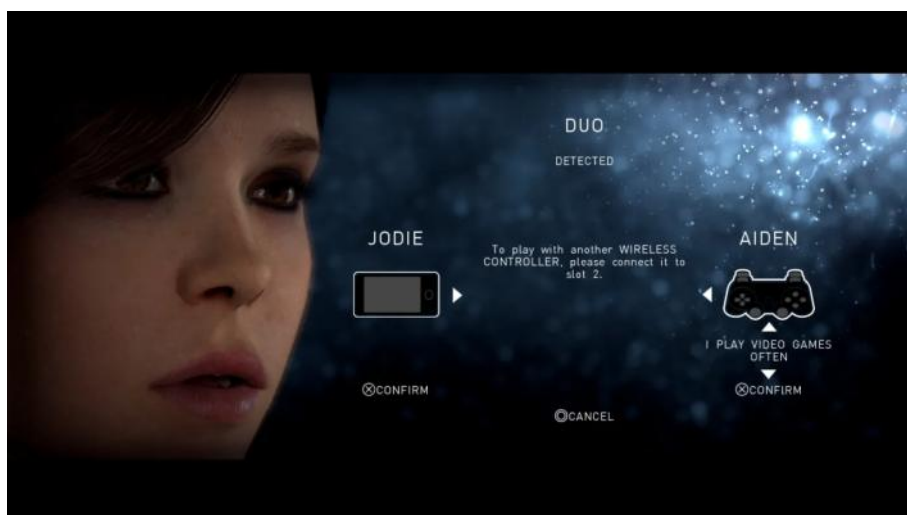
Beyond had an app that let players control Aiden in a simple way.
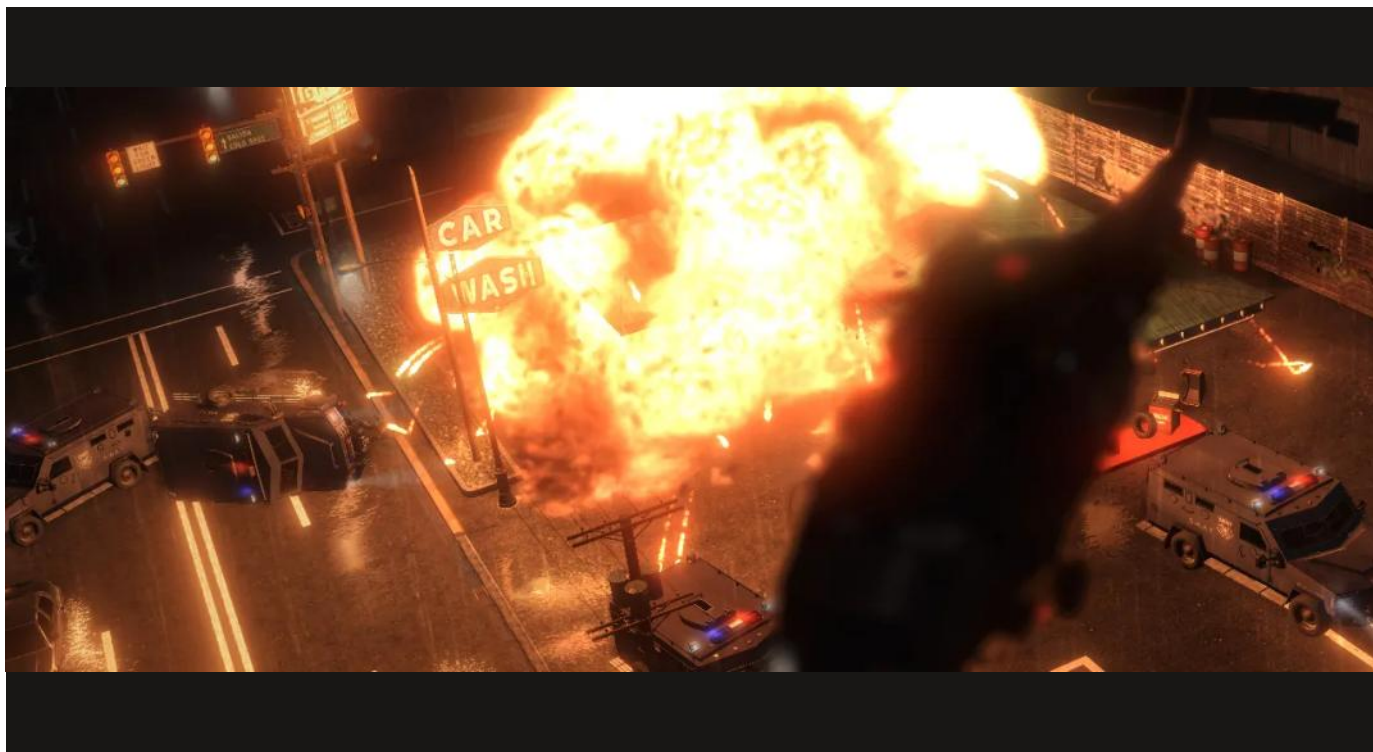
mode and to save every character's life. This would get me Explorer, Uncontrollable, Together Till The End and Saved All. It was also good just to replay the game after so long and experience it again. The Uncontrollable trophy was particularly painful because it goes against my natural instinct to be good in games. I had to pick all of the horrible options including intentionally setting a house on fire, but this is part of the fun of trophy hunting - getting you to do things you otherwise wouldn't do.

Along the way I managed to tick off some of the chapter specific trophies I was missing. The trophy Teammates was a fun little one where you had to steal some cookies amongst other things as well as Aiden's Apocalypse where you have to wreak havoc on a small town exploding gas stations and destroying helicopters. The worst part is that the chapter specific trophies don't pop until the loading screen after the chapter is complete. This can be an agonizing wait as you can never be sure you got it until the end of the chapter.

Playthrough 1 - Extras

The most complicated trophy is the All Endings trophy. There are about 7 different endings depending on how you want to split it. At the end of this playthrough I had kept everyone alive and I chose the option to enter the infraworld. Then I was able to simply reload the final chapter again and

choose to live. This did mean replaying the ending chapter Black Sun which is quite time consuming. After choosing to live, you unlock the Epilogue where there are a number of different choices on who Jodie can live with. I replayed this 4 times choosing the other endings but each time you have to watch the ending credits, it's simple but painfully slow and each time there is only one small ending video based on your choice, the rest of the ending is all the same. The illusion of choice in these branching story games start to break apart when you keep replaying them over and over.

Playthrough 2

At this point the trophies I had left to get were for finding all

the collectables (I had missed two from the first playthrough, though they can be attained by simply replaying the chapter), three chapter specific trophies I couldn't get at the time as they would have invalidated some of the longer running trophies I was working on and then the trophies for letting everyone die and getting the other endings.

The grind is real now. I need to replay the game from the chapter Homeless and make sure I kill all the characters along the way from this point in the game until the end. The Homeless chapter is the first point in the story where your decisions affect the critical characters and whether they live or die. Then it is a case of reloading the Epilogue a few times again until you are done.

Up until now it was a real fun trophy hunt. I was enjoying playing the game all the way through again, the collectables were easy to attain and they unlocked the behind the scenes features. But now that I have to replay half of the game it's not great. Ideally this is where I should put the game down and come back in 6 months and replay it but I just want to get it finished at this point.

Cleanup

So after finally getting to the end a second time I managed to get All Endings and a Better world. I then just had to round it up by doing a few chapter specific trophies that I still hadn't got.

Was it worth it?

This is a really tough one. I think if I hadn't lost my original game save file things would have been better but ultimately you really shouldn't play this game with a guide as your first playthrough, you should just play it and make your own decisions. This is likely to lead you to an ending where some characters are alive and some are dead. This means it's likely you will have to replay the game, at least from the Homeless chapter, to make sure they all survive and then the same to make sure they all die. So it's just a really grindy experience at the end. If it's a game you are passionate about I'd recommend spacing out these chunks, maybe just keep a note in the game box and come back to the multiple playthroughs over time.

The graphics on the close ups of the faces are still incredible to this day