



As promised last week at the end of my retrospective on Konami's Castlevania series, I mentioned that this week's installment would highlight the games of one of the most popular game creators ever, Hideo Kojima! So hit the jump below!

Kojima's career starts back in 1986. Working on games for the MSX computer system, his first was the sequel to Antarctic Adventure, entitled Penguin Adventure. Unfortunately his first title would never see the light of day, an interesting sounding one called *Lost World* (That's no typo -- the idea was to combine the words 'war' and 'world') as Konami didn't give it the green light.

Many of his games that *did* get greenlit, however, drew from various influences like movies and science fiction, here are some you should hopefully have played:

- *Metal Gear* (1987, Famicom/MSX/PC) - Perhaps Kojima's most infamous work, the original Metal Gear introduced players to the very Rambo-esque Solid Snake, in his very first mission for the outfit known as FOXHOUND, he must infiltrate the stronghold codenamed Outer Heaven, deep in the South African jungles.

Armed with nothing but his bare hands and a pack of Lucky Strikes, it's up to you to avoid being seen by the enemy soldiers, all the while defeating Outer Heaven's evil henchmen, like 'Machinegun Kid' who uses a machinegun in an attempt to stop Solid Snake. All leading up to stopping the real culprit, Big Boss and destroying the final weapon, the notorious Metal Gear!

Note that the NES (and PC) releases were both vastly different from the MSX original. (Which also used a password system, instead of the MSX original's battery-based backup.)

- *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* - The MSX-only sequel, Snake returns in a brand-new mission, to rescue Czech scientist Kio Marv who in the midst of a then-futuristic 1999 oil crisis, created a new species of algae (called OILIX) which leads to his kidnapping by the people of 'Zanzibar Land'.

So once again Snake is sent behind enemy lines to rescue Dr. Marv (by none other than recurring mainstay Roy Campbell!) and must contend with a whole slew of new adversaries, like Black Color, a cyborg ninja. Unfortunately his biggest foe, the latest incarnation of the Metal Gear line of walking death tanks!

Interestingly the character designs were redone in later re-releases of MG2:SS, most likely due to avoiding copyright infringement. (for example Big Boss returns in this game, and his original image looks just like Sean Connery, and Dr. Marv bares more than a passing resemblance to Albert Einstein...

Speaking of the changed artwork, you'll find it featured in both of these games which are included on a bonus disc in the PS2 release, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*. So if you're interested in checking either of them out, I'd recommend going that route! (

Random bit of trivia: Did you know that this game was almost directly inspired by the US exclusive, Snake's Revenge? Believe it.... or not!

)

- *Snatcher* (PC-88/MSX/SEGA CD/PC Engine/PSX/Saturn) Not nearly as popular as the Metal Gear series, *Snatcher* was a different style of game entirely! Loosely inspired by the sci-fi classic, *Blade Runner*, *Snatcher* stars a man by the name of Gilian Seed, who apparently has amnesia (which I thought was kind of odd, since he seems to remember his wife apparently...) and was hired by the organization known as JUNKER (*which stands for two different things, depending on which region the game is...*) whose mission is to stop these Terminator-esque robots from 'Snatching' humans.

Luckily he won't have to go it alone, as the JUNKER organization enlists the help of a miniature

version of the Metal Gear tank (*whose intro is quite hilarious, as you see a gigantic Metal Gear shadow walking out while the main theme of MG2 plays.... then you discover he's only three feet tall!*)

Gilian is then sent to investigate a series of murders, starting with a strange transmission from one of his fellow JUNKERs, Jean-Jack Gibson.... So Gilian and his pint-size companion head off to investigate.... and that's where things definitely get R-rated...

Unfortunately there aren't any modern day re-releases of Snatcher, so you'll have to settle for the lone english-language release, for the SEGA CD, which should still pop up on eBay from time to time... (*Or you could go the less ethical route, but that's up to you.*)

- *Policenauts* (PSX/Saturn/PC-9821) This game also drew much inspiration from both movies (in this case, Lethal Weapon) and sci-fi in general. In the distant future (2040 AD) you play as OLAPD (Old Los Angeles) officer Jonathan Harker, who had previously been employed as a special agent for the group 'Policenauts'. One day his estranged wife shows up (there had been an incident during his time with Policenauts, and he had to be cryogenically frozen for a while) and requests his help in finding her husband... Jonathan refuses, so understandably dejected, she leaves.... but if you want to find out what happens next, you'll have to check this game out for yourselves!!

However, until now there really wasn't any way to do so. Up until late last year, this game had remained unplayable to all but those who were fluent in Japanese. (and had hardware capable of playing imports) But, thanks to the kind folks over at junkerhq.net, you can now enjoy this lost Kojima classic,

entirely in english!!

You'll have to rip the game (or find the image) yourself but hit up the forums over at the site to find the english patch, and some help on getting it up and running. (

I suggest running the game on actual hardware if possible, as most emulators run into a snag at one point or another

.)

- Metal Gear Solid (PSX, GCN) - Definitely one of Kojima's most well-known works, Solid Snake is once again brought out of retirement. This time he's headed for the frozen wilderness of Alaska, as the renegade group FOXHOUND has been revived and is looking to start a nuclear war, armed with the latest incarnation of the long-running walking death tank: Metal Gear!

Taking a lot of the innovations that were introduced in the series with Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake (such as the ability to crouch/crawl underneath objects and through crawl spaces, as well as an innovative update to the Inventory system, where all your weapons/items are a few button presses away!) Metal Gear Solid marks Solid Snake's first foray in 3D (as in polygon graphics, not 3D like the 3DS...) featuring several new adversaries like Psycho Mantis, who knocks on the 'forth wall' by reading your memory card and moving your Dualshock controller (at least I *hope* you have a Dualshock to play this) with his MIND!

And Revolver Ocelot, who looks like he stepped right out of a Spaghetti Western, and wields a pair of old-fashioned six-shooters. Luckily Solid Snake won't have to go it alone, as Policenauts' supporting cast member Meryl Silverburgh is here to give Snake a helping hand in stopping the terrorist organization! (*It's weird because Policenauts takes place in 2040, and MGS was set in the year 2005, so I'm not quite sure how that works out.*) Also along for the ride is anime nerd Hal 'Otacon' Emmerich, who was forced against his will to help make WMDs for the new Metal Gear.

MGS had some seriously epic boss battles, like the Cyborg Ninja, or the near end-game fight versus the Metal Gear REX... all very epic. So if you haven't checked this one out, do it!

- Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty - Perhaps the most controversial entry in the Metal Gear series, players only control Solid Snake during the first hour of the game. After the events of MGS1, the plans for the walking death machine have hit the black market, and everyone has been working on their own variant of Metal Gear -- even the Marines! So it's up to Solid Snake to sneak aboard a tanker just off the coast of New York City, and get photographic evidence of the new Metal Gear. But things go awry when Revolver Ocelot waltzes right in and hijacks the new Metal Gear, sinking the tanker in the process!

As the 2nd "half" of the game starts, turns out you wind up playing the rest of the game as some new blood to the MGS series, a young rookie by the name of Jack (codename RAIDEN) and he's sent in to investigate an oil spill at an installation known as the Big Shell. Apparently a new terrorist organization called Dead Cell is up to no good, and worst of all they're supposedly lead by the legendary Solid Snake!

I admit it this second half is difficult to write about, because early in the 2nd part everything seems like it's on the level, but late in the game you just aren't even sure anything is for real or not! (*you'll understand when you get there*) by that point Kojima just literally goes overboard

with the fourth-wall stuff (making direct references that its a videogame) like one sequence near the end that throws phony 'Fission Mailed' game over screens at you (whereas the real game over screen provides a snapshot of your last moments alive, the game continues to play in this red herring screen) So MGS2 had a pretty good rep for being a fucked up game, at least near the end of it, anyway.

- Zone of the Enders (PS2) While this game is probably most notable for including the 'Tanker' portion of MGS2 as a demo/preview of things to come, the game itself was pretty cool. Basically its all about giant flying mechs blowing each other up... (*Admittedly it's been years since I've played the first one so I'm going on fuzzy memories*

and don't have as much to say on this one

) there was also a sequel: ANUBIS: ZOE 2 which I haven't played myself, but the theme song 'Beyond the Bounds' is pretty awesome. (Even though half the song is english, the other half gibberish... I thought it was something neat like Turkish or something, but nope.)

- Metal Gear Solid 3: SNAKE EATER (PS2) This third game in the Metal Gear Solid line was actually a prequel, casting players as a young 'Naked Snake' who would later go on to grow up to be the legendary Big Boss. The game takes place in the 60s during the cold war, the Russians are developing a new mobile death tank codenamed the 'Shagohod' which was a precursor to the walking Metal Gear tanks of the current games. So Naked Snake is sent in to find out as much as he can about this new threat, and try to stop it any way that he can!

One of the neatest features of SNAKE EATER is the camoflaughe system. Depending on your surroundings, your camoflaughe is rated on a percentile and the higher it is, the more hidden you are from the enemy soldiers. You can also find various camoflaughe and face paint patterns if you look around enough.

As mentioned earlier the game also comes in a deluxe edition called "MGS3: Subsistence", which in addition to the two MSX games, also included a 'Boss Rush' where you take on all the bosses one after the other, luckily Naked Snake goes into these fights fully armed, so if you want to use an assault rifle against young Ocelot (who you probably won't even recognize!) you can. MGS2 also had a similar deluxe pack as well, called 'Substance' which had some extra content like VR missions and 'snake tales' mini missions.

- MGS4: Guns of the Patriots (PS3) In Kojima's debut on Sony's next-gen powerhouse, it's the

future and Solid Snake is really starting to show his age (long story short he's the result of genetic engineering and has accelerated aging as a nasty side effect.) and the whole game basically shows a very ugly side of war, where people are just in it for the money -- innocent lives be damned. Snake may be old, but he can still hold his own. And he also has the benefit of some pretty high-tech stuff, like the 'Solid Eye' scanner, which displays various useful bits of information, as well as various infrared modes. and the 'Octocamo' which allows Old Snake to blend in with his surroundings, much like a chameleon (or an octopus, I guess?)

Snake is also helped on the way by a much older Otacon, who tags along via a miniature Metal Gear Mk. II (similar to the one that appeared in Snatcher) and an older but wiser Meryl Silverburgh (pretty much retconning the bad ending from MGS1 where Meryl dies) as well as a Cyborg-Ninja-ified Raiden, who is 1000 times more badass than he was in MGS2. Snake also meets an illicit weapons dealer by the name of Drebin, where he can purchase new weapons and upgrades for his existing ones, as well as ammo for his weapons as well.

Other highlights of MGS4 include a REX Vs. Ray fight which is particularly epic, but not nearly as epic as the final showdown atop the newly renamed 'Outer Haven', as Old Snake and Liquid Ocelot (having lost his arm in MGS1, he robs the corpse of Solid Snake's double, Liquid Snake for a replacement arm) and the two fight to the death. I'll confess I shed more than a few tears hearing classic songs like 'Escape' from MGS1 (*apparently copyright issues forced them to not use the main theme from the original MGS ever again*) and 'Snake Eater' the theme song to MGS3 during the climactic final battle.

It's certainly a testament to Kojima's greatness that he could evoke such a strong emotion from the player... that's never happened to me before, at least not playing a videogame. So if there's one thing Kojima knows, it's how to craft a memorable experience from the player.

I know there were a few games I missed, like all the PSP ones, but I haven't had much experience with those outside of a few games of Metal Gear AC!D (which is kinda neat, a CCG-inspired take on the Metal Gear series, check it out if you ever get the chance) but all the other ones I've mentioned I've played extensively, so I recommend checking out any of them, they're all pretty kickass.

Of course, Kojima's still at it today, helping to craft the next chapter in the MGS series, Metal Gear Solid: RISING which picks up after MGS4 putting the player in the shoes of the cybernetically enhanced ninja version of Raiden. It looks to be a particularly kickass action

Retro Rearview: HIDEO KOJIMA

Written by DarkTetsuya

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game, running through levels, slashing enemies six ways from sunday, it should be pretty awesome. What's not awesome is the wait, as the game's not due out till 2012.

So while you're waiting why not pick up any of the titles I've mentioned in this article, I highly recommend Policenauts if you haven't checked it out already, it's quite the experience.

I hope you've enjoyed this look at the games created by one of my favorite developers ever, he really knows how to make an amazingly epic cinematic game.