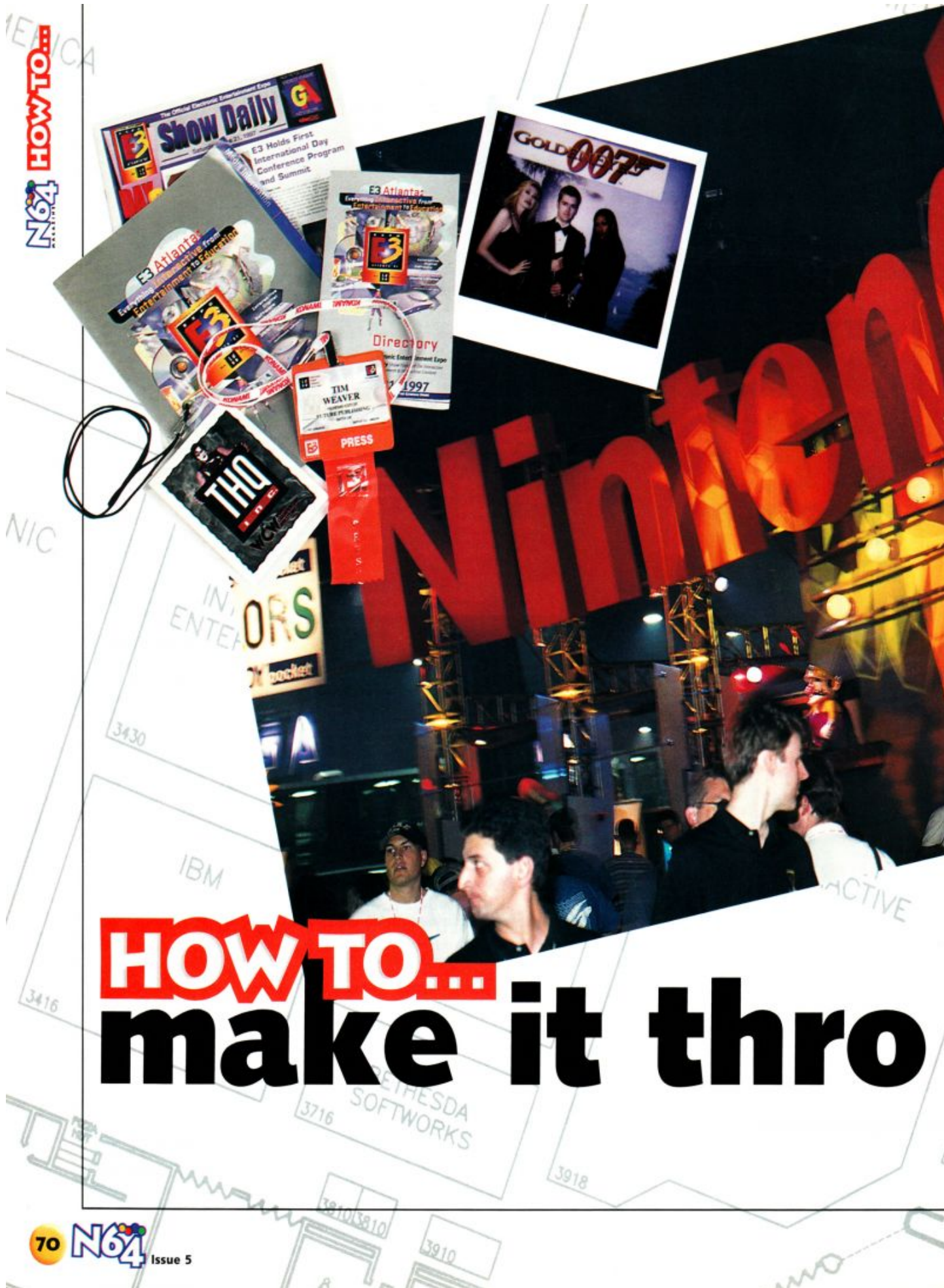


How to... Make it trough E3 Alive!

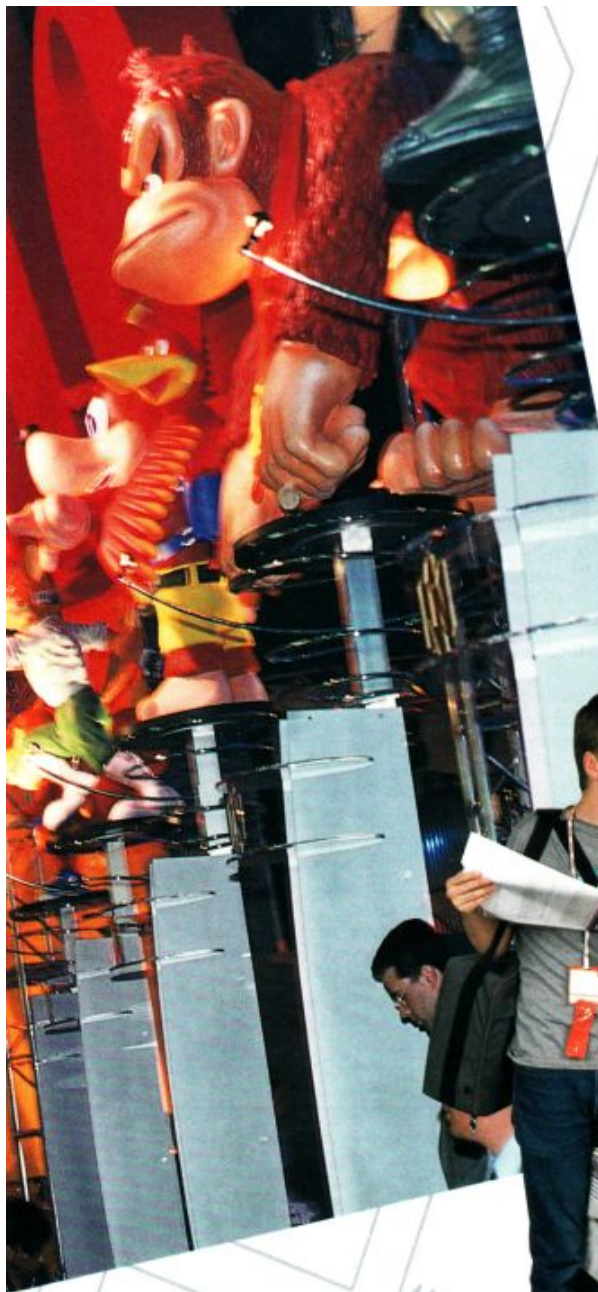
Article scanné dans le magazine N64 n°05 (Août 1997)

Sujet de l'article : Site

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HOW TO... make it thro



Packing his bags and digging out his passport (photo embarrassingly old), our reporter heads for America in search of the biggest games show on Earth...

It's showtime!" Um, no. Categorically, no. "The Man From Atlanta!" Forget it. There is no way I'm being the Man from Atlanta. Nope. No. "Georgia on my mind!" Uh-uh, no. "Stars and Sprites!" Absolutely not. Sooooo, how do you begin talking about the greatest show on Earth? Well, you start by saying it was big. And busy. And very, VERY loud. Then you talk about the games...

ugh E3 alive!

By Tim Weaver



August 1997



Tuesday

We arrive in Atlanta to a torrential rainstorm. And when it rains in America, it rains. So hard, in fact, that they close the airport two minutes after we land. Marcus (from GamesMaster magazine) and I leave the plane feeling distinctly sickish. In-air shenanigans (including 'drops' Alton Towers would be proud of) mean our stomachs are still working their way down from 30,000 feet.

△ Notice the bright, trusting eyes, the fresh clothes and the neatly-combed hair.

And then there's the airport. After seeping through customs and having a man/woman (I wasn't quite sure which) search through my suitcase, we try to fathom out how to get to the taxi rank. Now, call me old fashioned, but I always prefer my arrivals buildings to be right next to the exit (i.e., the taxi rank). In Atlanta, what you quickly come to realise is that to get to the

main terminal requires some walking of the Ranulph Fiennes variety. Or a subway train. We opt for the latter.

Outside, it's still raining. The taxi rank is manned by a strange old coot. "Stay there fellas!" he shouts as he scarpers off to find the next available taxi. Then, he turns to us and bawls: "Come on! I said, follow me!" Oh. We follow him, jump in a taxi and head downtown. The Ramada Downtown Hotel, to be exact. A bit like a Travelodge, we're told. So nothing special, you'd think, but tidy and clean with all the creature comforts.

Sadly, the only creature comforts the Ramada Downtown offers is cockroaches. It only needs flashing neon signs, distant gunshots and a man in a string vest to take us up to our rooms and it could be something out of Taxi Driver. Still, forgetting



△ The crime capital of America, apparently. America being the crime capital of the world. Still, eh?

the smell of vomit emanating from our toilet and the air conditioning (on so cold that it had ice forming at its grill), we recover from our long trek.

Police sirens go off outside. Silence. Then more police sirens. Then Marcus says: "Apparently, Atlanta is the crime capital of America." A chair is promptly wedged under the door handle and the door locked.



△ We weren't nervous, you understand. But, you know, better safe than sorry.



Wednesday

The Georgia World Congress Centre is just about the biggest building in the world. In fact, so huge is it that the whole E3 expo takes up only one of the floors. Across from it is the Georgia Dome, and further on down there's the CNN Centre, from where the world-famous news station broadcasts, and from where we got breakfast every day.

Breakfast on the first day consists of a

banana bran muffin, a croissant and an orange juice. But for most other mornings it's an egg, cheese and ham bagel or an egg and ham 'wrap' (sort of like an omelette but rolled over). In fact, the foods we ate were so fatty (in the evenings we had a mixture of fried chicken, cheeseburgers, chips and pizza) that, on returning to Blighty, I had enough grease on my skin to provide Castrol with raw materials for a decade.

Inside the Congress Centre there's a Southern US Water Conference. Suddenly finding oneself swamped by moustache-wearing Georgian water specialists is a nightmare only comparable with an evening at the hotel restaurant (which was closed due to having no licence). But, after a cunning escape, I move to the Press Registration room. Here I book my place at the show and garner a neck tag for posterity.

After some minor trouble with the attendant ("No, that really is me in the mag"), I'm overloaded with maps of where each company's stall is and, more importantly, what N64 games they're doing. But, frustratingly, none of us are allowed into the show until 10am the next morning.

Ambling down the hall, however, I notice a window out onto the show. Spotting this as my chance to see exactly what all the fuss is about, I leg it to the window in the hope of seeing something and, sure enough, am able to gawp at E3 for the very first time. Or, at least, a still-being-built E3. At the back is Nintendo's stand, with a Banjo-Kazooie banner hanging

down. Beyond that, stands and booths fade into the distance. (I later tested the Congress Centre out for size and it took me seven minutes to walk from one end to the other.) Unfortunately, even through this sizeable window, I can only see about a fifth of the show floor.

▽ The Shaman from Banjo-Kazooie, peering down from the Nintendo stand.



△ This is even more valuable than something you might find in a Wonka Bar.

Thursday

After having my appetite well and truly moistened by a report from E3 on ABC News (in association with Billy Bob Scotch Motors of Lenox), I wander the seven car-packed blocks from the hotel to the Congress Centre.

Inside, it's ludicrously busy. A queue for entry into the show runs for at least half a mile, and as I step onto the first of three downward escalators I can hear the distant but distinctive sound of video game music.

People brush past me, and, at the bottom of the third escalator, huge E3 signs point the way down the hall. I quicken my pace and then realise I'm running. I stop, faintly embarrassed, and take the last of the escalators down to the entrance.

There are three double doors open, and I skirt through the centre one. Suddenly, in front of me stands a 25-foot wall with 'Electronic Arts' written across it in mountain-sized letters. I smile. Then I remember FIFA 64. I move on towards the centre of the show, not bothering to consult my map, even though I'm patently already lost. And there it is: the Nintendo stand.

"Shut up, Mario!" screams an Italian voice from above me and, looking up, I see plastic, fully moving models of both Mario and Wario. Throughout the show they babble on to each other. Entering the stand beneath them, I'm

immediately staring at a huge video wall featuring a rolling demo of *Conker's Quest*, the new Rare game. Forking off to the right are six screens with playable demos of the game. Off to the left is *GoldenEye 007*. I turn left.

Half an hour later, I put down the new green Nintendo joypad and turn to find a queue, five deep, waiting to have a blast at Bond. Apologising, I move off, past *Conker's Quest* (that can wait till later) and on to *Banjo-Kazooie*. Another video wall throws out deafening levels of music, and I slip into position at the game stand. And with joypad at the ready I begin playing *Banjo-Kazooie*.

I'm stuck. Unfortunately, I can't reset the machine as it's hidden behind a small cupboard. Suddenly, a not-unattractive lady appears beside me, smiling. "Are you all right there?" I explain my predicament and she unlocks the cupboard and resets the machine. I thank her and she disappears. Mmm, nice.

Two minutes later, another not-unattractive lady appears beside me. "Are you okay?" Erm, yes. Is there a Miss World competition going on here or am I unbelievably good looking? Deciding that it's probably more likely to be the former, I glance at the logo on her shirt. Ah, Nintendo. Further on down, a similarly-clobbered lovely is helping another incompetent *Banjo-Kazooie* player.

"Fine, thanks," I mumble, and she disappears. I play the game for a little while and am then interrupted by a couple of blokes, one with a huge video camera and the other with an equally large microphone.

"What do you think of *Banjo and Kazooie*?" Microphone asks. He's American.

"Um, it's good. Well, I don't know, I've only been playing it for a couple of minutes. But it seems quite good, yes".

"Hey! You're English aren't you?"

"Yes. English. Yes."

"Thought so. Do you know London?"

No, it's only the bleeding capital. "Yes."

"I've got a friend there. He's a DJ. At the Underground Club? You know it?"

"No, not really."

"Right, well, he's really into jungle. Do you know what jungle is? It's music..."

It's twenty minutes before I can muscle myself away from Microphone and Camera. About five minutes in and he was telling me about his childhood in West Virginia. Ten minutes, the name of his dog; and, after 15, I was familiar with his schooling and job history. Only after 18 minutes did he even ask a question.

Towards the back of Nintendo's stand is a small third-party segment with Titus, Kemco and Hudson all vying for my attention. I shoot off and play

Bomberman first. Then *Dual Heroes* (and receive a resounding kicking from a Japanese journalist), then *Lamborghini 64* (which, until I came back to it on the Saturday, I didn't really take to) and the lush *Top Gear Rally*.

But the lure of the main Nintendo stand proves too much, and after some cookies and Coke at lunchtime I spend the whole of the day jumping between *GoldenEye*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Conker's Quest* and (I admit it) *Ken Griffey Baseball* (although only once, you understand, when the others were full).

△ Hair now a little ruffled, and fingers blistered from too much *GoldenEye* playing.



△ Banjos and Kazooies as far as the eye can see. That's America for you, eh?

Yes! I have actually played *Bomberman 64*. And the one-player mode looks superb.



Shigs Speaks!

Shigsy. The old Shigster. P'raps even 'Moto. Whatever name Nintendo's premier gaming asset goes under, he was at E3, and so was N64...



MIYAMOTO ON STARFOX 64

"In creating *Starfox 64*, we looked at many games we'd already made, like *Super Mario Brothers*, and decided to make a game with atmosphere, that's not so calm.

We have increased the number of

people and the amount of action and you can see this in the game. After *Space Invaders*, I'm afraid that shooting-style games have become games only for professionals, not beginners. I believe this game is satisfying for you, the professionals, and for your family and children.

"You can also see that we are mixing pre-rendered movies and real-time movies into games, like *Starfox*. There are 40 real-time movie cuts in the game, and

there are also more than 300 speech clips. I'm not here to make movies, I'm here to make video games, but games are becoming more realistic. In the future, we'll enable people to participate in real-time movies."

MIYAMOTO ON POCKET MONSTERS 64

"We haven't decided yet whether to introduce *Pocket Monsters* in the States. It looks like the game will arrive on Game Boy, but we can't say whether it'll arrive on the Nintendo 64. But we will debut a working version of the game at Shoshinkai this coming November, with a working version of the hardware.

"Compared to other N64 games, *Pocket Monsters* will be different because it'll be rewritable, first of all. But the game won't be the RPG that you are currently playing on your Game Boys. We can't reveal everything just yet, though."

MIYAMOTO ON F-ZERO 64

"At Shoshinkai this November we'll have a playable version of *F-Zero*. The game won't arrive in the US until 1998, we believe. But we're looking into the schedules of other games before we set a date."

MIYAMOTO ON YOSHI'S ISLAND 64

"The game will debut in Japan in November at the Shoshinkai show."

MIYAMOTO ON SUPER MARIO RPG 2

"It depends on how many Miyamotos there are!"

MIYAMOTO ON BANJO-KAZOOIE

"I'm very impressed with the game. Rare are a very professional company. I have no involvement at all with the game, though."





△ Wisps of smoke now coming from trainers, and bags weighed down with useless promo material.

Friday

Friday was to be third-party day. Sadly, I'm back playing *GoldenEye* within two minutes of arriving. After yesterday's getting-to-know sessions I'm now familiar with the ins and outs of Rare's Bond game. Picking up the sniper rifle I zoom in on my prey, line up the sights and then lug him in the head. Satisfying. But that really must be it. I must visit some other stands. I must.

I zip to a later level of *GoldenEye*, step onto an enemy frigate and amble around the boat, taking out soldiers and placing a tracking device on the helicopter, as advised by M. Then, dashing out along the side of the boat, I jump off into my dingy. Great. "What do you think of this?"



I turn to find Microphone once again standing beside me. He doesn't seem to recognise me and he's got a different cameraman. "Oh, it's terrific".

"Hey! You're English, right?"

The subsequent half an hour is simply too horrible to explain.

Wandering about at E3 is like going shopping on Oxford Street. You're forever bumping into someone or apologising for knocking someone with your bag. And there are always those people who walk along snail-like in front of you and then suddenly move in your direction when you're about to pass them. Consequently, progressing from stand to stand is a rather slow old business.

But with a little patience I end up at the Acclaim stand. It's enclosed in a fence with huge pictures of *Extreme G* and *Turok* on its side, and as I enter I hear the floor-thumping bass of *Extreme G*'s music.

There are three circular pillars with four machines on each dedicated to Probe's highly promising future bike-racer, but, unsurprisingly, it's hard to find a spare joystick. After waiting, though, I pounce, picking up the pad and enjoying a few minutes of face-contorting speed.

After a slice of that I leave *Extreme G*



△ *Extreme G* is well worth looking forward to – miles better than *Wipeout*, and incredibly fast.

and, brandishing my press pass about to all and sundry, nip behind the scenes. Inside there's Probe's *Ultra Soccer* – which, you may remember, we reported as having no publisher a couple of months back. Now, however, Acclaim have taken it in, although an entire year's work has been scrapped after the developers witnessed the beauty of *ISS64*. The early workings of an ice hockey game were also on show.

I move back outside, and from my left come the beginnings of a truly awful song: "With a K and an O and an N and an A and an M and an I!" Konami's stand is right next door, although after their in-stand songstress has blurted out the same song again, I consider leaving them alone for a while.

And so I do, deciding, in actual fact, to come back to them the very next day.

Saturday



Take a long, lingering look at Hybrid Heaven, here. It's going to be one of the finest N64 games of all.



Konami's stand looks like a castle. In the centre – as with all company stands – are 'business blocks' where suits congregate to talk about strategies and deal-forming. Konami's are more plush than most, with a two-storey, fully furnished set-up. I wander up to the desk, lifting my press pass up for the receptionist to see. "Yes?" she mutters, with a face that looks like it's been set in concrete. Indeed, I begin to worry that that if I look at her, I might turn into concrete, so I zip off and watch Konami's

1998 video strut its stuff.

Nagano Winter Olympics whizzes by in all its snowbound loveliness, and then for minutes I'm spellbound by Hybrid Heaven. Some people said it was going to be an RPG, while some reckoned it would

be more like *Resident Evil*. Whatever it is, the game looks glorious.

Then the song starts up again, so I have to leave.

Moving on down the show, I glance for horrific moments at *Hexen* and the slightly-better *Duke Nukem 64*, then stop off at the *San Francisco Rush* arcade machine. Great stuff. I'm quite happily playing on my own – going at my own speed – when some joker pops his head round the side of the cabinet and shouts into my ear, "Fancy a game?"

I cringe, trying to protect my ear drums from shattering. "Yeah, all right," I reply, resetting the game and watching him slide into the next cabinet. Then, behind me I can hear someone speaking through a microphone.

"...and so here we are at Midway, watching our very own Chris – who developed *San Francisco Rush* for the arcade and N64 – taking on..." – he suddenly appears beside me, squinting at my press badge – "...Tim Weeeeeevor from Futur Publications in the UK. Hey there, Tim!"

I smile. "Hey there." Then I think

about what I've just said. "Hey there?" "Hey there?"

"Ha! Don't worry, I'm not that good," says Chris, laughing. Suddenly I'm positive I can see horns growing from his head. And wasn't that a pitchfork he just laid down on the floor?

In fact, he's lying. He's very good. Indeed. He zooms off into the lead while I'm still working out which pedal's the accelerator, and on the third lap of five, when I'm just getting to grips with the steering wheel, he finishes. "And well done Chris! A real turn up for the books, there!" Hardly.

After being thoroughly humiliated, I cover my face and leg it out of Midway's stand (getting a quick gander at the N64 version on the way out) and return to *Lamborghini 64* at Titus. Which I play all on my own, with no chance of any embarrassment. Probably.

No matter how nervous you might be, sleep comes easily after a day at E3. "Snore."

