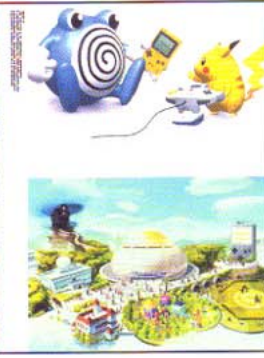
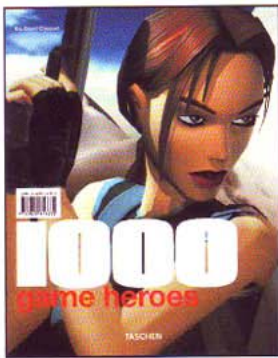


## book review



# HERO WORSHIP

Words: Lyndall Ezard

A thousand game characters at their jaw-droppingly glossiest.

### Don't like to read? Prefer to skim; dip; dive; escape... salivate?!

Welcome to David Choquet's *1000 Game Heroes*: the 'big' book of game characters for those 'who don't like to read books'.

You could spend hours on the internet searching for pictures, descriptions, collections. Tracking down histories of your favourite characters. Downloading text; clogging up hard drives; hanging around to burn CDs and print out pictures of varying qualities.

But, why? when Choquet has already done the hard slog for you, compiling the results for your premium enjoyment.

Who knew there were books like this? Books for us.

We love videogames because they allow us unparalleled access to the archetypes we fear, admire and desire; characters sourced from the age of mythology through to our own digital era. Demonic beasts such as the voodoo-inspired Shadowman. Goddesses like Rikku and D'arcy Stern. And the awesome warriors of *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter*.

These are creations born of new and rapidly developing technologies. From early arcade-style cabinets, hand-held electronics and TV plug-ins to modern-day PC and console games. From the vintage 2D pixel landscapes to the interactive complexity and intricate beauty of 3D virtual worlds.

But they are also icons to whom we are now closer than ever. Visual, experiential, personal and emotional. And, as such, Choquet's book is like a photo album for our generation. A compendium of digital friends with whom we have spent hours testing our skill, speed and savvy.

Turn the page—delve into one of the book's 10 style-based sections—and see who you recognise. Maybe it's Solid Snake, Rayman, Pokemon or Ulala. Even Pac-Man is there; no longer just the jagged-edged, 2D ghost-munching circle, but a giggle-inducing 3D version who's sprouted arms and legs.

Don't expect this to be a hold-your-hand, guided tour, though. Choquet has seen to it that entries are labelled by name only in the rear index, under game title. Perhaps it is intentional, adding something of a hide-and-seek element—a bit of highbrow mystery to whet one's curiosity. Indeed, the delicate and concise text Choquet uses, and the fact that each entry is repeated in French and German, merely adds to the book's sophisticated allure.

Gaming buffs and aspirants to the industry will also love the amazingly candid introductions to each section: personal narratives that explore the

historical, technological and artistic aspects of game hero creation, written by celebrated international game designers, such as Frederick Raynal (*Alone in the Dark*), Naughty Dog's Jason Rubin and, of course, Shigeru Miyamoto (Mario's creator).

But, ultimately, it is the stunning artistic visions collated within this book that make it unforgettable.

Taken together the sheer density and diversity of the artworks is a testament to the creative accomplishments of the industry and the imagination and stylistic prowess of game creators. The final images of technicolour perfection are beautiful and intriguing. But even the original embryonic hand-drawn sketches and wireframe models for games such as *Neverwinter Nights*, *Nomad Soul*, *Half-Life*, *Myst: Exile* and *Project Eden*—complete with arrowed comments and creative notes—are utterly compelling. A sheer delight for all artists and an echo of the wider cultural influences which converge in this ultimately playful medium of digital gaming.

But wait. Let me hint, too, at other pleasures hiding between the covers. Say, the section on 'Sexy Heroes', where you'll come across the ultimate digital pin-up girl, *Tomb Raider*'s Lara Croft.

The section is replete with its share of nubile heroines who look decidedly hyper-female (lots of big breasts), but act all macho (go get 'em girls!).

Indeed, sexuality in gaming is a fascinating and complex dimension. Is this really the extent of the digital harem though, Mr Choquet? Hmm. Disappointing for those seeking challenging analysis and diversity; perfect if you're just looking for a relaxing and titillating read with an overabundance of eye candy.

Of course, to be fair, this is what Choquet's compendium is all about: providing a visually stunning tribute to videogame characters as images of beauty. Something he achieves without argument.

Consider this a hardback magazine; the ultimate videogame art folio; a must-have keepsake. A pastiche of powerful and sensual videogame nostalgia, orgasmically lush with illustrations. Impeccably organised, indexed and printed. Portable, flickable, and, without a doubt, eminently lust-worthy.

As such, only a mint condition copy will do. (Certainly not a dog-eared edition borrowed from either friend or library.) Leaving only two options for videogame fans: buy it, or forever dwell in the greenest envy.