G-POLICE: WEAPONS OF JUSTICE – Q&A

Interview with Neil Duffield, Lead Programmer and Nick Harper, Lead Designer, Psygnosis South West Studio

Q.   Why did you decide to do a sequel?

A.   The response to G-Police, both from consumers and from the press, was extremely positive, so it was a straightforward decision to make a follow-on game.   There were also many gameplay features which we wanted to put into G-Police but didn't have the time, so doing a sequel gave us the opportunity to add all those elements.

Q.   How does the story progress from GP1 to G-Police: Weapons of Justice?

A.   The story of G-Police: Weapons of Justice commences ten days after the end of the first game.   The war between G-Police and Nanosoft was ended by the destruction of the Nanosoft cruiser, but naturally the GP resources are depleted, making them susceptible to large-scale attacks.   Small pockets of remaining Nanosoft resistance have formed organised crime syndicates who are taking advantage of the struggling G-Police operation.   Fortunately, help is on its way, in the form of Marines who were sent to assist with the now-resolved Nanosoft situation.   The Marines make a great difference, and slowly the situation seems to be getting under control.   But then things start to go wrong…

Q.   What do you feel were the weaknesses in the original game?

A.   The biggest weakness of the first game was the difficulty curve.   Most people managed to struggle through missions one to five but then hit a wall at mission six, when the game took a leap in difficulty.   On analysis we also found two elements which caused frustration.   The first was the complexity of the flight model.   While we live in a 3D world, playing a game in full 3D, with a vehicle which can travel almost anywhere, is far more confusing for games players than you'd imagine.   The second problem came from the depth-cueing.   Because the game's complex AI really pushed the PlayStation's CPU to its limits, the graphic engine took a slight hit, creating a depth cue which was closer than we'd hoped.   As a result many inexperienced pilots found themselves colliding with the scenery, both confusing and frustrating during battles.   Naturally all these problems have been cured, and improved, for the sequel.

Q.   What will be different in the sequel?

A.   We have had far more time to fine-tune the missions, ensuring the pacing and difficulty curve is just right this time around.   Our goal was to constantly teach the player new tricks, while maintaining a challenge which would keep them interested, but not frustrated.   Feedback from focus groups, constant playtesting and tweaking, and experience indicate we've got it spot on this time.

The depth of field has also been extended due to an echo-locator device attached to all player vehicles.   With this the player can see further through the gloom of the Callisto environment, making navigation much easier and smoother.   We have a cleaner flight model for the player, with an intuitive control system which is much easier to learn but still as versatile as that in GP1.

One of the best new features, however, are the three new vehicles which the player gets to try out.   There's an armoured car, the Rhino; an advanced prototype mech, the Raptor, and finally a space ship, the Corsair, for battles which occur beyond the Callisto environment.

The entire landscape has been redesigned from the ground up, creating a much more consistent, believable world, bursting with the usual elements which made G-Police so alive.

Q.   If I had G-Police 1 why would I want to buy the sequel?
A.   The control method is easier, the missions are more detailed, more involved and more fun, there are more weapons and there are more vehicles to try out.   G-Police: Weapons of Justice is a complete sequel, not just a few new missions with the odd gameplay tweak.

Q.   Are there any of the original members of the G Police team on the sequel?
A.   Three quarters of the team worked on the original, ensuring the enthusiasm and experience of the first game was carried over to this title.   For example, the artists were working on new game shapes and designs before G-Police was even in the shops.

Q.   Are there any technical breakthroughs with the sequel?
A.   Absolutely!   The mech vechicle, the Raptor, is a walking, running, jumping, human-controlled robot.   Its legs use a highly optimal inverse-kinematics solution to enable it to walk up slopes and strafe at any angle.   It's targeting system is pretty special, too, but we don't want to spoil the surprise for anyone who will be playing the game.

All the sections in space are in the PlayStations hi-resolution mode, providing a crisp, detailed environment for the player.   This entire section of code was brand new for the sequel.   We have, however, applied our city-building techniques and experience to create some fantastic space-based scenes, featuring massive battle cruisers, enormous mining platforms, and dense asteroid fields.   It's quite an intense experience.

Another major breakthrough was the redesign and coding of the game's lighting model, providing a more realistic feel which enables things such as night-vision, lighting failures and warning sirens to be activated easily and realistically.

Q.   What is the team's background experience to date?

A.   Gavin Whitlock (lead coder) previously worked on Assault Rigs (PSX,PC) and G-Police (PSX,PC).

Andy McCabe (coder) previously worked on Little Divil (Various), Split Realities (Saturn) and G-Police (PSX,PC).

Tony Marshall (coder) previously worked on G-Police (PC).

Michael Devereux (coder) previously worked on Die Hard Trilogy (Saturn) and Destruction Derby 2 (Saturn).

Stuart Wheeler (Designer) was a level designer on G-Police.

Graham Sergeant (Designer) was a game tester on G-Police and Psygnosis' pirate arcade game, Overboard. Some of his GP2 levels are the best in the game.

Stuart Maine (Designer) is fairly new to the game's industry, but is an incredibly talented level designer.   He's a Quake level design guru, creating the Quake levels for "Escape from Quake".

Rob Osborne (Lead Artist) has also worked on Psygnosis' PC flight simulator, Nations.

Claire Cooper (Artist) previously worked on G-Police and Jonah Lomu Rugby.

Iain Thody (Artist) previously worked on G-Police.   Iain also did the concept art for G-Police: Weapons of Justice, and many of his sketches can be seen in the G-Police database accessible within the game.

Trevor Slater (Artist) is the daddy of the team, having previously worked on F15 Strike Eagle, Tin Head, Titans, Road Warriors, Tetris (Amiga), Sub Wars 2010, Assault Rigs & G-Police. Trevor's texturing skills are unparalleled in the games industry.

Q.   Are there any new members in the team and what do they bring to the game?

A.   Mike Devereux brings his physics background, and low-level programming skills, while the new designers (Stuart Maine and Graham Sergeant) have brought fresh ideas and gameplay experience to spice up the levels.

Q.   Will G-Police: Weapons of Justice have as much FMV ?

A.   While GP: WOJ does have spectacular intro and end-game FMV sequences, all the mid-game cut-scenes are created using in-game graphics and real-time movies.   This provides a smooth transition between game missions and cut-scenes, while showcasing the exceptional work of the GP2 art team.

Q. **Will G-Police: Weapons of Justice be starting from where GP1 left off or like Colony Wars are you jumping so far into the future that everything is different?**

A. GP2 will start where GP1 left off, 10 days or so after the Nanosoft cruiser was destroyed.

Q. **Is G-Police: Weapons of Justice catering for the GP1 fans or are you trying to capture a wider audience by changing some aspects of the game i.e., easier controls ?**

A. While G-Police: Weapons of Justice will cater for fans of the original by proving heavy doses of dogfighting, special effects and exploration, the controls have been improved upon to make the game easier to get into. There will still be room for people to develop their flying expertise, and perform amazing manoeuvres, but beginners will find GP2 a lot easier to master.

Q. **How long exactly did it take you to produce G-Police: Weapons of Justice?**

A. In all, G-Police: Weapons of Justice took 18 months to produce, which we admit is quite a long time for a sequel. Because many members of the original game continued with the second title, we wanted to include all the features in GP2 that we didn't have time to put in GP1. The team wanted to make G-Police: Weapons of Justice a new game in its own right rather than just a missions disk. We hope everyone will agree that the wait will have been worth it.

Q. **Are there any new features/improvements in terms of the flying environment?**

A. The game environment has taken a great leap graphically, with the domes consistent and well-defined throughout the game. GP1 was always inspired by the imagery of Blade Runner, but we believe this game captures that mood much better. There are also elements of Mega City One from the Judge Dredd universe in there, too. The team's intention was to create a much better sense of place, where everything looked as though it had a purpose, rather than just being plonked on the floor. In other words, rather than create buildings just to fly around we've pushed the graphical style to ultimately give more impact to the player as they explore the world.

In addition, the city environment is much more complicated now, with interconnecting buildings and things to fly through. Not only does this create a graphically spectacular world, but it also provides the player with areas to fly through and around, challenging their flying skills and enabling tactics to be developed around the scenery.

Q. **Why have this new Raptor weapon as well as the car and Corsair? Why is it on legs?**

A. The Raptor was an opportunity to add an exciting new twist on the G-Police gameplay without detracting too greatly from the feel of the original game.

When using the Raptor, the player is essentially on the ground, creating a radical change of perspective as they view, and patrol, the city. To ensure this feeling isn't too restrictive, the Raptor has the ability to leap from building to building, and it can also glide down to earth, enabling large expanses to be traversed with relative ease.

The Raptor will appeal to fans of mech games without compromising the original intentions of G-Police.   We don't wont to forget the fans of the first game.

The Raptor is also an excuse for more firepower and guns.   It should have the same menace and destructive potential as that well known law enforcer, ED-209, from the movie Robocop.   Of course the G-Police Raptor, as opposed to ED-209, is controlled by the player.

Q.   Why have the car?   Being in a car is very different to flying around a city.
A.   Exactly.   The car puts the player in a vulnerable position, thereby requiring a different approach to playing the mission.   In contrast to flying around and being the predator you are now in a precarious position on the streets.   It's also great fun to race around the streets looking for trouble, especially if you activate the car's turbo boost option!

Q.   Why put so many different things in to the sequel?
A.   As the first G-Police came to a close there were many ideas and concepts which the team were excited about, but were unable to include.   When we were given the opportunity of working on a sequel it was the perfect time to design and include these features into the second game.   While this approach does take a bit longer, we wanted to be fair to the team as well as the fans.   Mission disks are a bit of a lame excuse for sequels, in our opinion.

Q.   In what ways are the levels in G-Police: Weapons of Justice different from GP1?
A.   G-Police: Weapons of Justice has been designed to train the player as they progress through the game, rather than force them to play laborious training levels in order to stand a chance.   The new approach provides the player with both an exciting, real environment to practice, and a comfortable difficulty to curve to encourage without defeating.

The levels have much more things for the player to do.   Just as things are looking sweet an unexpected twist will occur, once again throwing the player into turmoil.

Finally, the in-game cut scenes have been used to advance the plot, show enemies arriving, or indicate any major threat to the player.   It enables the mission to be explained without requiring the player to use too much lateral thought.

Q.   What was the motivation for doing a sequel?
A.   Although G-Police was a success we felt there were several key weaknesses we needed to address.

The most obvious was the limited draw distance.   We have now extended the players awareness of the environment by adding a scanner that penetrates the fogging.   The addition of a wireframe indicator that draws distant objects that were previously unseen

now gives the player advance warning of what is ahead.   This has greatly improved the gameplay, making flying easier. It also looks great!

Another problem was the learning curve. A lot of people who played G-Police said they found the controls tricky to get to grips with; unfortunately a side effect of a game which provides 360 degrees of freedom. The challenge was to make the game easier to get to grips with without resorting to on rails gameplay – freedom of movement is what makes G-Police a peerless title on the PSX.   We have now reduced the amount of controls the player has to learn as well as adding an automatic decrease speed function; this makes the throttle of your gunship similar to that of a racing car; you come off the gas and you slow down.   This new set up is altogether more intuitive for the beginner as well as adding the challenge of a new control system for G-Police players to master.

Q.   Are there any new player vehicles for G-Police: Weapons of Justice or are you sticking with the vector thrust Gunship?

A.   The Havoc and the Venom from the first outing are still there for 16 of the 30 missions. These extremely versatile gunships have earned themselves far too much respect in the colonial outposts to be replaced just yet.

We now have five different player vehicles with specially tailored missions to suit each vehicle's unique attribute.   To ensure the controls remain intuitive throughout, a generic control system will apply to each vehicle; for example, pressing the X button to accelerate will be the same for all vehicles and so on.

For this outing the player will also be in charge of an armoured personnel carrier (rather than just escorting dignitaries like in G-Police).   The player will be surprised with this APC – it's a cross between the APC from Aliens and a Lamborghini – excellent for getting your ground troops to the skirmish on time!

There's the mech, the Raptor, a powerful beast of a machine which really turns the tables for the player, and finally the Corsair, a craft which takes the game out of the domes and into the vastness of space.   All five vehicles are pretty spectacular.

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Developer: Psygnosis **Genre**: Action **No. of Players:** 1 Player
Peripherals: Analog Controller (DUAL SHOCK), Memory Card