

Neo-Geo.com exclusive interview: SNK Playmore Japan!



By Massimiliano “~Max 330 Mega~” Macri

Since '92, as one of the first NeoGeo collectors in Italy, and later on, as a member of neo-geo.com, I always wondered about the chance of establishing a direct contact with SNK, as I do believe “foreign” players and collectors shouldn't be afraid to ask, afterall... we all share the same passion.

While preparing my last trip to Japan then, I thought it was time to try and contact SNK Playmore, indeed they were really happy to make this public interview for the forum, so I proposed to Shawn a special on neo-geo.com.

Then finally, on 26 December 2008 (kind of “Christmas at SNK” mood!) at the Esaka HQ, I was granted the access inside SNK building, guided by Yoshihito Koyama (General Manager Overseas Marketing Dept. , taking the role of “spokesman” for SNK) and Adam Laatz (Overseas Marketing Dept.), two of the most kind and professional people I ever met, who spent time with me introducing the president, the staff, bringing me around the various departments and even letting me take some pictures, while explicitly asking me to publish only certain ones.

As any really strict environment of a japanese business company requires, they have rules about taking pictures to people and objects, and also the content of this document needed to be approved by SNKP P.R. Dept. both before (which questions) and after.

As result of this, the part about KOFXII we made, needed to be postponed (in “Part II”), as it's still a crucial moment for the game, at present date still to be released in the home market and newborn in the arcade.

Anyway, I'm now really proud I can finally publish this **official** document, which I hope everybody will enjoy, looking at this not as the last one but hopefully the first (^_-).



SNK HQ building, Esaka.



HQ entrance, the very same of the "old times"!



Inside the elevator!



SNK staff, at 7th and non "top secret" floor.



Yoshihito Koyama, actual oldest employee ('91) and G.M. at Overseas Marketing Dept.



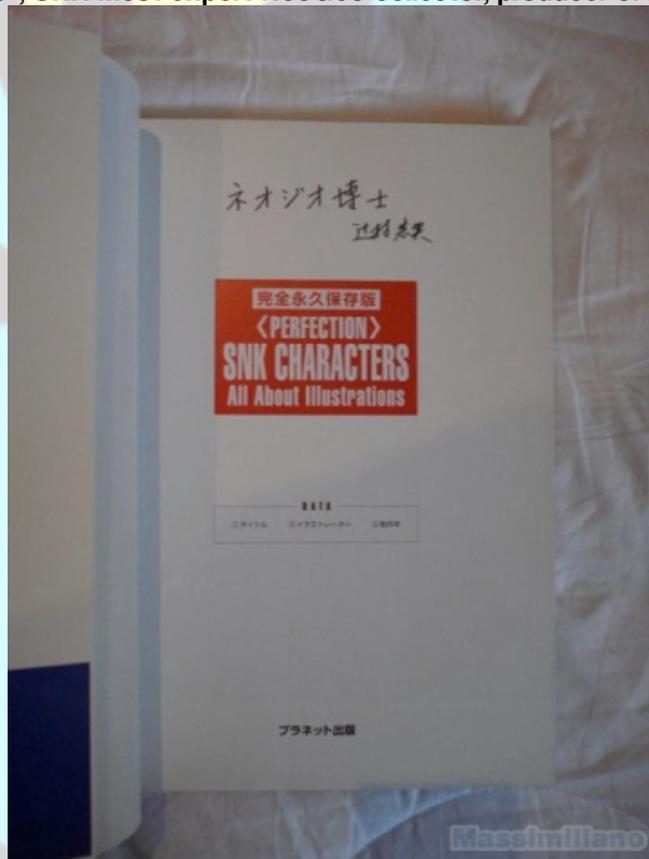
Conference room, (note NGCD on the bottom!)



Company products trough time, now not only NeoGeo carts, but also various merchandise and of course other platform's games.



“NeoGeo Hakase”, SNK most expert NeoGeo collector, producer of later KOF games...



... kind enough to sign one of the books we discussed about! (^_^)



Nearby Esaka station, the places which inspired KOF '98 and '96 backgrounds, last "survivors", after NeoGeo Land closure.



SNK building seen by train passing Esaka station.

PART I

26 December 2008, Esaka, SNK Playmore headquarters, h14:00:



First of all thanks for your kindness Koyama-san, it's your last day of work before the holidays, and you found the time to make this interview.



You're welcome, we are always happy when we can be in contact with NeoGeo and SNK fans. We know neo-geo.com very well, Shawn and the thousands of users of the forum which share our very same passion for gaming.



Thanks, our interest toward SNK has raised even more since two news items have occurred, the decision of a new president, and the upcoming release of KOF XII, so I couldn't think a better moment to arrange this interview!



Yes, the new president Mr. Hosoya has been the manager in charge for the Game Business since 2003, this October he became president and took control of all of SNKP activities (which counts for Pachislot and Mobile businesses as well).



So he is an experienced manager in the games business, good, we all welcome him!



Yes, he is fully aware of the games business panorama, and is taking the lead in a new journey for our company.



What about the actual staff composition? How much of our "beloved" SNK staff is still working on new projects?



We actually have about 2/3 of the staff hired around 2001, working on R&D, Illustration, Sound, Debugging departments and so on, but also staff from before as well, for example I was hired in '91.



(!!)... so, it means you are the oldest employee in SNK!



yes.

[laughs]



And what about the website "Contents Creation" vision, and company effort distribution on pachislot, mobile content and gaming?



Actually our business is splitted in three areas, and around 75% of our resources are absorbed by the pachislot division.

The reason is that the value of every machine is roughly in the thousands of dollars, and it's sure to be our principal gain from the market, so we put our best effort in this area, also in terms of IP.

The mobile division actually is facing a new market, and it can be considered also as a laboratory for distributing contents.

Furthermore, we are facing the truth that packaged software is being replaced by online distribution, as many gaming companies can provide a channel for downloading games to their platform.

The gaming business is our identity, and we want to continue making games like SNK always did, now more than ever, so I feel we are quite unique in this market.



About the arcade market, what we should expect in the future, mostly concentrated in Japan, but also in foreign countries?



Unfortunately I must say that in Europe there is no market actually, and in America our small presence is relegated to maybe a few shopping centers / arcades.

On the other hand, in Japan, we are practically one of the few gaming brands still making 2d games, (ie, ARC with BlazBlue on the same Taito Type X2 platform), so we are putting great effort on being protagonists in the arcades, as we can count on our unique content.



Now that Taito's Type X2 platform is the most powerful platform ever used for a SNKP game, does it means that we will again witness an enthusiastic race for the fighting games supremacy?



We made a 2d game in this day and age, and even if we could be considered "crazy", we are really proud of making games like we always did. We are sure our fan base will agree with that, and that it will probably increase. We really like Taito Type X2 cause it is PC based, and makes simple arcade-perfect porting possible to platforms with similar technology.



Any future development for the arcade or home market, plans to include other types of games? (IE: shooting).



Well indeed... maybe we could be planning a KOF Shooting Game.



???



...

[laughs]



Seriously, we would like to create a variety of games, but resources right now are busy on our core project development. We have spent 3 years with the development of one of our last game, and of course we have other ideas for future games, but we need to watch each step carefully as we move forward.



What about home console / portable markets, both Japan and foreign countries?



As I said, we want to make stronger the paradigm "first at the Arcade, then at home", giving home users the chance to enjoy additional content, made specially for them. We actually look at downloadable content, digital distribution with extreme interest, as it could give us the chance to reach foreign markets better.



Downloadable content and foreign markets...but which platform?



For example PC platforms. It could be a way, but there are others of course.



And what about future plans for the Metal Slug series on both arcade and home? We will see exclusive titles like the DS one again?



Actually Metal Slug 7 was an exception. We would like to concentrate towards arcade first and then home also for the Metal Slug series.



So you mean a completely dot-painted 2d slug, with no 3d or else?



Actually, I can say we sure would like to put the same effort we spent on KOF XII for the next Metal Slug, yes.



Nice to hear!

[Laughs]



Any plans for the old neogeo legacy, composed of many storylines, some not yet finished, and hundreds of characters: will new original games / sequels that might see the light? Especially series that were already discussed in the past like: 餓狼 2 (Garou 2), Magician Lord 2, 幕末浪漫 月華の剣士3 (Last Blade 3).



We are fully aware that our fans are waiting for many of our sagas to continue. We won't leave behind our stories and characters, as they are our real treasure, but as I said before, unfortunately we do not have unlimited resources, so actually we need to concentrate on current projects.

But we can say we are not short on ideas for the future, of course.



Will we ever see the return of the "グーマント" mascot on merchandise and/or games? There are still people who remember him!



!??? Gemanto!? [laughs]

hmmm.. I think he will never come back again... sorry.



(-_-!)



Is there a chance that SNKP will use the intellectual property / copyrights of old NeoGeo prototypes, already developed but unreleased, proposing some sort of "ultimate anthology"?



Well, unfortunately, many games were developed by third parts, and this makes things difficult, as they are not under our copyrights.

Even regular NeoGeo games like "Flying Power Disk" (Data East) or, one I personally like, "Puzzle Bobble" (Taito), cannot be proposed in anthologies (Note: Sammy too).

We bought IP from Nazca and ADK, so possibly we could proceed in some areas.



Ouch! But what about SNK or ADK related prototypes?



We still would like to continue making new anthologies, but all I can say is that we think about our games without timeline restrictions. For example we have considered pre/post NeoGeo titles as well.



Thanks, we really appreciated the chance you have given us today.



Thank you as well, we are always grateful for our fan base.

END OF PART I

©2009 Massimiliano Macri, SNK Playmore Japan and neo-geo.com, all right reserved, reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited.