"METROCIDE"

METRO CITY SURVIVAL/TOURISM GUIDE

Contains:
- Hints and Tips
- Profanity
- Short Stories
- Making-of Articles

ARMS-CO

ENCO

ROVERMATIC

WARNING: STOP! Or you will be turned into a loaf of toast.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the sprawling mass of pretension and bullshit known as Metro City. In this city, anything your little heart desires can be found.

As long as what you desire is a painful and certain death, that is.

We hope you enjoy your brief stay in Metro City, and try not to trip over the corpses.

CLUB

Raindrops careened from the sky, smashed into the awning outside Black Annex, and those that didn't then slide off it on their own were instead shook off by the loud bass roaring out of the club.

Rax stood, inspecting his own hair in the custom-built mirrors that stood on the wall outside the club. He tilted his head this way and that, admiring the way the new Spritz hair wax made his hair shimmer different colors in the rain.

A woman wearing custom leather clothes exactly a half-size too small for her approached, exaggerating the swing of her hips.

"Oh, hey, man," he said to her, huffing on his e-Cigarette.

"How's it going?" Tyff replied, pulling out her regular tobacco-filled kind.

"Oh, you know. Same old. My boss tried to fuck me yesterday."

"Did you let him?"

"I'm not into buff guys, really?" Rax said, like he wasn't sure whether it was a question or a statement.

"Too bad, he's tres fuckable," Tyff said, lighting up her cigarette with a lighter stylised like it's a little blow torch.

The flame was a custom job, designed to burn down instead of up and auto-matching the color of its flame to the hue of whatever she was wearing.

This time, it chose a nice deep purple, bordering on mauve.

"You know, you should really, like, try these new e-Cigs, Tyff. These ones? They change flavor as you smoke them."

"Yeah, but they're not the real thing, and umm... I'm, like, a fan of being authentic," she said, straightening part of her top where it was bunching up and failing to correctly show off the work the auto-surgeon had done last week to make her stomach wash-board flat.

"Your loss, dudette," Rax said, just before his jaw disconnected from the rest of his head in a spray of blood.

A look of surprise appeared on his eyes as he the e-Cig, tip glowing a stylish orange, fell from its position a few inches from where his lips had once been into a puddle on the ground.

He fell down.

It was about then that Tyff noticed the figure in the slate-colored trench coat running by the wall of the club, probably in a hurry to avoid whatever had just damaged Rax's designer face.

"WARNING," a police drone droned. "A violent citizen is nearby."

A second shot, of the same variety as the kind which had taken down Rax, wizzed by Tyff's head, forcing her to drop her cigarette and duck closer to the ground.

The drone slid along the street, a dozen other club patrons out there to be seen smoking near Black Annex's stylish logo scattering as it passed by, continuing to shoot its blaster at the figure.

One shot knocked out the 'a' in the club's famous logo, and another ripped an arm off an underage clubber, the limb and its associated viscera skidding to a halt in front of Tyff.

Finally, two more cop drones and three dead or dismembered club denizens later, and Tyff opened her eyes.

The ground was red from all the human detritus, and her cigarette lighter had been wedged in the 'on' position, helpfully selecting a matching tone of deeper red to fit in.

Tyff stood up, stepping over Rax and removing some jaw fragments from her cleavage and flicking them aside.

"I fucking hate Saturdays," she sighed, walking off home.

WELCOME!

Welcome to this, the Metrocide manual. In it you will find:

- Background information about the world of Metrocide.
- Some nice little vignettes giving you a window into some little-known aspects of life in Metro City.
- Hints and tips for playing the game.
- Trivia about the game itself.

And, finally...

- Making-of information.

We hope you enjoying being killed in Metrocide. I know we do!

METRO CITY GUIDE

This section will tell you about the history of Metro City – particularly the parts that will affect trench-coat wearing professional hit-persons.

If any of this history seems internally inconsistent, we encourage you to create your own elaborate fan-theories to explain them.

-- Rohan Harris, Programmer

THE CITY

Following the Friendly Security Act of 2368 (brought to you by Weapon-Tech), Metro City saw its citizenry become much safer and happier. Police drones were given access to the city's CCTV networks and arrests skyrocketed, with the majority of the city's lower income population having had at least one (usually fatal) brush with the law by the time they'd reached their teenage years.

Life was good like this for a long time until an Underground Resistance began to form. A network of seedy criminal lowlifes began to infest the city using advanced hacking prowess and EMP bombs. Police drones were largely helpless against such technology, and further measures were passed to ensure that they could effectively police the population, instigating 'One Strike' rules against offenses such as murder or illegally parking in handicapped spaces. This allowed severe punishment for first offenders, a 'Zero

Tolerance' policy on minor but very important laws and largely replacing all police activity on the ground with its new unmanned, airborne army, Metro City became something of a battleground.

It was these laws being passed which gave rise to the 'Trench Coat Riots' of 2376, which would see both the police and resistance be largely decimated by countless battles in the sky and on the streets.

The widespread replication of limbs and similar technology led to the introduction into society of cyborgs whose status as 'human' was questionable and had significant ramifications for the value placed on human life. Indeed, mass killings ceased to make front page news as the technology required to 'repair' people if they were treated quickly enough (or their minds had been recently backed up) meant that many otherwise fatal killings simply saw someone walking around the next day with new superior organs and other vital parts. Resistance operatives and (it was rumored) some government officials took to disposing of bodies in sewers and rivers as a result, ensuring that they'd be dead just long enough to avoid any chance of resurrection.

More affluent parts of town were significantly better patrolled in the aftermath of the Riots, and the government began to instigate less orthodox measures. Bounty hunters, hit-people, gang members and other ~~human scum~~ morally fluid entrepreneurs were actually considered for contract work on the government's behalf, and police drone use was permitted to escort some richer folks around town.

Now, Metro City is a metropolis living off the remnants of former glories, still retaining much of its political power and maintaining a stranglehold on its own inhabitants and those of the entire nation through campaigns of 'security and safety' in the form of militarized police drones. Resistance is strong, however, and there is much money to be made in the business of killing.

And if you aren't in the business of killing, just make sure you back up your brain daily.

(We recommend the Brain-n-Go MKIV, and you can get a discount using the code "METROCIDE" at their online store.)

METRO CITY DISTRICTS

Metro City is divided into three major districts, which are increasingly large, armed and well-patrolled. You will find multiple contacts in each district, so if a crime scene gets too hot, try fleeing to a different part of town and lie low there for a while...

Downtown

Come visit downtown Metro City, where neon lights compete for dominance in a majestic skyline. Mag-lev trains shoot past, police drones circle overhead to keep the peace and the fiery and passionate citizens amble below, behaving well in their pursuit of happiness. Any citizen up to no good in this area of town will find ample places where bad behaviour might go unnoticed. Countless sewers dot the roads and alleyways, the city canal flows past the Southern tip and some of the city's more dubious, previously lively hot spots can be found in between high rise office

blocks, apartment buildings and night clubs.

The Docks

Formerly the home of Metro City's Neo-Grunge movement, The Docks now finds itself largely abandoned as a port for major water traffic, instead being used by smugglers and thieves as a rallying point where they can gather in secret. In response, Metro City Police (inc) has responded by littering the streets there with security checkpoints which scan for illegal weapons. Any would-be criminals will have to ditch whatever weapons they're carrying before trying to proceed into locked off areas, lest they attract the ire of the city's oh so friendly police drones.

Hilldale

Undoubtedly the highlight of anyone's visit to Metro City who can afford to go there, Hilldale shows the best the city has to offer. Chain link fences and security checkpoints helpfully keep the downtrodden masses at bay from fortress suburbia, while the Hilldale Mall remains on of the most vibrant and outstanding buildings in the entire city. Town Hall is also located here, although the majority of those who work there catch private vehicles from rooftop landing pads rather than traverse on foot, because the rich are always snobby and shun physical activity that isn't in either a bedroom or a gym.

Even in the richest part of town, where almost everyone is armed to the teeth just as a precaution, it still pays to be cautious as ever.

Gang Member: Rod Yarnell

CITIZENRY & STUFF

Ahh... people. Can't live with 'em, can't shoot them and throw their bodies in a sewer.

Oh, wait...

Anyway, not that we like to generalize, but here's a general overview of the kind of people, robots and other random things you'll find sitting, wandering through or flying over the streets of Metro City.

Civilians

The inhabitants of Metro City are nervous wrecks owing to years of lawlessness pressed up hard against tyranny – the absolute worst of both worlds.

Civilians' behavioral traits vary, and you've no way of knowing how any given member of the public will react to your uncouth antics. Blessed with a fight, flight or freeze set of responses (among other quirks), the civilians will sometimes pull out a weapon and try and

shoot your dead for you misdeeds, panic and not move out of fear, or run screaming for the hills.

Those who choose to try and fight you may opt not to if they're unarmed. Those who are panicked might pull a gun out of the sheer chaos of the situation. Those who run away with eyeball symbols above their heads might call the cops once they've made it safely home and are out of harm's way.

The bottom line is this: you never quite know if being seen committing your dirty deeds will spell certain death or a minor inconvenience – so play it safe or be prepared to face the consequences!

Gang Members

These nasty pieces of work are just like regular civilians but are flagged since they carry much more cash than your average mook, and are much more likely to be gun-wielding aggressive psychopaths – like you! Tread carefully around these ones, or if you happen to encounter one while you're on your way to or from part of the city and no one else is around, that wallet may be worth a quick side-kill!

Cops

These devastating police drones circle overhead and are known for killing indiscriminately when fecal matter meets the fan. They have floodlights which tell you what mode they're currently in. Pay close attention to the colors to get an indication of what to expect from these hovering monsters!

White – On Patrol: The cop is roaming the skies waiting to respond to a call or witness a crime and spring into action.

Yellow – Patrolling a Crime Scene: The cop is hovering around the scene of a grizzly murder or some other such area where things have gone pear-shaped, waiting to scan any passing citizen for illegal weapons, and probably wistfully dreaming about their day jobs as toasters.

Blue – Scanning: The cop's attention is currently focused on the person it is scanning, and will likely look for another target to scan soon.

Orange – Looking For You: You have been identified, either by a cop, camera or civilian and this drone is currently on the warpath looking for you. If you enter its line of sight it will shoot to kill. Avoid at all costs!

Red – Pursuing Suspect: Whether it's you or another unfortunate individual, a red cop drone is currently shooting to kill. If you're on the receiving end,

make sure you either have an EMP Bomb or enough cash to call Tom at a blue call box. Only the luckiest and most cunning of citizens has ever outrun a cop which was in pursuit.

Cameras

These pesky scanners litter Metro City waiting to report any wrongdoing to cops at a moment's notice. In a pinch you can still commit crimes in front of one as long as you're done with your business quick-smart and are on your way. There is no grey area here like there is with civilians - if a camera spots you do anything wrong, your ID will be sent to the police immediately and you'll likely have only a few seconds to make your egress.

Checkpoints

While concealed smaller weapons will escape their notice, larger ones like the shotgun and rifle will be detected if you get anywhere near these huge monuments to tyranny. Their lights will flash red and the cops will be on you inside of five seconds if you make the mistake of wandering through one while heavily armed. Be sure to stash any cumbersome and noticeable weapons nearby before venturing through one.

Hunters

Metro City has a problem. And that problem is a trench-coat wearing individual traipsing about the place, taking out certain key targets for money.

And no, we're not talking about you.

Try not to attract too much attention - or you never know who might come after you.

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PLAYING THE GAME

In this section, I'm going to learn all about how to play the game "properly" from the game's lead designer.

This will hopefully make me feel better about not being very good at it.

-- Rohan Harris, Programmer

WEAPONRY

Weaponry is totally awesome! It's fun, useful, and make great gifts for your nieces & nephews. Thus, we thought it important to give you a handy guide to the weaponry and violence-related tools available to you in Metrocide.

M-7 "Little One" Blaster

Oh, sure, sure. I know what you're thinking. "But that's a lady's gun!" Well let me tell you something: put your gender essentialism and dangerously deep-seated masculinity issues aside for one moment – the M-7 is a bloody fine weapon. And here's why...

Blasters are legal to carry on Metro City's streets... but much like the old West, they cannot be concealed. This, combined with a government-enforced 'warm-up' time to ensure no sudden surprises befall would-be victims prevent rampant killing from infecting

the city once again. Be wary, however, since a 25 credit fine will be attached to any concealment of the weapon, and drawing it to fire in public is still a crime.

X-8 Shotgun

The weapon of choice for most of the modern gangs of Metro City, the Shotgun retains the effectiveness of its elder brethren while still, somehow, being the noisiest thing on the market. It was outlawed for citizens who couldn't afford a license in 2369, but rather than reduce the count on the street, it simply pushed those which were already out there into black market circulation. A decent fine is still attached for anyone found carrying one, and the weapon is confiscated on sight by police.

HINT: WITH NO WARM-UP TIME, THIS IS AN INSTANT KILL FOR ONE OR EVEN TWO PEOPLE (HANDY FOR TAKING OUT ANY WOULD-BE LONE WITNESSES), BUT BEWARE OF YOUR LINE OF SIGHT TO OTHER PEDESTRIANS WHEN FIRING, AS THEY'LL HEAR THIS THING A MILE OFF.

RASC Rifle

Nobody knows what "RASC" stands for. Rumor has it that even its designers "just thought it sounded fuckin' sick, man".

This long-range military-grade rifle has the twin benefits of being able to shoot with perfect accuracy over long distances and being rather quiet. It can also fire quite rapidly, although it reduces in accuracy quickly when shot too clumsily or while moving. It came into vogue for professional hired killers in the lead-up to the Riots, who saw it as a means to be a scalpel in situations where the whole city was a broadsword, turning its silent treatment into easy money for opportunistic entrepreneurs.

It also looks very nice sitting above your mantel, next to your White Rhino horn collection.

HINT: REMAINING PERFECTLY STILL FOR A MOMENT WILL INCREASE THE RIFLE'S ACCURACY TO PIXEL-PERFECT, AND IT HAS A VERY LONG RANGE. BE JUST OUT OF SIGHT AND IT'S A GREAT WAY TO TAKE OUT TARGETS WITHOUT EVER FINDING YOURSELF IN THE SPOTLIGHT,

Maverick Pistol

This gun was favored by those who like their killing up close and wish to remain perfectly incognito, delivering a rifle's accuracy and range with the ease of transportation of the blaster. It was outlawed in 2372, making it a rare and expensive item to get your hands on. It's only owned by the most dangerous players in the city, and also that creepy bloke on Chalmers St with the "I fought in Nam" polo shirt.

HINT: YOU CAN MAKE SHORT WORK OF ANY NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH THIS RAPID-FIRE WEAPON. IF YOU MAKE TOO MUCH OF A MESS, LEG IT TO A DIFFERENT NECK OF THE WOODS BEFORE TRYING AGAIN.

TOOLS

Who doesn't like playing with toys? Especially when those tools allow you to neutralize cop drones, blow things up and play with the lives of your fellow citizens like they're pests...

C-7 Remote Explosive

Homemade bombs became the weapon du jour of the resistance during its earliest years, but became more formally available later on in vending machines which replicated such bombs on the fly. Regular citizens could only use these vending machines for the legal-to-own blasters, but those possessing the correct resistance codes could get access to a range of weapons.

'Skycleaner' Anti-Drone EMP

Scourge of police drones everywhere, the EMP Bombs disable drones with extreme prejudice. They were another hugely important weapon against the government in the Riots, and now you can use them to get away with murder! How great is capitalism?

These "bombs" do not explode per se, but fire once-off, disabling nearby drones and, at the same time, scrambling their reporting circuits to have them think some random unlucky bastard in the city is the one the cops are really looking for.

'Little Friend' Holo-Lure

In the years following the Riots, so many bionic limbs were installed into such a huge percentage of the city's population that the government took to leaving 'triggers' inside them. These were programmed to activate and move any infected bodies directly towards whatever the government targeted them to, but was quickly co-opted by the resistance. Underground fighters began to use portable beacons called 'Holo-lures' to send messages on government frequencies which activated bionic limbs' homing beacons in a short range, allowing them to move citizens around either into or out of harm's way depending on the day's agenda.

And if your targets don't have bionic limbs… well, they look really cool and sparkly, so people tend to go stare at them anyway.

Stupid bastards.

Flashbang

While traditional audio-visual flashbangs are still used by the military to temporarily knock people senseless in preparation for attacks or during drunken Friday-night dares, the resistance uses flashbangs which send out an encrypted signal in all directions that temporarily disorients people by way of bionic receivers, again a

corruption of government plots to
control residents.

HINT: IT DOESN'T LAST LONG, BUT EVERY
SINGLE PERSON ON SCREEN WILL BE
AFFECTED BY IT. IT'S JUST A MATTER OF
HOW MUCH YOU WANT TO SPEND TO GET
THAT KILL. INEFFECTIVE ON COP DRONES.

GAME MODES

Early on, we became quite aware of how many unique play styles came out as we tested the game, we decided to throw some of the most fun ones in there.
But firstly...

Normal Mode

The basic game mode where TJ Trench, a shadowy contract killer trying to buy their way out of the city, has to follow a series of increasingly difficult kills, taking bigger and bigger risks to get from one district to the next before finally getting false papers high enough to get a trip out of Metro City once and for all.

Score Attack

Test your might against other would-be Trenches by comparing your high scores to the world. Be a complete spendthrift as your

points are racked up by the total amount earned rather than the amount of cash you have in hand.

Blaster Only

As its name suggests, this is one tricky mode. You have to make your way through each of the city's already very tough levels with nothing but the standard, citizen issue blaster. This includes tools like the ever-so-vital EMP, so it's just you, your blaster and Tom the hacker.

Dead Trench Walking

TJ Trench is having a very bad day. Every single citizen in the city has decided that today is the best day to take whatever their weapon of choice is to work, and every single one of them has decided that Trench is public enemy number one. How long can you survive.

TILES   OBJECTS   LOGIC

118/1736/414 METROEDIT

Tile: 92, 69
Height: 1
Exterior: Building Corner (5 Storey)
Interior: None
Texture: 17/46 [y/u]
Building_B_Lights_Tex_Bright_Corner.png
Side Texture: 0 [7]
Zone: n/a [9/0]
NPC Pathable (\)
Passable (P)

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MAKING METROCIDE

As a way of exorcising the painful demons of spending a year making virtual pixel-death and snide jabs at the idea of a cyberpunk neo-fascist future, and because we loved making-of sections in manuals when we were kids, we are including one here.

Feel free to skip if you're uncool and have no friends.

-- Rohan Harris, who is uncool

HOW TO MAKE A KILLING

ONCE UPON A BEGINNING

Metrocide, for us, is a glorious, pixelated accident.

It began when, in April this year (2014) three people who'd helped out on our first, somewhat enormous, project got together with me for a ten-day Cyberpunk-themed game jam.

We met up at the office we and some other indie game studios shared here in Sydney, Australia, and began to brainstorm. Ten days was simultaneously a long time and a very short time. For a jam, it was a long time. But to produce a game, it felt like a very short time.

In the end, we settled on a top-down cyberpunk city, run in real-time. Part of the reason for this was because I already had a

basic top-down tile-based rendering engine built whose code I could cannibalize, so I figured I could focus on the real-time aspect. With that decided, two of us went on a tear making little pixel-art objects and tiles, another began to figure out a potential city layout, and I began to code our city simulator.

Of course, you may notice one small but important detail, here: "simulating a cyberpunk city top-down" is not so much a game as a sentence fragment. We had, of course, begun to figure out what you might be able to do in this world – the thing that would take it from being an idea to an actual game.

So, what could you do? Why, everything, of course! Kill people, take jobs, trade things, move between different parts of the city, etc! We even toyed with the concept of using jet-packs to move up and down different levels of the city. Now, there was no way we were going to be able to do all of those things, but in my head I was almost imagining a half-way between Syndicate and the Shadowrun game for Sega Genesis all those years ago. Not so much because I thought we could do all of them, but because the idea of this world – a cyberpunk, hyper-violent top-down world – intrigued me so much I just wanted to see if I could code it. I figured I'd just build it and see if it it was a fun world to be. To hell

METROCIDE IN PURE 2D, MAY 2014

with a design document – I'd figure out what it would do after I'd made it.

We had chosen pixel-art because it was easy – even those of us without artistic skill of note could at least turn out lots of little things from garbage bags to banana peels.

And so, over the next ten days I spent less and less time interacting with humans and more and more time taking the random bits of pixel-art and sound that Matt, Danii and Krister were coming up with. By day, I'd keep working on our day project – a port of TownCraft for Mac and iPhone – and by night, I'd keep figuring out how to add the collision detection, the AI, and all the other things I needed to build.

Towards the end of the ten days, several things dawned on me. Firstly, there was no way we'd make a finished game in this time. Secondly, we didn't even really have a game. Some vague ideas had been discussed, but really we just knew it was going to be a little virtual cyberpunk world where you could kill things.

So we abandoned any hope of submitting something, and just kept going.

I think it was another week or so later when I got a tech demo together where you could walk around and shoot random pedestrians (at this point random ones were marked as 'gang members' you had to kill – something which partly remains in the game today). I showed it to Leigh, my brother and co-founder of Flat Earth. His first reaction was subdued. He obviously liked the feel of it, but still wasn't entirely sure what we should do with it.

My pitch was simple: I felt we had something fun, so we'd make it our next mini-project, and aim to have it out the door in three months.

THAT ESCALATED VERY QUICKLY

This was still April. I'm writing this in the middle of December and the game is almost out. We stretched our funds to within an inch of their life to do it, even lumping expenses on a credit card. Leigh has spent probably three solid months doing nothing but level design, and even longer play-testing the game so often he can basically finish it blind-folded.

So what happened to our tiny project?

Well, a few things. Firstly, the lack of a design document. That happened. And it meant that on and off throughout the months of

the development cycle Leigh and I would debate left and right about what to include or what not to include. I would add random features Because I Could, or because he suggested them and I grumblingly acknowledged they were a good idea - even if they would take me days.

I think we added as many features as we removed. Each time just being brutal with ourselves. "Does this make it more fun?"

It was Leigh that had the idea which took it from a tech demo into a game. It's actually an odd one, and one I kinda fought at first. On some level I still wanted a sprawling open-world with a mess of things to do, but I also knew it wasn't possible. Not with one full time programmer, half a full time designer, and an artist we only had on Fridays (no, really).

Leigh's idea was this: "Let's make it an infinite runner."

Not literally, of course, but take the tone of an infinite runner and put it into a hitman game. You take contracts, you kill people, but each time you even slightly slip up the police presence and effective difficulty increases, until you die. And it's one life per game. Perma-death.

Each level (a zone of the city) would be a bit different - a bit bigger, a bit tougher, and a bit more money required to 'exit'. We'd even have a mode adhering totally to the infinite runner idea; where the goal is simply to get the highest score without dying.

Now, almost all the basic mechanics of this were in place inside of about two months. A few mission types, fairly solid mechanics, the weapons that Leigh and Krister had designed, and - most importantly - the level editor which was built into the game. Leigh could play for a while, die a few times, then hit a key and have the game pause so he can edit the level a bit and then keep
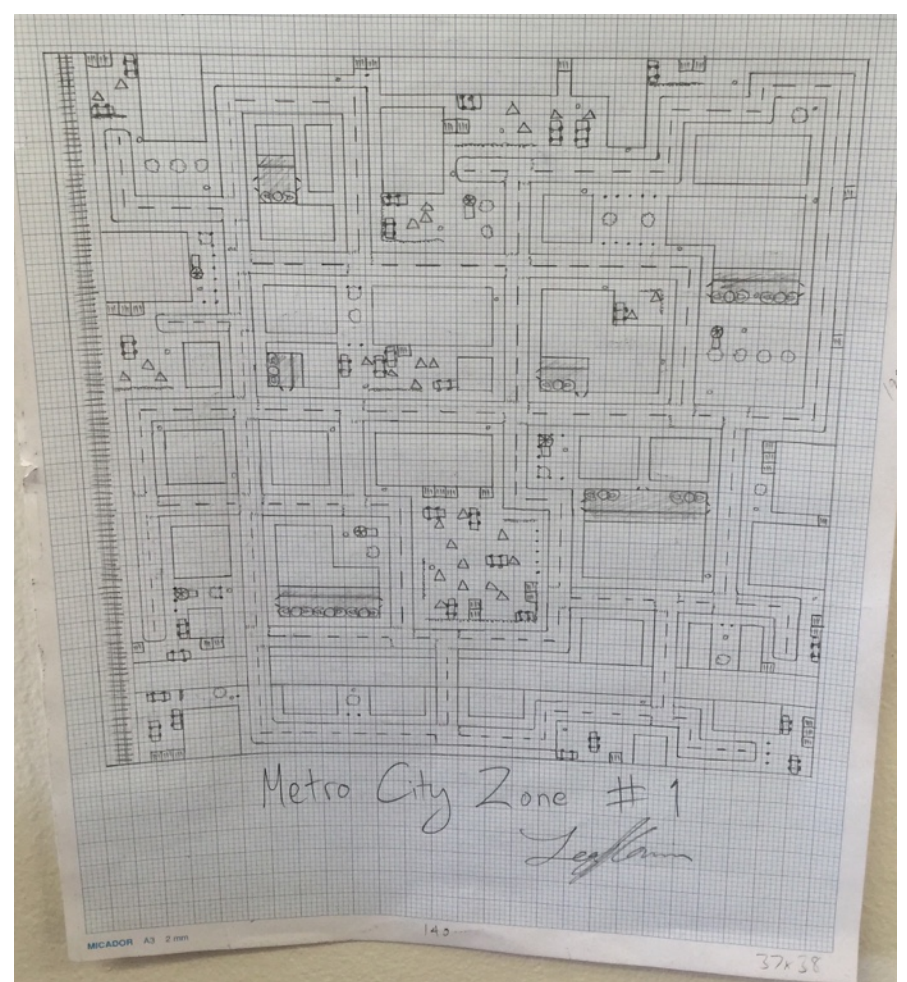
MAPS WERE FIRST DESIGNED ON PAPER

going – even without saving if he wanted.

But this game was purely 2D. It worked fine, and we had some good play-testing at local Sydney IGDA meet-ups using this 'Combat Alpha' as we dubbed it (the stealth / detection mechanics weren't there yet).

But we knew we needed more… and I think it was Matt who first suggested making the buildings 3D. Like the original GTA – we keep the sprites on the road, but have simple polygonal buildings above the street to give a sense of depth, and make the bigger, taller parts of the city all the more claustrophobic.

I think the most depressing thing was how right he was.

It took four weeks to take our 2D engine and bring it into 3D space.

It then took months longer for all the new 3D art assets to be done.

But it was incredible – the game now had not just 3D buildings, but 3D objects in rare places where it mattered (such as atop buildings or things that needed to float above streets – like our cool little free-hovering street-lights). Suddenly, the city became just as claustrophobic as we'd hoped, but at the expense of cheating with our 2D rendering engine, making new scripts to manage hundreds of modular textures for each building type, and what was then up to about our 8th version of the map save format.

It changed the gameplay, too. Not just aesthetically, but functionally. Now it was tougher – you didn't have the omniscient ability to see "through" buildings – you could take a shot of your target and fail to realize an NPC was juuust there in sight, poking out from behind an awning or tall building nearby. Ready to see you, and report your crime to the police.

We were getting there. In fact, we were happy enough with it that we decided to do something scary: a press preview round.

[cue scary music]

PRESSING ISSUES

When we first announced Metrocide, we did so with the front cover of Indie Game Magazine. We were happy to get such prominent placement, and they were happy with the exclusive.

Up until this point, we'd been talking about the game internally as a stealth action game, but the features which were in there were more reminiscent of an action-shooter than anything else. Sure,

you could pick up and hide bodies, but other than timing and positioning it was a difficult one to really consider a 'stealth' game, especially considering that genre usually includes the cunning use of darkness.

There are a few pillars of stealth-action which are immediately called to mind when you hear the term, and at this early stage they just weren't present in Metrocide.

Our first preview coverage reflected this. Not in the Indie Game Magazine feature (which was more about the reveal and the interview than a critical appraisal of the game), but in the press round which followed. There was fun to be had, the press reported, but in what ways was this a stealth-action game?

As a result of this coverage, we made two key changes to the game – the first was to highlight more directly the impact that making noise had (by way of visual 'splashes' of light whenever a sound was made) and the second was to implement the holo-lure, which gave players the all-important ability to drag folks off the main streets and into dark alleys for a good old-fashioned killing.

Another change was made to how we spoke about the game. It was with a heavy heart that I swallowed my pride of having mislabelled the experience and not thought too heavily about what players would expect when they heard the genre label. So I let the game go dark, not seeking out press for a few months, then, when we re-emerged with a more polished preview (around the time we hit Early Access in mid-October), it was no longer Metrocide the stealth-action game and was instead Metrocide the arcade stealth-shooter.

It's too fast-paced to be played like a stealth-action game where you're outwitting hapless AI into stumbling into your traps, hence arcade. It's still got stealth-elements, hence stealth. But it's all about shooting as well.

We hoped this would better illustrate how the game was designed and how it was meant to be played. Time will tell, and the lesson we learned was this: know what the core pillars of your game are and be honest about whether or not the action serves those pillars at each stage of development. If the game isn't what you say it is, you'll end up confusing a great many people.

THE SAGA CONTINUES

So, after our first round of press previews, with a slew of changes being made… it was back

to re-balancing and testing the game. Months more work for Leigh and our growing pool of beta testers.

And all this time, on weekends, I was writing and recording the sarcastic, fascist radio-ads for the world, to be blasted out of the "Ad blimp" (an idea taken from Blade Runner) as you stalk your targets on the streets.

Finally, as we hit November, we realized we'd almost reached as far as we could go. There was more work to do – plenty of minor features left to ad, things to be refined, bug-fixed or repaired.

But that wasn't our concern – we knew that was just a few weeks to a month of work, give or take.

What concerns us was that we'd made a tough game – a deliberately VERY tough game – which most of our testers and even some of the local game dev meet up people had now been playing for months. Was it too hard?

We had a call to make – and so we made a tough choice.

Early Access. Wait, did Leigh already say we went Early Access? Or maybe you already. Either way: we went Early Access.

It's a useful tool – a way of flagging that your game isn't fully

METROCIDE IN EARLY 3D, SHOWING OUR MINIMAP
IDEA, DROPPED LATER IN DEVELOPMENT

complete, but letting people buy it early for a bit cheaper than its normal rate. Unfortunately, due to a few rather unpleasant and unfortunate instances, Early Access, we knew, had a certain stigma attached to it. "Why should I risk buying your half-finished game with no guarantees you'll ever finish it?"

But the call was made. We decided on a set period – two months – during which we, as advertised, would perform play-balancing with a wider pool of people along-side any interface or bug-related tweaks we felt we needed to make.

And so, here we are, two months later, having just hit version 1.0 and preparing to leave Early Access and officially release just in time for Christmas. (People like giving ultra-hard top-down cyberpunk perma-death shooters to each other for Christmas, right?)

KEY LEARNINGS FROM MAKE GLORIOUS LOW-RES CYBERPUNK SHOOTER

Our first game took us two years. More, in fact. But it was mostly done part-time, and we had a very detailed set of design & technical requirement documents laid out before we began.

Things couldn't be more different with Metrocide. We had a team which was less than a third the size, and we were working on what little money we'd earned from our first game so we had strict requirements on how long we could work on it before we literally couldn't pay rent any more.

And, of course, we had no design document. At all. Just a tech demo, and a gut feeling that we had a good game buried in there somewhere.

There were advantages to this. The project felt very quick-paced – sometimes Leigh would get into work to find I'd coded whole new things into the game overnight, and I took great delight in letting him find them.

It almost became a meta-game in itself – I would add things to make the game tougher, and he would find them. I'd watch over his shoulder, trying not to smile too much as I knew he was about to discover something cool.

I still remember when I added the hitmen ("hunters", as we called them internally) – AI-run versions of Trench who would be sent to hunt you down if you successfully evaded the cops for too long in later levels.

I didn't tell Leigh or our testers they were there - I just let them find out, and that was a blast. A tester who knows the game back-to-front makes a few kills. Things get serious, but don't worry - the tester has this. She knows how to lose the cops. She's not scared. But then she sees a message. "A hitman has been dispatched by shadow authority."

"Uh, what?"

It's little moments like that which made me enjoy the ad-hoc nature of Metrocide's dev style, at times.

But here's the thing - that may have made some aspect of the development fun, but fun development does not a fun game make. Some games are great despite a grueling dev cycle, and others are awful despite having been a lot of fun to make. Did it help having these moments of levity and the freedom to just try whatever we felt like?

On balance... yes. But it still caused tension and stress. In the rare moments where we disagreed on something, we had no design document to fall back on. Not even a pitch document. We couldn't simply accept that we had an original concept whose premise our design had to serve. We had to make a decision, and this did sometimes get heated, if both of us felt very strongly about a feature existing in a certain way - or at all.

Fortunately, this wasn't very common.

I guess the big question is - would we do it again? Make a game without even a shred of a design document?

Perhaps, but it'd have be the right kind of game. While I think this kind of game did benefit from a fluid development style, many games we intend to make from here wouldn't. In fact, we'd be mad to do it. Imagine making a turn-based strategy game... a game heavy on management and with a multiplayer focus... while flying by the seat of your pants? Probably not a great idea. (Yes, that's a hint as to our next game. We're subtle like that.)

But we did it - Metrocide is done, and it's a game we're proud of.

Although sometimes I worry that it's too easy...
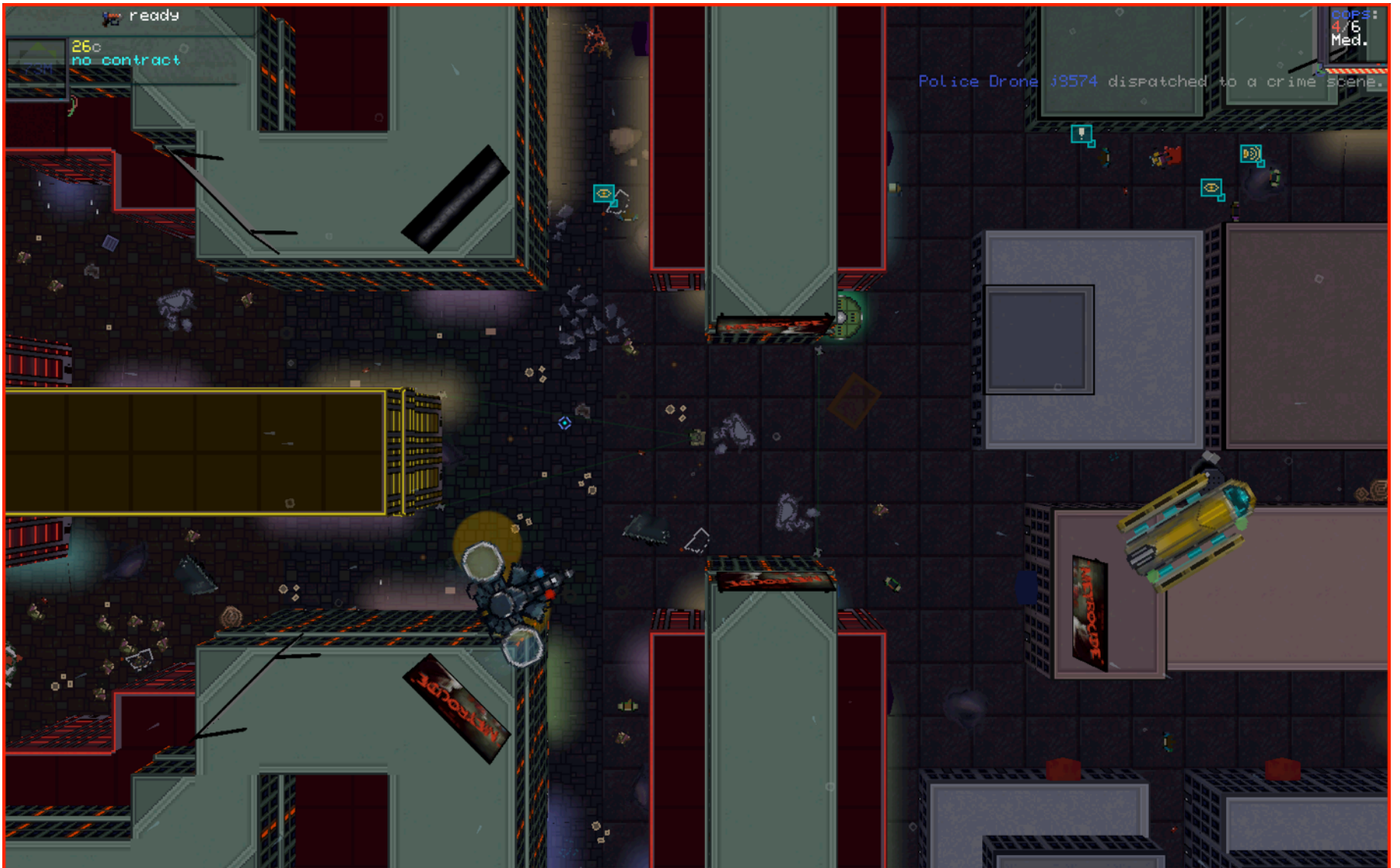
METROCIDE IN EARLY ACCESS - 3D BUILDINGS, NEON LIGHTS & MAYHEM.

```
    // A police unit directly witnessed a crime. This one therefore is chosen.
    specificUnit->dispatchToCrimeScene(c, firstRespondant);
    GameInterface::getInstance()->addCopScanLine(strUsingArgs("`9%s`7 dispatched to a crime scene.", specificUnit->unitName(
        );
} else {
    // A civilian or security camera reported the crime.
    // Get the nearest police droid and send the bastard to check out the scene
    PoliceDroid* p = nullptr;
    for (int i = 0; i < m_police.size(); i++) {
        if (m_police[i]->atCrimeScene()
            || m_police[i]->m_mode == EPoliceDroidMode::Escorting
            || m_police[i]->m_mode == EPoliceDroidMode::EMP) {
            continue;
        }
        if (!p || fastDistance(m_police[i]->m_realPosition, c->m_location) < fastDistance(p->m_realPosition, c->m_location))
            // This guy is our new top choice
            p = m_police[i];
            break;
        }
    }

    if (p) {
        // Dispatch the bugger to the scene. Chop, chop, Sonny Bonds!
        CCLOG("PoliceManager: Dispatching a unit to the crime scene.");
        p->dispatchToCrimeScene(c, firstRespondant);

        // DEBUG: unhash this to start following the unit
        //GameInterface::getInstance()->m_cameraLockObject = p;

        GameInterface::getInstance()->addCopScanLine(strUsingArgs("`9%s`7 dispatched to a crime scene.", p->unitName().c_str
    } else {
        CCLOG("PoliceManager: No spare units to dispatch to this crime scene.");
    }
}

d PoliceManager::commitCrime(ECrimeType::CrimeType crimeType, GameMob *suspect, bool noiseOnly, bool visualOnly, float soundM

if (suspect
    && suspect == GameInterface::getInstance()->m_player) {
```

ROLL-YOUR-OWN CYBERPUNK DYSTOPIA

In early April, a collection of us at Flat Earth Games, fresh off a family-friendly crafting/city-building game, decided to kill a lot of people. Virtually, of course. I suppose partly it was a reflex reaction from a year or more of making a game where it was literally impossible to die. But it was also prompted by the question of "what kind of Cyberpunk game would we want to play?"

See, it was a game jam. A ten day one – the 2014 Cyberpunk game jam. And to us, used to 48-72 hour jams, 10 days felt like a lifetime. So why not really go to town? We could surely do an action game in that time. What if we did a full-on cyberpunk action game where you played as a contract killer? We were thinking a real-time, action version of the kind of game we imagined we were playing with the 1994 Genesis "Shadowrun" game.

Of course, that's insane – but slightly less so if you cut down your scope a great deal. So it'd be totally top-down, pixel-art, and permadeath. The art could be turned out by all of us, I could build the city out of tiles so a map editor would be easy to create, and by focusing on a death-at-every-turn permadeath style, we'd limit the need for save formats AND give a nice, bleak feel to the gameplay.

It's now October, and we never finished the jam. Instead, finding what we had was something we really loved to play... we just kept going. We release on Early Access in a few weeks on Steam, having created – largely from scratch – a pretty solid 2.5D semi-open-world hitman game. We're pretty psyched. But really, I'm only explaining this to give some context to what I'm about to talk about – which was building the AI and behaviour of cops, citizens and bureaucracies of a cyberpunk dystopia.

One of the first things I knew I needed were citizens. Poor, unhappy schmoes milling about the world, acting both as landscape and – more importantly – terrified figures who'd react realistically if they saw you, y'know, murdering, lugging bodies around or aiming high-powered rifles about the place. And I was going to need a lot of them. We'd decided on

splitting up the city into several zones – each getting larger and more difficult as you unlocked them. This was partly, of course, because a one-person coding team like yours truly isn't going to be able to create a fully scalable open-world city like you see in AAA titles these days. The other reason was that perma-death and escalating difficulty seemed to lend itself naturally to escalation in its areas, too.

But each area was still going to be large. In our future world, jetsons-style hovercars and mag-lev trains are the only forms of transport other than walking – what used to be streets for cars are cracked, strewn with garbage and essentially just oversized pedestrian walkways. But even with our Pixelzens and our player moving about solely on foot, the levels were big enough that we knew we needed a good several hundred NPCs at any time to give the different areas the right level of "busyness".

So I began to figure out ways to let me run hundreds of NPCs without slowdowns, despite not being anything close to a Carmack when it comes to designing engines. (Our last game maxed out at around 16 mobs on the level)

The first trick was to keep it grid-based. The map is assembled, as I've said, out of tiles. This meant

that even though all NPCs ar free to move about the map as they choose, I could do all the pathfinding on a tile-by-tile basis. Some tiles have walls on one edge, and some are entirely solid (buildings, etc). This meant that a basic A path-finding algorithm would do for making our NPCs calmly walk around the streets. Each tile would become a node.

Then, when moving between nodes, I'd have to do proper collision detection. I broke up all objects in the game world into 'passable' and 'non-passable' items, and kept the non-passable items in chunks so I could do make the broad-phase collision detection fairly inexpensive.

Then came the real fun. Artificial Intelligence.

Once I had NPCs pathing, I had to make the world come alive.

For lots of game developers, the illusion of a living world is enough. But for me, there's a reason my "perfect games" have tended to be things like Ultima VII. And that reason is I just love watching virtual worlds. I spend hours in open-world games just watching people react to each other, and do things without my prompting.

So, while it's not always the best design solution (simulating, that is) for my own personal enjoyment... that's what we did in Metrocide.

AN EARLY SCREENSHOT FROM METROCIDE'S PURE-2D DAYS

began by generating personalities, at least in terms that'd make a difference for behavior and purpose in the world. Are they confident? Are they violent? Are they law-abiding? Are they smokers? Are they paranoid? These were either sliders or binary settings, and with all these generated using a dice-roll style (to skew roughly towards the middle in every case), I began to give them behavior.

After generating a name, a sex, a sexuality, a marital status, a family, pets (okay, so I was going overboard a bit), a personality and a home for each person, I then tried to figure out what they were doing. Visiting friends? Going out to a club? (We labelled clubs and other notable places on the map as 'points of interest') If they're a smoker, perhaps they're just walking around the corner to huff a cigarette without their partner finding out?

As a result, each person walking about the city has a specific purpose. Some will kill time wandering for ages, others will hurriedly walk two blocks away to have a cigarette in an alleyway before heading home, checking behind them all the while.

It's a little detail that almost no players will ever notice, but internally it made sense to me to know just what the characters were doing and why. It meant that when I then got to code the reactions our NPCs should have to seeing acts of violence or dead bodies, I could better figure out what they might do.

On your way home from the shops and you see a body, drenched in blood? Damn! Better see if the poor guy is okay, and then call the cops if he's not.

What if you see a person with their gun out? Well, how would YOU react? Would you freeze right there and desperately struggle for your phone so you could call the cops? Would you leg it home? And then call the cops? Or are you some gun-toting nut with a high aggression and few law-abiding tendencies? Maybe you'll turn vigilante.

But here's the rub: this isn't just the code for NPCs reacting to the player; this is reacting to each other, too. Genoa Smythe, a 31-year-old vex-head who's quite psychotic and carries a pistol, will react to seeing someone with a gun out whether or not that person is our player character - the world reacts to itself. That was important to us.

The result is exactly what we'd hoped for - an environment where all sorts of insane things can happen. A typical story might be that you're hiding in an alleyway,

waiting for your target to pass so you can blast him apart with your blaster. Raising your weapon and starting it charging makes a sound, and your target turns to face you. Unluckily for you, the reaction times of the target and the fact that he is also armed mean that he is very quickly pointing his weapon at you.

For a moment, you think you're dead, as his pistol will fire much faster than your crappy blaster. But then there's a loud bang as a shotgun goes off – neither of you noticed some gang-member standing on the corner until he saw your target (but not you, as you were hidden in the alley) raise a weapon... and he reacted as you'd expected. Some guy with a gun on my turf? I'm putting this fella down!

And of course this begin a chain-reaction. Someone sees this exchange and calls the cops – identifying the gang-member as the victim.

Soon the cops turn up, and a firefight with the gang-member ensue. Of course, all of this is good for you – you were paid to ensure your target became fish-food. Just how that happened was never specified. Result? No blame, but all the reward. Good job, TJ Trench!

It opens up a lot of interesting play-styles, too. Achievements for tricking bodyguards into shooting their own employers, hacking the police system to replace your wanted mug at a crime scene with some other poor innocent. It may have always been designed as a very tense, fast game, but that doesn't mean we couldn't find other ways to add nuance and complexity by the very way we built the simulation.

A created a fleet of cleaning droids, which would scour the city for waste, in a vain attempt to keep the city clean. They'd pick up cigarette butts dropped by smokers, newspapers dropped by other grotty humans... and even clean up the human remains and stains at crime scenes, replacing them with chalk outlines.

And then we got to the cops.

I began to muck about with Cop code. AI to make some of these little fellas 1940s-style beat-cops. Firstly: that's kinda tricky. Engaging in complex fire-fights when multiple people should be working together as a team was more than the scope of (what had become) a six-month project would allow. Secondly: This is a horrible cyberpunk dystopia.

In the '80s, our idea of a horrible cyberpunk dystopia was corporations running everything.

Boy, how scary! Unfortunately, that's more or less true now. The amount of power corporations and people with vast amounts of wealth have is enough to make that seem less like science fiction and more like, well... just the nightly news.

So what'd make this seem like a nastier update to the cyberpunk style?

Drones. That's what. The military uses them now. UAVs. UCAVs. Hell, lots of private citizens do, too. You can buy drones at the Apple store that you can control from your phone.

It's not the most unique idea in the world, of course, but from a gameplay and world-building perspective it seemed fascinating to me. Why not have our awful world of Metro City dominated by quad-copter-like things, repeating robotic phrases such as "REMEMBER: A productive person is a happy person" and "REMEMBER: Stay safe, citizens".

Our world started becoming a little less Blade Runner and a little more A Boy And His Dog, and that was fine.

Soon I had police drones around the city, and began to code the back-end bureaucracy of PoliceManager. This was much more fun than I'd suspected. I created different modes for our flying police drones. Were they
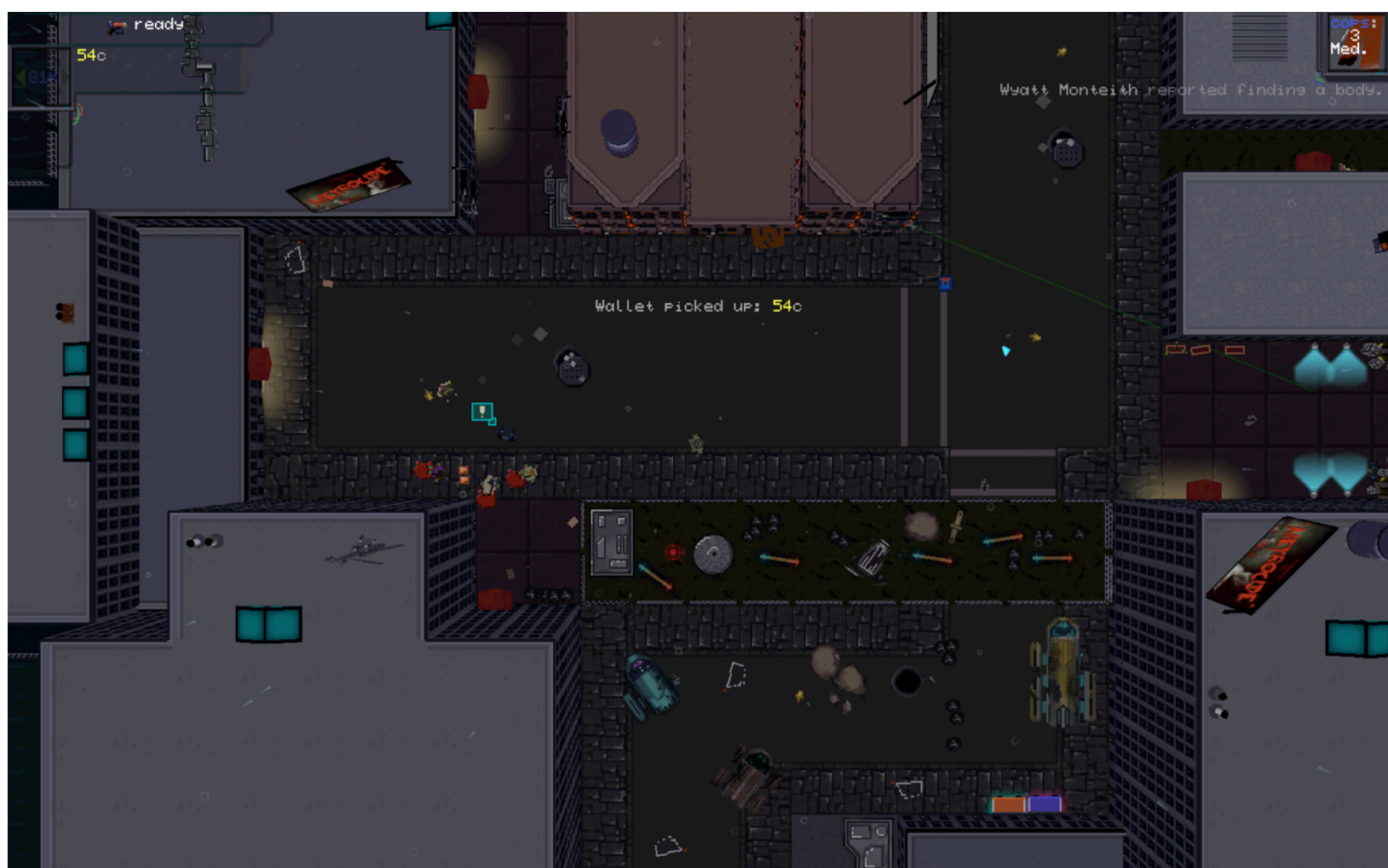
A CITIZEN REACTING TO FINDING A BODY IN METROCIDE

patrolling, escorting a specific citizen (Hey! Even police drones can be corrupt apparently), enforcing the area around a crime scene, scanning citizens for illegal weapons, or hunting down a specific person that had been identified? I created an internal management suite for the crime scenes. When a body was reported by citizens or cleaning droids, when a violent citizen was reported, the back-end looks to see if it's near or similar to existing crimes, and may lump it into the one crime scene, or create a new one.

If it's a new crime scene, or another one where a second or third body was found, a patrolling police droid might be re-tasked to investigate the scene. Once there, it will scan nearby citizens to see if they're carrying illegal weapons. If they find someone armed nearby, they'll try to take them out.

And if crimes persist... the police alertness level increases. Suddenly instead of two drones flying around the city, you might have six. So the more crime scenes the police find, the more invasive the police presence becomes.

Keep in mind that this means any violent activity can increase the police presence.
They may be after a gang member, but if you accidentally trigger a gun-fight that results in

two new cop drones blocking off a main street and scanning passers-by, that just makes your job harder.

The more we added these kind of mechanics, the more we began to find what the game was really about. Given there's no way to un-do actions, hiding bodies in sewers or water – or simply not being seen for as long as possible – became the most important thing to do in order to survive long enough to finish a level.

Almost all the gameplay elements we added came out of the emergent AI.

The idea of check-points to block off high-security areas like the rich residential areas in level 3 came out. Security cameras.

And then, finally... after months of play-testing and refining, we added one final thing to our sprawling mess of NPCs, drones and virtual bureaucracies.

Are the cops doing a bad job? Sure someone's out there committing these crimes, but they can't catch them? Has escalating the cop presence not done the right job? Well, then – there's nothing for it: they'll quietly call in a hitman.

They may not know your face, but by the time a handful of

hitmen are hiding around the streets, watching and waiting with a subtly that the loud drones can't manage... anyway... melodrama aside, the AI for those was quite fun.

So that's what Metrocide is – a game which almost entirely came out of exploring what we could do with a virtual city.

I've got to admit that this has been a real blast. As much fun as it can be to play the game, I reckon I had as much fun crafting it over the past few months.

I'd always wanted to code a play-ground for emergent behavior, and having done it now I can both see why people love games that do it, and why most game developers try to avoid it as much as possible.

We probably spent about half our design time dealing with emergent problems that broke gameplay. From cops scanning gang-members and all-out wars that turned a play-through almost un-finishable to bizarre combinations of game-stats that put our AIs into race conditions... it was a challenge. If we were doing this in 3D, or with more complicated mechanics such as driving and public transport systems... well, that'd probably have driven us insane.

And I am sure that even twelve months after release players will be finding strange ways to use (or mis-use?) the AI's quirks and patterns to power-game or even just generate strange bugs.

But that's kinda the fun of emergent (or simulation-based?) game design.

CREDITS

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EPIPHANY GAMES
AND
THE SYDNEY IGDA CHAPTER

BUILT ON A MAC WITH XCODE & COCOS2D-X

SOME PIXELATED HIT-PEOPLE WERE KILLED
IN THE MAKING OF THIS GAME.

WWW.METROCIDE.COM