

= Dead Head Fred =

Dead Head Fred (Japanese : ?????????? ? ?????????? ? , Hepburn : Deddo Heddo Fureddo ~ Kubinashi Tantei no Akumu ~) is a horror @-@ themed action @-@ adventure video game for the PlayStation Portable , developed by Vicious Cycle Software and published by D3 Publisher . It was released in North America on August 28 , 2007 and is powered by Vicious Cycle 's proprietary Vicious Engine . It features a premise that is a combination of 1940s @-@ style noir and contemporary horror , dubbed " twisted noir " by the design team .

The game is a single @-@ player experience whose title character , Fred Neuman , is a private investigator with the ability to switch heads . Fred has recently been murdered and decapitated , and has few memories of the events leading to his death . The plot follows Fred as he pieces together the clues of his murder and tries to get revenge on the man who killed him . Unlike many action game heroes , Fred has no conventional weapons ? he relies solely on the powers available to him from the severed heads of fallen enemies .

The game received generally positive reviews , with reviewers mentioning its dark humor and noir @-@ inspired motif as high points . It received criticism for its controls and lack of combat depth . In 2008 , it won the Writers Guild of America 's first @-@ ever award for video game writing .

= = Gameplay = =

Dead Head Fred is a third @-@ person action @-@ adventure game that incorporates a variety of gameplay styles , including combat , platforming , and puzzles . The core gameplay of Dead Head Fred revolves around Fred 's missing head and his ability to " switch " heads by defeating certain enemies , decapitating them , and collecting their heads (referred to as " headhunting ") . As Fred explores the city of Hope Falls , he can collect an assortment of heads , each of which has unique abilities . Examples include the Stone Idol head , which Fred can use as a battering ram , and the Corpse head , which can be used to suck up and spit out water , gasoline , and other materials . Fred uses these heads to navigate the city of Hope Falls , and certain parts of the city are not accessible until certain heads are found . The high level of radiation in Hope Falls has led to a proliferation of grossly mutated worms , which the player can collect and use to upgrade Fred 's heads and temporarily increase his fighting abilities , among other benefits . Also collectible are money and special items , which can be earned by defeating enemies or completing various side @-@ missions . There are several minigames unrelated to the plot , such as pinball and fishing , scattered around the city .

In combat , players have several attacks at their disposal , depending on the head Fred is equipped with . These attacks include combos , head @-@ specific counterattacks , and ranged attacks . During a counterattack , the player can complete a Quick Time Event to instantly kill an enemy by removing its head , which gives Fred " Rage " points . Rage energy builds up over time , and the player can use it to unleash powerful attacks on multiple foes . Dealing a large amount of damage to an opponent will stun them , during which time Fred can remove their head . Collected heads can be traded at " Head Shops " for a usable version .

There are several types of environmental puzzles that the player has to solve in order to progress through the game . Each one requires a specific head ? the Bone head gives Fred sharp claws which allow him to climb on the sides of buildings , while the Shrunken head decreases his size dramatically and lets him navigate platforming levels , such as a saw mill . There is also a mannequin head that Fred must use to socialize with the residents of Hope Falls , because they are terrified of his other heads . There are nine available heads , seven of which are suitable for combat .

= = Plot = =

= = = Setting = = =

Dead Head Fred takes place in Hope Falls , New Jersey , a once @-@ prosperous area based on American cities in the 1940s . The city has steadily fallen from grace since a business mogul named Ulysses Pitt began accumulating power . Pitt has a background of petty crime , and there are allegations that he was somehow responsible for the disappearance of Vinni Rossini , an influential Hope Falls businessman . Pitt 's new " Nukular Plant " has recently finished construction and has caused a high level of radiation in the city , leading to strange phenomena like mutated wildlife and undead monsters .

Hope Falls is composed of several areas . The first that Fred has access to is Dr. Steiner 's castle , the ancestral home of the Steiner family where Fred has been resurrected . Outside of the castle is a large cemetery that borders the forested area of Creepy Hollow . In Hope Falls proper are the urban areas of Downtown , Uptown , Old Hope Falls and Zombietown . Downtown is the home of Pitt 's headquarters , and Fred 's office is found in Old Hope Falls . Zombietown , as its name suggests , is overrun with zombies and most of its residents have fled the neighborhood or barricaded themselves in their homes . Two other rural areas border the city : Freak Farms , where Fred owns a small cabin , and the Boonies , a highly irradiated area where the Nukular Reactor has been built . Each area contains several teleporters in the form of sewer manholes , which Fred can use to quickly move from one area of Hope Falls to another .

== = Characters == =

The protagonist of Dead Head Fred is Fred Neuman (voiced by John C. McGinley) , a private detective . Fred is the only playable character , but since each head gives him a different set of animations , he could be considered nine separate characters . As he does not have a proper face , Fred 's mood is portrayed by the tone of his voice and by face @-@ like expressions formed by his eyes and frontal lobes . Fred has a wisecracking , sarcastic personality and occasionally breaks the fourth wall , such as heckling the player when he dies . Ulysses Pitt (Jon Polito) , the game 's primary antagonist , is a small @-@ time hoodlum turned racketeer . Pitt employs many henchmen throughout Hope Falls , the most prominent of which is his lieutenant Lefty , whose right leg has been amputated and replaced with a tommygun . Fred makes several allies throughout the game , including Dr. Steiner , who resurrected him , his girlfriend Jeanne Rossini (Kari Wahlgren) , and his former partner Benny Salazar . Fred 's enemies are generally employees of Pitt , like the skeletal " bone thugs " , or creatures created by Hope Falls ' radiation , like zombies and animated scarecrows .

== = Story == =

The game begins with Fred waking up in the castle of a Dr. Freidrich Steiner , an employee of Ulysses Pitt . Fred soon learns that he has been murdered and subsequently resurrected , and his head is missing . In its place is a liquid @-@ filled jar that contains his brain and eyes . Steiner explains that Fred is a private detective who had been investigating Pitt , but Pitt had discovered that Fred was on to him and had him murdered . Many of Fred 's memories are missing as a result of the trauma to his brain , and before Steiner can explain further , Pitt and several of his henchmen arrive . As Fred hides in Steiner 's lab , Pitt 's thugs apprehend Steiner and announce that he is to be taken to the Horseman , a minion of Pitt 's who resides in Creepy Hollow .

Fred leaves Steiner 's castle and meets a blue @-@ skinned hunchback in the cemetery outside . The hunchback introduces himself as Sam Spade , a gravedigger and " head merchant " who can help Fred by providing him with quality interchangeable heads . Fred continues to Creepy Hollow , where he defeats the Horseman and rescues Dr. Steiner . Steiner , however , has little information regarding Fred 's investigation and suggests that he question the residents of Hope Falls to learn more about his demise . Fred begins exploring Hope Falls , meeting many strange personalities along the way . He reconnects with his old girlfriend Jeanne , who is the daughter of a prominent Hope Falls citizen , Vinni Rossini . Fred learns that Mr. Rossini had been reported missing by

Jeanne , and Jeanne had subsequently hired Fred to find him . Fred had eventually followed the trail to Pitt , who had bribed Fred 's partner , Benny Salazar , into betraying him . Fred was promptly caught by Pitt 's henchmen and shot to death by his right @-@ hand man , Lefty .

Armed with the knowledge of his death and the events leading up to it , Fred continues his investigation and recovers a videotape of Vinni Rossini 's murder that incriminates Pitt . Pitt learns that Fred is still " alive " and kidnaps Jeanne to use as leverage against him . Fred confronts the mobster at his headquarters after shutting down the centerpiece of the his criminal enterprise , the Pitt Nukular Plant , and defeating Lefty . Lefty , however , was exposed to nuclear waste during the fight and subsequently mutated into a huge beast who comes to Pitt 's aid in the game 's final battle . Fred ultimately defeats both Pitt and Lefty atop the Pitt Building . Pitt is killed during the battle , but Lefty manages to escape and retreats to the remains of the Nukular Plant . After the battle , Fred 's head , which , along with Jeanne , had been held hostage by Pitt , is shown tumbling into an open manhole near the Pitt Building , unbeknownst to Fred . The final scene of the game shows Fred and Jeanne having dinner at a restaurant to celebrate , with Fred lamenting the loss of his head .

= = Development = =

= = = Geo = = =

Dead Head Fred uses the Vicious Engine , a game engine created and maintained by game design company Vicious Cycle Software . Considered " middleware " in the video game industry , the engine was designed as a simple set of creation tools that could be used across multiple consoles . The game was originally conceived as a platform game based on the character " Geo . " Vicious Cycle 's president , Eric Peterson , and some of his staff developed a conceptual world called " Prime " where Geo lived . Geo had the ability to switch his head between several different shapes (a cube , sphere , cylinder , and pyramid) that would help him solve puzzles , fight , and move around Prime in his quest to stop the evil King Rhombus , who was trying to destroy Prime . Each of Geo 's shaped heads had unique properties that gave him different abilities ? the sphere head allowed him to roll around very quickly , for example .

The Geo concept was described by the development team as similar to other platform games like Rayman or Spyro , and skewed towards a younger audience . When the concept was complete , the development team presented it to several publishers , who stated that they liked the idea but its geometry @-@ based core too strongly resembled " edutainment " , and that they were interested in developing a more edgy , adult premise . The Nintendo GameCube had been an early choice for hosting the game before the PSP was chosen .

= = = Noir setting = = =

Vicious Cycle went back to the drawing board and produced a new concept that they felt was darker and better suited to an older audience . The " head @-@ switching " game mechanic had been praised by the potential publishers and was kept , but this time the cartoonish , childlike Geo was replaced by an angry , vengeful private detective named Fred Neuman . The world of Prime was replaced with the bleak , film noir @-@ esque city of Hope Falls , where Fred would seek revenge against those who had wronged him . Vicious Cycle presented the new project to Sony , who promptly approved the game for the PSP , despite it not having secured a publisher . Shortly afterwards , the project was picked up by D3Publisher .

Vicious Cycle then submitted the concept to art company Massive Black Studios to develop initial character sketches . Massive Black 's artists were allowed to use their imagination while developing Fred , but the one stipulation Vicious Cycle made from the beginning was Fred 's head ? the developers wanted it to be a liquid @-@ filled jar with the detective 's brain and eyes floating around inside . Massive Black came up with several different versions of Fred , including some with guns , which lead designer Adam Cogan had already decided the game would not include . After receiving

the sketches , Vicious Cycle chose several that portrayed Fred with a squat , childlike appearance that retained some of the youthful focus of the scrapped Geo project . The publisher , D3 , decided to present all of the concept art to a test group . To the developers ' surprise , the test group was much more interested in a darker , more intimidating portrayal of Fred than the cartoonish , playful look they had chosen . The developers decided to flesh out the concept and took the chosen sketches back to Massive Black . This time the art came back darker , with similarities to Dirty Harry and The Matrix and The Evil Dead , and a Norman Rockwell @-@ inspired look that would influence the game 's art style towards a more violent theme .

= = = Further testing = = =

D3 provided the development team with more focus groups , and as a result , the game slowly incorporated more combat and less platforming and puzzles . Fred 's combat capabilities were revamped to give him more attacks , counterattacks and combinations . D3 also gave Vicious Cycle more time to develop the game , with the hope of receiving better reviews and potentially turning Dead Head Fred into a franchise . The delay pushed back the game 's release from January to August 2007 . D3Publisher bought Vicious Cycle two months before the game 's release , but the company 's headquarters remained in North Carolina and the staff was retained .

= = Audio = =

= = = Soundtrack = = =

The music of Dead Head Fred was composed by Rod Abernethy and Jason Graves and recorded at Abernethy 's studio , Rednote Audio . Abernethy and Graves had worked on previous games by Vicious Cycle , like Curious George . The composers were interested in developing a sound for Dead Head Fred that was retro @-@ futuristic , and borrowed from other death @-@ themed pieces like Stubbs the Zombie and Beetlejuice . The development team did not have any substantial ideas for the game 's music beyond the theme and mood of Hope Falls , giving the composers free rein on the soundtrack 's direction .

= = = Voice work = = =

A crucial area of development was the formation of the game 's mood , theme , and story to give it a dark , yet humorous quality . Hiring a Hollywood screenwriter to create the script was proposed , but ultimately Vicious Cycle designer Dave Ellis was given the task of writing the game 's cutscenes and voiceover script , while Cogan focused on the in @-@ game dialog . Ellis referred to several noir films for inspiration , especially Miller 's Crossing and Who Framed Roger Rabbit During this time , Eric Peterson cast several voice actors , including John C. McGinley from the TV show Scrubs and Jon Polito from the aforementioned Miller 's Crossing . McGinley was cast as Fred because of his Scrubs character 's sarcasm and wit , while Polito was cast in the role of mob boss Ulysses Pitt , which was very similar to his role of Johnny Caspar in Miller 's Crossing .

The development team then set about recording the game 's dialog , which proved to be challenging because of Vicious Cycle 's location on the East Coast . All of the recordings were done over the phone at a studio in Hollywood . Despite this , and the fact that Fred alone had over 1000 lines of in @-@ game dialog , the recording went smoothly , with the exception of one unidentified actor who walked out in the middle of a session . The original script had only one instance of the word " fuck " , but several recording sessions with McGinley resulted in a great deal of colorful improvisation . The design team liked the recordings and the script was modified to permit McGinley and other actors to curse more . McGinley focused on portraying Fred as " pissed off " and " having a chip on his shoulder " because his head was missing .

" No , this guy was unique because , well ? his head was gone ! With him , you could really just

open up your imagination and roll out a cavalcade of eccentricities and see what makes sense to you . It was pretty much unlike anything I ? ve ever done before . "

= = Promotion and release = =

Dead Head Fred was first announced at the Electronics Entertainment Expo (E3) video game convention in May 2006 , where a trailer was shown to the public . Following this , little was heard about the game until Cogan started a developer diary on Vicious Cycle 's website in March 2007 . Three diary entries were written by Cogan and Ellis , which provided details about the game 's pre @-@ production conceptualization and voice work . In May 2007 , D3 announced that John C. McGinley would be voicing Fred , and the next month the company issued a press release stating that the game was finished and ready for mass production . However , the game was delayed , allowing D3 Publisher to show it at E3 2007 . It was eventually released on August 28 , 2007 in North America after nearly two years of development . It was released on October 26 in Europe , November 2 in Australia , and March 19 , 2008 in Japan . In December 2007 , D3 reduced the price of the game , and in October 2008 it was made available for download on Sony 's PlayStation Network . The soundtrack was released on iTunes by Lakeshore Records on September 18 , 2007 .

= = = Future = = =

Dead Head Fred was designed specifically for the PSP , and Vicious Cycle intended it to be their " flagship " title for the system . However , the game 's designers have hinted that the game could potentially be ported to the PlayStation Network or Xbox Live Arcade with a few months ' work . As of March 2009 , D3Publisher has announced a sequel , but the designers have stated that subsequent titles were discussed during the game 's development . John C. McGinley has expressed interest in reprising Fred . Namco Bandai Games (the parent of D3) were impressed with the game and wanted to publish the sequel because they ' wanted ' to test out Vicious Cycle 's Gameplay on the PSP .

= = Reception = =

Dead Head Fred received generally favorable reviews from critics . The game 's writing and dialogue were considered the main strengths of the game , with GameSpy 's reviewer stating that " In the vast sea of PSP titles , Dead Head Fred stands ' head and shoulders ' above the rest . " IGN said " The tale of revenge in a dark world is twisted [and] unapologetically humorous " . Other publications were not as impressed , however , with one reviewer stating " ... the overused profanity just makes it feel like it 's been designed by teenagers desperately trying to be edgy . " The game 's supernatural themes elicited comparisons to The Darkness and Grim Fandango . GamesRadar included it in their list of the 100 most overlooked games of its generation . Editor Jason Fanelli felt that PSP games often lacked creativity and that Dead Head Fred was the exception .

Many reviewers were pleased with the game 's premise and setting , variously describing it as " weird " , " wacky " and " silly " . Hope Falls , especially the area of Creepy Hollow , was compared to the work of Tim Burton . Dead Head Fred 's graphics were warmly received , with GameSpy noting " The game looks simply phenomenal on the PSP screen . " Pocket Gamer UK said " graphically the game won 't blow your head off but it is undeniably stylish . " Pocket Gamer also felt that the game 's level design , with its emphasis on changing heads to solve environmental puzzles , made up for the " mediocre combat system " . The character design was praised ; GameSpy said " Fred is one of the most interesting and entertaining characters to ever hit gaming , " and GameZone said " Fred ? s freakish form is like looking at a car crash ? you really don ? t want to stare but you just can ? t help it . "

The voice acting , in particular John C. McGinley 's portrayal of Fred , was widely praised , as was the rest of the game 's audio . GameZone 's Natalie Romano said " There ? s also some great music in the game and the sound effects are ... wonderfully detailed " .

" The sound for the title , however , is fantastic . The majority of it is centered around the voice acting , which is anchored by John C. McGinley of Scrubs and Office Space fame . McGinley expertly brings his dry , sarcastic delivery to Fred 's lines and consistently delivers humorous lines across the entire game . "

The focal point of reviewers ' criticism was Dead Head Fred 's gameplay , specifically the combat . It was generally considered tedious and repetitive . Australia 's PAL Gaming Network described the combat as " one of the poorest elements of the game " , and Game Informer called the combat mechanics " awful " . The performance of the camera was also criticized , with IGN noting " Considering that the camera will sometimes choose some horrible angles for you in battle or during puzzles , it 's annoying to have to fight it as well as mutants that want you dead . " GameZone said " I just wish the camera wouldn't be such a hindrance sometimes . " Reviewers were also unhappy with Dead Head Fred 's loading times ; Eurogamer considered them " excessively high " , and IGN said " The only downside that crops up when it comes to the visuals are the continual loading times on just about every single area . "

= = = Awards = = =

Dead Head Fred was nominated for several awards , including the Writers Guild of America 's first award for video game writing , which it won . During E3 2007 , the game was nominated for the Best of E3 2007 : Best Handheld Game award by the Game Critics Awards , a group of prominent media journalists . Dead Head Fred lost to The Legend of Zelda : Phantom Hourglass for the Nintendo DS , but was notable for being the only new intellectual property nominated in the handheld category . The audio was nominated for two awards at the Game Audio Network Guild 's 6th annual ceremony , Best Soundtrack of the Year and Best Handheld Audio . Dead Head Fred lost to BioShock and Syphon Filter : Logan 's Shadow , respectively .