

# Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 Game Design Suggestions

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Non-Confidential:

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Visitors: These are the suggestions originally posted on the THPS4 suggestions webpage for Planet Tony Hawk.  
Enjoy,  
Noe Valladolid

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**DISCLAIMER:**

These suggestions are written with the "you" (Neversoft) in mind. These suggestions are also placed here so fans of the series can see some of the ideas put together by the staff at Planet Tony Hawk.

If you find any errors, mistakes, typos or things that are already in the series please ignore them. This list is more of a brainstorming and not necessarily what every fan would like to see in the series.

I'm going to include a lot of the suggestions I sent to Neversoft a couple of years ago. Many of these things are brand new ideas for THPS4 and the series.

- Assembled by Noe Valladolid

PTH West Coast Editor

## Working on the Animation:

On rail and ledge grinds the characters need to have the ability to turn their heads. In a grind if you start rolling fakie after attacking a rail at an angle your character should at least look over their shoulder instead of being stuck in the same forward facing animation. Characters should have some head movement and never roll blindly backwards. I'd like to see this applied to the specials as well. For example we can boardslide front and backside and the character gets in their specific stance. However during a special grind the direction is always forced. No matter how you approach the rail with Rodney, for example, his Heelflip Darkslide always has him facing forward while sliding down the rail. Why can't he heelflip and darkslide and face forward if that's your angle of attack?

The head turn would also work on vert. The character would keep turning their head, even during a rotation, always to face the coping of the ramp (trying to spot a landing). It was good to see the body twist and knees tuck while rotating in THPS3. But I would still like to see the head turn more into turns.

Obstacles shouldn't disappear. Not trash cans or benches. They should be able to be knocked down but they shouldn't disappear.

Minor details really add up in games. One of those details for example is giving each skater a little personality. No two skaters should start, or end, skating the same.

How about running starts, fingerflip hops, drop hops and many more ways of just starting a level? It worked for Rodney Mullen in THPS3 for the PS2. Why not give everyone their own starting animation?

Muska for example would put down his boombox and do a running start. At the end of his time he'd pick up his boombox and skate off. Others could throw their hands up in celebration or throw their skateboard on the ground in anger.

It should be possible to slide in the game. Even if it's only while going super fast, or on downhill or slippery

grades. I'd like to have the character put their hands down and power slide around some objects. Plus a character should put their hands down and slide on tight turns.

You should also redo the animation for the 360 Flip to Mute. Use the 360 flip to mute that he used in The End as a model. The board completes the 360 flip to the side of Tony and he reaches to his side and scoops in the deck. The Handplant animation should also be fixed. The characters pop into a handplant really quick. While every other lip trick is slow and drawn out. Not all handplants go straight up and down. Some arc across the lip of the ramp. So if you do an eggplant for example the skater should go across the coping a little before he plants his arm.

Fix the Big Drop: The character should put their hands down if they land a big drop or do a big squat when landing. If a character does a massive ollie then we should see them suck up their legs and slowly stretch them out to absorb the impact. This would work when ollieing off a launch ramp and not just off a curb.

Fix the full stop: On a full stop the character should balance on the tail of the board. This makes rotating in place much more believable than the way we can currently turn around in place without pushing or stepping off of the board.

Feet placement should change when pushing or on the ollie stance. The front foot should be in the middle of the board and only the toes of the back foot should be on the tail of the board. Picky yes but without the slight detail there it looks like the skaters push and ollie in the same position.

Fix the nosegrind/5-0 animations. If I approach a rail perpendicular my character shouldn't snap into a perfect nosegrind or 5-0 instantly. I'd like to see him pivot, overturn to the correct orientation.

Rails with 90 degree angles. Let's say you're on a rail with a 90 degree turn to the left, if you lean left just as you get to the corner your character should do a light pop and continue sliding with some loss in speed. This as opposed to just falling off the rail and continuing straight. I saw Ethan Fowler do this in a video, so it is possible.

Fix the orientation on ledges and rails. We can grind obstacles on the way up a ramp, why can't we on the way back down? Not on every obstacle, but on stacked obstacles or those with over vert walls, ledges or rails. Like the pool in THPS2. We can grind and stall the platform extensions on the way up, but we can't disaster or grind on the way back down.

Trick Ideas:

Sad to say there were some things Shaba got right in their version of THPS3 that were missed in the PS2 version of THPS3. These being the ability to hold certain grab tricks. We could hold the Kickflip Superman, 360 Flip to Mute, and Double Varial Heelflip to Mute.

Bob Loftin of Texas has a web page dedicated to skateboard tricks. Here is his URL: [www.bobstricktips.com](http://www.bobstricktips.com) Here is his current list of tricks, these contain pictures and movies also.

Frontside 180 No-Comply, Nollie, Street Plant, Frontside Pop Shove-It, Backside Half-Cab, Varial Kickflip, Multiple 360s, Space Walk, Ollie to Nose, Backside Ollie to Axle Stall, 1-Footed 540 Spin on a bank, Rock 'n' Roll, Rail to Casper, 1-Footed 360 Shove-It, 2-Foot Nose 360 Shove-It, 1 Footed Nose Wheelie, Cross-Footed Impossible, Rolling Finger Flip, Freestyle Footwork, 180 Fakie Finger Flip, Heel Flip, Drop Hop, Backside Pop Shove-It, Lipslide -- Original, Old-School Version, Frontside 540 Spin, Frontside Boneless, No Comply Grab, Ollie Kickflip, Frontside Ollie to Tail - 180 Shove-it Out, Frontside Manual, 1 1/2 Kickback, Casper Bigspin, Frontside 180 Ollie, Finger Flip, Fakie Ollie, Frontside Ollie to Tail, Frontside Grind, 360 Layback, 1-Footed Nose Wheelie, Backside 180 Slide, Sweeper, Backside 50/50 Grind, Rail Kickflip, Fakie 360, Shove-it Rock

'n' Roll, G-Turn, Walk the Dog, 50/50 Casper, 180 Shove-It, Fakie 180 Shove-It to fakie, Classic (non-ollie) Kickflip!, 360 Shove-It, Big Spin, the Ollie, 1-Footed Tail Wheelie, 360 Shove-It Pivot, Lipslide, 180 Shove-it Frontside Revert.

There, now you can't say that you're out of move ideas. A lot of these are old school and very unique. When you bring older tricks into your game engine you breath new life into the engine.

Let's look at a list of moves that I think you should include.

Wallplant:



We can do the wallride and the wallie in the THPS series. But level design can be limiting if we are stuck in a linear rut. Later on I go on and on about having the levels built up and down as well as out. But the important reason I have a trick listed here is to show you that there is a way to launch off of a wall higher than using just an ollie.

The wallplant pictured to the right can also be used as a fenceplant. Now when a skater hits a dead end on the level instead of turning around they can simply wallplant to start a combo, or use the wallplant to reach high places in a level or gain access to sections that were too far to ollie, footplant, boneless or wallride to.

Freestyle Tricks:

Neversoft has been in contact with the guys at The International Network for Flatland Freestyle skateboarding (INFFS), headed by freestyle legend Stefan "Lillis" Åkesson. Plus from you have the link to their freestyle newsletter <http://www.reversefreestyle.com/f/>. Neversoft also used footage from Lynn Cooper's "Wheelin' In The Years." So Neversoft has the freestyle hookup right? I was shocked to see so many mistakes in THPS3, especially since I passed along a message from Stefan directly to Ralph D'Amato at Neversoft?

There is no Reemo slide, that animation should have been the Primo slide. In THPS3 the Primo is a rolling railstand, the Primo is a sliding railstand with a 180 backside turn. In THPS3 You could roll a railstand so why even offer a Primo when the railstand isn't right? Rename the Reemo the Primo, if you have a railstand then make sure the skater loses all their speed as soon as they start that trick because a railstand is a stationary freestyle trick.

I did like the other freestyle tricks and I would like to see many more in the game. I would also like to be able to link every single freestyle trick to the other without having to ollie.

Now that I've seen what a waste of a special Private Carrera's "Ahhh Yeahhhh!" trick is there should be no excuse not to consider putting a Streetplant in the series. This combined with the Caveman argument (many pages from here) would absolutely cover your skateboarding bases.

Freestyle / Flatland Tricks:

The Spacewalk: A freestyle trick that unlike the manual or nose manual the Spacewalk is a wheelie that would not cause you to slow down. I'd animate it by having the torso and head of the character facing forward while their hips and legs swing the manual left and right keeping speed up.

Finger Flips: There are many variations of these cool tricks. Nose, tail, 50-50 flips.

More Handstand and Handflip Variations: 'nuff said.

Body Varial: Currently you have the Sex Change listed as a body varial. If we tap R2 the character switches stance. What if we hit L2 and instead of sliding his board around the character just hops and does a body varial worth zero points? This would be useful on ledges and rails, where instead of hitting ollie then a button combination you could tap L2 and have your character body varial without ollieing. Make the body varial worth minor points.

The 180 No Comply: We should be able to do more than just have a regular No Comply or Boneless while tapping or double tapping up. We could upgrade the No Comply with an automatic 180 and No Comply (whole new animation). Or instead of a Boneless how about a 360 No Comply? Look at how great those tricks looked in Powell's Public Domain.

Two other slides to add with your Casper and Anti Casper slides:

The Sidewinder Slide: Is when you slide on your tail with the board pointing at an angle. You could go Kickflip to Sidewinder Slide.

The Crooks Slide: Is when you slide on the nose at a crooked angle. You could go Heelflip to Crooks Slide.

One Foot Manuals: I liked the one foot manuals. Maybe these could become regular moves.

The Fingerflip Nose Manual: would probably be a special move, but it's cool to think of it as a regular move.

Grab Tricks:

Heelflip/kickflip Melon: Only because the Kickflip Indy needs company.

Hardflip Indy: Tas Pappas can Cab one of these.

Board Varials: Look at the great board varials that Danny Way does in the ON video, these were lifted from Powell's Public Domain. Two of them ended up in Grind Session. As the Jer Air and the Around the World trick. I'd like to be able to hold board varials away from my body on tricks other than the Christ Air.

Double Flips to grabs: Tony and company have managed a lot of double flips to mute or indy grabs. These could be given to vert characters and the kickflip to indy to street skaters.

Tweaked Grabs: The fact that skaters can tweak their grabs and bodies makes for some interesting vert moves. You can come up with a bunch of new moves based on all of the grabs you already have. Just twist the skaters and their positions to create an entirely new move.

For example, a tweaked Mute grab is a Japan. But what if you cross your legs on a Japan? Now you have a Tweaked Japan. Or you could have the skater twist their torso on the grab and send the spin in a new orientation? The Tuck Knee, Crooked Cop and Del Mar Indy are fine examples from THPS3. You already have tweaked Indy moves like the Nosebone, Stiffy and Crossbone. See how many tweaked variations you can do of existing grab moves.

Spine Transfers: I'd like to be able to go up a ramp, boardslide the spine and then roll onto the other side and pick up a spine transfer bonus.

Helen Keller Grab: That was actually pretty cool. You should bring it back. However you might want to call it just the Keller grab.

The Miller Flip: A frontside backflip 360.

The Lien: You lean your body flush to the board on this grab. Basically you lean to the side and touch your knees to the tip of the board, like leaning to the side of a rocket air.

The Slob grab: A frontside mute grab.

Tailgrab Madonna: This is just one of the variations for moves that you already have. Think about the variations that you already have. The Indy, the Indy Stiffy, and the Indy Nosebone. Why not have the Tailgrab Madonna?

Fingerflip Benihana: One of the more popular Benihana variations.

One footed Mute grab: Again, another variation of a grab move.

Flip Tricks:

Pressure flips: As long as the skateboards don't get 33 millimeter wheels and the skaters don't start wearing fat pants we should be okay. Hmm, come to think of it wouldn't that be a funny costume choice for Rodney? You

did have 80's Tony. How about early 90's Rodney. complete with fat pants and a deck with super tiny wheels? Late trick combinations: You can easily come up with at least 5 possible late flip combinations. Kickflip to late shove it. Impossible to late shove it. Double kickflip to late shove it. Hardflip to late shove it. Etc...

The Kickflip Underflip: I know the nollie flip underflip is a special move now. But it would be nice to see the kickflip underflip as a regular move.

The Big Spin: That's a 360 shove it and a 180 body varial.

The Frontside Flip: Instead of just tapping kickflip and R2 or L2, how about a unique animation for this move?

#### Lip Tricks:

Layback Stall: A classic lip trick that could be in the game. The character squats out a tail slide and holds it until you're ready to roll back onto the ramp.

Sweeper and No Handed Sweeper: Two more classic lip tricks that you can add to the game.

180 ollie to Noseblunt: Vert guys are getting very creative on these lip stalls.

Crooked Blunt: Pivot a noseblunt on the front axle.

Sidewinder Blunt: Catch a blunt on the lip with the back axle at an angle.

Shove it rock and roll, shove it disaster: More lip tricks to consider. However your game engine should also allow players to do this manually, at least on over vert walls.

Heelflip/ kickflip blunt: Another classic mini ramp move that found its way onto the vert world.

There are many lip tricks that you have overlooked. Not only that but some of these tricks end with the skater in the fakie position. It would be nice to see the character roll into the transition in nollie/fakie position after doing a lip trick.

The Jolly Mamba: The Miller Flip stalled invert. Mike McGill named it.

The Elguerial: Backside fakie 360 invert.

Half-Elguerial: Invented by Tony also called a Giddy Goon. How about holding the Half-Elguerial on the lip until you get the Giddy Goon bonus?

The Phillips 66: The Phillips 66 is a frontside Elguerial. I can't remember which hand you grab the board or stall on. But I saw it in an old video this almost looks like a somersault on the coping. Jeff Phillips invented this trick and very few pros could do it. Not unlike Burnquist and his Burntwist.

The Phillips 33: Half of a 66 and come down fakie.

The Dumptruck: This is when you plant both feet on the coping and pull the board out in front of you and then jump back in fakie.

Truck Crunch: This is a squatting Indy grab axle stall.

360 Flip Disaster.

Kickflip Disaster.

The Body Varial Disaster: Just watch Bob for a while and you'll see how many disaster variations he has.

The Footplant: How many variations of this did Tony have? He would plant his front foot, keep his other leg bent behind him, varial the board with his back foot or hand and then drop back in.

#### Grind Tricks:

Sugarcane: I believe that's a reverse Hurricane. The overturn is in the opposite direction.

The Pontius Grind: Chris Pontius, one time writer for Big Brother magazine, used to have a unique style on the board. Whether it was bombing a hill or 50-50ing a rail he would sometimes do it cross-legged.

#### Special Moves:

The special moves in the game should be like frosting on an already tasty cake. Players should be able to build solid combos and points without the aid of special moves. Look at the top players in the THPS2 tournament.



They used, almost exclusively, regular moves. If we had the option to program 24 possible moves per button this tactic in the game would only offer more game play, but it would serve to make the game more fun. Like I said though, the special moves would be frosting and make the game that much sweeter.

You should consider your choice for specials very carefully. Think that most of the flip moves, including the triple heelflip and 540 flip, can be done by Rodney Mullen off of a curb. Why should players have to get massive air in order to land a triple kickflip? It's not a 900 after all. Specials should be the moves that even the pros have only landed a few times in their lives. The Kickflip McTwist was only landed twice by Tony I believe. That's tough!

Sure you can keep the triple kick and heelflips. But let's see some real tough moves that the pros would agree on. Like nollie flip double underflip. Or the double kickflip late shove it I mentioned earlier.

Backside 540s are not uncommon for the pros, however when you invert the backside 540 you enter the world of genius and style. A backside 540 front flip is technically what the McTwist is. A FS 540 backflip is technically what a Rodeo Flip is.

I want to be able to do these moves manually through other means. I'd like to see the McTwist and Rodeo Flip as specials in the game. But I'd also like to get bonus points if I did the same motions using another special. I want to be able to rotate back and front flips for this reason. If I land a Perfect FS 540 backflip I should get a Rodeo bonus. And if I land a Perfect BS 540 frontflip I should get a McTwist bonus.

I think getting your character to the special meter should allow you to do some incredible things.

Your character's ollie, speed and balance stats should be higher while in special mode.

I'd like to be able rotate grabs while in special mode. You've heard me say how I'd like to be able to rotate special moves like the backflip. But this is slightly different. I'd like to be able to flip a regular grab.

You can hold R1 or L1 to rotate your grab in one direction. But what if you hold down to backflip or up to frontflip. This allows the character to rotate on a different plane. These tricks would look incredible and be much harder to pull off than regular tricks. Which is why I say you should have to have your special meter on in order to rotate your flips on a different plane. I'd like to manually be able to do a B/S Lien 360 backflip on vert.

Get creative with specials. You guys suspend a lot of reality for most of the game, why not go over the top on a trick or two?

There are many more 540 variations than just the Kickflip McTwist. Look at Danny Way in the ON video magazine and you'll see what I mean. There BS and FS 540 Varials, BS and FS McTwist and Rodeo Varials, BS and FS 540 Body Varials, and even the BS 540 Body and Board Varial. Danny also sticks the Alley McTwist (Alley-oop McTwist) and one-footed McTwist. Danny had the Nose Grab One Footed McTwist, Tony had the Tail Grab One Footed McTwist.

Tony has some good 720 variations also. Like the Inverted FS 720, dubbed the "McHawk". And my personal favorite, even more than the 900, is his Varial 720. That's the last trick he does in The End video and the trick that he stuck at the 1999 X-Games before his 900.

Double Kickflip Varial Indy: Another Tony Hawk original.

Heelflip Gaytwist: Bucky's stepping up with moves like this.

Psych Flip: Tas Pappas does the splits while doing his 360 Flip Indy Grab, dubbed the Psych Flip.

Hey, where's the 540 Board Varial?

What ever happened to the Burntwist?

The One Foot Fakie 5-0 at Slam City Jam was incredible.

Heck bring back all of the Specials from the first game.

It would be funny if on a Ho-Ho you could make the player walk along the coping a little before dropping back in. The Ho-Ho would possibly be the only way to get a streetplant in the game. Imagine being able to walk on your hands and have the balance meter of a manual. Of course you could never move that fast.

A board grab Ho-Ho would look sick on vert. It would behave like a vert handstand.

I have absolutely no idea if the Caveman rail attack works into your engine. However with any Caveman move your game covers every conceivable base of skateboarding. Minus of course butt boarding, slalom and barrel jumping.

I'd like to see Double Frontflips and Double Backflips. You shouldn't be able to rotate these.

One-Footed Front and Backflips are also cool.

One-wheeled wheelie: Plenty of freestylers could do this sick move. A nose one-wheel wheelie should also be in the game as a special.

Dark Bluntslide/ Dark Nosebluntslide: Slide on your trucks with the nose or tail flush to the side of the obstacle.

Handstand Darkslide: Can you tell me why not?

I was at Club Tony Hawk the other day and Tony answered a question about double flips. Tony said that his favorite was the double kickflip varial indy. However he also said that Brent Marks who used to be sponsored by Birdhouse had incredible double flips down. These include: Double Inward Heelflips, Double Backside Heelflips, Double 360 Heelflips, and according to Tony Brent once landed a Quadruple 360 Flip down 3 stairs. Now how's that for a list of special tricks!

Some specials like the double backside heelflip should be a self contained special. That is you shouldn't have to ollie to get the character to reach enough height to do the special trick. Just tap left, right, square for example and the character will automatically do the special move. Plus if some of these tricks are self-contained then you can add a boneless heelflip before doing the special.

Career Mode:

Skaters do a lot of things besides traveling across the country to collect giant floating letters and tapes. The pros go on skatepark tours they do demos, video and photo shoots. How about before each level in the game you give characters a mini level. For example before skating Philly what if you had to do a demo at a Philly skate shop. It would almost be part contest and part regular level. Of course the demo would be confined to a small skatepark, or even parking lot. There would be like 5 goals in the level. Things such as Grind the tour bus/van. Accept the local hero challenge (beat x-number of points), knock over 4 kids on rollerblades, ollie the autograph table, acid drop off the store roof, etc. Of course you have to do all of this while avoiding kids who keep getting in the way and angry moms demanding you have to give her kid something.

A local hero challenge would apply for example in a Huntington Beach level (my level ideas are below). You would have to do a demo at a secret skatepark run by the cops. Officer Dick would be the local hero and you would have to beat his score of x-number of points as well as knock over the evidence locker and ollie a cop car and such. Cops, both who skate and don't, would be cheering or booing you on the mini-level.

I believe you shouldn't just have huge levels with many goals, but throw in small levels between the bigger ones and contests as part of the Career mode. It's the little things that pros also have to do after all. Plus these additional smaller levels is where extra cash could be picked up so that players can load tricks into all of the button combinations. I just had a thought. These small levels could even be the entries from the best create-a-skatepark contest.



### Game Modifiers:

It's tough, I know, but frontside and backside labels should be stuck on everything you do. Not just a 180 increment label. If it's possible could there also be an Alley-oop modifier? The Alley-oop is akin to a switch move in that you do a trick or spin opposite in the way you're moving. Of course switch moves should still garner a bigger bonus.

There is a fix to the critics who call your game too easy. It was good that you changed the location of SKATE letters, hidden tape and deck in THPS3. But you should have gone the extra step and changed the other goals too. Like Get Chuck Unstuck, or help Chuck pull his zipper out of the snowblower, or help Chuck get out of an avalanche... And each character would have to play the level at a different time in the day. For example Rodney would always play the a level in the morning while Koston would always have it at night. Only when you beat the game could you play the level at any other time of the day. Keep on reading to get the breakdown of lighting effects.

The 100% gap checklist should only apply to one character at a time. That is, if you find every single gap you are rewarded with another cheat This way you could enter more cheats and goodies into the game than ever before. If you can manage to clear each gap with every character then you should unlock a really great hidden character or cheat mode. I have a wish list of cheats and codes later on.

### Level Ideas:

I wouldn't mind seeing the return of your best work in the series. So bring back Burnside if you want. However make it like Philly and bring an entire city around the level. I was disappointed that Burnside and the other returning levels were exactly like the PSOne version, pretty yes, but you could have done so much more with them. Give the skatepark a world outside of what you have already created.

Level design should be multi-layered when it can. Rooftops should be as interesting as the streets below in schools and on the city especially. Look around and you'll realize that the world is built up and down as well as out. Tunnels, bridges, stairways, escalators, elevators, beams, girders. The world in the THPS series should be built on as many levels as possible.

Environment is definitely a plus. The more sights, sounds and locals pulled from the real world, the better. I want to see pedestrians on the streets and other skaters in the parks. I want to ollie traffic jams and get chased by cop cars. If you noticed the level of detail went up when you weren't laying out imaginary locals. Plus you were still allowed artistic license and pushed the real world locals one-step closer to fantasy. I want to see worlds that have lots of reality behind them. Cities with traffic, pedestrians, changing traffic lights and other skaters too.

One thing that would help with your levels is the inclusion of real time lighting effects in your game. The PS2 should be able to handle lots of advanced features in the game. Imagine the NY level from THPS2 if you could add a real sun and real street lights. The level could be played at day, with pedestrians and cops all over the sidewalks, kids running around, hot dog vendors and bladers in the park. At dusk when there's mostly traffic and huge construction equipment tearing up sidewalks and blocking your way on the streets. Of course at night the streets would be empty, but the fact that everything is dark and illuminated only by light posts makes the obstacles harder to see or find. Add a bum or two asleep in the dark and the donut patrolling and you'll see that the levels really come alive and give the game replay value.

Think about that three times in the day lighting (morning, noon and night) and applying it to every level. How fun would the School II be to play in the morning when a few kids are running around the halls and teachers and rent-a-cops are diving in front of you? Then in the middle of the day after classes let out (that's how I see the current level) and again at night with only a few floodlights illuminating the school. Heck if you not only change the location of items and the SKATE letters but also change the time of day when each character does

their level then I seriously doubt that your game will ever be called easy again. And it isn't like you're taking away the player's ability, you're just forcing them to evolve and really learn the layout of the level, not just the locations of items for the next play through.

#### The Evolving Level:

I think that contest levels should be the only levels that go through the change in the day during the rounds. Plus the contest levels should always be evolving. For example wasn't the original goal at Roswell in THPS1 to show the space ship crashing and the Army picking up the alien?

Round 1 of the contest would have been a metal halfpipe with a few rails. During your contest run you would see the spaceship crash into the side of the mountain.

In Round 2 of competition you would see an Army convoy moving the spaceship away and an ambulance just behind the fence. The contest level would then take on additional skate obstacles from the convoy.

Round 3 would feature the level as we know it, with alien ship metal rails and a bowl that was previously empty now contained a space ship and the MASH unit now had an alien ready for his autopsy. You now have the processor power, I hope, to pull off evolving contest levels and also to change the time of day in which the levels are presented.

Skatopia:



Skatopia definitely. Skatopia is an 88-acre farm in Ohio with many skateable items. These include the Epcot Bean (a 13-foot deep bowl located inside a rusted out barn) and the King Dong Ramp, the rest of Skatopia is “500 square feet of near vertical, vertical and over vertical joy; 9 corners, 3 hips, one concrete spine, 200 feet of concrete coping, two roll in channels, 120 sheets of metal, 2 escalating over vert corners and one chicken coop!”. Currently they’re accepting donations for a mile long snake run and a clover bowl. Maybe you can beat them at the punch and put those in the game. Skatopia is set out in the woods and they have epic parties once in a while. Huge bonfires, reckless driving, lots of guns and alcohol. Some of the few things that make life worth living aside from skateboarding. You can even visit them on the new at: <http://www.skatopia.com> Skatopia is also the home of living legend Brewce Martin, the naked 3-wheeled, bowl master. Do I need to go on?

Futuristic Skatepark:

I’d like to see a future skate arena. A hidden level where your character gets teleported into a huge stadium that looks hyper futuristic. You know, blimps and flying cars flying high above the stadium. Lasers and holograms lighting up the stands with giant video screens showing pictures of you from the past.

Seeing as how a lot of pros think the hype behind competitions is growing to a frenzy why not build them a virtual stadium? However set this one in the future when skateboarding has replaced baseball as the national pastime.

You can get creative with the course layout. Have pools above ground and vert ramps below. Street obstacles in odd, artistic, shapes. Spirals that you can grind on and twisted rails and such. Unique ramp surfaces to skate on. Like a halfpipe or bowl made out of glass. Not like the radramp, but clear reflective seamless glass. Can the PS2 render those things? I’m sure it can. So you can see the crowd, lights and stadium distorted from behind the glass bowls.

Blimp Skatepark:

Put a level inside of a giant blimp. High transitions and plenty of grindable steel framing inside of a blimp. Plus you can have the helicopter drop you off over the blimp and you have to find your way inside.

Skatepark Under Construction:

How about a mega skatepark that’s still under construction? Things like skateable rebar and ramps with missing coping and holes in the transitions would be cool. Plus you could have hanging air conditioning ducts and lights suspended in the air that can be grinded on.

## The Amarillo Pipe (A Texas Level):



The Amarillo Pipe in Texas. According to Thrasher magazine it's bigger, smoother and better put together than Mt. Baldy or Gloryhole. God bless the Army Core of Engineers. It's got a perfect elbow that you can roll in on all the way through the pipe. Getting out of the pipe might prove to be a problem. The end of the pipe overlooks a steep drop off over Lake Meredith. The pipe is part of the Sanford Dam and built on federal no trespassing land. The pipe itself should only be part of a larger level though. Above the pipe there should be a busy city not unlike NY and Philly put together. You could have a big Texan truck stop (ollie or ride over a stack of trailers?) or trying not to get hit by the huge diesels going into and out of the truckstop? There used to be a great skatepark in Houston, you could move it right next to the truck stop. The Houston skatepark had a giant metal ramp but was run into the ground by the new owner. I think skating a sketchy rusted out skatepark would be interesting. Plus the southwest is host to some of the biggest and smoothest ditches around. Ditches so big and smooth they make Wallows look like a gutter. Pros love shooting out of ditches and over construction barriers now in magazine and videos. A natural gap is from the ditch, over the grass and sidewalk embankment and into the street. Big air = big fun. Just getting to the pipe should be an adventure, or a hidden part of a Texas level. The highest sticker placed in the pipe belongs to Jeff Phillips (him again?) at 11 o'clock. There's your new high sticker gap.

Okay now imagine how the level would look at night. Diesel trucks with bright headlights trying to run you down. The big Texas open sky, hmm a lot like Skate Heaven, with shooting stars and such. Plus how intimidating would the pipe look at night?

Of course you could cheat the physics engine in the halfpipe, seeing as how getting a character to pump a 20 foot transition is impossible. There is a edge line on the pipe from the water levels. Maybe you could treat that as the edge of the transition and just make the camera rotate around the skater as they go for air inside the pipe. This gives the illusion of a character really carving and doing tricks up the massive walls.

The State of Oregon:



Oregon is the home to a number of new skateparks built by Mark “Red” Scott, the guy who built Burnside. So you know these parks are huge and fun. The one pictured above is in Newberg, it lies between Burnside and The Monster in Lincoln City.

Aside from the great lines you can find at this concrete monster this park has two very unique features. The volcano (really tiny on the left with the yellow cap) has a metal cap about one foot high and built on a bearing. This means that the top of the volcano rotates! The other neat thing about this park is the Dragon Rail pictured above right. As you can see Oregon has it’s share of great skateparks including Talent and Ashland. If there was a way for you to fit all of these parks in one level it couldn’t possibly get any better.

European Contests:

What about the Münster contest in Germany? In fact the entire European series would make a great addition to the game. You already had Marseille. Now add Prague, Münster and Radlands. Sorry but the Radlands you had in the pre-made parks was pretty weak. Plus at a contest like Radlands you can have vert guys go through the roof of the tiny park.



## The Super Vans Park:



One of the new Vans skateparks. You did an incredible job with recreating the size of Philly and putting FDR in as well. Couldn't you make a mega-mall level and stick the skatepark somewhere in one of the shops too? The Washboard Bowl from Milpitas next to the Combi Pool, from Orange next to the Kidney Bowl from the Potomac next to the Capsule Bowl in Bakersfield next to the Snakerun from Ontario. You guys get the idea. One huge Vans park that takes the best from every park. Plus we get to terrorize store patrons and wreck the Vans store.

## School III:



If there were to be a third school level it would have to be made up of California Universities. From USC to Santa Barbara, Irvine and San Diego are all known for being great skate spots. Heath Kirchart is always taking pictures at the massive ledges and rails on the campus at the University of California, Irvine. They have rolling hills at Irvine and Long Beach. A composite of all of those hills, rails and ledges would be great. Hey, Cal State Long Beach has a pyramid too!

## Contests / Generic Contest Level:

I think placing in a contest should be tougher. I'm not talking about hitting just super-high scores either. I think we should get bonus points for using all of the terrain. A diversity or lip tricks, grinds, kick tricks and grab moves should influence the final score.

How would strategy change if you broke the contests down into Vert and Street competitions for the respective skaters? Ala Grind Session scores wouldn't count if you were a vert skater outside of the halfpipe or a street skater on a ramp.

Grind Session had the Triple Crown, X-Games Skateboarding had...the X-Games. Why doesn't Neversoft invent a generic contest level? Bleachers filled with a crowd. Cameramen following you around. Other skaters skating between your runs?

How about an Olympic-style event? Sterile obstacles, colorless skatepark, crooked judges and a biased flag waving crowd.



## Huntington Beach:



Aside from being a current Mecca for pro skaters, Huntington has a lot of good skate spots and skate history. The city, the beach trail, the skatepark across from the cop station and the pier are all part of skate videos and history.

Plus some of the best pool skating around can be found in HB. A well laid-out even a collection of So. Cal. Houses with pools in the backyards that you can reach by hopping fences, or going for rooftop jumps would be good. There is always the big pool contest in HB every year, you could even break up the tourney and have other skaters yelling at you and trying to get you out of the pool. Plus you can put famous pools scattered throughout the city or even country right next to each other. The Pink Motel pool can be right next to the Nude Bowl, no limits here.

Not only is there a lot of diversity of things to skate in HB you could make an event out of the pier. Like grinding over a hot dog cart, catching fire and having to fling yourself into the ocean to get the “Klein and Kirchart” Gap.

## The YMCA Parks:



The YMCA is even getting great parks. Tony Hawk designed the most recent monster ramp. They've got street layouts, vert layouts, bowls and hips too! Just like a mega Vans park you could take the best parts of all the YMCA skateparks and put them in one monster contest level.

## Warehouse III:

It seems that the warehouse levels keep coming back into the series along with the schools. A THPS3 warehouse should not just be made up of one warehouse though. You can collect the best warehouse ramps into one huge warehouse. The Plan-B ramp, the B-House ramp, the Volcom and Real ramps can all be in the same warehouse. Heck, even with girders and rafters that you have to jump through just to get to the next warehouse ramp. Think of the possibilities!

If you put together a warehouse amalgamation let's see the flaming hoop on the edge of the Birdhouse ramp and the wall of TV's in another warehouse to grind on. Did I mention that you should watch Destroying America?

## The Skyscraper Halfpipe:



If I were to design a final contest level for THPS3 I'd make it one to remember. Roswell and the Bullring will be tough to match up to but let me give it a try. First I'd design a halfpipe part Animal Chin, part Roswell and Part Bullring. Then I'd take that ramp with all of its transitions, over vert, spines and hips and put it on top of the tallest skyscraper in the world, The Neversoft Building. Nothing but other skyscrapers would be seen in the distance of the level and TV copters would be circling the level. I'd have some street elements set off to the side of course. But the entire park would be placed flush to the edge of the tower, a high net would be placed around the level to keep you from falling off the edge. And like I mentioned the evolving Roswell level I would totally make this competition level evolve.

In Round One you skate the halfpipe and park exactly as is in the morning. It would be very foggy on the rooftop and you could only make out the blinking lights of other skyscrapers in the distance. You might only be able to catch glimpses of helicopters and low flying jumbo jets as they pass overhead. In Round 2 the nets on the edge of the park come down and you play in the middle of the day. The fog has burned off and you can now clearly see that you are well over 100 stories from the streets. More helicopters start flying around and the level becomes tougher to skate with no safety net. And what's that? In the far off distance you swear you see another set of halfpipes carried by heavy lift choppers (from Mullet Falls). In Round 3 it is now the middle of the night. Search lights and blinking skyscraper lights now change the mood of the level. A police helicopter puts a spotlight on part of the contest floor so you could see the edge of the building. The heavy lift choppers have moved an equally impressive halfpipe next to the building, but leaving a huge gap between it and the rooftop. The only way to cross over between ramps is to bust a big air over the transition on the building and the transition suspended by wires. While airing between ramps you can see straight down and spot the tiny street lights below and even see a blinding searchlight as it passes between the gap.

I couldn't think of a more memorable contest level than the Skyscraper Challenge. I know I'd like to see a contest level with that much energy going for it.

### Skate Hell:

If I created a hidden level it would be Skate Hell. We know that Skate Heaven is full of the greatest spots ever. But what happens to the skaters who were evil all their lives. Surely there would be a Skate Hell. To me Skate Hell would look like Skatopia set on fire. The inside of the barn that is. Huge burning rafters overhead, the decks and rails partially burning. Skaters with horns growing out of their foreheads sessioning bowls covered in graffiti. Torn up burning couches to ollie over litter the place. Heshed out skaters wearing tight pants and mullets drinking beer and laughing at you as you sessioned the wood and metal halfpipes would add color to the level. Instead of rails you'd grind barb wire, razor wire and chains suspended all over the course. Huge gaping holes with burning rims and even more skate items would await in a lower level of hell. Come to think of it Skate Hell sounds pretty fun.

### Amusement Skatepark:

If Disneyland were a skatepark how would it be? What would it look like? Giant roller coaster rails? Odd ramp shapes and plastic slides everywhere? How would Neversoft's amusement park look like?

### Hidden Characters:

I was glad to see 80's Tony in the game. I guess I wasn't the only one who wanted to see him in there. But Tony's deck should be the fish-shaped one, and we should be able to choose his old Powell graphics too. I think that early 90's Rodney would be funny too. Baggy pants and a baggy shirt while skating a deck with super tiny wheels.

Tony in the matador costume from The End.

Jay Strickland in the Bull costume from The End. His B costume would be without the costume head.

Brewce Martin. He should be wearing his baggy shorts and knee pads. Plus he's got a Mohawk. His B costume would be naked. You could pixelate his privates the way they do in The Sims game. That would be hilarious.

Animal Chin. If a player unlocked 100% goals with every character, hidden and one create-a-skater. Plus they got every gap with every character in the game then they should be rewarded with Won Ton Chin. I think Powell would be down with that. I'd give Animal Chin some sick moves like a no handed, hang ten McTwist and call it the Zen Flip. And other outrageous moves like that.

Hell Skater. Nothing says skater than heshed out zombie, dead guy. Give him a Scarecrow deck to boot. His B costume would be Heaven Skater (a girl of course).

What's the point in putting in a future skate contest if you aren't going to have futuristic skaters?

Future Skater A: Would wear a brightly colored costume, like the athletes competing in the Olympics. He'd have a hoverboard, ala Back to the future, plus some crazy gravity defying tricks.

Future Skater B: This could be a parody of Sega's Jet Grind Radio. This skater could have a stylized artistic look. Sort of like a graffiti character-come-to-life look and a jet-powered skateboard.

Ming Tran: The Hook Ups devil/school girl would be a great counterpart to Private Carrera. Best part is Ming loves games and she's real!

Og De Souza "Oggie": I'm sure you've heard or read about Oggie. He's got a leg condition that means he has to skate by sitting on his board and pushing with his hands. He defines the spirit of skateboarding and is probably truer to skateboarding than many pros. I'd like to be able to use Oggie and see him do these tricks.

The Silver Surfer: Of all the Marvel Character's you've used why Spidey and Wolverine and not the one who is most likely to be caught skateboarding? No excuses since Kelly Slater is in the game. Bart Simpson: His skateboarding antics are based on a real life skater who used to be Matt Groenings neighbor.

Kid Mode: How about unlocking teen versions of everyone in the game? If there is a kid mode then perhaps you should use actual kid or teen pics of all of the skaters. Think about how the skaters used to look as awkward teens. Sort of like McSqueeb but apply the principle to everyone.

Human Pad Bucky Lasek: Back in the day he wore so many pads as a kid Tony said he looked like the Michelin Man.

Jamie Thomas once had Long Hair.

Elissa Steamer wore a ponytail.

Chad Muska used to dress preppy before he found hip-hop.

Both Rodney Mullen and Eric Koston wore baggy pants.

Kareem always looked cool.

Hidden Costumes:

Instead of having to clear 100% gaps and levels to unlock all of the goodies you could hide them in secret spots. For example, hidden costumes should be hidden in a locker at a school level and so forth. Plus these change of wardrobe would be a good way of putting hidden characters in the game. Just use the persona from their skateboard graphics on some characters.

Caballero 1980's: Hawaiian shirt buttoned at the top, white shorts with suspenders hanging down.

Mullen 1980's: All pads, like McSqueeb. Plus he'd have a small flat skateboard with tiny green wheels.

Tony the Birdman: Use the Birdman Skeleton design right off of his deck to give him a more animated personality.

Tony the pizza guy: From his appearance in Destroying America where he reprised his role as the pizza delivery guy from Gleaming the Cube.

Andrew the Executioner: His classic reaper figure from his decks would be killer to skate as.

Koston the Girl symbol: You could animate a 2-D Parappa-inspired Girl symbol in the place of Koston.

Rodney the freestyle ripper: This would be one way to get the classic "Ripper" Bones character into your game but have the skeleton representing Rodney.

Kareem the Ghetto Kid: Kareem could be given the graffiti art treatment and characterized as an alternate hidden costume/character.

Muska the Ghetto Thugsta: Why not have the Duke Nukem looking Muska as an available character?

Rune the Psycho Bird: Right off of his Flip decks. The Psycho Bird with a Hannibal Lector complex.

Caballero the skating Dragon: Inspired by his series of Powell decks.

Elissa the Toy Machine Monster: Put in the Monster from Toy Machine in her place.

Geoff the psychedelic trip: Give him psychedelic colors that swirl on him like disco mode.

Jamie as the Zero monster: He looks just like Thomas, instead of a face he has a jawless skull under the hooded sweatshirt.

Cheats:

Invisible Skater: How about an invisible skater? Like the original THPS2 demo. However the skater should still collide with objects and traffic like normal.

Invisible Deck: It would be hilarious to watch the skater floating in the air and doing tricks on an invisible deck.

Hover Deck: If we beat the game with the future skater we'd get a hover deck from the future for any character.

Jet Deck: Or we could get a jet-powered deck from the future so we could zip around the city streets faster.

Ghost Mode: Make our character and deck semitransparent. This way we could skate through traffic and pedestrians without trouble.

Cat Reflexes: This would help orient your character if they shoot off of a ramp. Instead of falling on their head they should be able to spin around and always land on their feet.

Donger Pop: This makes you ollie higher than you can boneless.

Quick Snap: Speeds up the rotation of special flips so you can land them on flat ground.

Kid Mode: Aside from being able to land any trick this mode should also clear the streets of pedestrians, obstacles and traffic.

Clear Screen: I know it doesn't sound like much but I'd like to play once in a while on a screen with no score, stance, points, clock or trick labels. Just the ultimate free skate.

Mini Games:

There should be mini games in between levels and contests. Do a cover shot or a 411VM part. Unlike Grind Session where it shows you an unrelated picture of your skater if you get the required points or combos we should get a high resolution shot of a trick or line you just performed on the cover of a generic skate mag. Or you should have a short 3 second clip with the 411VM logo on the corner of the screen showing your trick.

### Scrapbook:

Each character should have their stats and records in the pages of a scrapbook. The page should contain all of the important game data. Cover shots, video parts, hidden character/costume/secret unlocked, highest score per level, highest combo, all of the decks unlocked plus a high resolution pic of the character and current costume/deck setup.

### Film Editor:

Not that the replay movies are bad but some tweaking could be done. I'd like to see closer shots in replay than distance shots. Only because most videos present us with close up fisheye skateboarding.

If you were to include a replay editor in the game it might behoove you to look at the one in the game Driver. Those guys got it right. We should be able to drop in cameras and even add cheap special effects. Like drop a camera that does a Matrix-style wrap around in the middle of a flip trick. You get the idea?

### Save Preferences:

If I go to the trouble of choosing tricks, decks and stats for every character then I should be able to save those for all of the characters. Right now we can only have the most recent decks and costume (A or B) for the last character we used.

What if we get one character who has tricks, stats and button combinations the way we like them? Can we apply those preferences to another character, assuming we have enough money to do so? I'd like to do that instead of going one by one through the characters.

### Movies:

Aside from an ending movie for each of the skaters there should be mini movies in between levels and at the end of the game.

In between levels or contest courses should have some sort of movie or cinematic. Like a tour bus going from place to place during the career mode. Or a jet flying you around the world.

Plus the ending cinematic should include the actual game engine (like Spider-Man). For example let's say the last level is the Skyscraper Challenge I made up in the last wishlist. Show a high resolution movie of the character jumping off of the roof falling a few stories to another high rise under construction. We watch the character grind the steel girders while construction workers run jump out of your way. You can have sparks showering you from welder's torches. A camera shot showing the drop off between the frames of the building.

The skater reaches the end of the construction and ollies off the building again. Crashing a few floors below through another window. This high rise is on fire and the skater ollies over burning desks and holes in the floor (what am I a pyromaniac?). Finally the skater breaks through the other side and grinds down the fire dept. ladder truck.

(Here is where you can have multiple endings for each character)

Ending 1: You ollie off of the fire engine and land in front of Officer Dick who is writing you a ticket.

Ending 2: You land, roll away and keep skating through the streets.

Ending 3: You land pick up the board and get into a limo.

Ending 4: You snap your board in two ollieing off of the fire truck.

Ending 5: Land, hail a taxi cab and ride away.

Ending 6: You land skate down the street and grind down a subway platform.

Ending 7: Land on Officer Dick and have him chase you.



Ending 8: Land in front of a group of cameramen and photographers. Like they're shooting this for a movie  
Ending 9: Land on the fire dept. net. Shake hands with Fireman Dave and get into the Hook Ups Ambulance.

The Caveman:

Before the ollie was mastered running and jumping with the board was the way skaters attacked rails and ledges. This was called doing a caveman. I would like to have the ability to run in the game.

I've been mulling it over in my head just what one real world thing is missing in the series that would take the THPS series to another level. And I thought that being able to pick up your board and being able to run with it. Just like we used to do back in the days of the dino.

Imagine if you held down L1 on the flat, your character would get off his board, pick it up or kick it up and start running anywhere you directed him to. If you tapped X the character would jump up or over the obstacle. If you jumped over an edge, like the leap of faith, you could let go of L1 and hold circle to have them hold a Melon (default) grab on the drop.

This could come in handy when going uphill or upstairs. That's right! I'd like to be able to run upstairs. If you listened to my previous level ideas you'd know that I want a lot of real world things in your game. As it stands every level is laid out in such a way as you can skate wherever you want. In the real world there are not transitions everywhere. That's something that's been haunting those confined to a wheelchair. We have to climb stairs, we have to hop over puddles. Why even have staircases in your game if we either ollie over them or grind down a rail? Why can't we climb the stairs? Attack the rail with a Caveman slide? Plus a caveman allows you to run through shrubbery, sand, grass or gravel without losing speed.

But you'd have to create entirely new animation's for tricks and grabs coming from a running jump. Noel doesn't have anything planned for the next year, right? This opens up the game engine in ways I don't know if you've considered.

Criticism:

If I pride myself on one thing it is my ability to dissect and identify the strengths and weaknesses in the great games. This is where I made most of my enemies at Delphi yet also managed to gain the respect of a few people at Neversoft. It should be obvious that the only reason I have dedicated the time to put together this list of ideas is because I love the THPS series and I want to see it become better. I believe there is always room for improvement.

THPS3 was a paradox for the franchise. Easily the most popular title and best produced in the series however THPS3 was lacking and fundamentally flawed. The flaws existed mainly in the level design. The levels themselves were beautiful. Each drawn out in the type of detail and imagination you come to expect from Neversoft.

However the game's biggest weakness came with the addition of pre-drawn, almost infinite, combo lines. The warning signs were there with THPS2. With the addition of the manual, insane combos were no longer for the THPS über-talents like Cauthen, and he warned us. The revert helped realize the absurd combo strategy. However the wildcard that was thrown in was level design that simply made THPS less combo creative and more reliant on rail stacking.

Magazine critics and fanboys all over the world hailed THPS3 as the best in the series because the combo system had been improved and the level design allowed for absurd combos. At first THPS3 looks to appease the neophytes and masters of the series. It's level design helps players who aren't good at racking up points meet level quotas with little difficulty. The addition of freestyle moves and the revert allowed veterans to take their scores to another level.

Top off the game with a new engine and a tweaked control scheme and you can see why THPS3 was labeled "perfect" by almost every magazine. But I did not see the game as perfect. In fact I saw the game as far from perfect. Yes it was good. And yes Neversoft did improve the game in places where it was lacking. However when it boiled down to it Neversoft also took away some of the things that made the game so great.



There was a certain difficulty in the game that was not frustrating. The level design was great in previous THPS games. However the level of detail shot up when Neversoft tackled real world locals like Venice and Burnside. The real world does not offer as many predetermined lines as those in THPS3 would suggest. Trying to string together lines in Burnside or Venice took some skill and figuring out the level was half the fun.

Many of the levels in THPS3 are essentially the same. Around the perimeter of the level there is a series of rails or ledges. In some cases the rails literally drop you onto the next rail. Making the idea of building a combo seem redundant when all you have to do is balance the character and enjoy the ride. This is true for Rio, Tokyo, Canada, Skater Island, half of Los Angeles, half of Suburbia and half of the Airport. You know what I'm talking about especially in Rio. The curved rail around the skatepark is a blatant attempt to appease those who find it difficult to rack up the points.

My mind wanders and I think of the game reviewers that rated THPS3 so highly because it was so easy to score the big points. Was there a point in the game development where Neversoft had to cater to the wishes of casual gamers who could not master an already easy control setup? Where Neversoft made a game so easy that everyone would instantly be drawn to it. But in doing so they have painted the series into a corner if reviewers and fans expect to be spoon fed rail combos in future versions of the game.

The originality, animation, level and game design that made THPS the most respected and fun to play skateboarding series ever seemed to be thinned out by THPS3. THPS became eye candy and a collection of strategically placed rails. Sadly with THPS3 being a phenomenal success a few here at Planet Tony Hawk fear that Neversoft may simply "take the money and run." Or adopt the attitude that all they have to do is make THPS3 clones in every future version of the series. If I were Activision I would lean on Neversoft not to stray too far on the cash machine of a franchise they now work so hard to protect.

So what can be done? Will Neversoft look to overhaul the franchise they established? Will they take a serious look at THPS3 and try to figure out what works and what doesn't? Will THPS4 be such a major change in the series that fans might be taken for a whole new experience? Or will Neversoft play it safe by simply tweaking THPS4 the way they made THPS2 from the first game engine?

I hope that Neversoft goes for broke and just tries to create a new gaming experience with future versions of the series. Experimentation is necessary to keep the title alive. New ideas, new design and control schemes must be considered if Neversoft wants to maintain their title as king of the skateboard game.

Comparisons:



VS.



Neversoft should take a serious look at what makes other action, platform, sports and action sports game work and fail. My first impression of THPS3 when I discovered many of the combo lines had been determined and circular was that the level design was not Tony Hawk's Pro Skater anymore but instead Jet Grind Radio.

That is not to say that Jet Grind Radio is a bad game. Although full of inline skaters, but not a bad game. Characters in Jet Grind Radio (furthermore known as JGR) have perfect balance and most of the game revolves around spraying graffiti and finding long lines for combos. Each level in JGR is built with at least one "Infinite Grind" line. Some of these lines are obvious, like the Rio level in THPS3. Some of the lines however require some ingenuity. Characters in JGR can wallride, jump and grind various obstacles in an attempt to reach the infinite grind. From highwire acts that would dizzy a rollercoaster enthusiast to street-level curb grinds

reminiscent of early THPS level design. JGR was the first, and in my opinion, best at that type of level design. But JGR levels require absurd lines and predetermines lines because the game demands it.

Level design in the THPS series has never demanded rails and predetermined lines. It was the freedom in the game and the ability to create your own lines that made THPS an instant classic. If THPS3, or 4 or any other game from the series is going to use the JGR formula then it cannot stop with the placement of rails. The whole package has to be imported if that is the future of the THPS series.

By design JGR really only has three levels. Each broken down into three sub levels. So where is the fun in so few levels? JGR carried with it one of the most original concepts and plots that has yet to be reproduced in any other game, action-sport or otherwise. JGR featured inline skaters and the tricks they could do as simply the “in” to the game. At the same time you were doing tricks you also had to find a way to graffiti the city and avoid the police. The police would become progressively more difficult, culminating in chasing you down with helicopters, flame-throwers, machine gunners and tanks for spraying graffiti. That plot was then thrown on top of another plot involving organized crime, rival gangs and demon summoning. That is a lot of well thought out work that went into JGR and not simply just a showcase for cel-shading and infinite grinds.

Now let’s turn our attention to THPS3. The series has remained basically the same since THPS. The levels, tricks, animation, and control have gone up in quality. But there is still no semblance of plot, storyline or other cohesive element that brings the levels together. Not that THPS needs any type of plot or story. The design gives you the same freedom that your control layout has. You can do just about anything you want on each level of THPS. The question remains why? Where is the series headed? Is each game going to be roughly the same with only a few additions and touch-ups?

Will THPS ever get to the point where the seemingly random events like getting an axe to a creepy tall man who uses it to open up a haunted house mean something? Will he bring on the wrath of the Demoness who now haunts all skaters who trespass into her house? Or will those events remain just to be for visceral reactions? Will the level evolve and get harder to do (as in JGR) the closer you are to accomplishing all of the goals? Will Officer Dick ever give you chase for skating on private property? Will Private Carrera fall for a skater who can beat her at a game of SKATE? Will you help friend Ollie the Bum a job? No the game does not need a cohesive plot to remain fun. But think of how the game would be if the levels and characters were tightly integrated with a plot. A multi-faceted story arc that brings new things into the mix depending on who and how you play the levels through with a given character.

I get a sense that the levels really are designed independently and have no correlation with any other. I marvel at how much was accomplished in JGR where the control was nowhere as refined as it is in the THPS series. Yet the incredible story, unique premise, hidden items and evolving levels helped make up for the lack of refined controls.

Now that Jet Set Radio Future has been released on the Xbox it is generating a lot of interest. Magazines that panned or overlooked the original title are now writing droves on JSRF. The character design, animation, control, game engine and level design have all exceeded the original in every way. In some web and online magazines JSRF is outscoring THPS3 on the PS2 and X-box. This is not to say THPS3 is a bad game, but as far as sequels go JSRF pushed the envelope more than THPS2 to 3. Isn’t it interesting that the only game that could possibly give THPS a run for the money, as far as quality not popularity, is not another skateboarding game but an inline game?

But those are apples and oranges. The Japanese have a certain spin that makes their games unique. And the Americans have an equally unique spin and idea when we make out games. THPS can no more become a cel-shaded adventure any more than JGR can become the most accurate and open-ended action-sport game on the market. Each is good in their own way but each also stands room for improvement and perhaps even borrow some ideas from the other.

So where is the future of THPS heading? No one outside of Neversoft knows for certain. But add a plot or story? Tie in the skaters and the levels? Is that a good or bad idea? I will leave that up to Neversoft and the millions of fans out there to debate and discuss online.

Music Suggestions:



Since skateboarding is currently tied closely to hip-hop culture (even though it does have punk and surf roots) I suggest listening to and maybe considering some music from the Return of the DJ series. Bomb Hip-Hop put out four albums over the years that have been set in the roots of hip-hop. From rappers, to emcee, breakdancers and graffiti artist. I don't remember a time where a Bomb album disappointed. I think their DJ series is by far the best.

From the Return of the DJ series I suggest "Rockstar II" by DJ Z-Trip, "My Definition" by DJ Static, "Symphony 3000" by Top Rawmen, "Death of hip-hop" by Kool DJ E.Q. and "Scroll of the Wrist Beam" by DJ Qbert for consideration in the next game.

Other titles to consider are "Reverse Psychology" by Bullfrog, on the Bullfrog Album. "Disintegrator" by DJ Swamp on the album Never is Now. "Tried By 12 [Squarepusher Mix]" by East Flatbush Project on the album Xen Cuts, disk 3. "Shadrach" by the Beastie Boys from the album Sounds of Science.

A source for musical cues, especially when all the DJ's are concerned comes from a new documentary titled "SCRATCH." It was directed by Doug Pray and was distributed this spring by a major studio. Hopefully you got a chance to see it while it toured in Los Angeles. If not get it on DVD when it comes out. This will help bring you up to speed on the history and current events with the turntablism movement and the most talented of hip-hop performers. Many of the DJ's from the Return of the DJ series are featured in the documentary.

Graffiti Art:



Design and fashion for many popular skateboarders is also derived from hip-hop culture. Just look at the logos, print ads and designs in many popular clothing and websites. The biggest influence on design in hip-hop are the graffiti artists. The Tony Hawk series has paid particular attention to graffiti art, especially in THPS3. I shouldn't have to preach to the choir because you obviously "get it."

If the team at Neversoft needs more inspiration and help with design cues for the clothing and even levels or detail for the next installment of THPS4 I suggest the following websites.

ARTCRIMES: [www.artcrimes.org](http://www.artcrimes.org) and CAN TWO: [www.cantwo.de](http://www.cantwo.de)

Visual Inspiration:





BOX D

If I were to name one artist whom I think captures hip-hop and street culture more accurately than any other one it would have to be Michael Lau. Michael is an award-winning artist from Hong Kong, whose illustrations and figures have been showcased in galleries throughout Asia.

Michael captures the look of street culture, global, street and hip-hop culture. Whether it is skateboarding, snowboarding or just hanging out, his figures look exactly like kids that you may know. Their faces, looks and attitude are right from real life, only characterized.

His medium is the 12" figure. All of the bodies, clothes, accessories and heads are handmade by Michael. He has featured skateboarders, snowboarders and wakeboarders in his collections. Their clothes reflective of many of the top brands in those fields. I.E. His skateboarders wear shoes by Axion and clothes by Alphanumeric. His snowboarders ride Burton snowboards. There is an understanding of the culture and detail in every figure he has created. His figures have been featured in the Crazy Smiles and LMF productions at galleries. Michael calls the figures members from the Gardenergala series.

The Gardenergala figures capture hip-hop culture better than any photo or magazine article I've ever seen. They are physical manifestations of cultural ideals. I mention Michael to you specifically for the way he captured the look of Gardenergala skateboarders.



As you can see by the images above Michael is great at capturing the look of real skaters and kids today. He

knows and respects skateboarding as a whole and certainly knows it's history. Take a look at the characterized Mike McGill/Michael Lau skull on the deck being held by Box D. He isn't stuck in the past but also features skaters with modern decks skating street and halfpipes.

You should go to the Gardenergala webpage and look at some of the CGI movies made with the Gardenergala kids. The movies feature mostly skateboarding so hopefully you will be inspired by that. I'd love to see Michael's principal figures Maxx, Miss, B.B., Brian or Tattoo considered as a hidden character in THPS4. Sadly many wanna-be's are coming out of the woodwork and are diluting the market with blatant rip-off's to Michael's work. Michael does at least have talented contemporaries that he acknowledges, people like Eric So and Brothers Worker have more of the toy perspective than Michael. But Michael's eye for detail and cultural relevance is unrivaled.



The biggest obstacle should you be considering using anyone from Gardenergala is acquiring the license. Sony bought the Gardener license a couple of years ago and has been very selective as to who they allow to use the Gardener figures. But I know that Activision is a big company and Neversoft is a respectable name so maybe they will cut you a break should you consider adding Maxx, or any of the Gardeners to THPS4.

To learn more about Michael's figures and study his designs I suggest looking at one of his webpages <http://www.gardenergala.com/> I know the art team at Neversoft is capable. But it shouldn't hurt mentioning other artists who know their subject matter. Especially when an artist like Michael is capable of capturing the look of the skateboarder.

I know in the perfect world everyone's ideas are considered and implemented. The past 16 pages have been filled with many grand delusions. Even though some ideas are outlandish (like creating a Gardenergala hidden player) they are at least considered. If these suggestions find their way into the bottom of the recycle bin then at least you took the time to read this far. Thank you. I wish the team at Neversoft best of luck for the future and I hope that you maybe find the room in your games for one or more of my ideas and suggestions.

Sincerely,

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