

review

Ghost in the Shell - Stand Alone Complex
Video Game, Bandai (PS2)

video game

by Patrick Lichty

With the 2004 release of the *Ghost in the Shell II* movie and the *Stand Alone Complex* TV series, Masamune Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell* universe is becoming a staple of anime culture. Placed in a future where humans live as a continuum of beings -- from the "stock" (unaugmented) variety all the way to the fully cybernetic, where all that remains of the original equipment is a dwindling chunk of the original brain. The protagonists consist of the members of the covert intelligence / problem-solving unit Section 9, the most noted of which is Major Motoko Kusanagi (or Aramaki, depending on the story). If you are in the *GITS* universe, you are undoubtedly going to have intrigue, a bit of violence and a lot of questions about machine / human identity.

What's rather confusing in the Shirow universe is that there are three distinct through-lines: the first and second movies seem to have differing timelines, and the *Stand Alone Complex* TV show disregards the movies. However, further investigation of this would be beyond the scope of this review.

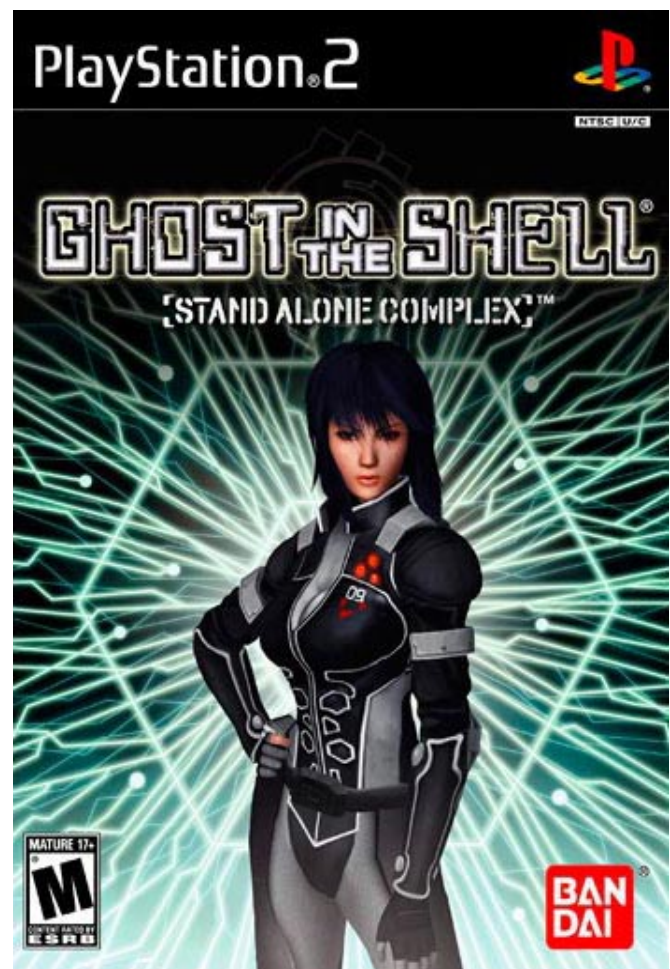
Based upon a possible plot placed in the *GITS - Stand Alone Complex* universe, you use a third-person perspective to guide Major Kusanagi through an investigation of money laundering, murders, and larger implications. That's all I will say for now.

My interest in the game is rooted in cyberculture studies, an area where *GITS* looms large, and I was interested in how Bandai Entertainment would handle the story line, gameplay, etc. The artwork and story line are straight *GITS*, with plenty of cybernetics abound and the possibility to use the Net to hijack other cyborgs' brains to get information, snipe, etc. The game engine represents Shirow's work quite well, the cut-scene art is well done, and the game response is smooth. In general, this game is a good third-person jump-and-shoot in the style of *Oni*, another first-person over-the-shoulder game with an anime feel. However, this leads to my biggest criticism, as there are times when I felt that *GITS - Stand Alone Complex* could be called *Oni 2*. Although *GITS* is a solid game with an interesting plot, I was hoping for some metaplay, like the maps and Dresspheres in *Final Fantasy X-2*, or the layering of worlds in the *.hack* series. Sure, you get to hack other cyborgs and get some variation in play there, but it doesn't go any further.

And when everything is finished, you can open the **Intelligent Agent 5.2**

"Deathmatch" and use a number of Shirow-inspired suits. However, if you are a single player in "Deathmatch," there is no Non-Player Character to go up against, which seems like a pretty obvious omission. So, if you are playing on your own and done with the game, your only options are to blow yourself up or go back and play.

GITS - Stand Alone Complex fits the story's universe and plot well, reflects the look and feel of the culture it's trying to represent, but has a few holes in its gameplay. It still gets three out of five stars from me, as it does what it does well; yet I wanted more, and I believe that the story left room enough to deliver more. If you are a student of cyborg / techpop culture, this game is probably right up your alley. If you're a *GITS* fan, go get this as well. But if you are a hardcore gamer who is not specifically interested in the *GITS* universe, cyberjacking, etc., then this game might leave you looking for more satisfaction.



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