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Document History:

02/28/03 - v1.00 - Initial Release

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Section One - The Basics

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0101: What is a ROM?

A ROM is a copy of the program from a console cartridge. In other words, it's the actual game. ROMs can be run by emulators to allow you to play console games on your computer.

0102: What is ROM hacking?

ROM hacking involves editing a ROM for various purposes. The term 'hacking' derives from the original computer related definition of the word which means to explore technology. ROM hacking does not involve breaking the ROM's security so as to deface its web page or steal its credit card.

ROM hacking might involve translating the text from one language to another, editing the graphics, fixing a glitch in the coding of the game or any other number of possible changes.

0103: Why do people ROM hack?

The prominent (and only valid) reason is because they enjoy it. Yes, they want to see the game they're hacking playable in English. Yes, some of them like the attention they get from working on a high level project. But if you don't enjoy facing and overcoming the challenges involved in ROM hacking, you're never going to successfully complete a project.

0104: What type of people ROM hack?

0301: How do I edit graphics?

You'll need to use a tile editor for this. (See Section Eleven - Tools for recommendations on tile editors.)

0302: Why are the graphics all scrambled?

That's just how the graphics are stored in the ROM. There is no way to put them in order. You'll have to search and experiment to get things right. (See 0105)

0303: Why can't I find the graphics I want to hack?

If you've searched the ROM and can't find the graphics you want to hack, chances are they're compressed. While it's certainly possible to uncompress graphics, it's not a simple task and not something a beginning ROM hacker should attempt. Set that project off to the side and work on something else until you've mastered the basic skills. Then you can worry about learning assembly. (See Section Nine)

0304: How do I edit the title screen of a ROM?

As long as the title screen isn't compressed, you edit it exactly like you would any other graphic, just that it's bigger. Consult "Title Screen Hacking Made Easy" by InVerse for more on this topic.

0305: Why are the colors all wrong?

Every game uses a different palette and there's no way for most graphic editors to know what that palette is. Some utilities will allow you to load a palette from a save state but most of the time, you'll simply have to adjust the palette by hand. Remember, though, these changes aren't permanent. You have to hack the palette within the ROM in order to save color changes.

0306: How do I change the color of the graphics?

Some emulators and utilities will allow you to modify the palette within that program but this isn't a permanent change. For this, you will have to do some palette hacking. Try The Palette Hacking Doc by Toma for NES palette hacking or SNES Palette Format by Jay.

0307: Why don't my changes show up?

First, make sure you've saved the changes in your editor. This may sound obvious, but almost everyone (myself included) has forgotten to click save at one time or another and then wondered why nothing had changed.

Also, if you're reloading from a save state, keep in mind that some of the information you are hacking may be stored in that save state. This means you'll have to do something to flush the memory in order to see your new graphics. In some games, this might be as simple as going to an inventory or pause screen. Others might require you to enter another area. Sometimes, you'll simply have to die and start that level over again to see your changes.

Another possibility is that your ROM is set as read only. Check the attributes and make sure read only isn't selected.

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VIII. Section Four - Editing Text

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0401: How do I edit text?

You open the ROM in a hex editor, along with the appropriate table, and edit away. (See Section Eleven - Tools for a recommendation of hex editors.)

0402: What is a table?

A table is a file that tells a hex editor what font characters correspond with what hex values. Tables are only readable by hex editors that are specifically designed for ROM hacking purposes.

0403: How do I make a table?

It's a relatively simple process but still goes beyond the scope of this FAQ. Consult the document [The Definitive Guide to ROM Hacking Tables](#) by InVerse or [Tables for Dummies](#) by satsu.

0404: What if the text I want to edit is in Japanese?

You edit it just like you do English text. You'll need a table that includes Japanese characters if you want to see them in the hex

IX. Section Five - Editing Other Things

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0501: How do I edit levels?

Some popular (and a few unpopular) games have utilities specifically built to edit the levels, so first check for one of those. If the game you want to edit doesn't have a level editor already, you'll have to figure out the level format yourself by corrupting the ROM. Consult Basic ROM Corruption by InVerse for more details.

0502: How do I edit statistics?

As with levels, a few popular games have utilities specifically for this purpose. If the game doesn't have such a tool, you'll have to search for the location of the statistics via ROM corruption. Consult Basic ROM Corruption by InVerse for more details.

0503: How do I edit items?

If you're wanting to edit the statistics of items, see 0502. If you're wanting to edit what items your character currently has in a game, see 0504.

0504: How do I hack save states?

Save state editing is a bit more precise than other types of editing. Consult Hacking RPG Inventories by The Spook for more details.

0505: How do I make Game Genie codes permanent?

This involves hex editing the ROM. Consult Game Genie Doc by SnowBro for more details.

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X. Section Six - Translating

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0601: How do I translate Japanese?

You aren't going to learn Japanese from a tutorial. If you are interested in learning the language, consult section XVIII References for a list of sites that provide educational information concerning the Japanese language. If you're just interested in getting the

Japanese in your project translated, you might be best served by locating a Japanese speaker willing to translate for you.

0602: Can I use an online translator?

You could, but your script would likely come out horribly mangled. Online translators are far from accurate. For example, using the most popular online translator, BabelFish, the sentence "Let's go in the room." translates to "That with everyone you will try going in the room." Now if it does such a bad job with a simple sentence, imagine how badly it will mangle an entire script. Online translators are fine when you want to translate individual item names or the occasional short sentence but relying on them to translate a game script for you is pointless.

0603: How can I find a script translator?

Your best bet is to post on ROM hacking related messageboards asking for a translator. Don't just say "I want to hack such and such game and need a translator." though, because you're unlikely to receive much help. You need to show evidence that you're capable of handling the project. Do some initial hacking to show that you know what you're doing. Change some dialogue text and show off your work with screen shots. The text you hack in doesn't need to be correct, it just needs to show that you're capable of hacking the ROM. Also, it helps to have your script dumped (see 0408) so you can inform a prospective translator of just how much text needs to be translated.

0604: How can I view Japanese characters on my computer?

Some programs have built in support. For example, in Internet Explorer, there is a Japanese (Auto-Select) option under Encoding in the View menu. Other programs will require you to install a Japanese font. There are also programs you can run that will allow you to view Japanese in just about any program. (See Section 10 - Tools for more information.)

0605: How can I type in Japanese?

In Windows XP or 2000, you can enable the native IME by going to Control Panel and selecting Regional and Language Options. Click Add and select Japanese as the Input Language. This will add Japanese as an installed service. You can then set the Language Bar and Key Settings button to allow you to type in Japanese.

If you're using Windows 95 or 98, you can download a Global Input Method Editor from Microsoft's website (<http://www.microsoft.com>).

Macintosh users can select Japanese from the keyboard menu. There are IME's for Unix as well. Your best bet is to check the website for your particular flavor to find the best method to accomplish this.

Another option is to download a Japanese word processing program. (See Section 10 - Tools for more information.)

0606: What are the different types of Japanese characters?

There are four basic types of Japanese characters that you'll have to deal with while ROM hacking. The most prevalent are hiragana and katakana, collectively referred to as kana. Kana is the written version of the Japanese spoken language. In other words, much like Romanic alphabets, each kana has a specific sound that it makes. Hiragana characters generally correspond to native Japanese words. Katakana are usually used to write non-native words and names. For each sound in the Japanese "alphabet", there is a corresponding hiragana and katakana character.

Next up is kanji. Kanji are the big, complicated characters that most people associate with Japanese (though kanji is used in Chinese and Korean as well.) Each kanji represents a specific word or idea. There are several thousand kanji. Finally, there is romaji which is when Japanese words are written using Romanic characters. You'll probably never actually encounter romaji in a game, but if you spend any time on ROM hacking messageboards or chat rooms, you'll likely encounter it.

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XI. Section Seven - Advanced ROM Hacking
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0701: What is an ISO?

An ISO is an image taken from a CD, much as a ROM is an image taken from a cartridge. Referring to an ISO as a "Playstation ROM" will likely get you ridiculed.

0702: How do I hack Playstation games?

There have been a few complete Playstation translations, so interest

in hacking for PSX is on the rise. Since you're dealing with a CD instead of a ROM, some things will obviously be different. The basics are still the same, though. You'll still be hex editing the text, using relative searching to locate it, etc. Consult "The PlayStation Translation Doc" by Cless for more information.

0703: How do I hack games for newer systems?

There have been translation projects involving Saturn, Dreamcast and PS2 games, among others. As of this writing, no complete translations have been released for any of these systems, however. Once again, the basics are going to be the same but you'll just have to experiment on your own to figure out anything special regarding a certain system.

0704: How do I hack PC games?

Once again, the basics of ROM hacking apply to PC games. Search the web and you'll likely find some tutorials regarding hacking PC games.

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XII. Section Eight - Assembly

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0801: What is assembly language?

No matter what language a game was originally written in, when it is compiled, it's converted to machine language. Using a disassembler, you can convert a ROM into assembly language. Each processor type has its own flavor of assembly, hence NES, SNES, etc will use different types of assembly.

0802: What is assembly hacking?

Assembly hacking is when you hack a ROM by disassembling it and rewriting portions of the assembly code. This will give you much greater control over the changes, since you'll be able to see exactly what is happening within the game.

0803: How do I learn assembly language?

You're not going to learn Assembly language from a single tutorial like you will with most ROM hacking techniques. You'll have to read what documents exist and then start breaking a ROM in order to really learn Assembly. Try "6502 Microprocessor" (commonly named 6502.txt)

complicate things by dealing with a language you don't understand. It's really not a good idea to choose a big RPG as your initial project, though. Get some experience first, then move on to bigger and better things.

0903: Why are there so many unfinished hacks for a certain game?

If there are multiple unfinished patches for a single game, it's likely that there are problems with the game that make it difficult to hack. That doesn't mean that it's impossible to translate that particular game, just that nobody who has the skills to accomplish it has sat down and worked on it. Many games, mostly RPGs, have taken several years of effort to actually complete a translation. A lot of the time, new ROM hackers will pick up a big RPG with grandiose ideas of translating it and garnering instant fame. Then they run into the same problem that everyone else who attempted it encountered, or else they just get overwhelmed by the sheer size of such an endeavor, and give up. If there are multiple patches for a single game, it's probably safe to say that it would be a bad choice for a first project.

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XIV. Section Ten - Tools

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1001: What graphics hacking tools should I use?

Tile Layer Pro is hands down the best tile editor for just about everything you'll need to do. Tile Mod is another popular graphics editor that can do a few things TLP can't. YY-Chr is also worth a look. There are many editors that can accomplish most hacking, so just use the one that you're most comfortable with.

1002: What text hacking tools should I use?

For hex editing, Hexposure is the king. Unfortunately, it's a DOS application, so if you're using Windows XP, you'll have to go with Hexecute or Translhextion. For script dumping, ROM Juice is probably the only really decent general extractor and Gizmo is probably the best inserter. In general, however, it's usually better to use a custom built tool.

1003: What emulators are good for hacking?

It's not good for much else, but Nesticle has a pattern editor that

group because it looks like you're wanting to take credit for their hard work. If you really want to start a ROM hacking group, then show some progress on a project of your own and then solicit people to help you with it. It's generally easier to find an existing group and offer your services to them, however.

1103: How can I get someone to translate a particular game?

Asking someone to translate a particular game rarely ever works. Most ROM hackers work only on games they enjoy. Asking someone to translate a game, even if it's a sequel or similar to another game they've hacked, is most likely only going to annoy them. The best way you can go about getting a particular game translated is to build a shrine, of sorts, to it. Post screen shots, summarize the game, in short, show people why that particular game really needs to be translated. Then link your shrine on a few general ROM hacking forums and hope for the best.

1104: Why shouldn't I e-mail a ROM to a ROM hacker?

A sure fire way to gain hatred from the ROM hacking elite is to send them ROMs via e-mail and ask them to translate it. For starters, most ROM hackers know exactly where to get any ROM they could ever want. Sending a ROM via e-mail can be a problem for multiple reasons. First of all, just because you have a 'leet broadband connection doesn't mean that your recipient does. They could be on a very slow dialup and a large file such as a ROM could clog up their bandwidth for a significant amount of time, thus turning them against you before they have even read your request. Just because you CAN send large files via e-mail doesn't mean you should. That's not the purpose of e-mail. You can use a car to slaughter cattle as well, but that doesn't mean it's a good idea. Secondly, you have no idea where a ROM hacker might be checking their mail from. It's almost a guarantee that the ROM you're sending is copyrighted material, and some people don't appreciate unwittingly downloading illegal files on someone else's computer or in their laptop at a local cafe. In short, never e-mail a ROM without explicit permission from the recipient.

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XVI. The Scene

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1201: What is "The Scene"?

"The Scene" (which you'll often see written in bold) refers to a large subset of ROM hackers who communicate via IRC and various

The Repository - <http://www.romhacking.com>
Zophar's Domain - <http://www.zophar.net>
CTC - <http://www.confederatedtranslationcompany.com>

Translation Archives

The Whirlpool - <http://donut.parodius.com>
RPGd - <http://rpgd.emulationworld.com>

Non-Translation Hacks

Acmlm's ROM Hack Domain - <http://acmlm.overclocked.org>
Challenge Games - <http://www.cg-games.net>
RuSteD ROM Hacks - <http://bmf.rustedmagick.com>

Japanese Information

Japanese Online - <http://www.learn-japanese.com>
Jim Breen's Page - <http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/japanese.html>
The Japanese Page - <http://www.thejapanesepage.com>
Japanese Online - <http://www.japanese-online.com/>

My Websites

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Suicidal Translations - <http://www.pigtails.net/ST>
Anywayz... 21st Century Parasite - <http://www.anywayz.org>

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XVIII. Conclusion:

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Above all else, remember that this is a hobby and nothing more. Too many people (myself included) get caught up in the politics of "the scene" and forget that it's all about video games. So whatever you do, don't forget that. I mean, what's the point of a hobby if you're not having fun?

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XIX. Credits:

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There are entirely too many people to credit/thank for the existence of this document.

