

REVEALED! TERMINATOR AND SPIDER-MAN FOR PS2

Lifecycle 2 Vol4 #1 01/02

Next Generation Magazine



NextGen

SPECIAL EDITION:
ULTIMATE
XBOX
REVIEW
GUIDE

26 LAUNCH
TITLES RATED,
INCLUDING...

FOUR
GENUINE CLASSICS

TWO
COMPLETE DUDS

THREE
MAJOR SURPRISES

...but which are which?



Halo, Dead or Alive 3, Project Gotham Racing, Tony Hawk 2X, Madden 2002, Munch's Oddysee, NFL Fever, Amped, Dave Mirra BMX, and more

GameCube ■ PlayStation 2 ■ Xbox ■ PC ■ Dreamcast



PlayStation.2



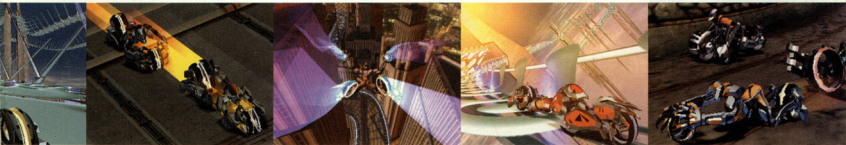
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Special

Cover Story Next Gen's Ultimate Xbox Review Guide

Xbox can boast the most impressive launch lineup in gaming history, and we're playing them all — but not every title is pure gold. Our staff scrutinizes all 26 "launch window" games and sorts the good from the (very small amount of) bad 23



EDITORIAL

Caffeine is good



In the three years I've been at *Next Generation*, I've always hoped that, one day, I'd be that guy at the front who tells you what the issue's all about. Never did I think it would be like this, though. You see, it's Sunday, I'm really tired and haggard, and I need to get this column in before the magazine ships to the printer first thing tomorrow morning. In short, I'm exhausted and my work is late. Honestly, though, I just had to see how *Halo* ended (and trust me, it was worth the all-nighter).

But it's not just *Halo*. In the last month we've seen more exemplary titles than we usually see in an entire year. In part, we have the launch of Xbox to thank for that. Check out our complete review guide starting on page 23 to see what I mean. Of course, Xbox isn't the only game in town; PS2 has the superlative *Metal Gear Solid 2* this month (page 72), GameCube plays host to Shigeru Miyamoto's latest, *Pikmin* (page 76), and even PC gets *Civilization III* (page 90) — a game that all *Next Gen* editors rightly fear due to its time-sucking properties (if you played the last one you know what we mean). So no matter what next-generation system you own, you're in pretty good shape right now. Do yourself a favor and kick back in front of the TV (or monitor) and have some fun. After all, that's why we play games, isn't it?

— Blake Fischer



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And so we say so long

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200 Miles Per Hour. 1000 Decisions Per Second. >>



>> Catching air in SF. Looks good, earns style points and offers tasty view. But you lose lap time and possibly your bet. What do you do, pally?



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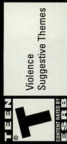


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→ News

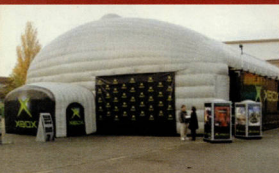
Game industry news and analysis



■ Eager gamers lined up in New York, San Francisco, and other cities across the U.S. to get their Xboxes at the stroke of midnight on November 15. If you were lucky enough to be at the New York event, you might've gotten to play a game with Bill Gates himself. (Not a bad way to spend an evening)

■ WE HAVE LIFTOFF

LAUNCH MANIA



■ Microsoft's Xbox Odyssey tour made stops across the country for a few weeks around the launch

Xbox and GameCube are now in the hands of gamers — and the real fun starts



If you wanted an Xbox or GameCube when they hit the stores — on November 15 and 18 respectively — you more than likely got one. Despite long lines, panicked gamers, and a few hitches here and there (Bundles? We don't need no stinkin' bundles!), both this year's major system launches look like they avoided nearly all

the pitfalls of Sony's colossally over-promised, under-delivered PS2 disaster last year. Consoles, at least on the first morning of each launch, were readily available to those who had cash in hand and were willing to do a little legwork.

This doesn't mean, however, that either launch lacked its own share of hype. Microsoft staged a huge event in New



York in front of the Times Square launch "R" Us leading up to the midnight launch with hoopla, crowds, and Bill Gates himself. One dedicated gamer who showed up early enough to be at the front of the line actually got his system handed to him and signed by the Microsoft chairman. Other midnight Xbox launches took place around the country, but they didn't come close to matching the size and scope of New York's monster gala.

In San Francisco, EBX hosted its own high-spirited party with free pizza and Mountain Dew, tunes blasted out by a local radio station, plus a raffle giveaway for Xbox games and a snowboard. Surprisingly, the line (of over 100 people) didn't actually form that far in advance, with the first person arriving at around 6 p.m. While official numbers have yet to be released, our informal poll of several retailers and fans in the area concluded

FIVE MINUTES WITH BILL

What do you do when Bill Gates calls you up and wants to chat for a few minutes? Grab your tape recorder, down your Dew, and start asking the hard questions.

NextGen: Five years ago, you told Next Gen that Microsoft's gaming focus would be on PC. Since then, quite a bit has changed and you're entering the market with a console. Where do you see Microsoft's gaming focus in the next five years?

Bill Gates: For the hardcore gamers who want to play games on their TV set, the Xbox is where it's at. The PC is really different — that's one thing I've learned during this whole Xbox process. The types of games are different, the way people think about development is different. We can continue to make great improvements on the PC side and we can make the Xbox have better games, and we can make those work together.

NG: Do you see Windows and Xbox converging in the near future?

BG: Well, there's certainly common technology that benefits the two, but they're optimized for very different experiences. So I would say, in terms of convergence, there's some neat things we can do to make sure they work well together — that all makes sense. But first and foremost you've got to get people to understand [Xbox] is the best game platform ever, and go out there and get critical mass, and then you can add a lot of neat things on to that.

NG: Do you see online gaming as becoming a major part of the console business in Xbox's lifetime?

BG: Yeah, we absolutely think that online gaming will be a major thing so we're going to learn as we go. We spent a lot of time with the Xbox — we spent a lot of time with the developers and got their feedback and designed around that.

We made our bet on broadband gaming. We built an Ethernet adapter into every Xbox and we put a hard disk into every Xbox, so it's a very different approach than anybody's taken before. We decided that, "Hey if you want to play online games you're going to want to talk to your friends while you play." We can deliver that because of the assumptions we've made.



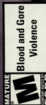
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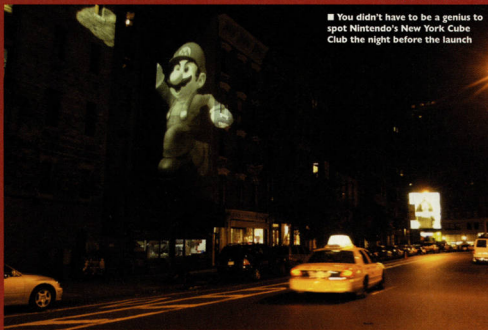
PlayStation 2

THE TIME
FOR JUDGMENT
HAS COME





■ Nintendo buyers waited up to 14 hours in line in front of local stores to ensure that they would get a GameCube the moment it hit stores



■ You didn't have to be a genius to spot Nintendo's New York Cube Club the night before the launch

that *Halo* was the number-one choice for first-day buyers.

Nintendo tried a less flashy approach.

The software giant — heralded by many in the mainstream press as the favorite in the console war — hosted its standard Cube Club in New York on the night of the launch. With a flood of balloons, a three-story Mario projected onto the building, and attendant celebrities like Lil' Kim, John Turturro, and Matthew Modine, it was a classy but hardly spectacular affair.

Indeed, Nintendo seemed to be taking an almost stealthy approach to the GameCube launch. Rumors started circulating early in the week that, despite the system's official launch date of November 18, some retailers had been told to start selling their units as soon as they received them. A majority of the stores did in fact hold on to their systems

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

➔ **Word at Tokyo Game Show was that Sega looked unstoppable.**

Shucking off the hardware business is proving better and better for the veteran company, which wowed show audiences with almost every product it had on display. Significantly, many major titles are coming for Xbox, although it's worth noting Yu Suzuki dis-

played a "lack of enthusiasm" over the idea that AM2 is designing an Xbox-based arcade board — a puzzling announcement indeed, considering Sega already has Naomi 2 with Naomi 3 in full development. Oh well, maybe he's just still a bit peeved *Shenmue II* will have to stay in development a few more months while being ported to

Xbox. We suspect the graphics will kick ass on the new system though.

Likewise, Microsoft also looked pretty good at TGS.

In addition to the usual suspects, there were a number of surprise titles from smaller developers, including the tasty-looking racing game, *Double STEAL* (called

Wreckless in the U.S.), from Bunkasha (no, we've never heard of them either). It seems that in the face of a flat Japanese market, many smaller developers see Xbox as their only viable (read: affordable) platform, and Microsoft is doing everything it can to make them all comfy. In fact, on the final day of the event, Bill Gates himself

reportedly went out of his way to personally meet and greet every CEO who runs a studio that isn't yet developing for Xbox. On an unrelated note, **Next Gen's** Word of the Day is "obsequious."

Half-Life developer Valve is close to sealing a deal with one of a number of Hollywood production



Photos courtesy of Nintendo

At New York's Cube Club, held in lower Manhattan, the GameCube launch party offered drinks, dancing, celebrities — and of course, games

until the prescribed date, but any events surrounding the official launch date proved more happenstance than intentional on Nintendo's part.

This is not to say that the hardcore fans minded at all. Come Sunday, eager Nintendo buyers lined up in front of the nearest Target, K-Mart, or Toys "R" Us as far as 14 hours in advance. Despite cold weather and no real way to know how many units would be available in the store they chose — and more importantly to some, whether those units would be black or indigo — the gamers weathered it all

Consoles were available to those who had cash in hand and were willing to do a little legwork.

with smiles and good humor. And while nearly everyone we talked to was interested in *Rogue Squadron II*, most seemed indifferent to Nintendo's current first-party offerings. Many, however, said they were looking forward to *Pikmin* and *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, both of which were coming in the next few weeks.

Whether Xbox, GameCube, or PS2 is

declared the ultimate winner of this round, gamers are already coming out ahead. The final numbers aren't in yet, but we predict that all of the concerned parties will do pretty well this holiday season. Now they need to continue gaining momentum into 2002 or risk falling from grace like Dreamcast and sliding out of the race. Whatever happens, it's going to be exciting. **NextGen**

companies interested in doing a Half-Life movie. We admit the idea has merit — after all, *Half-Life* made the storyline an important part of FPSs — but then, Square knows how to tell a story in an RPG too, which didn't help *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*. Still, at least the folks at Valve won't be financing it themselves.

And the Foot-in-Mouth award goes to... Sony president and COO Kunitake Ando, who flat out told the *Financial Times* just before the Xbox and GameCube launches that Microsoft had replaced Nintendo as Sony's main competitor and that, "Xbox changes the industry's lifecycle... It's unclear how long we can keep this business model."

He went on to say that Sony might have to push for release of PS3 earlier than intended. But hey, nobody's gonna mind having to run out and buy a new PlayStation every three years, right? Right?

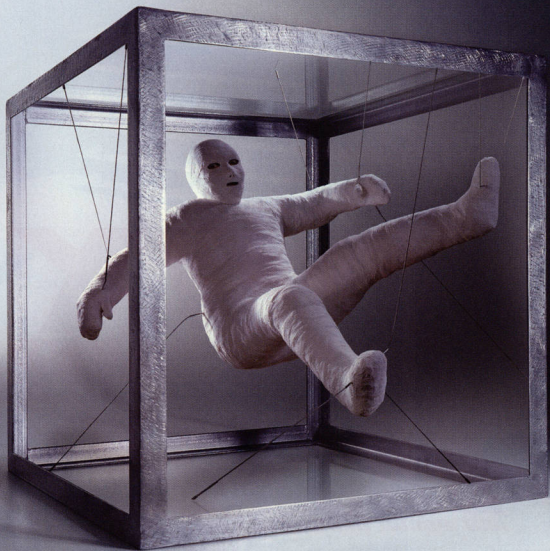
Bad news — although hardly unexpected. SNK has officially given up the ghost. The house that built NeoGeo,

where the King of Fighters reigned, is no more. The buying public's utter indifference to NeoGeo Pocket seems to have been the fatal blow to the 28-year-old company, which had been struggling to stay alive for almost a year. Let us observe a moment of silence...

Here's a bit of good news

though: Acclaim has managed to inch its way into profitability for the first time in a while. Strong sales of *Dave Mirra* and a lucrative *Crazy Taxi* license seem to have proven just the boost the company needed. Nicely done, but word to Acclaim: Stay away from *Batman* licenses from now on, OK?

NextGen



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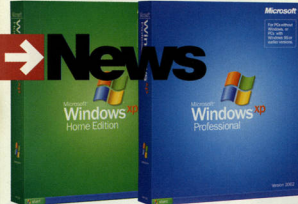


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INDUSTRY MURMURS

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

01/02

■ BILL'S EXCELLENT OS VENTURE

Windows XP plays hard

Microsoft's latest won't enable you to fly, but it will make your gaming better

Typically, upgrading your PC means dropping in a beefier graphics card, a faster processor, or more RAM. But this winter, the most important, far-reaching upgrade you may make is installing Windows XP. We know it's hard to believe, but it's true: You need this OS.

Windows XP has tons of ease-of-use features, like easy CD burning and a built-in firewall, but gamers only need remember three words: stability, software, and speed. Built on the rock-solid Windows 2000 kernel, XP is literally almost impossible to crash, and nearly every game we've installed runs on it, with old DOS games being the most likely to have trouble. And although it's currently only marginally faster than Win 2000, it already smokes Win 9x, and this gap will continue to widen as developers write new, XP-specific optimization routines.

Many gamers are worried about Microsoft's new piracy-protection scheme, which tracks your PC's hardware configuration and disables the program if it thinks it's been installed on a different PC — don't be. You can change 4 to 6 components every 120 days with no worries, and other circumstances can be easily handled with a phone call.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Windows XP offers more reliability, performance, and versatility than any OS you've seen before. You want the best? Here it is.



Windows XP already runs much faster than Win 9x. In fact, a Falcon Northwest rig with XP recently recorded the first-ever 3Dmark score of over 8000

GO PAST, YOUNG MAN!

Game design mogul Peter Molyneux is at it again. While he's been tinkering away on *Project Ego*, which is well under way at Big Blue Box (and trust us, it looks sweet), he recently announced that he's working with his second satellite, Intrepid Games, on a game called *BeC*. Nothing has really been shown so far (look for it to show up in some form at E3) but what we do know is that the game takes place in a fully simulated prehistoric world on the verge of disaster. If we had to speculate on the gameplay based on Molyneux's track record, we'd guess that it's probably some sort of god sim with dinosaurs — possibly dinosaurs that breakdance.



XBOX'S MAGICAL SOUND SHOWER

We've been hearing rumors about an *OutRun* sequel for a number of years, but all has been quiet on the AM2 front. Recently, however, Yu Suzuki alluded to the top-secret project while announcing AM2's Xbox-based arcade board. Of course, after he brought it up, he refused to comment any further. And while combining the world's most technically proficient game development team, the world's most powerful gaming hardware, and one of our favorite racing franchises may seem like a dream, we only have this to say:

What about *Afterburner*? Truth is, we're never happy.



A HARD CEL

Look for a whole new generation of cel-shaded games to come your way next year courtesy of Japanese developers that evidently can't get enough of the cartoon look. The newest, apparently random victim of the art style is Sega's *House of the Dead 2*. We don't know about you, but we're a little leary of a gun game where you have to shoot cartoon zombies. Despite the mismatch, however, early screens of the game look fairly promising. We'll have to wait to see it in action before we're sold, though.



UNDER EVERY RAINBOW

Yet another prolific independent developer is on its way to acquisition. This time around THQ is aiming to pick up Rainbow Studios. The Arizona-based studio has made quite a name for itself with titles like *Spintown*, *ATV Off-Road Fury*, and *Motocross Madness 2*, and it's currently working on a slew of high-profile PS2 and Xbox productions. The merger has yet to fully go through, but if it does, THQ will have added some major force to its burgeoning collection of internal studios.





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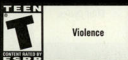


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Simply put, Xbox can boast the best launch lineup in console gaming history. Period. While we can't deny that there are a couple of truly horrible titles and a few simple ports, Microsoft's six first-party titles range from solid to stellar, and you'll find a number of really good third-party efforts as well. The Next Gen team tirelessly played every title we could get our hands on — 26 in all — to bring you this guide to the best (and worst) of what Xbox has to offer. Enjoy!



NEXT GEN'S ULTIMATE XBOX REVIEW GUIDE

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JUST DEAL WITH IT

The sad truth is that for an FPS, you can't beat a mouse and keyboard. That said, Bungie has done a magnificent job in tuning the controls and "cheating" to make Halo very playable with a gamepad. Your crosshair will actually slow down as it passes over an enemy, making it easier to target, and the crosshair itself provides about five degrees of "inaccuracy" so you don't have to be pixel-perfect.

Yes, it would've been great if we could have played Halo with a keyboard/mouse setup, but then again, have you ever tried using a mouse on your lap in front of the TV?



HALO

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Bungie

Looks like an angel, plays like a dream

➔ It may have taken over three years, but sometimes the wait is worth it. Let's keep this simple: Halo is one of the best games you'll ever play. Period.

As a first-person shooter with an excellent storyline, it out-Half-Lives Half-Life. As a showpiece for a new hardware platform, it dazzles the senses; this is one of the few games we can think of where objects actually look better the closer you get. As a game, it is a delight and a challenge.

What makes the game so instantly memorable is its perfect blend of finely tuned action and smart storytelling. You

take the role of the Mark 5, a new model of cyborg soldier, in a desperate struggle against an alien horde called the Covenant, which is intent on possessing the titular Halo — an artificial, ring-shaped world. From the moment you wake up on the mothership, you're completely immersed in a tightly woven drama that quickly leads you to the planet surface and a desperate race to find out why the Covenant wants Halo so badly — and, hopefully, how it can be stopped.

It's the attention to detail that really makes the game stand out. From sandy beaches to snowy valleys, the surface of Halo is visually breathtaking. The level



■ With a jeep and two AI gunners, you're a serious force to be reckoned with

designs are at once fantastical, yet also highly credible and well laid-out. When you're surrounded by fellow troops, their AI is astounding. They're very smart, organized fighters, and they keep up a continuous stream of one-liners and chatter that really adds a lot of personality.

And, about halfway through,

when you might begin to feel there's a certain sameness about the action — all the buildings on Halo share a common design, and there is really only a handful of different kinds of alien enemies — you're thrown a couple of wrenching plot twists that completely change everything. This is great, great stuff.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you didn't think there was a reason to buy an Xbox, Halo will change your mind.





Fuzion Frenzy

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Blitz Games

→ First things first: *Fuzion Frenzy* is a party game, and as such, it should only be played along with other people — preferably, as many other people as possible. Solo, it just isn't much fun, but playing many of *Fuzion Frenzy's* 40 mini-games against three of your friends is a real blast.

Most of the mini-games fall into one of three categories: gem collecting, racing, and musical beat-matching fare. They last about a minute or two each, which keeps the pace quick, but each is balanced enough to keep hardcore gamers interested. Conversely, however, they are also simple enough to keep casual gamers competitive. And, since events are chosen randomly in the tournament mode, you never know what to expect next.

What keeps *Fuzion Frenzy* from being a truly superb game are the vague onscreen instructions and the confusion that often results from cramming too many special effects onto the screen. On many levels the explosions and general mayhem actually make it difficult to keep track of your player, while others have the game camera panning back to keep all players on the screen, which reduces them to indistinguishable ants.

Still, *Fuzion Frenzy* is the best party game you can buy for Xbox — OK, it's the only party game you can buy for Xbox, but at least it's fast and fun.

ENextGen ★★★★★



■ Although the action can be confusing at times, *Fuzion Frenzy* still makes a great party game

AirForce Delta Storm

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Konami

→ *AirForce Delta Storm* is all about blowing stuff up, and to hell with the whys and wherefores. It features some 80 aircraft, from the slow-moving A-10 Warthog to the sleek and agile F-14 Tomcat, which you can pilot through over 50 missions that become steadily more challenging as you go.

The aircraft are nicely detailed, but aside from very nice weather and sun-glare effects, the rest of the game's visuals are merely average. And while there's a decent sense of "flight" overall, the controls are much too sensitive, which can make the frenetic combat needlessly difficult. Most of the mechanics behind aiming and firing are handled automatically, however, which helps a bit. It's not bad, but there's really not anything new to see here.

ENextGen ★★☆☆☆



■ Every aspect of this flight sim is just average — the epitome of a two-star game



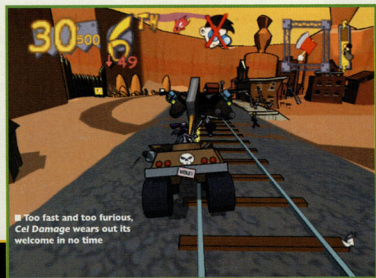
Cel Damage

■ Publisher: EA ■ Developer: Pseudo Interactive

→ *Cel Damage* is an insane destruction derby that's fun for about 20 minutes and then quickly bogs down into a repetitive and flat experience. The biggest problem is that the weapons are far too powerful, resulting in a near-constant cycle of death and respawning. There isn't enough variety to support extended play either. The flag capture mode, in particular, is no more than an exercise in frustration.

Pseudo Interactive deserves credit for taking cel shading to the next level by adding truly cartoonish physics, but a great look doesn't make a great game. This is a real missed opportunity.

ENextGen ★★☆☆☆



■ Too fast and too furious, *Cel Damage* wears out its welcome in no time

*can a single ray of light
really save the galaxy?*



Project Gotham Racing

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Bizarre Creations

➔ One thing Xbox critics definitely can't complain about is the lack of a standout racing title at launch. The son and heir to Dreamcast's excellent *Metropolis Street Racer*, *Gotham* delivers more of the same high-speed, real-world thrills while sufficiently upping the ante in a host of key areas. Accurately mapped and modeled versions of Tokyo, London, New York, and San Francisco become your own private race tracks, and the scenery is nothing short of stunning.

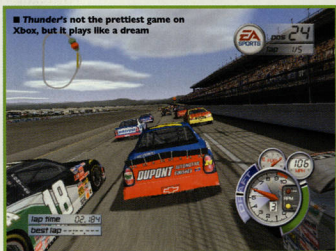
A bevy of cars, from the low-end Ford Focus to the up-market Ferrari F50 give you plenty to unlock, along with hidden game modes, tracks, helmets, and custom paint jobs. You do this by accumulating "kudos," points earned by beating challenges and pulling off style moves like powerslides. Expect a tough time; the computer AI is fierce, and a single mishap is often enough to cost you a race.

Fast, funky, and filled with unlockable goodies, plus a killer soundtrack, *Project Gotham* has enough gloss, variety, and originality to compete with the genre's best and give speed freaks a great reason to jump on the Xbox bandwagon.

ENextGen ★★★★★☆



■ *Project Gotham* faithfully re-creates four major cities and sets you loose in high-performance cars — cool huh?



NASCAR Thunder 2002

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: Tiburon Studios

➔ This year EA Sports sent the NASCAR franchise to its darling developer Tiburon Studios, the guys behind *Madden*. The result? Graphically, a solid game, with great reflections, sun wash, damage modeling, persistent skid marks, and more. But it's still a straight port of the PS2 version, which means lots of low-res textures and considerable jagginess.

The actual driving, however, is spot-on. The drafting is well implemented, and not only does *Thunder* boast the largest number of onscreen racing opponents ever in a NASCAR game, it's also the first one to include all 23 tracks in the Winston Cup circuit. Now if only they could only take advantage of the true power of Xbox. Maybe next year.

ENextGen ★★★★★☆

PHOTO FINISH

For reasons that are beyond the Next Gen staff, Xbox has not one but two NASCAR games at launch. While some fanatics may buy both, here's our take: They are almost identical in quality, but *NASCAR Heat 2002* has a great challenge system that will teach every aspect of stock car racing, while *NASCAR Thunder 2002* has all 23 Winston Cup tracks. If you're a stickler for realism and want every track, go with *Thunder*, but if you want a richer experience with more variety, you can't beat the *Heat*.

NHL 2002

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Sports Canada

➔ Another year means another great effort from the hockey gods at EA Canada. Xbox's *NHL 2002* is an exact duplicate of the PS2 and PC versions, which is to say that it has great graphics, superb animation, and peerless TV-style presentation. In fact, the only real issue we have is that the game's defensive AI is rather flawed, somewhat marring an otherwise incredible experience.

One of the main additions this year is a collection of nearly 200 unlockable bonus features (also known as Player Cards) that can be earned by completing certain challenges. The cards actually add considerable depth to the single-player experience and help to round out yet another EA Sports winner.

ENextGen ★★★★★☆



■ *NHL 2002* delivers near-perfect six-on-six hockey



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MX 2002 Featuring Ricky Carmichael

■ Publisher: **THQ** ■ Developer: **Pacific Coast Power and Light**

➔ **MX 2002** is a very technical game — perhaps the most advanced motorcycle racing/stunt game we've seen so far, in fact. You not only have to master gas, brakes, and steering, but also how best to fan the clutch and even how to bounce your suspension over jumps. Yet at the same time, the ease of control and built-in tutorials keep everything surprisingly accessible — a very nice balance. It also features a ridiculous number of unlockable tracks, stunt courses, and other options, offering a lot of replay value.



However, it also looks really bland (essentially identical to the drab, sparsely textured PS2 version), and the handling seems a bit light. It's not bad at all, but there are more exciting racing and stunt titles out there.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆



■ **Arctic Thunder** manages to stay bland despite high speeds and lots of explosions. Go figure.



Arctic Thunder

■ Publisher: **Midway**
■ Developer: **Midway**

➔ As the spiritual descendant of **Hydro Thunder**, **Arctic Thunder** is a combat racer and would've been a decent game — if it weren't always running at full throttle. Power-ups appear ridiculously often, and you find yourself either constantly dodging most of them so you can keep track of what weapon you're using, or furiously pulling the trigger.

Arctic Thunder's only saving grace is that the courses are well enough designed that you rarely get stuck in an alcove or behind a pillar — a frequent, frustrating flaw in racing games. But this doesn't come close to redeeming the onscreen mess that makes up most of the gameplay.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Test Drive Off-Road: Wide Open

■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Angel Studios**

➔ Certainly not the worst **Test Drive** game we've ever played, **TD Off-Road: Wide Open** is certainly not the best either. The graphics are PS2-generic, comprising enormous maps with only so-so textures. The Xbox version boasts improved controls over its PS2 counterpart, but the basic gameplay is just as dull.

As a racing game, it just doesn't feel like it's breaking any new ground. There are only three types of races through three major terrains, and none of them are particularly compelling. The career mode has an extremely facile money management system, and the tweaking done to the different vehicles is largely cosmetic. Ultimately, it's a flat and uninspired game, and it certainly can't compare to the large collection of stellar Xbox launch titles.



NextGen ★★☆☆☆



■ Looking for an arcade-style four-on-four hockey experience? Here it is

NHL Hitz 20-02

■ Publisher: **Midway** ■ Developer: **Black Box Studios**

➔ Normally we have to draw straws to see who gets stuck reviewing these Midway "extreme" games, but this year we came up lucky. **NHL Hitz 20-02** is a great-looking and fantastically fun version of exaggerated hockey — far better than Midway's last effort **Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98**.

The graphics are very well done, with large models sporting plenty of on-player details. The controls are nicely balanced, and there is no wicked AI catch-up logic like in previous Midway games. It's got all the NHL teams plus a ton of unlockable jerseys, teams, and novelty arenas. If you're up for a game of hockey where players quite literally catch on fire and suffer frequent flights through the glass, this is superb stuff.

NextGen ★★★★★

Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2

■ Publisher: **Acclaim** ■ Developer: **Z-Axis**

➔ Dave Mirra 2 features the same brilliant trick system as the original, with dozens of moves easily combined into literally thousands of tricks. There are 10 new levels, two of which weren't available in the PS2 version and all of which are four times larger than those in the original Dave Mirra.

Add an incredibly robust level editor, great multiplayer options, and the ability to rip your own tunes to Xbox's hard drive, and you have a pretty damn cool game. We wish the graphics were a little more polished, but if you're looking for fun (with brutal-looking injuries when you crash), then this is the game to get.

NextGen ★★★★★



■ The combination of great levels and tons of tricks makes Mirra 2 a worthy purchase



Transworld Surf

■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Angel Studios**

➔ As the Tony Hawk genre steamrolls inexorably on, it was inevitable that eventually someone would get around to surfing. *Transworld Surf* challenges players to perform tricks, jumps, and combos to earn points that'll unlock more locations, surfers, and brand-name equipment. Only problem is, the subject matter doesn't exactly allow for a lot of variety; unlike *Tony Hawk* and its ilk, which keep things fresh with different arenas, *Transworld Surf* merely delivers wave after wave. The water effects are cool, as is the soundtrack, but with an unforgivably steep learning curve and that intrinsic repetitiveness, only the most extreme fanatics of the stunt genre will get much joy out of this.

NextGen ★★★★★



■ The problem with surfing is that, from the water, almost every beach looks the same



■ Not just an SSX racing rip-off, Amped is a snowboarding game for snowboarders, full of rails and jumps

Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding

■ Publisher: **Microsoft** ■ Developer: **Microsoft**

➔ While some snowboarding games, like *SSX*, focus almost entirely on speed and action, others, like *ESPN X Games*, are attempts to create an actual sim. Amped falls much closer to the latter, but it has managed to learn a couple of lessons from the former as well. The result is a unique experience that very nearly captures the essence of the sport.

What makes this work is that the simulation elements never overshadow the fact that Amped is still a game. All of the mountains, for example, have been tweaked out with tricks and rails so that there's never a dull moment. And when you add in the scoring, media, and pro challenges on each level, you get a game with a great learning curve and tons of depth.

Much like *Tony Hawk*, however, Amped's greatest triumph is that it actually embodies the feel of the sport it's based on. Sure, a lot of the tricks are probably unrealistic, and you'll never find real mountains as perfectly groomed as the ones found here, but the core experience simply feels right. While the game still has a few small issues — some minor collision problems, for example — it really is the first next-generation game to "get" what snowboarding is all about.

NextGen ★★★★★



■ Amped turns out to be one of the better snowboarding games you can buy



DEAD OR ALIVE 3

■ Publisher: Tecmo ■ Developer: Team Ninja

If looks could kill, we'd all be dead

➔ *Dead or Alive 3* is, by far, the best-looking home videogame we've ever seen. The characters are drop-dead gorgeous (in every sense of the word). The backgrounds are incredibly detailed. And the fast and fluid animation outclasses all but the best Hollywood has to offer. This game is more than just a pretty face, though; it also delivers some of the most balanced and

exciting gameplay ever seen in a 3D fighter.

As in the previous installments, counterattacks are key, and the danger of having moves caught, then reversed, is very real. However, the counters have been tweaked significantly, resulting in a much better balance of offense and defense. This constantly forces you to vary your style, as neither charging in nor hanging back

will win the day. Add in interactive background elements like the trees in the forest, the stalagmites in the ice cave, or the walls around you, and even tactical placement of your fighter becomes important. There are no ring-outs, but it is possible to knock characters through walls, out of windows, or off the roof and onto a lower tier — all of which cause serious damage.

While the standard one-on-one mode is a blast, the game really shines in the two-on-two tag battles. This may at first seem like a tacked-on feature, but it's actually a deeper and more

strategic way to play the game, as you can swap out characters mid-combo to string together even more devastating attacks.

The game's only weakness is its single-player game, which offers virtually no cohesive story and little in the way of bells and whistles, with one of the most pointlessly frustrating boss battles ever. But then the single-player mode is really just the side salad to this sumptuous fighting feast, and in all important regards, *DOA3* practically defines the phrase "killer app." It's fast, it's deep, and it's so beautiful it almost hurts. What more could you need?

THE HDTV ADVANTAGE

Once you've seen a game like *Dead or Alive 3* on a high-definition television you won't want to go back. It's not just the increase in resolution that makes the game look so much better; there's also a boost in color depth and contrast. The result is that environments are simply more rich and detailed. The improvement in picture quality is similar to the improved picture from using S-Video — multiplied by 100.

The \$20 High Definition AV Pack will enable resolutions up to 1920x1080 if you're lucky enough to own an HDTV setup. Of course, there's the little tradeoff with cost: a decent 32-inch tube TV costs about \$700, while a comparably sized HDTV will run \$1,500. And beware: While all games are HDTV-compatible, not all take advantage of the increased resolution.

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Quite possibly the best 3D fighting game ever made, both in graphics and gameplay.



■ The detail in the characters and environments is breathtaking. *DOA3* truly is the best-looking videogame we've ever seen

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Mild Lyrics



PlayStation 2



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■ The Simpsons videogame curse effectively continues with Road Rage

The Simpsons Road Rage

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **Radical**



It may be the funniest TV show ever, but there's nothing amusing about *The Simpsons* as a videogame franchise. From Bart vs. the *Space Mutants* to *Simpsons Wrestling*, gamemakers have always struggled to translate the show into a decent game. But at least they tried; Radical simply lifted an existing design and grafted on the license.

It would be misleading to say *Road Rage* is similar to *Crazy Taxi*. *Road Rage* basically IS *Crazy Taxi*. Actually, that's not entirely true: The gameplay is not quite as good, and although the game features the original cast voices, the jokes fall flat.

It's strange. *Crazy Taxi* is great, and *The Simpsons* is great, so the two together should be gaming magic, right? Yet the result is less than the sum of its parts. In the end, *Road Rage* is significant only as the most shameless incident of design burglary in recent memory.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Star Wars Starfighter: Special Edition

■ Publisher: **LucasArts** ■ Developer: **LucasArts**



We reviewed the PS2 version back in **NG 04/01**, and this Xbox version is a "Special Edition" in that it offers a number of new multiplayer options and a rock-steady 60fps framerate. Otherwise, even if the graphics haven't been upgraded or changed (other than the framerate), it's still quite beautiful and features some exceptionally well-designed and well-balanced missions. The game also has a storyline that matters not one jot and only lasts a scant 14 stages, but it's a blast to play while it lasts.



NextGen ★★★★★

■ The Xbox "special edition" version features five new missions



■ This is one of those games that really only impresses in screenshot form

NBA Live

■ Publisher: **EA Sports** ■ Developer: **EA Sports**



This Xbox version of EA Sports' hoops series is basically the same game you can find on every other platform — in other words, chock

full of uninspiring graphics, plodding gameplay, and clumsy controls.

Sure, there's some guilty pleasure in playing 7'6" Shawn Bradley against the computer's 5'3" Muggsy Bogues in the one-on-one mode. But even this proved painful—slow, since we had to wait to check the ball on top of the key after each basket.

Be warned: The awesome video footage in *NBA Live 2002's* commercials never appears during actual gameplay. (It's all from the replay camera or from a developer's "floating camera" angles.) Instead, what you get are 10 small players moving around, sometimes even off the screen. We don't claim to know how a camera system could successfully work in a five-on-five basketball game, but this certainly isn't it.

Avoid *NBA Live 2002* unless you simply cannot survive without a basketball game on Xbox — or for that matter, on any other system.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Silent Hill 2

■ Publisher: **Konami**

■ Developer: **Konami**

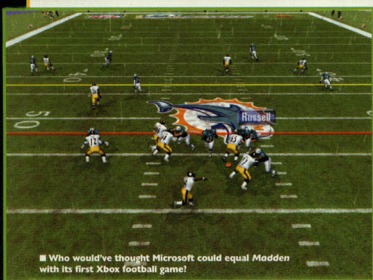


Silent Hill 2 for Xbox is exactly the same disturbing yet wildly enjoyable game as it was on PS2 — identical in both graphics and gameplay. There's an additional sub-game, a kind of prequel called "Born From a Wish" that shows Maria's story, leading up to the point when she meets James in the main game. Unfortunately, while Konami claims this adds "four to six hours of gameplay," we actually finished it in slightly under 60 minutes. So if you've already played this on PS2, there's no particular reason to pick it up again. On the other hand, if you haven't (and why haven't you?), then this added bonus would make the Xbox version the one to buy.



■ You get slightly less than an hour of gameplay in the Maria subgame. Everything else is virtually identical to the PS2 version

NextGen ★★★★★



■ Who would've thought Microsoft could equal Madden with its first Xbox football game!

NFL Fever 2002

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Microsoft

Microsoft scores big with its rookie effort



When we first saw *NFL Fever 2002* up at Microsoft some months ago, we privately snickered at the game's ugly textures and clunky animation. We thought it was going to be terrible.

Oh, how we were wrong.

NFL Fever 2002 is simply a superb football game, and in almost every respect it is the equal of *Madden NFL 2002* and *NFL2K2*. Graphically, however, it is superior to both, with the textures on the field looking particularly amazing. The player models are terrific, and the attention to detail extends from the jumbotron right down to the stretching mesh on the players' uniforms.

The controls are simple and intuitive, and picking your play is a snap, as is reading the defense, setting a new path for wideouts, or calling an audible. The passing is smooth and accurate, with great catch animations. The running game is just as solid, with the spin and shoulder charge followed by excellent tackling and collisions. Our only minor complaint is that the name labels can obscure the blocking and running lanes. On the other side of the ball, this game may be the most fun you'll ever have playing defense. By switching to any player and pressing the Y-button, you can see exactly what your defensive assignment is.

In addition to exhibition and season play, *Fever* has a nice training mode, a fantasy tournament against fictitious teams, tons of hidden teams and stadiums, plus a robust franchise mode. Football fans' cups are running over right now, and *NFL Fever 2002* is at the crest of the flood.



Bottom Line: *Fever* might be the "out of nowhere" system seller that *NFL2K1* was for Dreamcast.

Madden NFL 2002

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: Tiburon Studios

Sometimes, baby steps are good enough

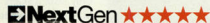


While this Xbox version of the latest incarnation of EA Sports' hardy perennial is nothing more than a straight port from PS2, it is still a straight port of a fantastic football game. The smooth yet precise control that has made *Madden* football a standout for years is still here, with new animations that make the receptions look all the more realistic. The Xbox controller works just fine too, although we did find the upper black and white buttons a little too out of the way to be as useful as we would have liked.

Graphically, it's a step up from last year's effort in every way. The players' soulless shark eyes have been fixed, along with better face mapping, more detailed sidelines, and sharper graphics throughout the stadium. The audio commentary has also been given more spit and polish, with much more conversational interactions between John Madden and Pat Summerall.

All the extra features fans have come to expect are here too, including the Madden Cards (there are some cool new ones), the in-depth franchise mode (which covers 30 years), great season and tournament setups, and the "Easy Play" mode, which is ideal for complete newbies. The new addition of a situation mode even allows you to create unique scenarios and compete with a friend in whatever you can dream up.

Madden NFL 2002 is simply a further refinement of last year's excellent PS2 effort, but we don't think football fans will mind. This being a port, EA hasn't really done as much as it might have to take full advantage of Xbox's superior firepower, but that's our only complaint with an otherwise seminal football experience.



Bottom Line: Slightly better than last year's (or even this year's) excellent PS2 version, it's hard to find much fault with this outstanding effort.



■ Madden has become synonymous with quality football for each of the new consoles

EVERYONE'S A WINNER

Let's get one thing clear right now: No matter which football game you spend your hard-earned scratch on, you'll love it. Both of these games are superb and almost identical in quality. But if you were going to make us choose just one, we'd go with *NFL Fever 2002* because it takes better advantage of Xbox's graphic capabilities and makes playing defense a blast.



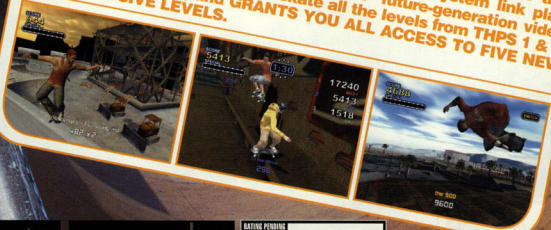
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Screen shot from Godgames' Serious Sam: The Second Encounter. Coming soon!

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THE BIG JUMP

Unfamiliar with the soap-opera background behind *Munch's Oddysee*? Here's a refresher course from NG 04/01 on why Oddworld Inhabitants stopped development for PS2 and brought its game to Xbox:

"Every time you hit an obstacle that you think the hardware should handle," complained Oddworld President Lorne Lanning, "you're slashing that out of your features budget because now one of your guys has to try to write this thing for mip-mapping, which every video card in the world does, except [PS2] doesn't."

ODDWORLD: MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

■ Publisher: **Microsoft** ■ Developer: **Oddworld Inhabitants**

Oddly compelling, uncannily entertaining

Given this title's soap-opera-worthy history (remember when it was a PS2 game?), we were concerned it might be scarred beyond repair when it finally shipped. But amazingly, *Munch's Oddysee* has survived its roller-coaster gestation not only intact, but in style.

For the uninitiated, *Munch's Oddysee* is a third-person, fully 3D action-puzzle game that takes place in a personality-drenched, Jim Henson-esque fantasy world. This atmosphere pervades every aspect of the game, from idle animations to throwaway dialogue, giving it an identity that's both infinitely likeable and incredibly immersive.

You control two main characters. Abe is a Mudokan (think aborigine) and does most of the running, jumping, and carrying work who can also possess enemies. Joining Abe is Munch the Gabbit, a sort of frog-thing who runs like a snail, swims like a fish, and has the ability to

spew lightning from his forehead, possess mechanical devices, and befriend adorable balls of fur and teeth called Fuzzles. Together, they must depose the Glukkons, a race of evil, corporate money-grubbers who are systematically draining Oddworld of all its resources and wildlife.

Gameplay is a pleasant evolution of typical 3D platform action and brain-stretching puzzle gaming. For instance, a level might find Munch taking control of a crane and dropping enemies into a giant meat

grinder so Abe is free to release some enslaved Mudokans, who then cooperate to open a giant gate. Your ability to combine various skills and ideas like this is tested at nearly every turn, but the surprisingly intuitive, context-based controls keep your role from becoming overly complicated.

Munch isn't perfect, however. The camera often needs to be

manually adjusted to provide an appropriate view of the action, and the game admits its PS2 origins a bit too often, with smeary, non-bump-mapped textures sporting often plainly visible seams. Still, these are minor quibbles. Like *Halo* before it, *Munch* has risen above its storied past to provide a unique, ultimately fulfilling gaming experience.

NextGen ★★★★★☆

Bottom Line: *Munch* isn't a typical platformer, but it's still completely entertaining, unique, and highly recommended.



■ Munch can either hop around slowly on foot (flipper?) or use a wheelchair to outrace enemies



Mad Dash Racing

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Crystal Dynamics

➔ A curious hybrid of racing game and 3D platformer, *Mad Dash* has an incredibly steep learning curve for a game featuring a cartoon boar named Chops. The game's kid-targeted character selection and story will probably lull people into thinking this is a simple pick-up-and-play game, but it's quite complicated — maybe a little too complex for its own good. The levels are so vast that it's easy to become disoriented, and there aren't enough directional arrows to keep you on the right path.

But players who stick with it will pick up on some of the cooler gameplay nuances like close-quarters combat and specially designed routes for specific character classes. Special stick combinations for swimming and climbing provide a good variety to the general gameplay.

As a kart racer for the hardcore, *Mad Dash* hits its mark. The "cute-n-fuzzy" look is misleading, so just don't expect to "get it" on your first try.



ENextGen ★★★★★

■ *Mad Dash* may look simple, but it's actually quite deep

Kabuki Warriors

■ Publisher: Crave ■ Developer: Genki

➔ This is a good example of a really bad fighting game. While the graphics are occasionally superlative, the extremely simplistic and sluggish gameplay dooms this title from the start. At least the premise is unique: Take your troop of kabuki fighters on tour in old Japan and earn money not only by winning matches, but by exhibiting good showmanship as well. All would have been well if it

had been fun — or even remotely challenging. Unfortunately, even the tour mode — ostensibly the meat of the game — in which you travel to different towns to fight, can be beaten in under an hour on your first try. Look, just buy *DOA3* and forget this unhappy mess.



ENextGen ★☆☆☆☆

■ Check out the feathers! They're one of the few redeeming touches in this otherwise forgettable game



■ *Dark Summit* is not quite the adventure of a lifetime, but it's a marginally fun ride

Dark Summit

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Radical

➔ A combination snowboarding/adventure game is certainly intriguing, but *Dark Summit* somewhat botches the execution. Each slope includes a number of "missions" — use your skills to smash a nefarious device, for example — but the control is off just enough to make it frustrating as a snowboarding game. Meantime, the adventure elements are obscure and the storyline rarely affects anything. The game looks quite nice, and it's by no means bad, but it falls far short of its intriguing potential.

ENextGen ★★★★★



Shrek

■ Publisher: TDK Mediactive

■ Developer: Dice

➔ This young-skewing platform adventure is kept from greatness by a few small things — namely, bland, broken gameplay; an uncannily counterintuitive camera; unfocused, comically haphazard level design and goals; and ho-hum sound. Simply put, this game sucks.

The graphics are admittedly gorgeous. Nearly every texture in the game, from brick walls and corrugated metal to the cloth of Shrek's tunic, is beautifully bump-mapped and looks incredible. In fact, *Shrek* may be the best tech demo we've ever played. But as a game, in which you run around jumping onto, punching, kicking, carrying, and farting upon everything in sight, *Shrek* is dreck.



■ This game offers some nice textures, but unfortunately it just isn't fun

ENextGen ★☆☆☆☆

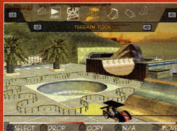
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PlayStation 2

GAME BOY ADVANCE



The Ultimate Xbox Checklist

Take Next Gen's Xbox at-a-glance game shopping guide with you to the store to make sure you get exactly what you want.

GAME TITLE	Genre	# Players	5.1 Dolby	HDTV	Rating	Comments
AirForce Delta Storm	Sim	1	✗	✓ 480p	★★☆☆☆	A playable, if unspectacular jet fighting game. Lots of nice explosions, though.
Amped	Action	1	✓	✓ 480p	★★★★☆	Not a racing game like SSX, but a very good snowboarding game for people interested in the actual sport.
Arctic Thunder	Action	1-4	✗	✗	★★☆☆☆	Unless you've just had a six pack of Jolt cola, don't bother with this combat racer.
Cel Damage	Action	1-4	✗	✗	★★☆☆☆	This unique car combat title is severely hampered by unbalanced weapons and a lack of variety.
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Action	1-2	✗	✗	★★★★☆	Huge maps create a canvas on which to string together bone-breaking BMX stunts.
Dark Summit	Action	1-2	✓	✓ 480p	★★★☆☆	A unique blend of snowboarding and mission-based objectives that never quite gets in the end.
Dead or Alive 3	Fighting	1-4	✓	✓ 480p	★★★★★	Not only is this the best-looking game on Xbox, it's also one of the best fighting games we've ever played.
Fuzion Frenzy	Party	1-4	✓	✓ 480p	★★★☆☆	Fun with friends, but probably a bland experience if you're playing solo.
Halo	Action	1-4	✓	✓ 480p	★★★★★	Better than <i>Half-Life</i> ? You betcha. This FPS is one of the best games of all time.
Kabuki Warriors	Fighting	1-2	✗	✗	☆☆☆☆☆	Shallow and boring. This fighter is nowhere near as good as DOA3.
Mad Dash Racing	Action	1-4	✓	✗	★★★☆☆	<i>Mad Dash</i> is basically a complex kart racer with tons of advanced techniques.
Madden NFL 2002	Sports	1-4	✓	✓ 1080i	★★★★★	The gold standard of football games; you can't go wrong with this pick if you like NFL football.
Munch's Oddysee	Advent.	1	✓	✓ 480p	★★★★☆	Some minor camera and graphics flaws, but a great 3D platformer/puzzle-solver.
MX 2002 Featuring Ricky Carmichael	Action	1-2	✓	✓ 480p	★★★☆☆	Solid racing/stunt game, but it won't blow you away.
NASCAR Heat 2002	Racing	1-2	✓	✓ 480p	★★★★☆	Only 19 of the 23 Winston Cup tracks are featured, but you get to experience all aspects of stock-car racing.
NASCAR Thunder 2002	Racing	1-4	✓	✗	★★★★☆	This NASCAR Racer features all 23 Winston Cup tracks. It's fun, but the graphics are a little underwhelming.
NBA Live 2002	Sports	1-4	✗	✗	★★☆☆☆	This basketball title misses the mark completely with bland graphics and boring gameplay.
NFL Fever 2002	Sports	1-4	✓	✓ 480p	★★★★★	Fever slightly edges out Madden this year and is arguably the best football game of all time.
NHL 2002	Sports	1-4	✓	✗	★★★★☆	Killer graphics, and highly realistic gameplay, but poor defensive AI keeps it from perfection.
NHL Hitz 20-02	Sports	1-4	✗	✗	★★★★☆	If you prefer arcade-style action to realistic sim-style hockey, Hitz is for you.
Project Gotham Racing	Racing	1-4	✓	✓ 480p	★★★★☆	Terrific racing game with tons of challenges and incredible graphics.
Shrek	Advent.	1	✓	✓ 480p	☆☆☆☆☆	Good graphics does not equal a good game. You have been warned.
Silent Hill 2	Advent.	1	✗	✓ 480p	★★★★☆	Pick it up if you haven't played it on PS2. Otherwise you're paying \$50 for an hour of new gameplay.
The Simpsons Road Rage	Action	1	✗	✗	★★☆☆☆	If you've played <i>Crazy Taxi</i> , forget this rip-off. The play isn't good, and the Simpsons jokes aren't funny.
Star Wars Starfighter: Special Edition	Action	1-2	✓	✗	★★★★☆	It's a port of the PS2 version, but this <i>Star Wars</i> space combat game still stands on its own.
Test Drive Off-Road	Racing	1-4	✗	✗	★★☆☆☆	This off-road racer ultimately falls flat owing to uninspired graphics and gameplay.
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2X	Action	1	✓	✓ 720p	★★★★☆	A special edition remake with some added extras. Fun, but not enough new stuff.
Transworld Surf	Action	1-4	✓	✗	★★☆☆☆	This surfing game lacks the variety to stay interesting for any long period of time.
4x4 Evo 2	Action	1-2	✓	✗	★★☆☆☆	Competing with <i>Test Drive Off-Road</i> for this year's "Most Boring Driving Game" award.

* Key: 5.1 Dolby - support for 5.1 Dolby Digital (note: All games support Dolby Surround). HDTV - Support for widescreen (16:9) aspect image; number given is the highest HDTV resolution supported at that ratio



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OKAGE

shadow king



→ Alphas

Next Generation visits a war-torn future to learn the secrets of tomorrow's hottest games



56 ■ Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2



58 ■ Space Channel 5 Part 2



60 ■ Spider-Man: The Movie

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■ XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2

TERMINATOR: DAWN OF FATE

■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Developer: Paradigm ■ Release Date: June ■ Country: US

Stay sharp. You've been targeted for termination



➔ Imagine this: You are Kyle Reese, a resistance fighter hiding out in a bombed-out post-nuclear wasteland ruled by a brutal artificial intelligence and vast armies of mechanized soldiers. There is chaos all around. Suddenly, the ceiling explodes and six robotic T-400 warriors barge in, opening fire. You lock onto the closest enemy and fire a couple of rounds into its head, sending it collapsing to the floor. A fellow soldier on your left

does the same, but there are still too many of them, and now Hunter/Killer Bugs are starting to pour in. You plant C4 on a nearby fuel tank, run for it, and just as the explosion disposes of the threat behind you, the wall before you bursts inward and an H/K Spider Tank steps through the rubble, blasting everything in sight...

Sound tense? Get used to it. This is the dangerous world of *Terminator*:

Dawn of Fate, a new third-person action title based upon one of the most thrilling sci-fi franchises of all time, James Cameron's *Terminator* films. Set in the futuristic battleground of the year 2029, the game functions as a prequel to the films, chronicling humanity's war against the machines right up until Arnold Schwarzenegger's T-800 is sent back in time, marking the beginning of the first film.

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100

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CONNOR

■ The view will switch into first-person when you commandeer a turreted gatling gun, and a fully first-person game mode will be an unlockable bonus



■ Kicking a Terminator won't do any damage, but it can buy you some time

"Most gameplay models could be summarized as action, then relief, action, then relief. We never hired a 'relief' guy."

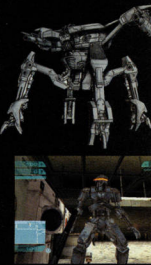
—Scott McCarthy, brand manager, Infogrames

The first thing you'll notice upon seeing *Terminator: Dawn of Fate* in action is the way the game has re-created and even amplified the films' relentless pacing. It simply pummels the player with one threat after another, feeling as much like a Eugene Jarvis-designed arcade blast-a-thon as it does a modern action adventure. True, Brand Manager Scott McCarthy promises mission parameters a bit more sophisticated than "run to a point, shoot the bad guy, run some more, shoot the bad guy." But, true to form, the game's legion of Terminators absolutely will not stop — ever — until their targets are dead. McCarthy reinforces this impression when he says, "Most action titles' gameplay model could be summarized as: action, then relief, action, then relief. We never hired a 'relief' guy."

To help players defend themselves against the onslaught of enemies, the team has adopted a fluid combat

system that begins with a basic, *Devil May Cry*-style control scheme, and makes the camera smarter and smoother, enabling players to more easily track enemies in 3D space. Combat itself is mostly a guns-and-ammo affair (with around 20 different weapons) — although each character will also have kicking and rushing attacks that can knock down some enemies, enabling players to

■ Most of the roughly 20 enemies are new, from the clunky T-400 Terminators (this screen) to the H.K. Spider Tank (above right)



→ Alphas



steal their opponents' weapons or simply make a run for it.

Whether running or standing firm, players would do well to pay attention to the often interactive, destructible environment. For example, shooting a fuel tank will cause it to explode, taking nearby enemies with it, and C4 can be used to collapse a passageway, thus deterring pursuers.



■ These shots are all from the PS2 version, but the game is currently awaiting concept approval from both Sony and Microsoft, so an Xbox version should be announced any day

There are also stationary gun turrets that the player can commandeer to dole out some serious damage. This environmental depth is complemented by numerous NPCs who populate the war zone, from soldiers locked in battle with the machines to civilians who recoil, quaking in fear. Be careful to pay them heed, as each NPC's behavior is influenced by your own. For instance, if you strive to preserve civilian lives, those civilians are more likely to offer you medical help or extra ammunition.

With this much action in the works, it's going to take three different playable characters to get it all covered. The shots in this preview show Kyle Reese, the jack-of-all-trades soldier who also appears in the first film. The second character is Catherine Luna (read: Solid Snake), a stealth operative who favors an EMP baton and performs missions of infiltration. McCarthy deflected our questions about the third character, enticingly offering: "All I can tell you



■ At times, you'll be joined by additional NPC soldiers, many of whom (like John Connor, shown here) can defend themselves pretty handsomely



is that the final character will be used when you need to bring in some major firepower. Is he human? Machine? Both? We'll see."

Combating these heroes are tons of enemies created specifically for the game. All told, there are nearly 20 types in all, including early model T-400 and T-500 Terminators, all-terrain H/K Spider Tanks, and countless H/K aircraft. While most are obviously new, the classic Model 101 Terminator — a T-800 with flesh, also called an "Infiltrator" — will also make an appearance.

We're excited about *Terminator: Dawn of Fate*. It looks to combine the graphical quality and action of *Devil May Cry* with *Red Faction*-style destructible environments, meaningful story elements, tons of adrenaline, and one of the coolest licenses of all time. Can anything stop it from being great? We don't know — with these consoles, we just don't know.

— Eric Bratcher

ONCE, TWICE, THREE TIMES A TERMINATOR

It appears that Arnold Schwarzenegger may soon grace a third, James-and-Linda-free *Terminator* film, currently titled *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*. According to Hollywood's rumor mill, the original script introduced a new female terminator who could morph like the T-1000, disappear entirely, or even become pure energy. ("She" is evidently made of "sentient frequency metal." Whatever.) Newer rumors suggest that this character, reportedly played by Famke Janssen, will protect Edward Furlong's character from yet another Terminator, played by Vin Diesel. Again, this is all rumor, and actual filming keeps getting delayed. Don't even ask about the fourth film.



■ The T-800 may soon return to a movie theater near you



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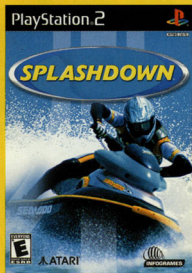
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PlayStation 2

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SCORE: 0
→ Alphas

BEST SCORE: 9708

DOUBLE PEG GRIND + SMITH GRIND
637 X2

■ XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2

MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Rainbow Studios ■ Release Date: Q1 ■ Origin: US

Has Activision's two-wheeled trick become a contender?

→ When the first *Mat Hoffman* title shipped last May, it was clearly relying too heavily on the cachet established by *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. The game sold respectably, but it lacked the quality and polish of the earlier marquee title (though it did share *Tony Hawk's* nearly two-year-old engine — eeeeww). In the move to PS2, Activision assigned new developer Rainbow the task of riding the series out of the Hawk's shadow.

Rainbow's first task was to build a robust new engine capable of generating levels comparable in scale to those in Acclaim's *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2*, this game's main competitor. It then incorporated a whole laundry list of new stunt



features. "We've added the wall ride, sprocket grind, flatland tricks, and numerous double-tap tricks that are not specials," explains Producer Brian Bright. Additionally, the game will boast a *Mirra*-style "Trick Morphing" system by which tricks can be altered during execution, yielding thousands of possible permutations. The usual "more is better" enhancements also apply, as there are now 11 riders (plus some hidden ones), eight single-player levels, and additional two-player levels.

It's uncertain as to whether these adjustments will prove sufficient to give *MHPB2* command of the BMX genre. *Mirra 2* is truly a formidable competitor, boasting many of the same enhancements: NPCs, modifiable tricks, and a park editor. Furthermore, *MHPB2* lacks online



■ Hoffman is undeniably similar to *Mirra*. But being second to market, Hoffman can learn from *Mirra's* few mistakes

play options and a Create-A-Player mode, both of which would provide additional depth. Still, it's clear that this fledgling series is well on its way to leaving the Hawk's nest.

— Eric Bratcher

GO NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, OR WEST, YOUNG MAN

One innovation *Mat* has that *Mirra* doesn't is "Road Trip" points, which the player earns by accomplishing the various level goals and then uses to buy passage to additional areas. Thus, gameplay is non-linear, as Producer Brian Bright explains: "If you have enough Road Trip points to go to either LA or Boston, the path you choose is entirely up to you."



■ Tricks can now be modified on the fly

A handprint is formed by thick, dark, textured paint strokes. The fingers are spread out. The palm and fingers are covered with numerous bright red splatters and blotches of varying sizes, creating a stark contrast with the dark paint. The background is a light, off-white color with some faint, illegible text visible, suggesting a page from a book or document. The overall composition is centered and vertical.

wounds
will
heal... ..

→ Alphas



■ A wealth of new costume-changing power-ups means Ulala isn't limited to her more familiar orange outfit

■ PLAYSTATION 2

SPACE CHANNEL 5 PART 2

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **United Game Artists** ■ Release Date: **Spring** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Dance, fools, dance!

→ The original *Space Channel 5* was an instant classic. The gameplay wasn't much different from any other rhythm action titles, but its mod, retro-'60s production design and snappy score — not to mention the sex appeal of its lead character, Ulala — made it eminently likeable.

Part 2 is a bit larger in scope than the original, but it's still just as quirky.

The "Simon Says" gameplay isn't being changed around much, but a lot more emphasis will be placed on the story, which the team hopes will tie the musical numbers together better.

One big change is that, besides dancing, in certain scenes Ulala will now play a number of instruments and sing. Also, as the game progresses you'll be able to find special items that can have

different effects — changing Ulala's outfit, for example. And while many stages will feature the same kind of dance numbers as in the previous game, UGA has added a few big Broadway-style production numbers as well.

All of these updates will no doubt add a lot more substance to *Space Channel 5*'s inimitable style — which is a good thing. The original was an under-servedly neglected title in the U.S., owing in part to its somewhat limited Dreamcast audience. With the move to PlayStation 2 (and perhaps other systems), we're hoping Ulala will have the opportunity to charm her way into more hearts than ever.

— Jeff Lundrigan/Christophe Kagotian



■ Big production numbers have been added, and Ulala now plays instruments as well



■ Ulala and tentacles! Nooooooo!



SKIRTS IN SPACE!

Ulala's outfit is deliberately retro-kitsch, but she comes by it honestly. In practically every science-fiction movie or TV show from the '50s and '60s, the women of the future were routinely clad in miniskirts. The future sure ain't what it used to be, is it?



■ The first game's psychedelic side has been well preserved. Michael's back, too



■ Many of Spider-Man's battles will now take place in mid-air, thanks to a sleek new movement scheme

■ GAMECUBE, XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2, PC

SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Treyarch** ■ Release Date: **May** ■ Origin: **US**

From the silver screen to the TV screen

Despite their amazing powers, superheroes have had almost tragically bad luck in videogames. That said, Activision's *Spider-Man* games are an exception to the rule, perfectly capturing the essence of everyone's favorite web-slinging wall-crawler. Thus, with the series' third entry, developer Treyarch has chosen to enhance the spider-like sensations rather than reinvent them.

The most notable (and fundamental) of these improvements is Spidey's expanded ability to web-sling around the environment. Now he can bank left or right, climb or descend, redirect on the fly, and even dash while swinging. This

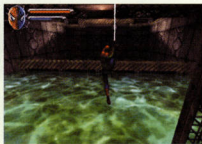
increased mobility enables a new, decidedly above-ground combat dynamic. "We felt compelled to give the player levels with fully fleshed-out aerial combat," reveals Senior Producer Gregory John. "Even at this early point in development, it's an incredible rush to battle the Green Goblin through and above the rooftops of the city." Additional enemies will include The Vulture, The Shocker, and the common criminal who kills Peter Parker's Uncle Ben.

Spidey's entire arsenal of web-based weaponry will return, complete with as-yet-unrevealed enhancements. And although John promises increased

mission variety, he insists that "the best strategies will always involve using Spider-Man's specific set of skills."

The move to next-generation platforms has enabled many graphical improvements, including a 60fps frame-rate and higher polygon counts for both the characters and the environments. Even Spidey's mirrored eye-lenses will be reproduced, thanks to environmental mapping. All told, Treyarch's ideas should give a fresh feel to this already solid franchise. Now, if only everyone in the office felt this confident about the movie...

— Eric Bratcher



■ For the most part, the game mirrors the film on which it's based, but the team has added new materials as well



SUPERHEROES: THE NEXT GENERATION

Because Treyarch has brought in additional villains, we thought it only fair to head over to www.heromachine.com and create some new heroes to give the wall-crawler a hand.



Bat Boy



Coward-Man



Token-Hottie Girl



Fred Durst



... *but*
your
mind

will be
scarred
forever.

SILENT HILL 2



Violence
Blood and Gore



PlayStation 2

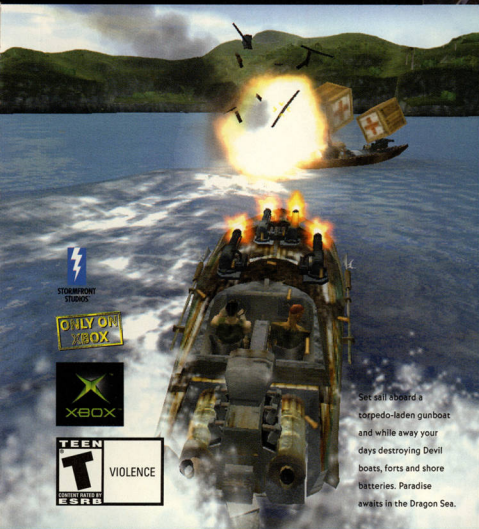
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Out here,

amongst the clouds

and the sea,

a chain gun.



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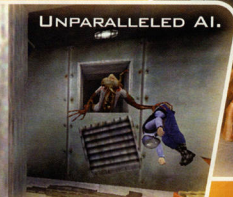
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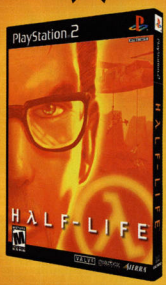


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The Gitaroo is the weapon! Keep with the rhythm as you shoot, duck, and dodge your way to victory!

EVERYONE
E
Mild Language

PlayStation 2



■ Summoned creatures (now called Aeons) are still a critical component of your offense and now replace the rest of your party for the duration of the battle

■ PLAYSTATION 2

FINAL FANTASY X

■ Publisher: **Square EA** ■ Developer: **Square** ■ Release Date: **January** ■ Origin: **Japan**

➤ Square may have learned some hard lessons about making movies with *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, but it still knows how to create incredible games. This latest *FF* actually shakes things up a bit, introducing voice actors into the series and replacing the established ATB (Active Time Battle) system with a more traditional, turn-based combat system. You can even rotate characters in and out of the party in the middle of a battle. Of course, it's also stunningly beautiful.



■ The graphics during exploration, cut scenes, and battle sequences are nearly as good as those in the cinemas, so the whole game blends together quite well



→ Milestones



■ PLAYSTATION 2

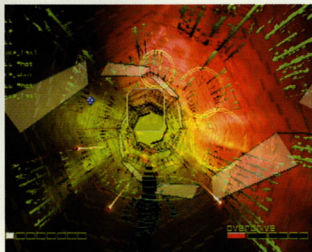
REZ

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **United Game Artists**
■ Release Date: **January** ■ Origin: **Japan**

→ With a super-psychedelic, Tron-influenced, abstract visual style, United Game Artists' musical rail shooter (previewed in **NG 09/01**) looks like nothing we've ever seen before. However, it plays like Sega's classic *Panzer Dragoon* with a techno beat. Like UGA's previous offering, *Space Channel 5*, *Rez* looks to be a compelling, highly playable (and replayable) melding of futuristic style, solid gameplay, and great music.



■ Targeting and shooting different enemies generates an assortment of sounds, so skillful players can actually create new mixes by playing with different strategies



■ PS2, PC

ARMY MEN RTS

■ Publisher: **3DO** ■ Developer: **Pandemic Studios**
■ Release Date: **Q1** ■ Origin: **US**

→ We have to admit we're a bit intrigued by this one, a 35-level 3D RTS. Pandemic did good work on Activision's *Battlezone* games, and the franchise legitimately fits this genre. Plus, we're amused by the *Apocalypse Now*-inspired storyline: Your foe is Colonel Blintz, a legendary Green commander who went Tan after a massive head wound left him with "a chunk of plastic missing from the top of his head."



■ We're as sick of the franchise as anyone else, but *Army Men RTS* could actually turn out well

■ PC

SID MEIER'S SIMGOLF

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **Firaxis/Maxis**
■ Release Date: **January** ■ Origin: **US**

→ Firaxis' genre-bending, golfing/empires-building sim (first previewed in **NG 08/01**) has been pushed back until January — and believe it or not, we're thrilled. According to Firaxis, the delay was necessary because game god Meier is insisting upon doing so much of the coding personally. It's inspiring to see a designer of Meier's pedigree and skill so fired-up about his work. Bless you, Sid. We'll take it when you're done.



■ Wanna go golfing with your Sims on a course that you designed yourself? We certainly do

#8 IN A SERIES OF MOTIVATIONAL POSTERS



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XBOX

→ Milestones



■ XBOX

GENMA ONIMUSHA

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Capcom**

■ Release Date: **January** ■ Origin: **Japan**

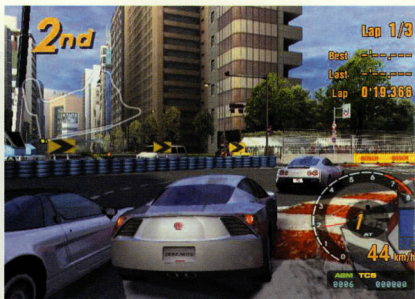
→ Capcom gave its "Resident Samurai" title a substantial makeover for its Xbox debut. In addition to a number of brand-new enemies (including Ayane, the meanest little doll since Chucky), it incorporates a new, deeper battle system that enables the player to charge up elemental attacks in order to cause more damage. It also introduces a new type of soul for the player to gather. The new souls are green in color and can be absorbed by monsters as well as you, thus enabling the monsters to power-up into new forms. Finally, with full Dolby 5.1 surround sound and luscious HDTV support, the game looks and sounds far better than its original incarnation.



■ This doll is cute now, but wait 'til she sprouts giant sword-hands and starts levitating. We're serious



■ With new monsters, new moves, and full support for both HDTV and Dolby 5.1 surround sound, *Genma Onimusha* is one seriously enhanced port



■ PS2

GRAN TURISMO CONCEPT TOKYO 2001

■ Publisher: **Sony (Japan)** ■ Developer: **Polyphony Digital**

■ Release Date: **January (Japan)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

→ This tentatively-titled, stand-alone expansion pack for *Gran Turismo 3* matches five of *GT3*'s tracks with 20 new concept cars. Highlights include the twin-engine Honda Dual Note, the super-high-performance Nissan GT-R, and the simply strange Toyota Pod. Sony has yet to indicate if the game will make it to the U.S., but with nearly 2 million units of *GT3* already sold in the U.S. at press time, we're thinking it will.



■ The bizarre Toyota Pod (above) is actually equal parts car and virtual pet, with a front panel that changes color according to the car's "moods"



#11 IN A SERIES OF MOTIVATIONAL POSTERS



FAILURE

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PlayStation 2

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FINAL FANTASY X

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Blood and Violence

→ Finals

Some months are busier and better than others, but this one's a real doozy — *everything's* here!



76

GameCube

Pikmin

76



Switching from third- to first-person for precise targeting is a skill you'll have to master to beat many of the tougher enemies

PLAYSTATION 2

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty

Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Konami

One thing's for certain: You won't be disappointed

No other game in history has received the kind of overwhelming hype enjoyed by *Metal Gear Solid 2*. Given that, you'd almost expect the game to disappoint on some level. Sadly for all of the cynics out there, it doesn't. From the graphics, to

the gameplay, to the storyline, *MGS2* is a shining example of what a videogame can be. It's simply one of the most ambitious projects ever created, and it's one heck of a great ride. And if you thought that the countless previews, cover stories, and

movie trailers were going to spoil the experience, think again. No matter what you think you know, the only thing you should expect is the unexpected.

For the uninitiated, *MGS2* falls into an almost self-defined

category of stealth action. The game is largely military in nature, but as a single warrior against a horde of heavily armed baddies, by necessity a lot of your time is spent avoiding contact instead of direct head-to-head confrontation — well, in theory at least.



While there's plenty of action, you actually spend most of your time sneaking around, which ain't easy



You can also hold up enemies and rob them of various possessions

PlayStation 2

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The Rating System

Since we're living in a time when even average games are pretty good, we at **Next Generation** will continue to demand even better. Note that a three-star rating is a typical "good" game, so expect to see a lot of them.

★★★★★	REVOLUTIONARY
★★★★☆	EXCELLENT
★★★☆☆	GOOD
★★☆☆☆	FAIR
★☆☆☆☆	BAD

● Denotes a review of a Japanese product



we can rule the sea and land as we never have before.

■ We're sorry, but Snake's mullet just keeps getting funnier every time we look at it. (Don't mind us — we'll just be over here snickering...)

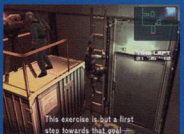
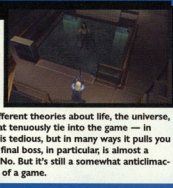
While you're certainly encouraged to stick to the shadows, you're more than welcome to try and take out the opposition with some well-placed head shots. And, though violence is certainly in the nature of the

game, you can actually get through the whole story without killing a single person.

In fact, players are often rewarded for creative thinking. As far as we can tell, nothing has been left to chance, and

DON'T READ THIS!

While the storyline is *Metal Gear Solid's* greatest strength, it's also its most glaring weakness. We're reluctant to spoil anything, but our main beef with the game is that, with roughly 40 minutes of play to go and for no reason whatsoever, it suddenly slows down to a snail's pace. Designer Hideo Kojima then uses the in-game characters to explain different theories about life, the universe, and everything — and how they somewhat tenuously tie into the game — in long, drawn-out cut scenes. Not only is this tedious, but in many ways it pulls you out of the action. It doesn't help that the final boss, in particular, is almost a joke. Is it enough to ruin the experience? No. But it's still a somewhat anticlimactic end to an incredible rollercoaster ride of a game.



This exercise is both a first class exercise that, well,

■ As with the original, you have to keep a close eye on the map to keep out of sight without alerting the many guards



■ The storyline is well integrated and moves along quite smoothly, although that just makes it all the more grating when it starts dragging towards the end

many of the items you find can be put to multiple (and often odd) uses. The game's world reacts to your presence as well, so if you do something weird like, say, sniping all of the birds in a particular area (cough, cough), you're certain to hear about it later.

MGS2 is such a finely polished experience that it's actually hard to single out any one aspect without giving nods to about a dozen others. Still, we'd have to say that where it really succeeds is that it's not just a sequel for fans of the series (although there are plenty of references to the previous games) but it's set up to greet newcomers as well.

Wrapping it all together is a

captivating storyline told through some of the most brilliant realtime cinematics ever seen. The story itself is sometimes a little too convoluted for its own good, but every scene is told with such style and skill that you'll be captivated. We're deliberately avoiding any mention of the plot in this review so we don't spoil even one of the many juicy surprises, but the storyline is at the heart of what makes the game so compelling. Sometimes it becomes bogged down in its own intricacies, or it gets slightly preachy (especially as you get closer to the end — see sidebar), but it remains, like every other aspect of this stunning creation, a tremendous achievement. — Blake Fischer

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: *MGS2* is everything we hoped it would be, and more. Great action, an enthralling story, and plenty of surprises make this *the* PS2 game to get this holiday season.

PlayStation 2

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Outrun and outwit your enemies head-to-head in split screen multiplayer model



6 all new mission types



Violence





■ Does anyone else find it odd that the first thing you do upon finding a new planet is enslave the natives to labor for you?

■ GAMECUBE

Pikmin

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo

Miyamoto, let your freak flag fly

→ Every new Nintendo system has one wildcard game at launch: *Pilotwings* for Super NES, and N64's *Wave Race*. GameCube gets *Pikmin*, Nintendo's most bizarre creation since *Pokémon* and the latest from legendary designer Shigeru Miyamoto.

You control cute little Captain Orima, whose spaceship crashes

on a remote planet. (FYI: In Japanese characters, "Orima" is "Mario" spelled backwards.) Your life support will only last 30 days, during which time you'll have to find the 30 scattered pieces of your ship. You can complete the game without finding every one; you just won't get the best ending.

Since Orima can't carry stuff

or fight giant critters on his own, he makes use of the Pikmin — cute, plant-like creatures that grow out of the ground. There are three types: Red Pikmin are best at fighting and immune to fire; Yellow Pikmin can be thrown higher and carry bombs; and Blue Pikmin can walk across water without drowning.

Controlling the Pikmin is beautifully easy: They'll naturally follow you, but you can manually move them as a group with the yellow C-stick. The A-button throws them, and the B-button whistles a Pikmin back over if it gets separated. It's all very intuitive, with that special Nintendo magic to it. The levels are also meticulously designed so that when you find a ship part you have to solve several puzzles to bring it safely back to your camp. Multitasking armies of Pikmin to get the most done each day is the real key here.

Pikmin is an original, enjoyable game that does a great job of holding your hand as you develop ever-more-complex strategies. In creating something between a classic Nintendo platformer and a PC

DEATH OF A PIKMIN

We're not going to sugarcoat this game for you: Many Pikmin won't make it through alive. But if their deaths are entertaining, their sacrifices will not have been in vain. Here are a few of our favorite ways.

DEATH BY FIRE

A prolonged, painful death. Pikmin race around, eyes wide, with their leaves engulfed in flames. Water would help, but...

DEATH BY WATER

Only Blue Pikmin can swim; the rest thrash about violently for about 10 seconds before their little limbs stop splashing. Their screams stay with you.

DEATH BY INGESTION

Although Pikmin invariably seem to want to stand in front of creatures with giant, gaping maws, it's never a good idea and only ends in tears.

PURPLE PIKMIN ZOMBIE UNDEATH

Certain spores will turn peaceful, loving Pikmin into purple-skinned killers that attack you. Actually, there's really just nothing fun about being swarmed by angry armies of purple Pikmin.

realtime strategy game, Miyamoto has delivered a fun and quirky experience that may not be on as grand a scale as Nintendo's flagship titles, but will still be fondly remembered for a long time. — Chris Slate

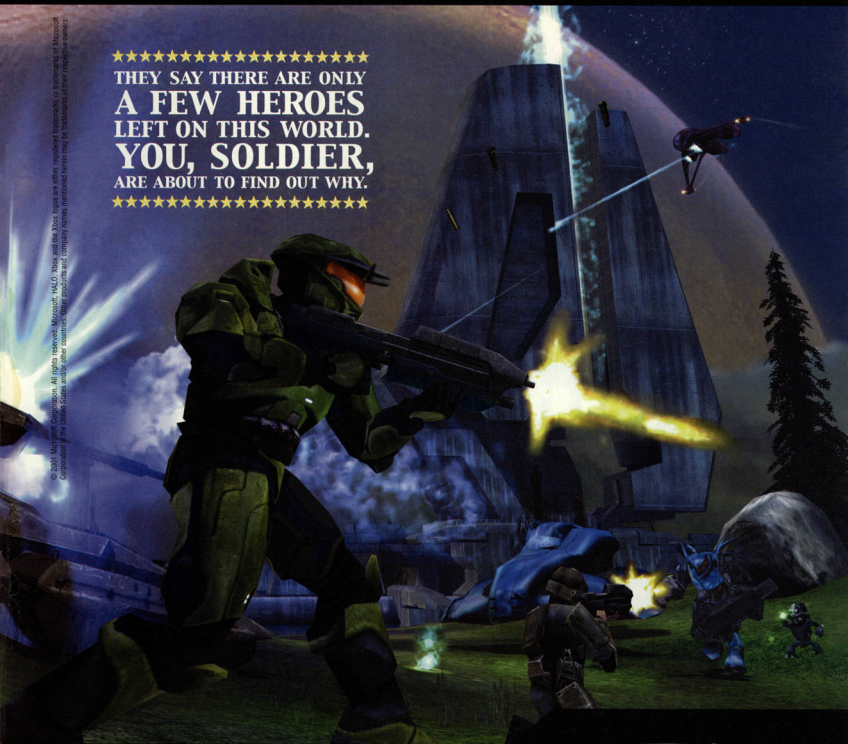


ENextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A charming, addictive game that backs up Nintendo's promise to innovate on GameCube. If you like puzzles, then get your thinking cap on and put those Pikmin to work.

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★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
THEY SAY THERE ARE ONLY
A FEW HEROES
LEFT ON THIS WORLD.
YOU, SOLDIER,
ARE ABOUT TO FIND OUT WHY.
★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★



This is no place for subtlety. This is no place for pity. This is a place where aliens want to turn humans into a bad memory. This is a place where strategy matters indoors and out, where your weapons and vehicles are both human and alien. This is a place for carnage. This is HALO™



VIOLENCE
BLOOD AND GORE



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→ Finals PlayStation 2

■ GTA3 is the only game we can think of with a carjack button

■ PLAYSTATION 2

Grand Theft Auto 3

■ Publisher: Rockstar ■ Developer: DMA Design

Crime may not pay, but it can be fun



→ The *Grand Theft Auto* series has always been the farthest thing from politically correct — and fiercely proud of it. By putting you in the role of a smalltime (if especially vicious) crook, it's meant to offer the vicarious thrills of breaking the law with impunity. *GTA3* moves the series from its top-down 2D roots to a third-person 3D experience, but it continues in the same antisocial vein. It ought to be a real kick, and in many ways it is, but there are some problems.

The gist of the gameplay

NextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: It is perhaps overly ambitious given the flawed execution, but we'll take ambition over playing it safe any day.

Involves you getting in touch with various underworld bosses and pulling off different crimes for them.

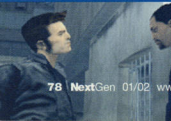
However, by the fourth or fifth "job," you can fully expect to fail much more than you succeed. Your only option is to repeat the mission again and again, since success is often just a matter of random luck (the traffic finally lines up just right for you to snake through, or enough rival gang members happen to walk by for you to reach your hit quota in time, etc.). Adding to the frustration is

the fact that your targeting system is practically useless, and the vehicle physics model is annoyingly floaty.

All that said, there's still quite a lot to like here. There are dozens upon dozens of unique, varied missions. The huge city is wonderfully alive and teeming with hapless citizens. And there's a brutally cynical humor underscoring everything that's hard to resist. The storyline takes a while to kick in and progresses very slowly, but it's refreshingly adult in tone and rarely candy-coats its mobster subject matter.

In other words, if you can put up with a few frustrations, it's a great way to work out your more misanthropic impulses. Whether you can look past the annoyances is another question. — Jeff Lundrigan

■ The graphics are more blocky than gritty, but it looks OK



FIFA 2002

■ Platform: PlayStation 2
■ Publisher: EA Sports
■ Developer: EA Sports Chertsey

The soccer gaming scene in the U.S. is nowhere near as competitive as other sports genres, so you might be forgiven for thinking that EA's *FIFA* series has an easy time. But when you consider that it also has to hold up in soccer-crazed Europe, you begin to understand why *FIFA* has to undergo pretty serious retooling each year to stay ahead.

FIFA 2002 once again makes full use of its almighty license, covering virtually every league, federation, team, and player in the known universe. The added bonus this time is the qualifying campaign for the 2002 World Cup. (The World Cup proper is absent — no doubt being saved for its own title next year.)

As always, the depth of *FIFA*'s options and play modes is unchallenged, but the real test of any



■ No soccer fan should be without FIFA 2002

soccer game is how authentically it re-creates the free-flowing nature of on-field play, and here *2002* makes some impressive strides forward. Chief among them is more intuitive passing. Most soccer games pass the ball directly to the feet of players; *2002* is more realistic, enabling you to pass into the space ahead of the open man. Mastering this enables strikers to make penetrating runs and rewards positional awareness off the ball as well as on.

For soccer aficionados, it's one more touch that continues to make *FIFA* the most authentic-feeling (not to mention prettiest) soccer sim on the market. — Gary Whitta

NextGen★★★★☆

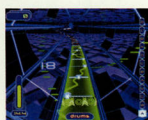
Bottom Line: With improved tactics and graphics, *FIFA 2002* once again cements itself at the top of the virtual soccer universe.

Frequency

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: SCEA
■ Developer: Harmonix Music Systems

This is one of those rhythm action games that you're either going to really get into, or just be utterly confused by. Playing a bit like a racing game meets "Simon Says," *Frequency* has you trek through a 3D octagonal tube, each side of which represents the different tracks of a song you're attempting to re-create. A typical song, for example, would have you hammer out predetermined button patterns for the guitar, bass, drums, vocal, and a wealth of other miscellany. As you complete a side — and hence, that track of the song — you can move along to the next instrument and bring the music to life. And if your hand-eye reflexes need a rest, you can also remix each song by laying out the tracks differently.

All this could be somewhat off-putting if the soundtrack were your typically soulless videogame techno, but fortunately the game's



■ Frequency may look a little confusing, but it turns out to be a fine and mildly innovative title

20 levels feature a rather eclectic range of high-quality music, from rock to electronica to rap. Artists include DJ Q-Bert, The Crystal Method, Orbital, Fear Factory, and Juno Reactor.

There's something incredibly liberating about putting together pieces of music with nothing but some quick key presses. This isn't just another button-mashing game; skill and artistry are equally involved. Give it a try and you'll be hooked. — Peter Suciu

NextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: America's first homegrown rhythm action game is a lot of fun.



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Giants: Citizen Kabuto

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **Digital Mayhem**

Hit PC games usually make for only decent console fare, but *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* bucks the trend, delighting and mystifying in equal parts.

Set on a surreal, tropical island, three humor-prone raves provide the entertainment: the technology-friendly Meccs (whom you start as), voluptuous and spiritual Sea Reapers, and Kabuto, a massive, lumbering hulk. You follow their exploits through widely varied missions, from rescuing helpless youths as a Mecc to stomping local fauna into gooey chunks as Kabuto.

Surprisingly, all of the issues

we would normally associate with a PC port have been addressed. Keyboard and mouse aren't supported, but the developer has done a great job of making the third-person gameplay work on the Dual Shock controller. And graphical-ly, the bright, colorful landscapes and characters don't disappoint on your TV screen.

Practically defying comparison to anything else, *Giants* stands tall in its own right. If

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's the *Monty Python* meets *Godzilla* of computer games, suspiciously well converted to PlayStation 2.



■ *Giants* was a fine game on PC, and it's pretty smashing on PS2 as well

you're in the mood for an action game with personality to spare, this is for you.

— Scott Steinberg

■ Larger-than-life hockey gameplay might seem redundant, but *NHL Hitz* will make you a believer

■ **PLAYSTATION 2**

NHL Hitz 20-02

■ Publisher: **Midway** ■ Developer: **Black Box**

Check!

→ Midway has been peddling these "extreme" sports game since the days of *NBA Jam*. Recent versions like *NHL Blitz* had the same "wacky" feel but were often hamstrung by a reliance on button mashing and a wicked catch-up logic that ruined the single-player experience.

For *NHL Hitz 20-02*, Midway recruited the hockey veterans at Black Box and came up with a genuine winner. It's a beautifully animated, highly playable, very exaggerated version of NHL hockey, full of extra features. The basic gameplay is over the top, with outrageous speed, tons of scoring, and players flying through the glass and into the crowd. The play balance, however, is superb as

you must be able utilize both brutality and finesse. And thankfully, the ridiculous catch-up code is gone.

What sets this apart is its loving attention to funny details. When a player "catches fire," a lightning bolt literally sets him ablaze, and sometimes teammates will even warm their hands on him. The 12 bonus rinks (including Egypt, a graveyard, and a disco) also have plenty of clever touches.

It adds up to the best extreme sports game yet done for a next-generation console. If you are looking for a great party game and a chance to cross-check a buddy into next week, *NHL Hitz 20-02* will scratch that high-sticking itch. — Jim Preston

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Although we admit it's not saying much, this is the best "wacky" sports game we've played in years.

**Soul Reaver 2**

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Eidos Interactive** ■ Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**

Soul Reaver 2 expands upon the strengths of the original game in every way. The combat, in particular, has been beefed-up thanks to the addition of projectile weapons, and the puzzles are more thoughtful with less emphasis on manipulating blocks.

Unfortunately, SR2 expands upon the original game's weaknesses as well. It still suffers from an incredibly herky-jerky sense of pace, interrupting the combat and puzzles every few minutes with lengthy cut scenes to explain the game's Byzantine

and often tiresome backstory.

Yet the gameplay is utterly absorbing. Some of the architecture is brilliant, and we often paused just to look around and take it all in. The game cleverly shifts between the material and spectral realms, forcing you to look creatively at most situations, and the combat is both simple and fun.

Yes, at times it can be frustrating with its meandering,

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Perhaps a little too rocco for our tastes, *Soul Reaver 2* is nonetheless an absorbing and expertly crafted game.



■ Aw heck, we can't help ourselves: "Don't fear the Reaver!"

endless exposition, but few titles can match its eerie atmosphere. — Jim Preston

SSX Tricky

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **EA Sports** ■ Developer: **EA Sports Canada**

Last year's *SSX* was arguably the best PS2 launch title and the most exciting snowboarding game on the market. This year's version is in large part the same as last year's, with some tweaks and extras.

Much of the game will seem familiar, as many tracks are in the same locales as before — even though almost everything has been refined. Two new tracks and five new characters have also been thrown into the mix, and the trick system has been

enhanced with a new "tricky" meter that enables you to perform even crazier stunts.

Other than that, though, it's pretty familiar ground. Players must win races to unlock each course, upgrade their characters, and earn new equipment. It's still just as fun as in the original game, but as you might expect, the experience isn't quite as fresh as it was a year ago.

In order to make the whole package more desirable, EA has included a special behind-the-scenes "making of the game"

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you haven't played *SSX*, this is a must-buy, but if you already own the game, the full-price "expansion pack" is hardly revolutionary.



■ If you liked last year's *SSX*, you'll love this year's, since much of it is kinda the same

video. It's interesting to watch but by no means as compelling as a true sequel would have been. — Peter Suci



Smuggler's Run 2 throws a lot more at you than the original, although it's balanced enough that this is rarely frustrating

PLAYSTATION 2

Smuggler's Run 2: Hostile Territory

Publisher: Rockstar Games Developer: Angel Studios

A Run for your money

The further we get away from the PS2 launch lineup, the less impressively it lingers in our memory. There were really only two pleasant surprises: EA's SSX and Rockstar's Smugglers Run. Happily, Rockstar has decided to continue its success with Smuggler's Run 2. A safe but extremely fun sequel.

The basic conceit is the same: You pick up contraband in your vehicle and try to drop it off at predetermined points. There is some variation on the theme with airplane and helicopter drops, and some levels demand that you lose your pursuers before returning to base, but for the most part it plays much like the original. There is an actual plot this time, though, and the three different settings: (desert Russia, Vietnam,

and arctic Russia) give it a more real-world feel.

Visually, SR2 is a small step up from last year's effort. The graphics are still quite detailed, with enormous maps full of clever little touches. There is certainly more life and activity in the 36 different missions, with trains, cops, gangs, rockslides, and land mines to send you tumbling.

But no matter what plot devices may be used or what graphical flourishes have been added, the game is still really just about driving recklessly in 17 cool off-road vehicles. There's a more robust multiplayer mode this time, but it's the nicely balanced single-player mode that sets this game apart. It may just be a sequel, but in this case, more of the same ain't bad. — Jim Preston

NextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A small improvement over the original that also smartly retains all the fun.



The landscapes are a lot more finished and alive than before

Supercar Street Challenge

Platform: PlayStation 2 Publisher: Activision Developer: Exakt

Speed is the driving force behind Supercar Street Challenge, but had it been injected with a little originality, the game might've been running on premium instead of regular unleaded.

The twist this racer offers is a chance to drive high-end concept cars. There are several pre-configured models (including Lotus, Paganì, or Saleen), but for many, the most exciting part of the game may be designing your own.

Roadside, vehicles handle with an odd mix of arcade sensibilities and semi-realistic

physics. Cars glide effortlessly over various and sundry surfaces, save when braking — then it's into a powerslide or showstopping brush with a strategically placed median. Frankly, it's all a bit clichéd.

Still, the graphics are nice. Colorful courses boasting recognizable landmarks glow with a polished sheen. Even the soundtrack effectively gets the blood pumping. It's no Gran Turismo 3, but then...



Supercar Street Challenge is just about the definition of "middle of the road"

Yes, you could do better. And yes, you could do worse. SSC is just about par for the course. — Scott Steinberg

NextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Standard automotive thrills with a mildly amusing twist — vehicle design options.

Yanya Caballista: City Skater

Platform: PlayStation 2 Publisher: Koel Developer: Koel

Yanya Caballista has the distinction of being played with a fingerboard over the Dual Shock sticks, a juvenile touch that's outdone only by the game's cartoonish, cel-shaded graphics. Regardless, it isn't bad, just eccentric — perhaps too much so for its own good.

Aliens called the Gawtoo have invaded New San Francisco, but thankfully they live for skateboarding tricks (um, OK). To save the city, you'll spend hours vying for their attention, jumping around and ripping off stunts like an even more hyperactive Tony Hawk.

Trouble is, the controls are batty. With the fingerboard over the sticks, you maneuver as if angling the board onscreen. But since PS2 gamepads weren't meant for vertical usage, pulling off even basic maneuvers and combos is just made that much harder.

Luckily, the antics are candy-coated by adorable aesthetics. It's the essence of anime, with doe-eyed charac-



Yanya Caballista isn't the greatest skateboarding game, but it has its charms

ters, puffly surroundings, and equally obscure dialogue and plot lines. — Scott Steinberg

NextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: This is a bonzo extreme sports product so foreign in origin and design that it could pass for a Kia.

WWF Smackdown: Just Bring It

Platform: PlayStation 2 Publisher: THQ Developer: Yuke's

Just Bring It looks great on paper, boasting virtually every WWF superstar, 68 match variations, and over a thousand moves. However, it also suffers from a total lack of an over-the-top, smash-mouth atmosphere.

Sure, all the opening themes and signature moves are there, and there's a neat attempt to simulate the behind-the-scenes drama via a story mode, but inside the ring the experience is dulled by a horribly unpredictable camera and terribly flat, disjointed

commentary. Such trimmings might be considered trivial in other games, but in the WWF's case, the attitude is half the fun. The wrestling engine is competent and enables plenty of variation, but the combatants seem strangely "floaty," especially when tables, ladders, and chairs are in the mix.

Just Bring It's saving grace



A WWF game without attitude? How can such a thing happen?

is its multiplayer mode. The aforementioned problems remain, but with so many inventive combos it's impossible not to have fun beating up on friends, particularly in a four-man tag. — Gary Whitta

NextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Marred by some serious flaws and a jarring lack of atmosphere, Just Bring It still delivers a few rasslin' thrills.

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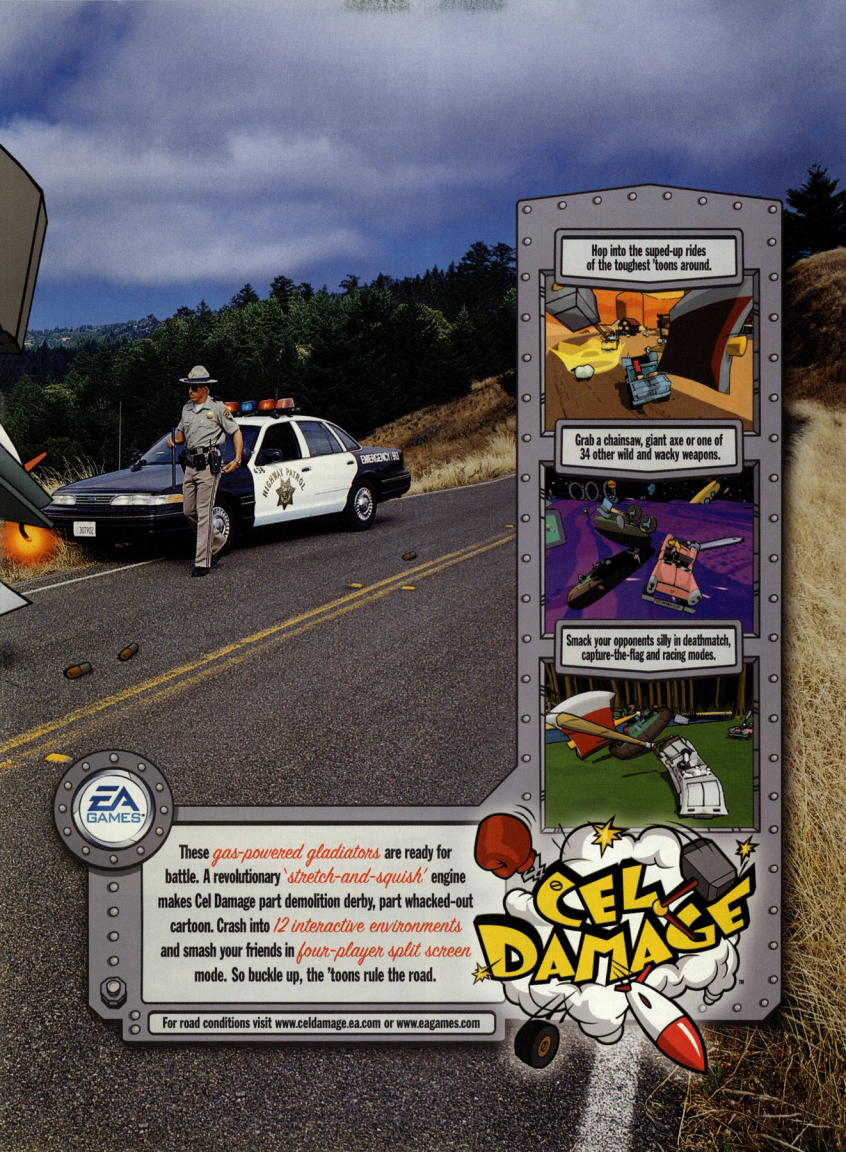
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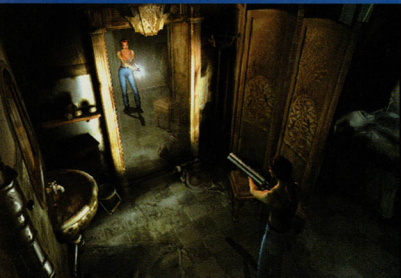
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■ DREAMCAST

Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare

■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Developer: Darkworks

Scary, but not *that* scary



■ Although light can be used as a weapon, a shotgun, of course, sure comes in handy at some key moments

→ We reviewed this generally diverting adventure game for its PC release back in **NG 10/01**. The latest incarnation of the original 3D action adventure series, its main drawback was that its PlayStation roots made the control scheme on PC rather problematic. By contrast, its main flaw on PlayStation was that the graphics were an eyesore. Thankfully, the Dreamcast version gives you the best of all possible worlds: sharp, solid 3D graphics, along with reasonably familiar Resident Evil-style gamepad control.

In the present day, one of Edward Caraby's descendants (we think anyway — the game is a little sketchy on that point) makes the trek to Shadow Island to investigate the death of a friend. Along for the ride is a suspiciously buxom scientist, Aline Cedrac, who's initially not even sure why she's there. After their chartered plane crashes you're given the choice of playing as either Edward or Aline, which means there are two completely different, if complementary, storylines to follow. It also means the game features the obligatory "Let's split up even though we're both in incredible



■ The game features graphics that are the usual 3D characters over 2D backgrounds, but they still look great

danger" scene — whatever.

The control is actually a little below par for a modern survival horror game, probably because this was designed with a non-analog PlayStation pad in mind. Still, it works far better here with an actual gamepad than on a PC's keyboard.

The graphics are, in fact, quite well done and suitably creepy most of the time. The puzzles are a bit arbitrary, but for the most part aren't too hard to figure out. The story is interesting, though a tad predictable, and with a few exceptions the voice acting is quite good.

So it ain't exactly Code: Veronica. But then, what is? — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★★★★☆

Bottom Line: If you haven't tried any other version, Dreamcast is definitely the way to go with this one.

■ DREAMCAST

NFL2K2

■ Publisher: Sega Sports ■ Developer: Visual Concepts

Still a great game of football



■ While the graphics are still excellent, Dreamcast is starting to show its age against newer systems like Xbox and PlayStation 2

→ It was Dreamcast that gave the world the first really astounding-looking football videogame with NFL2K, in turn beginning the "2K" sports franchise that has since grown into the mighty EA Sports' most fearsome competitor. Now the 2K series is destined to live beyond the system that gave birth to it, but before Dreamcast finally croaks, it gets to take one last swing at its next-generation competitors with NFL2K2. And while anyone who's seen NFL Fever and Madden 2002 will instantly sneer at the game's marginally inferior graphics, it still looks damn good for a system now officially past its sell-by date, and it doesn't play a bad game of gridiron, either.

2K2 takes the "evolution rather than revolution" route, staying true to the control and play styles that made the previous versions so popular, while adding beefed-up game types (including

a Madden-style franchise mode) and yet more high-production gloss. And, as ever, it's a fine game of football, although quibbles remain about the quality of the running game and some behavioral quirks with receivers. One nice touch: The color commentary soundtrack is supplemented by snippets of on-field trash talk and bullying threats between players — the kind of thing you only normally hear on NFL Films.

If you're thinking about upgrading to PS2, GameCube, or Xbox anytime soon, you'll be better picking up Fever or Madden, both of which have NFL2K2 beat in gameplay and aesthetics — albeit not by much. Dreamcast diehards, however, will delight in the fact that they don't need to upgrade in order to continue enjoying one of the best football franchises on the market — even if for only one more season. — Gary Whitta

NextGen ★★★★★☆

Bottom Line: It's showing its age, but NFL2K2 can still compete with anything the next generation has to offer.



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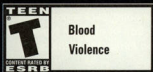
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PlayStation®2



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■ PLAYSTATION

Dragon Warrior VII

■ Publisher: Enix ■ Developer: Enix

So huge it blots out the sun

→ The third-best-selling videogame of all time in Japan, Enix's latest is the most old-school, hardcore RPG we've played in years. The interface and turn-based 2D battles may remind you of the original *Dragon Warrior*, released for NES back in 1989, but the new game's scale is simply gargantuan. There are some 20

character classes (plus the ability to become monsters), roughly 300 monster types, and a solid 80 to 100 hours of gameplay. In fact, we suspect few gamers will endure until the end credits — it's just too damn big.

The game's main strength is its majestic storyline, in which the player's party must rebuild his entire world

by locating the pieces to ancient maps. When a given country's map is completed, the player's party is sent back in time to prevent its destruction. This breaks the game into smaller chunks and keeps things fresh by constantly introducing new characters and situations. However, good luck if you miss a crucial map shard, as you may have to search literally every urn, chest, and human being across the whole world and two time-lines before you find it.

There is at least one glaring weakness in the game: the graphics. While the story-focused RPG hardcore may decry this as unfair criticism, the undeniable truth is that *DWVII*'s



endless battles would be less monotonous and many pivotal story moments far

more touching if the game looked less like a SNES title and more like, say, *Chrono Cross*. — Eric Bratcher



→ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: The harder-core you are, the more you'll love this defiantly old-school RPG, but graphics hounds and those with short attention spans can sit this one out.

■ PLAYSTATION

Syphon Filter 3

■ Publisher: SCEA ■ Developer: Eidetic

Is this the PSX alternative to MGS2?

→ While many gamers have moved on to the next-generation systems, titles like *Syphon Filter 3* prove there's still life in PSX. This latest in the popular third-person action series may have

weathered graphics compared to recent, flashier efforts, but the gameplay is sharp as ever. *SF3* begins with playable flashbacks detailing the dawn and heyday of The Agency, weaving new playable charac-

ters into its complex story of international intrigue. Missions progress into present day, when series regulars Gabe and Lian, after testifying in private Senate hearings, must stop an arms-dealing group from spreading the Syphon Filter virus.

SF3 inherits the series' somewhat complex configuration and sluggish control, necessitating slow-going, precision technique over running-and-gunning. Of the three targeting modes (default, target lock, and manual aiming), only manual aiming is consistent and effective, often forcing you to duck behind or lean out from cover to hit certain kill zones (head, body, limb). There are 18 levels across



■ There hasn't been much effort to upgrade or change the basic targeting and gameplay control system, but then, there wasn't any real reason to

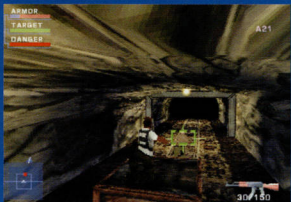
worldwide locales, each with multiple objectives. They're segmented nicely with several checkpoints and timely scripted events that all add up to at least 20 to 25 hours of gameplay. Additional mini-games with random enemy

regeneration (timed completion, stealth, assassination, and cover fire missions) and multi-player modes offer some replayability, but don't measure up to the core single-player experience.

— Tommy Layton

→ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Graphically solid, slickly presented, and sporting a solid selection of mission types in a complex storyline, *Syphon Filter 3* is perhaps the last great PSX action title.



■ The gameplay and graphics remain largely the same, while the story is carried on in interesting ways.



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■ The game still keeps the 3D isometric look of its predecessor, but everything has been spruced-up, and all of the icons are animated now

Commandos 2: Men of Courage

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Eidos Interactive ■ Developer: Pyro

As the original *Commandos* showed, sabotaging evil Nazis during WWII appeals to the inner warrior in all of us. With *Commandos 2*, the Pyro team attempts to re-create the same thrill and succeeds — sort of.

While the game follows the same action-puzzle gameplay path as the original installment, an admirable job has been done trying to fix any problems that players had. Now, for example, each character has multiple skills to utilize. Sadly, this often proves a hindrance, as figuring out which person should do what is not very intuitive. Characters can become trapped because their secondary skill is not what is needed to complete the next step in a given puzzle.

In fact, the most frustrating thing here is how mind-bogglingly difficult it all is. You'll spend so much time saving and reloading that much of



■ Care must be taken so that not one of these soldiers sees your men

the fun is lost, and the lack of an actual tutorial to learn about characters and skills will likely test all but the most dedicated player.

Still, the graphics and sound are outstanding, and the campaign includes highly detailed indoor and outdoor missions. *Commandos 2* can be exciting and addictive, and if you stick with it there is a sense of satisfaction with each success. Still, it's hard to recommend the game to anyone who hasn't mastered the original.

— Carla Harker

NextGen ★★★★★☆

Bottom Line: *Commandos 2* is insanely difficult. Non-masochists need not apply.

■ PC

Civilization III

■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Developer: Firaxis

How do you improve on perfection?

→ It's doubtful that any other PC game series is as hallowed as Sid Meier's *Civilization*. In each installment your goal is nothing less than to grow a civilization from the Stone Age to the Space Age, and they are, quite simply, the finest strategy games ever made.

After much legal wrangling with Activision and others, *Civilization III* is finally here. As expected, given the series' five-year hiatus, changes to the gameplay are quite numerous and varied. The "classic" Settlers units, for example, have had their

irrigation and other improvement functions delegated to a new unit, the Worker, which is cheap to produce, making road building and mining a snap.

Likewise, a nation's boundaries are now defined by "cultural influence," a commodity produced by cities that can extend their territory far beyond the previous two-square limit. Indeed, should a rival city find itself surrounded by your culture, its citizens may defect to you without a shot being fired. Also, the bonus items in territory squares now have a direct effect on production. You can't build cannons without access to iron



■ Each nationality now has a few distinct advantages and disadvantages

deposits, for example, which increases the importance of trade. As a result there are many renovations to diplomacy as well.

However, while there are plenty of gameplay tweaks, *Civ* veterans will find these don't affect one's "classic" strategies. The changes mostly seem to increase your options for trying new strategies, without really altering the core game. And actually, that's a brilliant approach: Keep it familiar, then increase the strategic possibilities. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Given that *Civ II* was as close to perfect as any game has ever been, it's arguable that it wasn't possible to change it so much as add to it.



■ There are a bunch of new city management options

Project Eden

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Eidos Interactive ■ Developer: Core Design

In *Project Eden's* favor, it isn't your typical action game. Set in a grim future, it puts you in charge of a squad of four different operatives (one at a time) in a deft mix of action and puzzles.

The core of the gameplay lies within the characters themselves.

They all have individual skills, be it repair or hacking ability, that you'll need to use to complete the various challenges. Almost every puzzle requires the skills of two or more of your available squad to solve together, so you'll constantly have to think of new ways to utilize each character in conjunction with the others. Surprisingly, it all works nicely thanks to an elegant interface and control scheme.

But it's not perfect. The graphics are a mixed bag — pretty in some places, grainy in others. Additionally, it's very linear, with exactly one way to solve most puzzles. Worse,



■ The flycam can cross chasms and activate simple switches to allow the bipedal folk through

sometimes the solution involves a lot of backtracking and searching for just the right tool or person required. And while many of the levels are well designed with some nicely integrated puzzles, others are too convoluted for their own good.

As a testament to the game's originality, most folks will likely play to the end despite these flaws. It's not as polished as we'd like it to be, but it still has that "one more level" draw that keeps you going past midnight.

— Kevin Rice

NextGen ★★★★★☆

Bottom Line: This game needs a coat of wax and a buffing, but the creativity in its design and execution warrant playing through.

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GAME BOY ADVANCE

Stronghold

Platform: PC Publisher: GodGames Developer: Firefly

It's been a long time since anybody's toyed with the idea of a "sim castle" game. Such is Stronghold, however, a game that combines the city-building techniques found in titles such as Zeus with plenty of realtime strategy elements.

The military campaign is the strongest and most entertaining part of the game, but if you're without the desire to defend a castle against enemy forces, you can also choose an economic campaign or a sandbox mode. The latter is going to be the most appealing for the SimCity crowd since the goal is simply to build the castle you've always dreamed of.

The only real flaws in Stronghold are a lack of in-game information and what appear to be a couple of bugs. Occasionally people will begin to leave your castle for no apparent reason, and it might be difficult to draw them



■ The castle wall stands, and victory is achieved

back without knowing why they left to begin with. Even the lowest taxes will cause your popularity to decline steadily, so it becomes necessary to turn tax collecting off just to keep people from deserting. Another apparent bug is that parts of walls will disappear when enemy soldiers start to attack, even though no siege weapons were available to them.

Despite this, Stronghold is still an excellent title that manages to bring the middle-age "hobby" of castle-building to the modern-day game. — Carla Harker

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Both sim and strategy players will find something to like in *Stronghold*, whether it's a long military campaign or just creating the largest, most well-run castle ever.

Zoo Tycoon

Platform: PC Publisher: Microsoft Developer: Blue Fang Games

In the short term, this RollerCoaster Tycoon clone is really fun. You manage all aspects of a zoo, from placing refreshment stands to hand-designing suitable habitats for our all-important animal friends. The atmosphere is excellent, with entertaining animal animations, plenty of zoo-like sounds, and a real feeling of progression as your zoo expands. But a few hours in, you start to feel like the game's keepers haven't quite raked the dung out of every corner.

The basic problem with Zoo Tycoon is the less dynamic nature of a zoo as compared to a theme park. There are no coasters to build, and animals will tolerate very little creativity in the design of their pens; in fact, one picky jaguar remained steadfastly miserable until its enclosure was so "highly suitable." It won an award.



■ The problem with Zoo Tycoon is that it's more exciting to mix the chimps with the tigers, or let the elephants escape

Compounding this premature staleness and unpredictable AI are a few too-rigid gameplay decisions. For example, a 12-month scenario lasts a full 12 months even if you fulfill all the requirements in six, which leads to lots of sitting around. Also, new features are researched in a designated order — why should you have to research gorilla bars when your zoo doesn't even have a gorilla?

— Eric Bratcher

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A pleasant diversion, but it's about as deep as a puddle, and frustratingly finicky.

PC

Star Wars Galactic Battlegrounds

Publisher: LucasArts Developer: Ensemble Studios

An empire of a different age



■ It looks like Star Wars and plays like Age of Empires — and yeah, that's cool

➔ Lately it seems as if finding a good Star Wars game for PC has been as difficult as finding a tall Jawa, but LucasArts finally hit the target when it brought in Ensemble Studios to create this fine realtime strategy game.

Not surprisingly, the game feels a lot like Ensemble's own *Age of Empires*. You gather resources, construct buildings and troops, research technology, and, hopefully, take out all opposition. The compelling twist, however, is that *Battlegrounds* features six different civilizations from both series of Star Wars movies. Everyone joins the party too, from Darth Vader to Queen Amidala to Chewbacca. Each civilization also manages to look unique from the others, which keeps the game fresh no matter which one you choose.

With over 300 different units, the game employs a vast array of strategic possibilities.



■ Even the Gungans have their own campaign, and yes, they're as annoying as ever

Unfortunately, the AI is far from perfect, as the enemy will often send wave after wave of outnumbered troops in a suicidal attempt to accomplish its goals. Pathfinding — especially over long distances — also needs work, though waypoints can alleviate this some. Another problem is the inability to set default aggression levels for troop buildings; troops usually come from their

various buildings set in an aggressive stance, and changing each one to defensive becomes a chore.

Despite these few hiccups — and the inevitably derivative nature of the gameplay — *Battlegrounds* is fun. The seamless merger of the old and new Star Wars worlds creates a beautiful, highly detailed game that will keep you enthralled for weeks. — Carla Harker

NextGen ★★★★★

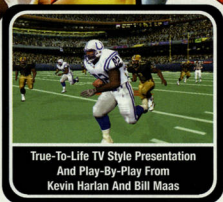
Bottom Line: *Age of Empires* and *Star Wars*? Bring it on.



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→ Letters

We do you write

→ When I heard that *Shenmue II* was canceled for Dreamcast, I was, like many other Dreamcast fans, really

upset. I had been looking forward to a great game like *Shenmue II* for my dying (or should I say "dead") Dreamcast.

Anyway, I would like to know if any other upcoming Dreamcast games are to be canceled? This would be a great help since I would be spared the disappointment of my anticipation.

"Joshua87"
Via email

Toshinden), but it wasn't required. So depending on when each of you bought your system, you could have paid just about anything.

→ In your preview of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* in NG 11/01, you make note that online play with a network-to-USB adapter was great. What brand of adapter did you use, or where can I find a list of compatible adapters? I have a Netgear USB-to-Ethernet adapter and it does not seem to fly.

"Michael"
Via email

We use a D-link DSB-650TX USB Fast Ethernet Adapter, although Sony also recommends the Linksys USB100TX. Those are the two (count 'em, two) USB adapters that seem fairly free of problems. Other models may work, but PS2 seems to be a little twitchy and particular about networking through the USB port. However, if you're on a DSL line, for example, and you have a router, once you get the adapter hooked up, it should be a snap to connect. Just set it to auto-detect and it should run through the router just fine.

→ I'm a hardcore gamer who decides which system to buy based on which sports games are available. Sports games are what I primarily play and are most important to me. I just wanted to know, which system is better and which one should I buy? I have a PSOne, so should I stick with the Sony family or go to the powerful Xbox? Please help me decide and thank you for your time.

Michael Junio
Via email

We have to honestly say that, for perhaps the first time in gaming history, as far as sports games are concerned it just doesn't matter much which next-gen system you choose —

DEAD TO (EXCLUSIVE?) RIGHTS

In NG 11/01 on page 12, you reported that Xbox would have the game *Dead to Rights* as an exclusive. Is this true or a typo? I've only seen it announced for PS2, to be released in the first quarter of 2002. And if it is an Xbox exclusive, does that mean "exclusive for a year" or "exclusive forever" (as the dictionary defines the word)?

"Chad"
Roswell, GA

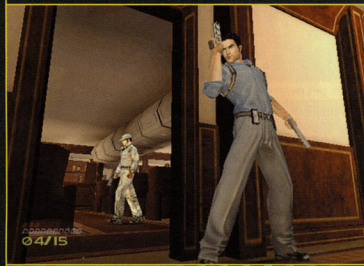
No, it's not a typo. *Dead to Rights* is indeed now an Xbox exclusive. Whether that means it will remain exclusive forever, or we can expect a "*Dead to Rights: Hyper-Exciting Special Edition*" for PS2 sometime next year is anyone's guess.

Sorry to say, but a quick glance over "upcoming" Dreamcast releases in the U.S. shows — well, nothing. No first-party games (after *Sega Sports Tennis 2K2*), and nothing from third parties either. So while Dreamcast won't (and shouldn't) be forgotten, it certainly is gone. It is worth pointing out that *Shenmue II*, *Rez*, and *Headhunter* will be released for Dreamcast in the U.K., but unless you've got a modded console, that's not much help.

→ One of my friends and I are in a conflict about the pricing of the first PlayStation. He says that he bought one and it cost him \$200, which I disagree with. I told him it was around \$132. He says he also bought one game and a memory card, so I think he bought a bundle of some kind for that price. Please tell me who is right.

"kingjeremy6969"
Via email

Actually, the original PlayStation cost \$300 when it first launched — the same as PS2 today. Roughly a year later, you could have bought one for around \$200 — in stark contrast to PS2 today — and a year to 18 months after that it was widely available for between \$130 and \$149. Also, bundles weren't really the practice, as such, for the original PlayStation until much later. Some chains offered special launch deals if you bought a PlayStation with an extra controller, memory card, and/or a couple of games (typically *Ridge Racer* and



■ You read that correctly: *Dead to Rights* is now an Xbox "exclusive" — whatever that means

the possible exception being GameCube, which you should probably avoid. Both EA Sports and Sega Sports are publishing across all platforms, which only leaves each console's own first-party titles. This is where GameCube falls down since, traditionally, Nintendo has only sporadic interest in sports games (such as *Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball* for N64, and the upcoming *NBA Courtside 2002* for GameCube). As for PS2 vs. Xbox, we'll point out that Microsoft's *NFL Fever* is a great game, and Sony's own *GameDay* for PS2 has been a disappointment for two years. However, if you're a *Madden* or an NFL2K fan, that's not a factor. Maybe you ought to see what other games you want to play besides sports titles and use that to decide.

➔ I just wanted to thank you all very much for putting a skeptical yet hopeful preview of the new appearance of *Zelda* for GameCube (GameCube Watch, *NG II/01*). It stopped me from burning all my *Zelda* merchandise in a fit of rage against Nintendo. It seems that Nintendo is being very close-mouthed on this whole new *Zelda* controversy, and if they do say anything about *Zelda* for GameCube, it's about how much we're looking forward to it or whatever. The only thing I could think about this new *Zelda*'s appearance is how badly it is going to suck. Anyway, I just wanted to tell you thanks for letting me see this new look in a more positive light.

"Allie"
Via email

On the other hand:

➔ In *NG II/01* I was disheartened to see *Zelda* reduced to a mere piece of crap. The once "ultra-slick polygonal adventurer" as we know him has been turned to a stupid-looking baby toy. Why have the creators of Link put this curse on our favorite Nintendo character? I think just because of this I will buy an Xbox instead, where the characters don't look like babies.

Clay Jones
Via email

The *Next Gen* staff as a whole is a lot more divided about the

latest *Zelda* than Matt Casamassina was in his penultimate GameCube Watch. The question basically seems to come down to whether you want a more mature (or at least mature-looking) Link, or feel the series does, in fact, need to get back to its cartoon fantasy roots. Here at *Next Gen*, we're waiting until we can actually play the game to pass final judgment.

➔ In the "Upcoming Titles" section of your Xbox special (*NG II/01*), you forgot to mention the game being developed based on Steven Spielberg's film *AI*. Has it been canceled? If not, when do you think it will be released?

Andres Baca
Miami, FL

Officially, it hasn't been "canceled" but we wouldn't hold our breath either. According to sources at Microsoft, *AI: Artificial Intelligence* has been quietly placed "on hold." Make of that what you will.

➔ I have a question that I'm dying to get answered and I hope you guys can help. I have an HD-Ready TV, but I don't have a digital receiver. Will I be able to play Xbox in HDTV format without the receiver?

One other question: I recently had a chance to test out Xbox at a local department store and I noticed the controller didn't have a rumble feature. Also, the eye on the controller was black and looked kind of cheap — not the green glowing ones that I've seen on your Web site and in magazines. Was this a test controller, or was it the controller that will come with Xbox?

"Jammell"
Via email

Yes, you can use your Xbox with an HD-Ready TV. All a digital receiver (a.k.a. "the set-top-box") does is decode incoming broadcast signals from off the air. (Typically this is your digital satellite box, digital cable box, etc.) Your HD-Ready TV is fully capable of displaying the higher-resolution and progressive HDTV modes (480p, 1080i, and on the better models 720p). Since the Xbox

INTERNET DREAMS X

All the "previews" for Xbox's upcoming game *Halo* say the same thing about multiplayer: It has four-player splitscreen, and it can be networked to other Xboxes with their own TVs. My question is, will *Halo* ever feature true online multiplayer for Xbox? I've heard some rumors that originally it was going to be supported online, so please set things straight!

Alex Faix
Via email

At the moment, general Internet connectivity for Xbox is very much up in the air. *Halo* multiplayer games (and a few other titles) are possible over a LAN as you mentioned, but Xbox is not set up to connect to other players via the Internet at all. Still, given the fact that the system appears to use standard TCP/IP protocols, it wouldn't surprise us if there were some kind of user hack available very shortly after Xbox's release.



➔ Right now, splitscreen and LAN are your only Xbox multiplayer options

HDTV output is a straight signal with no broadcast encoding, you can just plug it right in and go. You'll need an Xbox component A/V unit of course, but it should work with no trouble.

As for your second question, it sounds like you were playing with a damaged controller. While the release controllers have the new black jewel (which, we agree, isn't as cool as the green one), they rumble just fine. But while we're on the subject:

➔ I have an Xbox question that's been killing me. I've read that Xbox supports progressive scan in its games, but what about when playing a DVD movie? I've been pricing progressive scan DVD players, and

they're about \$1000. It would be awesome to get a progressive scan DVD player for under \$300!

Blake Ringholz
Via email

Sadly, while Microsoft originally promised that its DVD playback would support progressive scan, it seems that this feature has been quietly dropped. It is a bit puzzling, because the system has no problem with HDTV resolutions for games. However, preliminary testing on the system's DVD movie capabilities has shown that while it does a great job (with several cool, if useless, "DVD Geek"-only features like 10x zoom), it's still not on par with a really high-end player.



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HALO

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- 1 Project Edge
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- PROJECT GOTHAM
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MEDIA WITH PASSION

January 1988

8-bit still reigns supreme, but the battle lines are drawn for the 16-bit console war

→ In early 1988, NES was beginning to show its age. And while the 8-bit generation of home systems would continue to receive great games like *Shinobi* and *Super Mario Bros. 2*, it was clear that the console war would soon begin anew in Japan. There, NEC's PC Engine and Sega's Mega Drive, both 16-bit machines, were scheduled to roll out by the end of the year. Both consoles would earn a U.S. release in 1989, dubbed TurboGrafx-16 and Genesis, respectively. Ironically enough, though NEC never made a dent in the U.S. market with its first gaming console, PC Engine did extremely well in Japan while Mega Drive floundered.

Meanwhile, another potential U.S. console quietly bowed out of the race before getting to the



■ **Face it:** If your best game is as dull and unplayable as *Sewer Shark*, you're in serious trouble

starting line. The casualty was Hasbro's Control-Vision, an ill-designed system that stored its games on videotape rather than cartridges. Considering that the first two games — *Night Trap* and *Sewer Shark* — cost \$4.5 million and resurfaced as two of Sega CD's most infamously bad games, this may have actually been a blessing in disguise.

SPECIAL: Why Super Mario Bros. 2 was delayed again

NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

SHINOBI

THE ARCADE'S FAVORITE NINJA INFILTRATES YOUR LIVING ROOM



SPECIAL REPORT: Japan's looming 16-bit console war, and what it means to you

ATARI ■ NES ■ C64 ■ MASTER SYSTEM ■ PC ENGINE ■ GENESIS ■ PC

What we were playing

What to play while waiting for SNES

SHINOBI



■ Platform: Sega Master System
■ Publisher: Sega

BIONIC COMMANDO



■ Platform: NES
■ Publisher: Capcom

GHOULS 'N GHOSTS



■ Platform: Arcade
■ Publisher: Capcom

NARC



■ Platform: Arcade
■ Publisher: Williams

NINJA GAIDEN



■ Platform: Arcade
■ Publisher: Tecmo

Top Ten Films

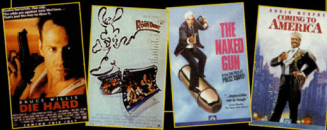
(U.S. Domestic Gross Box Office)

of 1988

Rain Man	\$172,825,435
Who Framed Roger Rabbit?	\$156,452,370
Coming to America	\$128,192,301
Big	\$116,968,774
Twins	\$110,938,388
Crocodile Dundee II	\$109,306,210
Die Hard	\$81,350,242
The Naked Gun	\$78,592,922
Cocktail	\$78,222,763
Oliver & Company	\$74,151,346

...and in the real world

- The Nobel Prize in Physics goes to Leon M. Lederman, Melvin Schwartz, and Jack Steinberger, "for the neutrino beam method and the demonstration of the doublet structure of the leptons through the discovery of the muon neutrino." We might understand this if only we hadn't spent so much of this year playing *Contra* instead of studying.
- '87-'88 Emmy Award winners: Outstanding Animated Program (Daytime) — Jim Henson's Muppet Babies
Outstanding Comedy Series — *The Wonder Years*
Outstanding Drama Series — *thirtysomething*
Outstanding Game/Audience Participation Show — *The Price Is Right*
- The price of a first-class U.S. postage stamp skyrockets from 22 to 25 cents in March.
- The New York Yankees win the World Series, defeating the Oakland A's in five games.
- David Letterman's Top 10 Least Popular Attractions at Disney World — January 21, 1988



10. Raw Sewage Flume
9. Oprah Mountain
8. Moses Malone's Enchanted Laundry Hamper
7. Parade of Short Actors in Stiffing Animal Suits
6. Pegleg Pete's Prison Shower Room
5. Mugglyland
4. Hall of Vice Presidents
3. Walt's Walk-In Freezer and Crypt
2. Turn the Hose on Lady and the Tramp
1. Peter Pan's All-Male Cinema

DAY 33:

*Killed Catalisks this morning by
combining water, air and fire elements.
Haven't saved the world yet. Really hungry.*

DAY 37:

*Fighting never ends.
Axion working overtime.
Pulled grain.*

DAY 42:

*Spent day in "fire" realm.
Got lost. Sure wish I had
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axion. Combine the elements of
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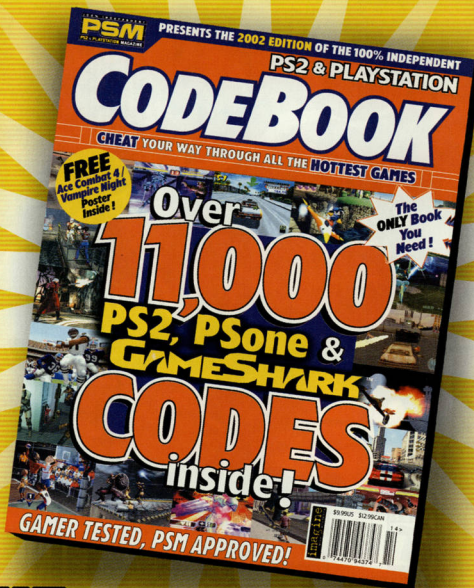
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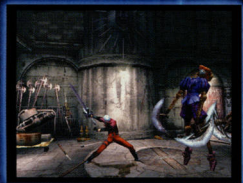
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Blood
Violence



PlayStation 2



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A SHADY FIGURE NAMED DANTE FINDS CLUES THAT THE DEVIL WILL RISE UP AGAIN.
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Violence

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