VIDEOGAME ADVISOR

SEPTEMBER 1996
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The Interactive Gaming Industry Guide

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 9

Digital Video Disc

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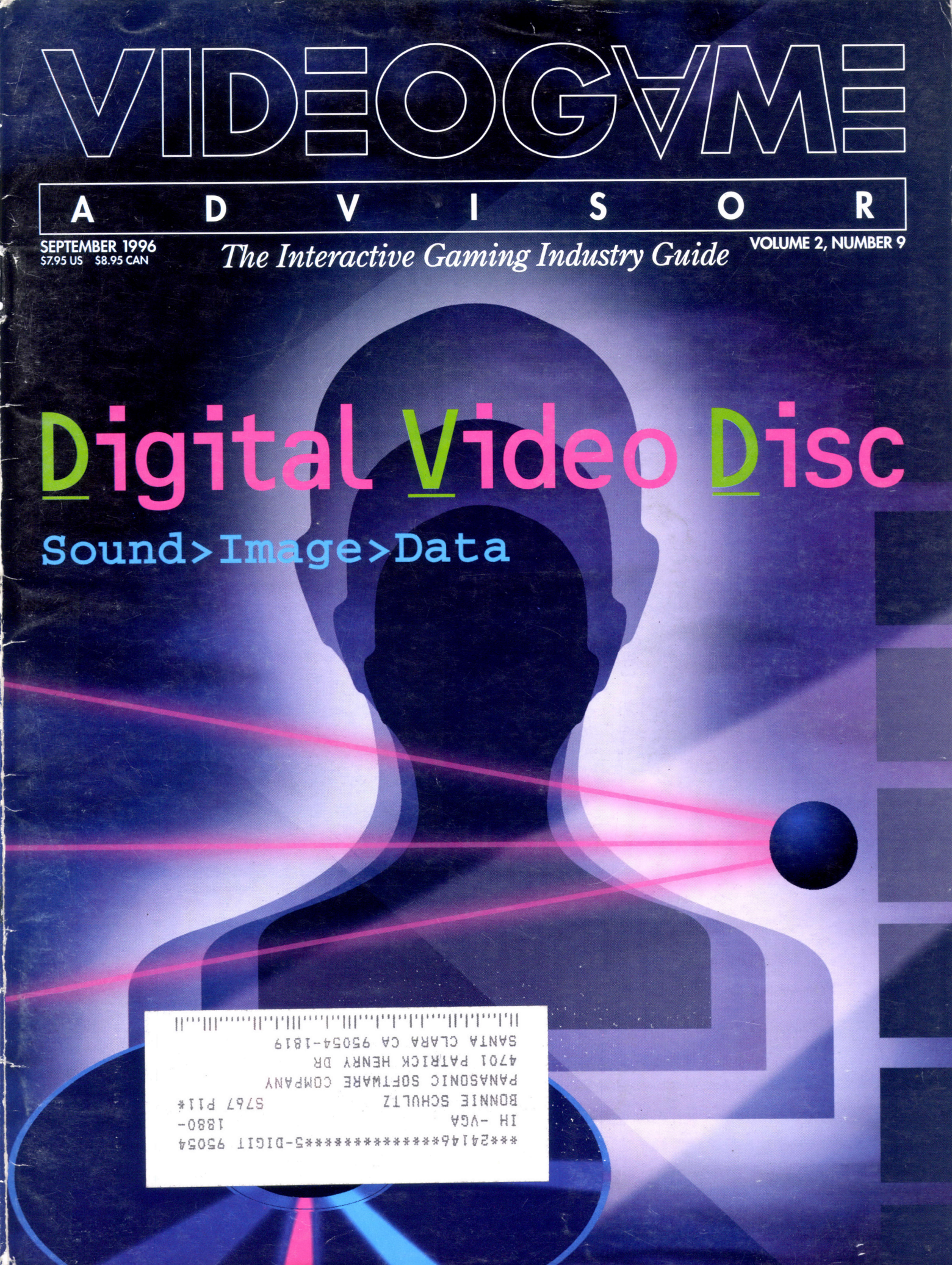

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Heliotrope Studios Acquired

By Greg Angelo

THQ Inc. announced the acquisition of Heliotrope Studios, a Connecticut-based interactive software developer for PC-based videogames. Heliotrope Studios is primarily known for designing the strategy game PAX IMPERIA, listed in MacWorld Magazine's 1993 Hall of Fame as Strategy Game of the Year.

Brian J. Farrell, President and CEO of THQ, stated, "This acquisition gives THQ proprietary rights to imaginative and original game content, as well as an immediate entrance into the PC CD-ROM and on-line markets. The addition of this talented PC development team is the perfect complement to our existing core business of developing game software for Nintendo, Sega and Sony."

Andrew Sispoidis, founder of Heliotrope Studios, commented, "With this relationship in place, we inherit THQ's sales, distribution and marketing strengths. I am confident that gamers worldwide will be delighted with the product we produce." **VGA**

Activision's Theory: If It Ain't Broke...

By Greg Angelo

Activision continues to expand the presence of its 1995 blockbuster hit *MechWarrior 2* with the release of the *Ghost Bear's Legacy* Expansion Pack for Windows 95 and the eagerly anticipated on-line competition pack, NetMech, for MS-DOS.

Ghost Bear's Legacy, releasing in the 4th quarter on the MS-DOS format, adds 30 new missions and 15 new battle Mechs to players' arsenals of weapons. It also features an original and intriguing storyline, as well as the original gameplay that made *MechWarrior 2* such a success last year. Win 95 plug-and-play simplicity allows players to jump right into the game without complex installation commands.

In related news, gamers eager to battle with human opponents in *MechWarrior* via modem or local area network should be eager to obtain a copy of NetMech for MS-DOS, which allows up to eight different "MechWarriors" to compete in an all-out battle to see who will be left standing. The package also includes a free 15 hours of access to a local gameplay network. **VGA**

DVD - The Digital Frontier

By Geoff Wulf

"Change will come in the near future as technology pulls diverse markets together. We've already seen this manifest itself in the compact disk, as we can now listen to an audio performance, read a library of books, access essential information, archive records, do our taxes, interact with a magazine, entertain our children, play a videogame, and watch a movie, all with the same four-and-five-eighths inch silver platter and a laserbeam"

I can still remember purchasing my very first vinyl album, The Monkee's Greatest Hits, and playing it until I could barely discern the music through the scratch and pop. At that time, videotape was the emerging technology, and I recall walking through the first videostore in our neighborhood, jaw dragging, as if it were a science fiction movie come true. Since then, data storage has taken many forms from the staggering crawl of magnetic tape to the first unsteady steps of the CD. Today, we're sprinting to keep up with a new technology, the Digital Versatile (or Video) Disc, which has knocked out the ceiling of potential in the communications medium.

As we see the possibilities begin to span a multitude of markets, we recognize the responsibility of keeping up with DVD. When it is finally unleashed, we will be on the verge of obsolescence in everything we now know and understand in this and many related industries. This, more than any other recent advancement, will change not only the computer and gaming communities but also movies, audio, books, periodicals, television, and communications. And it won't stop there. We have spoken of untapped potential before in this market, but that statement was never more of a reality than it will become in Fall and Winter of 1996. In response, VGA will follow DVD here each month, keying-you into the important factors, including timing and technology, corporate positioning, partnerships, and consumer, distributor, and retailer response.

There has been a great

(continued on page 20)

For The Official VGA/NPD TRSTS Reports, See Page 62-63

CONTENTS

F E A T U R E S

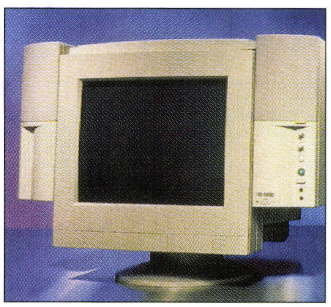
01 **DVD: Digital Video Disc**
VGA takes a look at how the impending release of DVD (and the new technology it represents) will effect our industry.

24 **The VGA Multimedia Speakers Review**
Some of you already carry these products, but most of you don't. This month, VGA examines the salesability of multimedia speakers with your current product offerings.

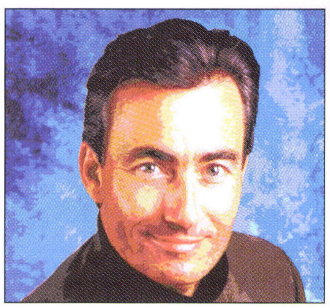
30 **Interviewing the Big Guys** (part 4 of 4)
In a four part-part article, VGA speaks with the power players of the four predominant hardware manufacturers about the past, present and future of our industry.

36 **Stars in Games: DVD & FMV**
This month, VGA takes a look at how FMV titles and our industry will be effected by DVD and the stars themselves.

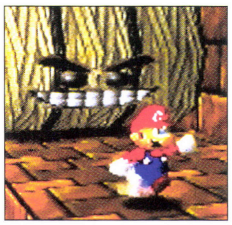
24



30

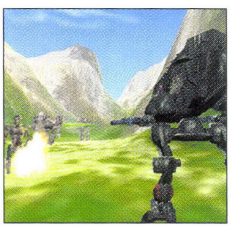


DEPARTMENTS



01
Eye On The Industry
All the trade news that's fit to print and you need to know.

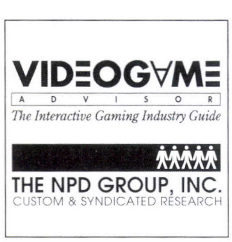
16
The VGA Interview: EB
Arguably, one of the strongest retail chains in the industry, takes time to tell all in this exclusive interview.



38
Reviews
Honest and objective reviews of next month's hottest software and how to buy it.

44
The VGA Release Schedule
This exclusive product release schedule provides you with essential purchasing information.

51
Previews
Getting thoroughly familiar with upcoming titles from the purchasing perspective.



62
TRSTS Reports
VGA and the NPD Group bring you the only official top 20 and the top 10 lists in the industry.

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Fall ECTS Has a Few Planned Suprises

By Geoff Wulf

This September's ECTS 96 has been revealed to be the official European debut for the Nintendo 64. The official introduction of Nintendo's new machine will be just one highlight at the ECTS, an event that is already guaranteed to be the focus point of Europe's interactive entertainment market.

Attracting the world's key companies and visitors from publishing, development, manufacturing, distribution, retail and media, ECTS will feature not only the biggest names in interactive entertainment but also market leaders in the fast developing home multimedia, education and lifestyle software markets.

According to show organizers, the expo will, in effect, usher the era of 64-bit gaming into Europe. They are also expecting the unveiling of N64 product from leading software companies such as Acclaim Entertainment and Virgin Interactive Entertainment.

Event manager Minnie McBride commented, "The show will highlight the most intriguing format war in the history of gaming, the increasing influence of companies from the toy, music, movie and business software markets as well as the explosion of new categories in the broader multimedia environment. Everything, in short, that will make late '96 and early '97 a fascinating period of growth and transition for the interactive entertainment industry." **VGA**

Computer Player Announces "Disc" Debut and Distribution Expansion

By Claire Duffy

Air Age Publishing's Computer Player enthusiast magazine has introduced an entertaining, interactive CD-ROM that will accompany the magazine. The move was made in conjunction with the expansion of the magazine's single copy distribution.

Publisher Gary Dolzall commented, "With the August '96 issue, Computer Player begins a new era. With our dynamic editorial product, demo disc and distribution enhancements, Computer Player becomes a primary player in this growing market."

Computer Player's new distribution agreements will place the magazine in Babbages, Electronic Boutique and Software, Etc. In addition, the August issue of the magazine will be featured in a special nationwide promotion in the Wal-Mart chain and will also make its debut in Blockbuster Music Stores. "The distribution enhancements in place for Computer Player will give the magazine extraordinary visibility and allow us to better reach both established computer gamers and the tens of thousands of newcomers just becoming involved in computer gaming," says Dozall. **VGA**

Psygnosis Renews Distribution Agreement with SCEA

By Mark Benoit

Psygnosis Ltd. announced that the company has reached an exclusive agreement with Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA) to continue the U.S. distribution of its PlayStation software titles.

Ray Sangster, U.S. general manager, Psygnosis Ltd., stated, "We're very pleased to have SCEA continue to distribute our next generation PlayStation game console titles in the U.S. The initial U.S. sales success of Psygnosis' hit title Destruction Derby and WipeOut can be attributed in great part to SCEA's diligent sales and distribution program. We anticipate that, by renewing our agreement with SCEA, Psygnosis will see the same results throughout 1996 and into 1997."

Shigeo Maruyama, chief executive officer of SCEA, commented, "As before, the quality of the software that Psygnosis will be introducing this fall is exceptional, which is key to driving PlayStation hardware sales. Our sales projections for Psygnosis' new software lineup are significant, and we will fully support the company with a fine sales and distribution program."

The new distribution agreement takes effect immediately and extends through the end of Psygnosis's fiscal year ending March, 1997. **VGA**

Prima Joins-in on the Restructuring Trend

By Erin Blackwelder

Prima Publishing announced that Roger Stewart, editor-in-chief of the entertainment division, resigned effective July 26, 1996. He will be replaced by Debra Kempker. For the past six months, Debra and her team have been responsible for the expansion of Prima's highly successful line of game strategy guides.

Stewart's departure from the company would appear to be an amicable one. He had this to say about the resignation, "After five years I feel the urge to move on and explore new endeavors and new opportunities. I have enjoyed working with Debra Kempker and am pleased to leave the division in her hands." **VGA**

Tony Garcia Appointed VP of New 3DO Northwest Operation

By Claire Duffy

The 3DO Company announced that it has opened software development operations in Redmond, Washington, and, in conjunction with the move, the publisher has hired Tony Garcia as vice president of the new 3DO Northwest operation. Garcia was responsible for developing and publishing some of the most popular PC-based videogames products of all time, including Microsoft *Flight Simulator V* and *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*.

Trip Hawkins, chairman and CEO of the 3DO Company, stated, "We are dead serious about becoming an entertainment software force in the industry. In the last seven months, we have completed acquisitions of three software companies, introduced our first PC products, and hired some of the strongest talent in the industry. With the addition of the new operation under Tony's helm, we are confident that we can attract the brightest talent in software development from the Northwest, bringing us closer to becoming a world class developer and publisher."

Tony Garcia has more than 14 years of experience in the creating and development of videogame titles. He started the Microsoft entertainment business unit and in five years grew it into a world-class videogame operation. Prior to Microsoft, Garcia was a producer at LucasFilm and also worked at Sega and Epyx where he assisted in the development of several titles. **VGA**

Williams Finds New VP of Sales Within Their Own Ranks

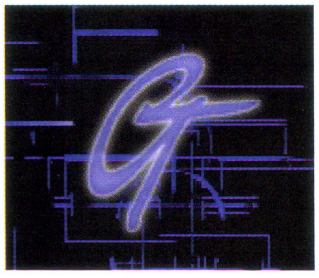
By Erin Blackwelder

Williams Entertainment announced the promotion of Melani Bain to Vice President of Sales. As a result of this promotion, Ms. Bain's new responsibilities will include overseeing the company's regional sales force, forecasting sales, creating budgets, and ordering product, as well as the managing of the company's more than 150 accounts in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Ms. Bain joined the company, then known as TradeWest, in March 1989. Over the years, she has held various positions in the company's Administration Department, including Sales Coordinator and Director of Sales. **VGA**

GT Reports Exceptional Growth

By Mark Benoit



GT Interactive Software reported record earnings for the second quarter. At quarters end, June 30, the company boasted revenues of $72 million, up 138% from the same period last year. In addition, net income for the period was $4.8 million, a healthy 124% increase over last year's second quarter net income.

The second quarter also marked the completion of two major acquisitions by GT interactive, reported in previous issues of VGA. The respective acquisitions included The WizardWorks Group Inc., a leading publisher and developer of value-priced interactive entertainment, edutainment and productivity software. And, in addition to WizardWorks, GT Interactive also completed acquisition of FormGen Corporation. FormGen is, perhaps, best known for publishing Duke Nukem 3D, a current PC hit.

Acquisitions completed, GT Interactive also entered into a broad-based publishing agreements during the second quarter. One such agreement is with award winning children's author Mercer Mayer and Big Tuna New Media, which is Mayer's software development company. As a result of the deal, GT now possesses exclusive publishing rights to Mayer's catalog of children's properties, including, *Little Critter, LC and the Critter Kids, Little Monster* and *Critters of the Night*.

President and CEO of GT Interactive had this to say, "With nearly a 300% increase in the quarter over last year in our premier publishing business and approximately a 240% increase in the value-priced area, augmented by our acquisitions of The WizardWorks Group and FormGen, we took significant strides toward achieving our goal of becoming a major global interactive software publisher." **VGA**

Cheap MPEG-2 for the PC

By Chris McGowan

AuraVision and Odeum Microsystems jointly announced the availability of a reference design called Fly Fisher that the two firms claim will allow OEMs to develop sophisticated MPEG-2 video solutions for personal computers and various "set-top boxes" for under $100. Fly Fisher utilizes Odeum's ODM8212 MPEG-2 audio/ video decoder and AuraVision's VxP524 Video Stream Processor. It will allow PCs to handle applications such as MPEG-2 digital video broadcasts, video conferencing, and live television. Fly Fisher boards incorporating Odeum's integrated ODM8111 will allow playback with Dolby AC-3 audio. **VGA**

Acclaim Names new Executive Vice president and CFO

By Ellen Simons

Acclaim Entertainment announced the appointment of Mark Hattendorf to the position of Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer. Hattendorf will be replacing Anthony Williams, who has been appointed to the new post of Executive Vice President, Mergers and Acquisitions, for Acclaim.

Hattendorf will oversee all of Acclaim's financial, accounting, shareholder relations and strategic financial planning functions. Williams will direct the company's continued diversification efforts and expansion of its merger and acquisition activities. Gregory Fischbach, Chairman and CEO of Acclaim, commented, "We are excited to welcome Mark to Acclaim. His extensive financial background in a variety of industries, especially entertainment, will play an integral role in broadening and strengthening both Acclaim's management team and its presence in the global marketplace."

In his 25-year career, Mr. Hattendorf has held various senior-level posts with such organizations as Peat Marwick Mitchell & Co., Twentieth Century Fox Film Corp., and Prodigy Services. He is a certified CPA and holds a bachelor of science in accounting, as well as a master's degree in business administration from Loyola/Marymount University in Los Angeles. **VGA**

As Expected, Demand Exceeding Supply on the N64

By Mark Benoit

Nintendo of America announced that less than four weeks after the debut in Japan of the N64, more than 800,000 units have been shipped to meet unprecedented consumer demand for the product. The system will launch in North America September 30, at a MSRP of under $250.00, with orders already exceeding supply.

A full lineup of games will be available for the holiday season. "We have customers asking daily about how they can get in line to get their N64," says Pete Roithmayr, director/senior buyer, Electronics Boutique. "We've never experienced demand like this before. This will be the number one 'must have' item on people's holiday gift list."

Nintendo expects to sell through a total of 3.6 million systems in the Japanese market in its first nine months of availability and more than 1 million units in North America. Peter Main, Nintendo's executive vice president of sales and marketing, stated, "We've committed to delivering at least 500,000 systems to our retailers between September and Christmas, but that apparently won't even come close to satisfying demand. Our retailers, cumulatively, have requested nearly 1 million units, which unfortunately we just won't be able to meet. It looks like Nintendo 64 may be this year's 'cabbage patch' phenomenon, with demand far exceeding supply, and customers already are anxious about whether they'll get one or not." **VGA**

Prodigy Enters Into Agreement with Electronics Boutique

By Erin Blackwelder

Prodigy, Inc. has announced a marketing agreement with Electronics Boutique, one of the largest specialty retailers of videogames, to distribute free CD-ROMs featuring games and Prodigy software at store locations nationwide.

Customers visiting Electronics Boutique locations will receive free CD-ROMs with their purchases, containing interactive demos of 14 popular game titles including Apache, Capitalism and Star Rangers. In addition, the disk includes a 60-second video preview of current and upcoming on-line games on Prodigy an electronic catalog of software and video-game offerings from EB, and introductory software to try Prodigy for 20 free hours.

Barbara Sargenti, vice president of OEM and retail customer acquisition at Prodigy, stated, "We're excited to partner with a powerhouse retailer like Electronics Boutique and have the opportunity to show its customers that Prodigy is serious about offering quality on-line gaming." **VGA**

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, have you Reached a Verdict?

By Claire Duffy

QSound Labs, Inc., a company specializing in virtual sound localization and enhancement, will continue its efforts to prove patent infringement by Spatializer Audio Laboratories. A Los Angeles court-appointed Master has again recommended that there is an issue of fact that requires a jury trial.

David Gallagher, president of QSound Labs, commented, "This recommendation is only the first step in a long process. QSound Labs is committed to defending its unique 3D audio technology. We will spare no effort to prove patent infringement in this instance or any other." The company and its legal advisors feel that the judicial system will, through due process, eventually agree with QSound Labs' position.

The special Master partially agreed to grant Spatializer's motion for summary judgment but in doing so limited future development to Spatializer's technology in the 3D audio I/C market. **VGA**

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ASCII-Spacetec Deal Results in New Technology PSX Controller

By Mark Benoit

Owners of Sony PlayStation will soon have a powerful new 3D game controller to enhance their fun. Spacetec IMC has entered into an exclusive licensing, development, manufacturing and marketing agreement with ASCII Entertainment Software. The new PlayStation controller will be based upon the core technology found in Spacetec's line of SpaceOrb 360 3D (PC-based) videogame controllers. ASCII will have exclusive rights worldwide for the sale and distribution of the new product.

According to the respective companies, the new controller is expected to substantially increase the speed and realism of 3D gaming. "Controllers haven't changed significantly in the last ten years," stated Hide Irie, president of ASCII Entertainment. "Spacetec IMC's breakthrough technology is setting a new industry standard for moving in 3D." Standard game controllers were designed with 2D side-scrolling games in mind, allowing movement in only one or two directions. Upon its debut, the new ASCII Entertainment controller is believed to be the first to allow full, simultaneous six-axis, 360 degree movement in every direction.

What it means to your customers: With the new peripheral, players will be able to execute moves not possible with traditional controllers. By simply pushing, pulling or twisting the as yet unnamed controller, players will be able to move or spin in any direction on screen. The companies also state that with the device, gamers will be able to combine moves and employ new tactics, thereby enhancing the entertainment value of the experience. **VGA**

SNES Thriving in Hotels and Motels Coast to Coast

By Mark Benoit

Hotel guests all over North America are enjoying Super NES games in their rooms, thanks to LodgeNet Entertainment. Using the systems, guests are able to order videogame hits such as *Super Mario World, Tetris* and *Donkey Kong Country 2* on a pay-per-view basis.

LodgeNet Entertainment is currently the second largest provider of pay-per-view services to hotels in North America. It is also the fastest growing, partly because of its exclusive Super Nintendo service. Of 335,000 rooms serviced by LodgeNet, 250,000 carry the Super NES gaming feature. Guests may purchase 60 minute blocks of playing time and may stick with one game or switch among as many as ten.

"During the second quarter, hotel guests purchased an incredible 24 million minutes of Nintendo Playing time," said Tim Flynn, president and CEO of LodgeNet Entertainment. These minutes are reflected in per room revenues which are up 17% since the company introduced the gaming service in January of '94. "We're well into our third year with Nintendo, and the popularity and numbers show no signs of slowing," adds Flynn.

In related news, LodgeNet has also entered into an exclusive agreement with GE Capital-ResCom L.P. to provide similar services to multi-family residential complexes throughout the U.S. **VGA**

Atari's Fate Sealed - Merger with JTS Final

By Geoff Wulf

JTS Corporation and Atari Corporation have announced that their proposal to merge has received stockholder approval. JTS Corporation will be the surviving entity in the merger, and the combined organization will be based in San Jose, California. The Atari Common Stock was delisted from the American Stock Exchange following trading on July 30, 1996.

David Mitchell, Chief Executive Officer and President of JTS stated, "This merger is another step toward our goal of becoming a leading international supplier of hard disk drives in the rapidly growing hard disk drive market." JTS designs, develops, manufactures and markets hard disk drives for use in notebook computers and desktop personal computers. The Company recently introduced its new 3-inch Nordic product for notebook computers.

Jack Tramiel, former Chairman of Atari, commented, "We are pleased to be a part of JTS Corporation. The disk drive market is growing rapidly, and we continue to be excited about the prospects of the 3-inch Nordic disk drive." There were no comments made in reference to previous claims made by the Tramiels stating that they would not be exiting the gaming industry. **VGA**

Sony & Phillps DVD Fees:

By Chris McGowan

Philips Electronics NV and Sony Corporation have announced their own patent licensing plans for DVD-Video and DVD-ROM players and discs. The rates, covering the patents belonging to Philips and Sony, will be 2.5% of the factory price of a DVD player and $0.045 (4.5 cents) per disc. According to OVDA Technical Committee chairman Geoff Tully, the above "does not include any MPEG royalties, which are ostensibly to be licensed through Cable Labs." In addition, the other eight companies in the ten-firm DVD consortium have not yet reached any agreement on pooling their respective patents. An August 2 "Reuters" article estimated that Matsushita should get the biggest chunk of patent fees from DVD technology, contributing 25% of the patents, followed by Pioneer Electronic Corp. and Sony with 20% each, and Hitachi and Toshiba with 10% apiece. Philips denied reports that it only had 10% of all DVD patents. "Philips has a much larger share of the patents," claimed Philips Key Modules managing director Jan Oosterveld in the "Reuters" piece. **VGA**

ZD Magazine Network Appoints New Senior Vice President

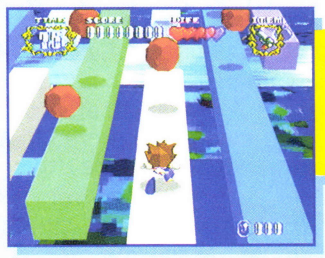
By Claire Duffy

The Ziff-Davis Publishing Company has recently announced the promotion of Joe Gillespie to senior vice president of the Ziff-Davis Magazine Network.

Ronni Sonnenberg, president of the Ziff-Davis US Publications, commented, "Joe has been with the Network since its inception. Since then, the Ziff-Davis Magazine Network has significantly grown from three domestic titles to more than two dozen worldwide today. Under Joe's leadership, Network advertisers are now investing 35 percent more of their ad dollars in Ziff-Davis publications. Most recently, Joe oversaw the Network's successful implementation of the Worldwide Discount program. Joe's promotion is both a recognition of his success to date as well as an indication of the strategic importance of the Network in the years to come."

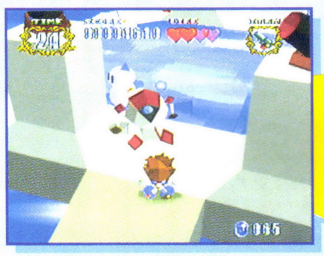
Gillespie joined Ziff-Davis in 1988 as Mid Atlantic Sales Manager for PC Magazine and in 1989 was promoted to Ad Director with the Ziff-Davis Magazine Network. He was named Managing Director in 1992 and promoted to Vice-President in 1993. Prior to joining Ziff-Davis, Gillespie was National Sales Manager of MIS Week. A graduate of Rutgers, Gillespie holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and has over a decade of experience in high-tech publishing. **VGA**

'True 3-D Environment!'
– EGM



"Floating Runner's 3D platform gameplay is among the best exhibited on any next-gen platform."
– GameFan

"...cross Jumping Flash! with Super Mario, [and] wind up with a game not too far off from Floating Runner."
– PSX



"There's plenty of jumping, plenty of shooting... and a strong look and continuity to the play environment."
– PS EXTREME

PROMOTION SCHEDULE

	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
PRINT PROMOTION				
PUBLICITY				
INTERNET				
TELEVISION				

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Introducing the First Dedicated Gaming TV

By Erin Blackwelder

Samsung has announced the company's newest innovation, the GXE1395, a personal videogame television. The TV, available this month, features hyper amplified sound and graphics, especially developed to en-hance console-based videogame playing.

The GXE1395 works with all current game systems, offering surround sound, folding speaker doors, and an impressive 15 watt sub woofer and doubles as a 13" TV with 181-channel tuning with DBX noise reduction.

What promises to set the GXtv apart from other systems is the sound system which is equipped to handle the CD-quality audio output of today's advanced dedicated gaming consoles. The powerful bass sounds will enhance the listening experience of today's popular game genres. *DOOM* with the volume turnedup may give your store managers a new relationship with their neighbors.

If your company hasn't been selected for the initial wave of the product's introduction, you may find that the estimated retail price of $299.95 could be the reason. Chosen retail chains include software specialty, mass merchandiser and general consumer electronics stores tbecause hey can add this SKU to their current product offerings with little to no difficulty. **VGA**

Ubi Soft Reinvents the Wheel with New Product

By Greg Angelo

For those too stingy to pay for real guitar lessons or for technophiles interested in the idea of learning to play an instrument with the computer as teacher, Ubi Soft is releasing *Learn & Play: Classic Rock Guitar.*

Featuring the license of classic tunes such as *Sweet Home Alabama* and *Blowin' in the Wind*, Learn & Play's 84 guitar lessons will start by teaching students the instrument's basics and build student proficiency and expertise with each successive lesson.

Similar "learn at home" releases such as the Miracle Piano Instructor a few years ago did not fare exceptionally well in the market, but Ubi Soft is hoping that its license of classic rock songs will boost sales. Needless to say, students must provide their own guitars. **VGA**

SegaSoft Announces Two New Promotions amidst Expansion

By Claire Duffy

SegaSoft Inc. has recently named Gary Griffiths as president and COO and Steve Payne as executive vice president of product development and marketing. Griffith and Payne, along with Nobuo Mii, chairman and CEO, and Andre Oberholzer, EVP and CFO, make up SegaSoft's senior management team.

Nobuo Mii commented, "We've been moving very quickly in our quest to be the leading interactive entertainment company. With these promotions, we have the team in place for a streamlined organization that can keep up the pace and deliver the best products to market."

Previously executive vice president and COO of Segasoft, Griffiths joined the company in 1995 after serving 17 years with IBM, where he was responsible for new business and development for the PowerPC. Payne adds marketing responsibilities to his product development role with this promotion from senior vice president, product development. Prior to joining SegaSoft last February, Payne served more than three years at Sega of America, Inc., where he held a series of marketing and product development roles. **VGA**

Toshihiro Fukudome Set to Head-up Interplay Japan

By Claire Duffy

Interplay Productions has announced the recent appointment of Mr. Toshihiro "Ted" Fukudome to its affiliate, Interplay Japan, as its Representative Director and President. Interplay announced the opening of its Japanese offices in September 1995. Fukudome will oversee the marketing and promotion of Interplay products within the Japanese software market.

Dick Lehrberg, executive vice-president for Interplay, stated, "When it comes to knowing the Japanese markets, Ted is an expert. This area of the world is an extremely important one to us, and it is imperative that we choose the right person for the job. Ted comes to us with a breadth of experience and knowledge, and we're pleased to have him on our team."

Fukudome has had a good amount of experience in management and marketing with such companies as Mattel, Tupperware, Polaroid and Sanrio. Fukudome commented, "I'm very pleased to have joined such a strong contender in the interactive (gaming) industry. Interplay has made a tremendous name for itself in both the States and here in Japan, and I'm very pleased to be a member of the worldwide team." **VGA**

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Psygnosis Signs Music Deal for *Wipeout XL*

By Greg Angelo

Leading European game designer Psygnosis Co., Ltd, acquired by Sony shortly after the initial release of the PlayStation, has announced a joint effort with Astral Werks, the electronic division of Caroline Records, to produce *Wipeout XL* for the PlayStation this fall. *XL*, scheduled to ship next month, is the sequel to Psygnosis' hit title of 1995, *Wipeout*, which has to date sold over a quarter of a million units.

Psygnosis hopes to utilize the partnership with Astral Werks to draw greater attention to the release of its new *Wipeout* sequel and at the same time pioneer a new era of videogame entertainment and musical collaboration. The company's release of Wipeout XL will be accompanied by the simultaneous release of a 'soundtrack' album featuring XL's musical scorers: The Chemical Brothers, Future Sound of London, and The Prodigy, among others.

Sue Campbell, Psygnosis Product Manager stated, "[This] is the first time a game has looked so cutting edge, musically... Bands like Future Sound of London and the Chemical Brothers are not just complimentary to the Wipeout XL gameplay experience, they're crucial to it." **VGA**

MGM and Micro Interactive Ready to Release New 007 Game

By Greg Angelo

MGM Interactive, the videogame publishing subsidiary of well-known motion picture corporation Metro Goldwyn Mayer, has announced its choice of Micro Interactive to develop its upcoming title featuring the film world's most infamous super-spy... Bond... James Bond.

With *The Ultimate James Bond: An Interactive Dossier*, being the first such Bond-related title released with MGM's stamp of approval, Micro Interactive has been granted access to 33 years worth of James Bond archived video clips, photographs, and documentation. The game will feature multimedia profiles of all five Bond actors, as well as Bond's many loves, enemies, and, of course, a complete library of his many gadgets.

Retailers should also be interested to know that the two-disc set for *The Ultimate James Bond* will be packaged with 1995's $100+ million grossing film and MGM's most popular rental title of all time, *GoldenEye*. Expect a new standard in cross-marketing to be reached when the title does ship later next year. **VGA**

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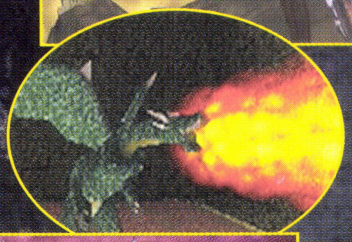

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Great game!! Can't stop playing!! **I will buy the sequel.** --Piscataway, New Jersey.

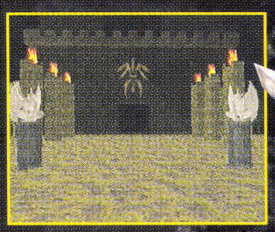
I've only played King's Field four days, and it has blown me away. I bought my PlayStation in hopes of games like this. **I can't wait for the sequel.** Nice work. --Brockton, Massachusetts.

Since I purchased King's Field, I have already completed the game, and loved every minute of it! I experienced the sensations of fear from surprise by monsters and actually being afraid of heights! **Keep it up, bring on the sequel!!** --Anderson, California.

Excellent game, great fun, kept me hooked for hours, and I still couldn't stop playing. **Make another.** --Rockport, Maine.

I average 4-5 hours playing this great game after work. I am losing sleep, but can't put it away. -- Somerville, Massachusetts.

I really am thankful for ASCII to take time and translate a great role playing game for the PlayStation. **I only hope there will be more to come.** --Rock Hill, SC.



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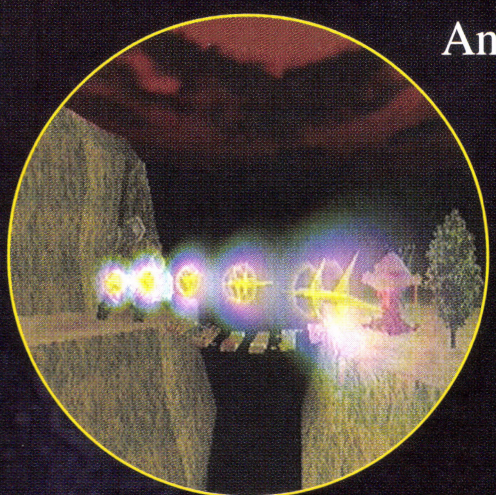

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--PSExtreme

PUBLISHED BY	RELEASE DATE
ASCII Entertainment	Halloween '96
SYSTEM	**THEME**
PlayStation	Action/Adventure RPG
# OF PLAYERS	**SIZE**	**% COMPLETE**
1	CD-ROM	95%

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Psygnosis Recruits Mark Beaumont As Senior VP, Marketing

By Claire Duffy

Psygnosis Ltd, has recently appointed Mark Beaumont as Senior Vice President of Marketing. With over fourteen years of experience in videogame and multimedia marketing, Beaumont will head-up Psygnosis' most significant product roll-out to date, which includes such highly anticipated multi-platform titles as *WipeOut XL, Formula 1* and *Destruction Derby 2.*

Formerly a Business Administration Major at the University of California, Berkeley, Beaumont joined such early industry innovators as Atari, Inc. and Activision. Most recently, Beaumont worked as Senior Vice President, Product Development and Marketing with Time Warner Interactive. During his tenure with Time Warner, he orchestrated all development and marketing activities behind the launch of *Primal Rage.*

Beaumont commented, "I am delighted to be joining Psygnosis at a time when the company has such a strong product line-up - titles like *WipeOut XL, Destruction Derby 2, Discworld 2, Mortality Bytes,* and *Thunder Truck Rally* should be the envy of any A-list software publisher. Additionally, I am confident that Psygnosis is investing in the areas of future technology that will ensure our subsequent product lines are equally strong." **VGA**

Activision Names Ron Scott VP of Sales and Distribution

By Erin Blackwelder

Activision, Inc. recently announced the appointment of Ronald L. Scott to vice president of sales and distribution for North and South America. The announcement was made by Bobby Kotick, Chairman and CEO.

Mr. Scott will be responsible for the overall retail marketing and distribution of Activision's various software products, and will oversee the company's North American regional offices and Latin American operations. His responsibilities include the development of sales strategies, sales analysis, trade marketing and the supervision of all operational budgets. "Ron's multi-functional background and impressive track record coupled with his participative management style will be a valuable asset to Activision as we continue our leadership position within the interactive entertainment industry," stated Kotick.

Ron joins Activision with more than 13 years experience in sales and marketing in the consumer packaged goods industry, working for such companies as The Nestle Food Company, and the Procter & Gamble Distributing Company. **VGA**

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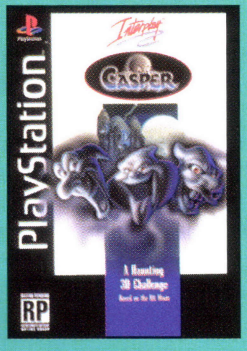

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The VGA Interview – Electronics Boutique

By Geoff Wulf

"We will build and maintain mutually beneficial, long-term relationships with our extended family of business partners..."

Businesses in our industry come in all shapes and sizes and there are few, if any, specific rules that apply to them collectively. The majority of them are, more or less, isolated in this hugely diversified market on the retail and distribution front where idea and implementation are worlds apart. In spite of this, some businesses have mastered the quirky marketplace and have dug a permanent niche for themselves in the malleable clay of retail gaming. This issue of VGA premiers a new department in salute to those entities and their constituents who have proved themselves in the field and to perhaps glean a few secrets from the pros.

Electronics Boutique seemed to be a natural place to begin as they're one of the largest in the market with their more than 500 stores in the US, Canada, Puerto Rico, Ireland, the UK, and Korea. EB is also one of the oldest, having begun life in 1977 as a mall kiosk in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, selling calculators and digital watches. But their achievements hardly stop there. Electronics Boutique, EBX, and K-mart-owned Waldensoftware have gone a long way to establishing their place in the market, but EB's domestic expansion has also resulted in a new store concept, the 5,000 square foot Stop-n-Save Software, which concentrates on an easy-to-shop environment and greater title selection. In addition, the company plans to expand outside the 'mall-store' to free standing, 10,000 square foot stores alongside a recent company acquisition, Brandywine Sports Collectibles (BC Sports Collectibles).

Yet another indication that the company is serious about its involvement in our industry can be found in their relationships with its vendors and the media. One third party president commented, "If I could change anything about our relationship with some retail channels, it would be to make them more like the folks at EB." In fact, (and it may be coincidence) most times that I'm trying to get hold of our Publisher I'm told, "He's on the phone with a major retailer... I think it's EB again."

The origins of EB

Electronics Boutique is a subsidiary of the Korean based Anam Group, which had revenues of 1.5 billion in 1993. Anam Group began as Anam Industrial, Korea's first manufacturer of semiconductors. In 1968, Kim Joo-Jin, in the US studying economics, started Ankor Electronics as an agent for Anam Industrial, his father's new firm. Kim also dabbled in digital watches while his packaging business was still on the rise, and Kim's wife, Agnes, opened a kiosk in a Pennsylvania mall in 1977 to sell off his overstock, which blossomed into more than 400 stores by late 1994. Though EB is a privately held company, Anam Industrial and Ankor Electronics are publicly traded on the Korean Exchange. Anam Industrial is currently the world's largest assembler of semiconductors, manufacturing for Intel, Motorola, Cirus Logic, and Texas Instruments.

Business

Electronics Boutique's success is due, in part, to their strong relationship with associated businesses. A portion of their mission statement identifies the need for commitment in this area:

> *"We will build and maintain mutually beneficial, long-term relationships with our extended family of business partners..."*

We at VGA have always stressed the importance of cooperation in our industry, and confirmation of this seems to be abundant in successful operations world-wide. In a 1995 article, one vendor stated, "They're easy to deal with in terms of getting new products in and stock balancing. They're looking at products rather than procurements." EB makes a very strong point of honoring commitments, ushering in new, even risky, products, and working with in-store merchandise to ensure their success.

On the store front, EB stresses the need for an exceptional staff and takes steps to provide their employees with quality training through EBU, the

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VIDEOGAME ADVISOR

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The Interactive Gaming Industry Guide

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 9

Heliotrope Studios Acquired

By Greg Angelo

THQ Inc. announced the acquisition of Heliotrope Studios, a Connecticut-based interactive software developer for PC-based videogames. Heliotrope Studios is primarily known for designing the strategy game PAX IMPERIA, listed in MacWorld Magazine's 1993 Hall of Fame as Strategy Game of the Year.

Brian J. Farrell, President and CEO of THQ, stated, "This acquisition gives THQ proprietary rights to imaginative and original game content, as well as an immediate entrance into the PC CD-ROM and on-line markets. The addition of this talented PC development team is the perfect complement to our existing core business of developing game software for Nintendo, Sega and Sony."

Andrew Sispoidis, founder of Heliotrope Studios, commented, "With this relationship in place, we inherit THQ's sales, distribution and marketing strengths. I am confident that gamers worldwide will be delighted with the product we produce." VGA

Activision's Theory: If It Ain't Broke...

By Greg Angelo

Activision continues to expand the presence of its 1995 blockbuster hit *MechWarrior 2* with the release of the *Ghost Bear's Legacy* Expansion Pack for Windows 95 and the eagerly anticipated on-line competition pack, NetMech, for MS-DOS.

Ghost Bear's Legacy, releasing in the 4th quarter on the MS-DOS format, adds 30 new missions and 15 new battle Mechs to players' arsenals of weapons. It also features an original and intriguing storyline, as well as the original gameplay that made *MechWarrior 2* such a success last year. Win 95 plug-and-play simplicity allows players to jump right into the game without complex installation commands.

In related news, gamers eager to battle with human opponents in *MechWarrior* via modem or local area network should be eager to obtain a copy of NetMech for MS-DOS, which allows up to eight different "MechWarriors" to compete in an all-out battle to see who will be left standing. The package also includes a free 15 hours of access to a local gameplay network. VGA

DVD - The Digital Frontier

By Geoff Wulf

"Change will come in the near future as technology pulls diverse markets together. We've already seen this manifest itself in the compact disk, as we can now listen to an audio performance, read a library of books, access essential information, archive records, do our taxes, interact with a magazine, entertain our children, play a videogame, and watch a movie, all with the same four-and-five eighths inch silver platter and a laserbeam."

I can still remember purchasing my very first vinyl album, The Monkee's Greatest Hits, and playing it until I could barely discern the music through the scratch and pop. At that time, videotape was the emerging technology, and I recall walking through the first videostore in our neighborhood, jaw dragging, as if it were a science fiction movie come true. Since then, data storage has taken many forms, from the staggering crawl of magnetic tape to the first unsteady steps of the CD. Today, we're sprinting to keep up with a new technology, the Digital Versatile (or Video) Disc, which has knocked out the ceiling of potential in the communications medium.

As we see the possibilities begin to span a multitude of markets, we recognize the responsibility of keeping up with DVD. When it is finally unleashed, we will be on the verge of obsolescence in everything we now know and understand in this and many related industries. This, more than any other recent advancement, will change not only the computer and gaming communities but also movies, audio, books, periodicals, television, and communications. And it won't stop there. We have spoken of untapped potential before in this market, but that statement was never more of a reality than it will become in Fall and Winter of 1996. In response, VGA will follow DVD here each month, keying you into the important factors, including timing and technology, corporate positioning, partnerships, and consumer, distributor, and retailer response.

There has been a great

continued on page 20

For The Official VGA/NPD TRSTS Reports, See Page 62-63

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VIDEOGAME ADVISOR

...$750,000 was spent at the height of the 16-bit market to enhance and improve their distribution. The Distribution Center helps EB to cut costs, allowing for greater profit margins than many of their competition.

Electronics Boutique University. EBU is for field managers in four day, twice a year programs involving advanced training, product familiarity (EBU's vendor trade show is one of the largest of its kind), and general discussion groups.

Customer service is one point continually stressed to EB's staff. Their goals are not to meet but to exceed customer's expectations; no small feat in today's marketplace. It is, however, a refreshing approach in a time when many retailers have buckled under customer abuse or the mighty dollar and abandoned many of their pro-active customer service policies.

Another positive action EB has taken with their employees is to allow ideas to filter across rather than straight down. Many large retail companies dictate strict policy and have done with it, but EB conducts regular district-level 'think tanks' for store managers called "Exercise Your Mind", or EYM seminars. EYM is an open forum where managerial staff can meet and share information on merchandising, management, and industry.

One largely ignored facet of employee need is opportunity for advancement. Promotions are largely conducted from within, and a multi-tiered system of store manager, area manager, district manager, senior district manager and regional manager, keeps motivated staff goal oriented and happy.

In the Face of Competition

EB has done many things to stay competitive in the market, not the least of which has been to its huge, automated Distribution Center which computer-controls the inventory of all of its more than 500 stores. More than $750,000 was spent at the height of the 16-bit market to enhance and improve their distribution. The Distribution Center helps EB to cut costs, allowing for greater profit margins than many of their competition. Even after the creation of the NeoStar Retail Group last year, a merger of EB's two primary competitors, Software Etc. and Babages, they remains a leader on the retail front.

EB's president, Joseph Firestone, has some very strong opinions about the competition, citing them firmly as copycats, milking-off EB's innovation. In many respects, EB has led the market and established a few "standards" which customers expect anytime they enter a computer software store. But EB's retail prowess does not extend across the board.

In 1992, EB took over the management of Waldensoft from its owner, K-mart, with less than encouraging results. The already dismally un-battened chain, according to Firestone, went from "terribly unprofitable" to "not quite so unprofitable" under EB's rule.

Aside from this minor blemish on EB's record, their 300-plus American stores boast an average of $900 per square foot in revenue, even through the turbulent switch from 16 to 32-bit console systems in 1995. For a large chain with the kind of maneuvering power available to EB, this might not seem so unlikely, but as much as 45% of EB's sales are in videogames. Even so, EB showed a marked increase in profit from '94 to '95 while the competition remained in decline.

The Future of EB

What's on the horizon? EB is planning for the expansion of BC Sports Collectibles into their 10,000 square foot superstore. Of the 5 BC locations, none have, as of yet, opened alongside an Electronics Boutique. According to an EB spokesperson, zoning problems have led to delays, but they will continue to push for an open, free standing superstore in the near future.

In the meantime, another of EB's new ventures, Stop-n-Save Software, has opened two stores with a third on the way and is doing at least as well as expected. The Stop-n-Save's are almost superstores in themselves, with 5,000 square feet apiece and more than 4 times the inventory of the average Electronics Boutique mall-store. One of these stores is located adjacent to a BC Sports Collectibles, creating, in effect, EB's grand concept.

This summer, EB opened two new stores in South Korea and has distinct plans to expand in the Eastern market. The first America retail computer chain to enter the Far East, EB hopes to grow to 10 stores in South Korea by the end of this year and, by the end of 1997, have a total of 300 in Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, South Korea, and Japan.

On the WWW

Not to be overshadowed or outdone in any aspect of the computer industry, EB has one of the best and most complete retail web sites on-line. It follows many of the established rules in site design, breaks a few others, but in all, has managed to create the definitive customer-friendly web page, covering everything from store information, store locations, product information including new titles and release dates, employment opportunities, subtle advertisements, and a thorough company overview. I am certain that EB can expect to be copied in this arena as well, Mr Firestone.

As in any new venture, designing a web site was a learning experience for EB. Having established its primary goals, to inform the company's customers of new games and software, the company discovered the thing that stops most retail sites in their tracks.

"Maintaining a site is a full time job," says EB's Director of Marketing, Karyn Pless. "We need to continually update the content to make it worth visiting." She adds adamantly that EB is totally committed to accomplishing just that, however, and will continue to turn out a quality up-to-date site.

The issue of using the web for purchasing is a growing concern in the industry. Electronic purchases are the "wave of the future" due to the inherent speed and reliability of the transactions. Many are dubious about unsecured lines and large sums of money being shot through a dozen different servers before finally arriving at its destination, and account security is a term we've been hearing a lot of lately. In spite of the buzz, however, EB neatly sidestepped the issue.

"We feel that electronic purchase ordering has potential," remarked Karyn, "but we do not currently conduct electronic commerce."

The Electronic Boutique site is currently located at (http://www.eboutique.com). **VGA**

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DVD - The Digital Frontier (continued from page 1)

deal of information circulated regarding DVD, and much of it is technological 'gobbledygook' such as HDDT specifications, track pitch, DTR, and signal modulation. Today, we're going to give you a DVD primer, for those who haven't been following close on its heels these past 12 months, and figure out once and for all, what DVD is, what it does, and what it will be doing in the future.

DVD is a storage system similar to CD which catalogs information in digitally encoded "data pits" much like the grooves in a record.

A Simple Study in Physics

As most of you already know, DVD is a storage system similar to CD which catalogs information in digitally encoded "data pits" much like the grooves in a record. The information is then picked up by bouncing a laser off these spinning pits, reading, decoding, and processing the data through your stereo, computer, or game console. The capacity of a standard CD is remarkable. Weighing in at around 600 megabytes (MB), CDs carry an enormous amount of memory space, especially considering that, as little as 5 years ago, a personal computer's hard drive with one-fifth that capacity was considered to be ostentatious. But even a CD's huge facility is small potatoes for audio and video which represent, even compressed, several megabytes for every few minutes of playback.

A CD, in terms of raw space, is capable of holding much, much more information than it does. The data pits, like molecules in a block of wood, take up only a fraction of the available space. This is because of inherent problems with the laser's ability to retrieve the data under anything less than perfect conditions.

In basic physics, we all learned that light passing from one medium to another bends or refracts. The plastic in which the CD's recordable surface is encased is a change in medium through which the laser must pass twice (once on the way in, once on the way out) before the data is read by the processor. Because of this, a margin for error must be included in the manufacturing process to account for dust, scratches, or even slight tilting of the unit, to leave the output unbroken.

For DVD, which had to provide more than 7 times the capacity of the standard CD to reach all of the required specifications, Toshiba developed a "bonded disc," which is comprised of two separate 0.6mm discs bonded back to back. Sparing you the technobabble, what this does, in essence, is create a disc in which the reading laser must pass through only half the

substratum of a standard CD to reach the printed surface. The resulting output is clearer, allowing the discs to be imprinted with finer HDDT (high density data tracks). In English, because of a more frequent distribution of data, far more information can be stored on the same 5" disc.

Other technological additions such as a new refined red-laser, a special real-time MPEG2 (pronounced "m-peg-two") decoder, and advanced error-correction methods have all gone into making these machines a reality in our not-too-distant future.

What Does It All Mean?

With more memory and a method to read and decode it quickly, the potential of a DVD-ROM system is as yet unchallenged. Ideas for use continue to be researched and developed, but even the initial capabilities will be more than enough to change the face of this and many other industries.

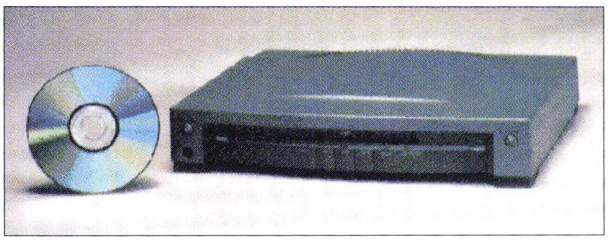
With the new capacity, decoding chips, and error correction technology, the output of a DVD will be far superior to any other media we've seen to date, including all magnetic tape formats (such as VHS and Beta), Laserdisc, CD audio and CD-ROM. This means clearer, sharper images and resolutions in FMV, more robust audio and video, and better access times for computers. DVD is also equipped with Dolby Digital Surround Sound, the same audio you receive in the best movie theaters.

DVD's will come in four flavors, depending on the needs of the software developers. DVD-5 is the smallest, with 7 times the recordable space of a standard CD, about 4.7GB (a GB, or gigabyte, represents approximately 1,000 megabytes); DVD-9 is next with 8.5GB; then DVD-10, essentially a double sided DVD-5, with 9.4GB; and lastly the double sided DVD-18, at a whopping 17GB (more than 25 times the capacity of a standard CD)

Since DVD was initially developed for the movie industry, it was bred with a few specific features in mind. Eight audio tracks and 32 subtitle tracks will allow the same movie to be played in 40 different languages all on the same disc. One program can be displayed from as many as 9 different camera angles. A program can be produced with multiple endings or storylines, allowing for a level of user interactivity not before possible. The same program can be printed with G, PG, PG-13, R, and NC-17 versions, all controlled from the main box to give parents greater control over what their children watch

With more memory and a method to read and decode it quickly, the potential of a DVD-ROM system is as yet unchallenged.

DVD - The Digital Frontier (continued from page 21)



(this will likely result in additional rating versions such as NV-nonviolent or NP-no profanity). You will also be able to select between the familiar Pan-and-Scan television format of a movie and full-screen letterbox.

In the computer world, the Digital Versatile Disc represents a new breed of PC. It's possible that, in the near future, most computers will function almost solely on DVD-ROM and RAM memory, the programs being far too large to store internally. Hard drive space will be relegated to the task of file storage and bearing the hard-copy of the computer's operating system. New computers outfitted with DVD-ROM drives will also include all the features of movie players (much like the modern CD-ROM drive's audio capabilities), further blurring the line between the family computer and the television.

You can anticipate a two year or more wait before we see this technology materialize with any substance in the console gaming arena, but, when it does, expect integrated units, movie player and gaming system in one. Matsushita and 3DO already have plans to incorporate DVD technology into the M2 and its successors, and Sega has publicly stated its interest in the union as well. Nobody can say for certain how this congregation between the PC, the television, the stereo, and the console gaming system will affect the industries long-term, but the capabilities are recognized and are being pursued at this very moment. Picture a single disc that will play your movie in half a dozen different versions, then play you the soundtrack through your stereo, then let you play the videogame based on the film without ever taking it out of the box. And, as an added promotional bonus, it will do your taxes and balance your budget while you sleep.

You can anticipate a two year or more wait before we see this technology materialize with any substance in the console gaming arena

When Do We Get To See It?

Possibly sooner than you think. Most of the general public are ignorant either of the existence of the DVD technology or its potential, but North American consumers will be slapped with 2 units; Toshiba's SD-3006 ($699) and SD-1006 ($599) by Christmas, 1996. According to Toshiba, the unit releases will be accompanied by "hundreds" of titles from various movie distributors.

Be that as it may, the movie industry, as of this summer, has remained stalled on the resolution of their support for this product. The trade groups involved, the BSA, CEMA, RIAA, MPAA, and the ITIC, are meeting regularly to come to an agreement on the subject of concern: copy protection. Nobody is, as of now, suggesting a specific time frame, but the software companies seem to be mutually focused on a fall/winter 1996 release.

DVD-ROM is developing alongside the movie industry at a surprising rate. Toshiba released the specifications to computer software manufacturers in May, and, according to Microsoft, we can expect to see DVD-ROM product by the end of the year.

Supporting companies have already begun preparing for the DVD thrust as well. Warner Media Services and Nimbus CD International are currently poised to begin manufacture of DVD and DVD-ROM for this fall. Nimbus has invested $25 million into the upgrades necessary to keep itself one of the world's largest independent disc manufacturers. Their Virginia manufacturing plant will be fully operational by August of this year.

Others are preparing to set new standards as well, such as the new packaging format designed by TracPac, an innovative and durable sleeve-and-drawer style box, meeting and in some cases exceeding the industry's requirements for packaging. The boxes are compatible with both VHS and CD storage facilities, boast a large printable area, contain built-in security, and are optimized for display.

The Bottom Line: DVD is a true frontier in the electronic entertainment world. Like most pioneers, some will be driven down by the new technology, but many of us will prosper more than we could have imagined. In the future, you will find competition in businesses previously unrelated to you. Some of you will start entirely new businesses, and many will expand into mediums you would never have expected. Through it all, VGA will continue to scout ahead to bring you news and insights in a monthly feature that will help you to stay in the forefront of a changing world. **VGA**

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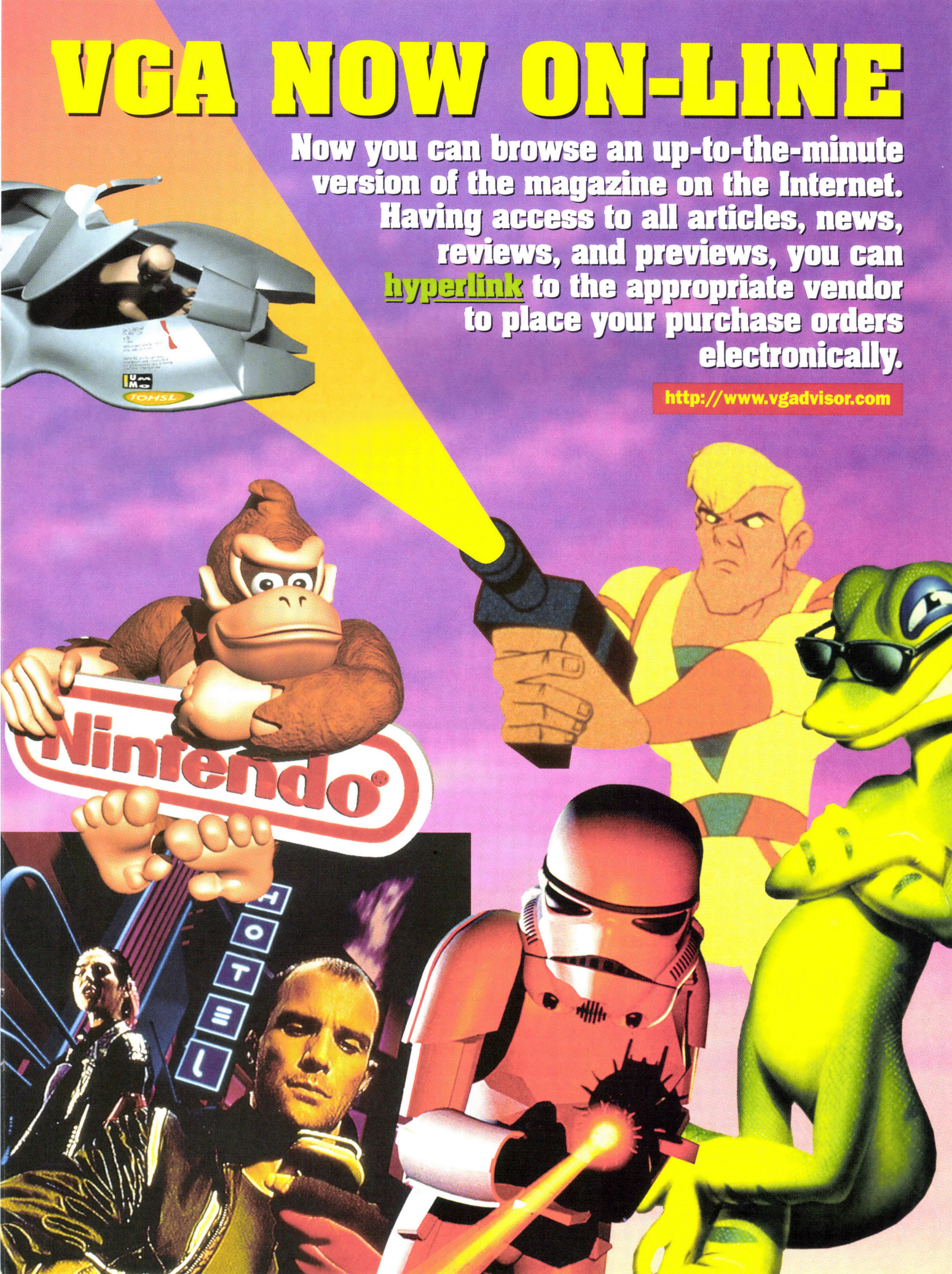


The VGA Multimedia Speakers Review

By Geoff Wulf

In the realm of PC-based videogaming there are a number of things that define a quality title: graphics, animation, playability... but there's one that's often overlooked by many which can make the difference between a great game and a mediocre one. Sound. Game audio has been addressed by software manufacturers for a long time now, and they recognize the importance of making a title sound as good as it looks, but the computer hardware manufacturers are a long way from designing built-in audio that does even the most casual sound byte justice. For this reason, accessory speakers have become extremely popular among the gaming and reference/multimedia sets to release the full potential of their software.

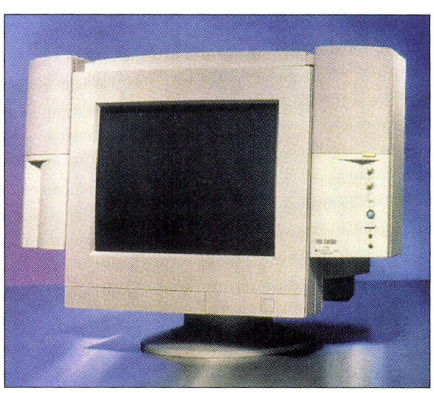
Several companies have successfully capitalized on this need, such as Labtec, Sony, and Koss, by developing speaker systems on par with many home stereo arrays, including features like noise reduction, surround sound, and bass enhancement. There is also a tremendous range in quality and price in the home multimedia speaker, units spanning from a negligible $15.95 to as high as $500. The smallest of these is an improvement over the built-in speakers of even the newest high-end computers, but more advanced speakers can literally shake the walls. This month we're going to take a peek at a few mid-priced speaker systems, as well as a number of innovative products designed to enhance the whole personal computer audio experience.

LABTEC

Labtec takes a unique approach to speaker design in that they have categorized the computer user according to his or her needs and developing technology that addresses the individual. These categories are the General User, the Edutainment User, the Gamer, and the Audio Enthusiast. (If all goes as planned, we can expect to see DVD users as the latest user category in the not-too-distant future.) In addition to targeting specific needs, Labtec has also identified those speaker qualities most desirable to all potential consumers, such as general performance, space saving design, aesthetic quality, and ease of use. The result of their research and development is a line of speakers and speaker products that took home four Innovations '96 awards at this past Winter CES. We've taken a look at the winners and tested their performance for this month's multimedia peripheral review.

The Spacializer 3D audio gives Labtec an edge in a saturated market. The Spacializer creates, by modulation, "phantom speakers" that give the illusion of quadraphonic surround sound with just two speakers. Originally developed for the professional music industry, today the company's technology is widely used in a variety of audio products, including licensees to Matsushita/Panasonic, Sharp, Hitachi, and, of course, Labtec.

Labtec has also taken a direct marketing role through retail channels by setting-up interactive displays in stores to educate the consumer on the differences between models and to make a purchase decision more convenient. These displays host anywhere between four and sixteen different units from Labtec and other designers to give the customer an easy and immediate comparison through a simple backlit-button interface that manages everything from the Spacializer technology to volume and speaker selection. Sound tracks that provide samples of edutainment, gaming, and music for comparison are built into the display, and there's even a "How to Buy" tutorial giving tips on making the perfect selection. Each display is custom built to the retailer's specific needs. The displays will be established in prime Montgomery Ward and Lechemere locations across the country.



LCS-1224, Amplified Computer Speakers for Edutainment

Manufacturer:	**Labtec**
Tech. Developer:	**Spacializer**
Compatibility:	**Universal**
Availability:	**late October**
MSRP:	**$89.99**
VGA Rating:	**B+**

Features: Spacializer surround sound; one-touch mute; variable volume; variable treble; magnetically shielded; subwoofer output jack; microphone pass-through jack; headphone jack; mountable with Labtec Clear Desk Bracket.

The Deal: One thing I like about Labtec is that their products appear to do just what they are designed for. These tall, self-contained, powered speakers have a distinct presence, a

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look which is in harmony with the clear tones of the audio they channel. Engineered for multimedia, they focus on crisp sounds, employing an aluminum voice coil for better high frequencies, with a secondary emphasis on bass. This gives enhanced clarity to speech, which is the primary audio content of edutainment titles.

The Clear Desk Bracket speaker mount is a godsend to ease the growing pile of clutter on my desk, but little usable space was saved as this particular model is nearly as tall as my monitor. There's plenty of clearance for a modem or other small peripheral, however, (or a coffee mug for that matter). The price point at less than $100 is appropriate to the family as well, being very affordable for a high-end speaker system.

The Spacializer feature on these speakers cannot be toggled on and off, but it's a function that isn't missed. This technology adds a quality of "real life" to CD-ROM's, and the sound, though potentially loud, isn't overwhelming at even the highest volume setting.

LCS-2612, Amplified Computer Speakers for Game Enthusiasts

Manufacturer: Labtec
Tech. Developer: Spacializer
Compatibility: Universal
Availability: late October
ESRP: $119.99
VGA Rating: B+

Features: Spacializer surround sound, Spacializer on/off, one-touch mute, 3 piece speaker system including subwoofer; magnetically shielded; variable volume; variable treble and bass; microphone pass-through jack; headphone jack; mountable with Labtec Clear Desk Bracket.

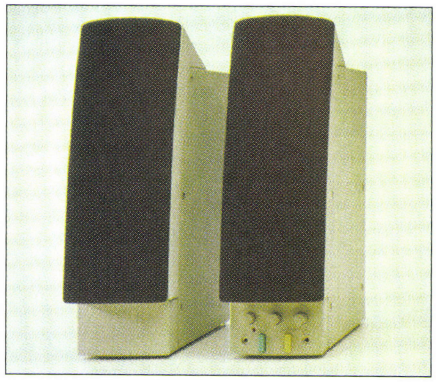
The Deal: What does every gamer want? Labtec knows... a 3 piece system including a spiffy-looking subwoofer which channels total immersion audio with heavy-hitting bass that vibrates your entire body with every hit and explosion. This system is short (in height) compared to other Labtec speakers and gives the impression of solidity and depth, especially backed up by the chunky subwoofer/powerbase, an impression that follows through in performance.

In testing, I took the risk of alienating the people next door (and giving children within a one block radius life-long nightmares) and played Doom at the highest volume level. I fired my first shot and had to turn it down... for their sake. The subwoofer delivers well with clean sound that hits you like a clean brick wall. This, combined with the surround quality of the Spacializer, draws users deeper into the game, creating a whole new experience. In doing so, I found my-self again playing titles I had long since tired of. The Spacial-izer toggle helps to illustrate the effect of the Spacializer surround sound on the speaker array. The difference is not unlike walking from a narrow foyer into a concert hall.

The mount is great and uses a relatively small amount of space even with the subwoofer. Apparently, I own a short monitor, as I was unable, try as I might, to fit the subwoofer under the speaker as shown in the picture. But, with minimal maneuvering, I was able to find a home for it on my desk.

LCS-3210, Amplified Computer Speakers for Audio Enthusiasts

Manufacturer: Labtec
Tech. Developer: Spacializer
Compatibility: Universal
Availability: Late Summer
ESRP: $99.00
VGA Rating: A-



Features: Spacializer surround sound; Spacializer on/off; advanced transmission line design for extended bass; magnetically shielded; narrow, space-saving footprint design; variable volume; variable treble and bass; subwoofer output jack; microphone pass-through jack; headphone jack.

The Deal: These sleek, imposing speakers have the same kind of visual appeal on a computer nut or audio aficionado as the Ferrari might have on a car buff. As in both of the above examples, the appearance prepares you for the performance. I decided an edutainment title or a game would not be fitting to test these speakers with, so I went out and purchased, especially for this review, a CD copy of the opera, Carmina Burana.

Like all of Labtec's speakers, the LSC-3210 are plug-and-play, taking all of three minutes to set up. Space allocation has always been an issue for me in computer products, especially since my monitor, like many of yours, sits on a narrow, raised platform built onto my desk. Unlike the above examples, the LCS-3210 cannot be mounted to the monitor, so I was marginally concerned about placement, but the tall, slender design perched nicely alongside my monitor like bookends, with room to spare.

The presence of Spacializer technology was apparent from the moment I loaded the CD. Perhaps the differences are wasted on anyone not a true audiophile, but after a few minutes of working with these speakers, my pride in my very-expensive-home-stereo-console began to deflate.

The quality of the sound was impressive by any standards. I never managed to get the volume higher than about half way for fear of the (previously mentioned) neighbors and the people on the next block, storming my door, but not once did I detect a sign of distortion. The controls over treble and bass allow you to adjust the tonal quality to your personal preference, but at any setting the sound comes through crisp and clear. I understood immediately why this unit has already won an award. For the price, it has no equal.

If it exists out there, you'll find it in here!

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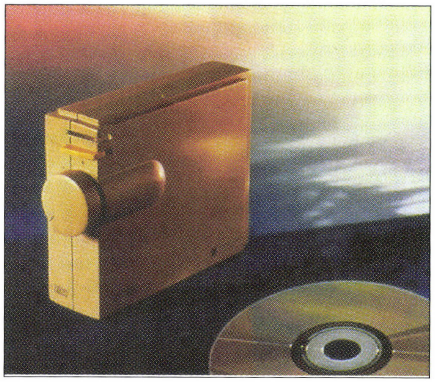
QuickSound
Manufacturer: Labtec
Tech. Developer: Labtec
Compatibility: Most PC sound cards; operates with DOS, Win 3.1, Win '95 /
Availability: Now
MSRP: $69.95
VGA Rating: C+

Features: external standard CD player controls; external volume and tone controls.

The Deal: This little device can be summed up in one word - convenience. It ends the hassle for PC users of having to quit an application, access the sound control program, make the adjustments, then load everything back up. It also includes a CD player that can be controlled with the press of a button. The software was easy to install, and for once I got a PC application up and running on the very first try. As far as function, the QuickSound works as advertised. It's a control panel that switches between functions (line, midi, CD, microphone, etc.), controls the volume, adjusts the balance, bass, and treble, manages the CD player, and even sports that handy mute button. Five memory settings allow the user to store different configurations for particular uses.

The price point is a little high for most retail outlets, but the ease of use and relief of PC-induced headaches will entice more than a few consumers to buckle and buy. In addition, as a PC product, it claims the majority market, and a small quantity would complement any speaker display.

The Imager LCS-9210
Manufacturer: Labtec
Tech. Developer: Spacializer
Compatibility: universal
Availability: Mid-October
MSRP: not available
VGA Rating: B



Features: provides Spacializer surround sound to existing speakers; bypass button to toggle Spacializer; variable space control.

The Deal: As I have mentioned, the Spacializer technology goes a long way to providing Labtec's "real life" 3D sound. Labtec has devised a way to capitalize on this for individuals with multimedia speakers already in place. The Imager is an enhancer that is connected in-line with existing systems to incorporate the Spacializer sound quality without spending the money on an entirely new array.

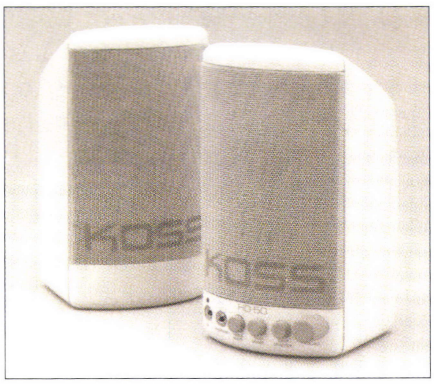
The Imager's variable adjust allows you to set the degree of 3D to whatever suits you best, and a toggle lets you switch quickly between normal and processed audio. The unit is also designed with "Double Detect and Protect" circuitry that detects previously processed incoming signals to prevent over-processing and distortion of the audio signal. Bearing this in mind, I tried it with the already-enhanced LCS-3210. Provided I kept the 3D setting low, there was no appreciable difference in sound quality, but turned up over half way, an incessant buzz begins to rattle out of the speakers, even at rest.

Otherwise, it performed well. Though it doesn't affect the actual quality of the audio, I managed to turn a pair of $19 computer speakers into a more-than-adequate surround sound system with the flip of a switch.

KOSS

Koss is a veteran to the audio business, having introduced the first SP/3 stereophone in 1958. Today, they're the leading U.S. manufacturer of stereophones with a line of over 30 models from professional electrostatic, cordless, infrared versions to the simple, personal headset. Not long ago, Koss branched into the computer market with a line of multimedia speakers and accessories. The President and CEO, Michael J. Koss stated, "As quality stereo sound becomes increasingly important to multimedia users, Koss is there to meet the demand." Koss's offices are based in Wisconsin and Switzerland. Perhaps Mr. Koss has a thing for cheese.

Hard Drivers 50 Amplified Computer Speakers
Manufacturer: Koss
Tech. Developer: Koss
Compatibility: N/A
Availability: Now
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: B



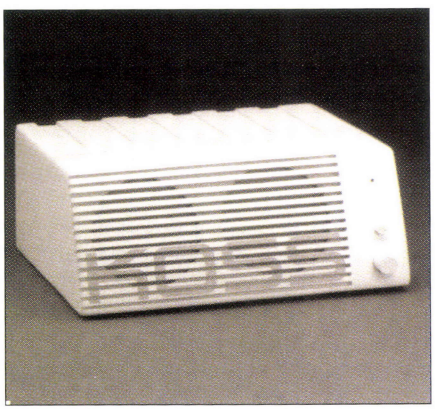
Features: multiple input selector; bass and treble boosts; volume control; microphone jack; headphone jack; mountable with Koss COM/10 Speaker Hanger.

The Deal: Possibly one of the greatest selling points for all of Koss's speakers is the lifetime "no questions asked" guarantee which is extremely attractive to consumers. But that doesn't detract from the quality of sound produced by their product. They have a narrow base for space conservation and are mountable to the monitor, taking it a step further and clearing up additional desk space.

The sound quality was impressive, though, like less expensive models, the rigid, metal speaker screen gives off a slightly tinny sound at higher volumes. The sound was clear, and the bass and treble boosts added to their flexibility for CD-ROM and music.

Another feature I found handy was the input switcher that allowed me to swap between sources, such as an external stereo or a MIDI keyboard. These units are very obviously designed with convenience and versatility in mind and are good general performers that will add a positive variety to your inventory.

SW1 Subwoofer
Manufacturer: Koss
Tech. Developer: Koss
Compatibility: Universal
Availability: Now
MSRP: $129.99
VGA Rating: B-



Features: compact size; connects to any headphone jack; front mounted on/off toggle; volume control; magnetically shielded; lifetime guarantee

The Deal: This is very simply described. It has great audio quality through two 4" speakers pumping sound in the 40 to 120 Hz range, and in the event the neighbors downstairs storm your apartment looking to destroy the little earthquake-maker, it's cunningly disguised as a humidifier. Appearances aside, this subwoofer really puts out sound. As most subwoofer output is monophonic, it can be located without regard to strategic positioning. You can receive the same sound quality by placing it under, on top or behind the desk, on a shelf, or on the floor tucked neatly away into the corner.

After playing with it for a while, I found a setting I liked and ran through a gambit of games and music titles. The difference between sound with and without the SW1 is essentially one of power. Low notes and deep bass actually have a physical impact that will appeal to any gamer who already has a set of multimedia speakers to complement it.

For a single module, incomplete without additional hardware, the price is a bit steep. Many consumers will debate long and hard before investing the $100 in the speakers themselves. But for the audiophile, the SW1 is a big step toward a complete home-computer sound system.

EXR/100 Amplified Laptop Speakers
Manufacturer: Koss
Tech. Developer: Koss
Compatibility: Universal
Availability: Now
MSRP: $99
VGA Rating: B+

Features: compact, portable speakers; 3D-sound; bass boost; magnetically shielded; headphone jack; AC and battery power supply; lifetime guarantee.

The Deal: Great idea! With the recent surge in development of multimedia laptops, this product is the perfect answer to the "dad's-transistor-radio" sound quality of portable computers. To accompany laptops, the EXR/100 was designed primarily to be portable. As such, they have their own battery cases and are designed with high-output 3" speakers that take up a minimum of space. The individual speakers can be attached for more convenient size or separated for optimum stereo positioning.

Turning them on was a breath of fresh air after listening to the nasal audio of the laptop I used to test them. Though you would never mistake them for a live performance, they boast a quality similar to that of many desktop speakers three times their size. For portable presentations, they're a must, as they eliminate the bulk of toting around larger units in a suitcase, as well as that mad hunt for an available AC outlet.

Though of limited appeal, this product confronts a need that has largely gone unanswered, and, with a reasonable price of just under $100, it can be an easy and welcome addition to current speaker stock you offer. **VGA**

Interviewing the Big Guys '96-'97

By Glenn Rubenstein

Trip Hawkins likes to talk, and quite frankly, he has a right to, since he began Electronic Arts in the early 80's he has witnessed the industry go through a number of changes, and seen the events unfold from every point on the spectrum. From programmer, to developer, to publisher, to salesman, to system manufacturer - he's worn just about every hat the industry has to offer, and with that experience comes a vast amount of knowledge. Not that he will always tell you what you want to hear.

When we scheduled this interview we were hoping he'd spill the beans on the M2 project which constitutes the future of 3DO's existence in the system market, but instead he chose to focus on Studio 3DO's current crop of games and where he foresees the market heading. Read between the lines though, and you will get an interesting idea of where the M2 could go, also note his blunt answers on the original 3DO Multiplayer's lack of market share. While Trip can talk earfuls of information, his insights earn him respect and keep 3DO a force in the industry.

...I think it's worse right now because of the high software development costs. That means you have to have a lot more capital to survive as a company in this industry than you did back then.

VGA: Let's start with the obvious. If you could, please tell everyone what the current state of the 3DO Company is.

TH: In the gaming industry, there are only a handful of companies that are public companies that are really focused on the videogame business and we are one of the few of those amongst that group. Only Electronic Arts and Broderbund have more cash than we have. We have a very talented group of people in the company and we're developing some great games from the software standpoint. We're a very good technology company having put most of the finishing touches on the architecture for the M2. We've got a lot of experience now with 64-bit technology and we're right now looking to become one of the first and leading companies in Internet entertainment. We feel that's probably going to be the hottest growth area in the next couple of years.

VGA: So what's the status of the M2?

TH: There's a limit as to how much I can say - you really need to ask Matsushita. But, we think it's great technology and we're really pleased with the work we've done on it... and Matsushita has been really quiet about their plans and it's really not my prerogative to go around their wishes in that regard.

VGA: So what is in store for the 3DO company in the coming 12 months?

TH: We're going to be launching "Reading 59" in late September which is going to be one of the most interesting products to come to the retail market this year. It's going to be bundled with a browser and have a very attractive retail price. I think that it will be a new beginning for the entertainment business. It's one of the first truly multiple player games that is basically Internet-only access.

We had quite an interesting experience beta testing this thing. We had over 16,000 beta testers who downloaded it over the Net and I think that we're going to be part of the whole growth phenomenon of people catching on to using the Web because from a retail selling standpoint, it's a very interesting product because a lot of people out there are just beginning to discover the Web and this will be a chance for them to get a good browser at a low cost and one of the first games of this type as well. That's one we're going to follow with quite a few PC software releases and over the course of the next year we're going to support some other platforms and to do some additional home grown interest products that fully exploit our Internet strategy. I think you'll see a lot of growth and expansion in what we do on the Internet.

VGA: Just because some people might be curious, what's the current state of the 3DO multiplayer - the first one that's on the market now, not the M2?

TH: There were about three quarters of a million 3DO players sold (worldwide) and they are still for sale in pockets of distribution around the world. And, I think that the product was the lead off hitter in a line up of 32-bit products that really have been a disappointment. Even today, when you look at the most recent

products that have come into the market, it goes without saying that because of the march of technology, if you come into the market later generally, you are going to have the opportunity to work with later stage technologies that should be better - if you look at the sequence of products introduced in the last few years.

The newer the product, the generally better the product and at the same time none of the products have sold all that well and that has caused a round of price cutting on all of them. Basically, I think if you went back a couple of years and asked people how well 32-bit players would sell at prices as low as $199, everyone would have thought the volume would have been much greater. And, I think the fact that SONY, within a year of introducing the product to the U.S. had to come down to $199, and Nintendo within a couple of months of introducing Japan had to come down to $199,... I don't think these moves are being made because everyone is thrilled with their profitability.

You can look at some of the executive turnover as a reflection of how these companies really feel about how things are going. But it's just been a real disappointment for the industry as a whole that we haven't been able to sell a greater quantity of units at these lower price points. As I mentioned, there are a lot of new technologies that have just proven to be expensive to work with and the 3DO player certainly was the first one to come to market and it is the first one that's not being phased out but it's been a tough time for the entire industry.

VGA: Given all these factors, and I realize you can only disclose so much, what are the M2's strongest assets and what chance do you think it has in the current market place?

TH: Taking the broad view for the industry as a whole I think we're in a bigger crisis as an industry than we've ever been in before. Some people compare it to the period after the collapse of Atari, but I think it's worse right now because of the high software development costs. That means you have to have a lot more capital to survive as a company in this industry than you did back then.

In the industry as a whole everyone is trying to do the same kind of products in the same genre and support the same formats. The PC may have a large installed base but not a lot of PC owners buy a lot of videogames... that's always going to be the case. The dedicated market needs a big hit right now so the question to ask is "what it is going to take for this to be a big hit?".

Sony continues to be on the bubble where every time they cut their price it makes you wonder, gee, is this the magic price point? Will they do the volume they need to do at this price point? How long will their life cycle be? If you were going to make an argument for Sony doing well, you would have to include the fact that they can continue to bring the price down and that the 64-bit market will continue to be a long way away. But I think when all is said and done, the Sony first generation PlayStation will have been a market that did O.K., but not great, and it will have been so crowded with software competition that their economics aren't going to work very well for the industry.

When I look at the industry as a whole and you want to look forward, if you just want to make a videogame machine only and you want to use any of these new technologies, I think that's a real tough proposition because the new technologies are expensive. The early adopters are pretty discriminating and demanding about new technologies. 64-bit is certainly a quantum leap from 32-bit. This is something where the 3DO suffered from a problem generic to all 32-bit systems and that is that a lot of consumers had a hard time in 2D games and they had a hard time telling the difference between the 16-bit Nintendo and the 32-bit games. For a 3D game, a lot is confusing to the consumer because they see quality problems on the 32-bit which, on the 3DO, is because of camera movement.

One of the (better) features of the 64-bit is that you can see that the digital video quality will be spectacular and the 3D capability will be dazzling... and you see some signs of that with the Nintendo 64. But again, the read we get from the consumers is that the stand alone game machine will be hard to get down to the price that will generate really high volume.

So from my point of view, looking at the next 5-10 years, the only way we'll build a really huge market - a general mass market other than the PC - is if it is other sources for consumer demand for computing, DVD movies and Internet access. From my point of view, the ideal product would be one to combine one or two of those things plus add-on options and become the entertainment computer. Not trying to be a PC, but something for the family room and the 32-bit machine tried to be that, it tried to do video but it wasn't good enough... photo CD format - but nobody cared, played music CD's - everyone had it, education CD's but everybody said they'd do it on their PC. This next time around with DVD and the Internet, I think there's a more likely opportunity to create a mass market device that really becomes the Trojan horse that the industry's been looking for.

VGA: Given the past relationship with retailers and 3DO, how does the 3DO company find themselves dealing with retailers in the industry as a whole. How do you think that's changed?

TH: Retailers have a very positive view of 3DO, certainly one of the likely long term survivors because of our strong cash position and they have a positive image of the quality of the products we've made. The software we released for the 3DO got very good marks from the retailers in terms of quality and we've gotten very good feedback from retail about the support job we've been able to do in working with them and the overall caliber of the professionalism we've brought to the industry. I think the retailers are certainly disappointed that the 32-bit category hasn't materialized in the way they had hoped - on all of the 32-bit systems they had concerns about margins and concerns about volume potential. I don't think they look at that picture - I think they basically look at it as a lot of technologies affected a lot of the companies.

VGA: What do you see as the current state of your competition? Where is Sega heading?

TH: Well, they are an interesting company. They generally try to focus on the P&L performance of the parent company in Japan and off-load a lot of losses to subsidiaries, and then they'll report and focus on the unconsolidated results. But on a consolidated basis they lost $600 million last year and you can see that they've deconstructed and sold off a lot of pieces of Sega of America and

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Sega of Europe. I think they did a lot of things they had to do to stop the bleeding but I don't really understand yet a coherent, new plan for Sega.

Sega historically has been a very good software company an the Sega Genesis is the one time in their history they were firing on all cylinders, made a great piece of hardware and really executed in all phases of the business. They got a lot of help from Electronic Arts in getting the format established and then their hardware products since then haven't been the success as the technology has moved forward and it has proven to be a challenge for Sega to stay on it as a platform company. I think they will continue to be very successful as a software company in the long term.

VGA: What about Nintendo?

TH: Nintendo has a great franchise - it's been much more focused. Nintendo operates like a very good toy company in that it has a very good customer franchise with younger consumers - very good brand loyalty with the younger preteen customer. They are very good at designing products to reach into that younger audience - they do that better than anyone else in the business and to the extent they can continue to develop and price products for that audience, I think they will continue to do very well.

I think they face the same question mark as the whole industry - if the prices on these products are going to be in the $200 plus range it is going to be hard for them to repeat the market dominance they enjoyed in the previous decade. They've had a pretty steady decline in their market share over the last 5-6 years. Some of that is the market maturing - some of it is the technology moving forward - the product concept is changing and evolving. If Nintendo wants to focus on where their strength is, historically, and stick with that young audience - if the market expands and embraces a more mature audience, that might take away from Nintendo's strength.

VGA: And, what about Sony?

TH: Sony's turned out to be a truly unusual company in that there have been a lot of big companies that have gotten into the gaming industry and Sony has turned out to be the only one that I can think of that has come in and fairly quickly grasped the competitive aspects of the business and in many phases have done an excellent job. They've built a fine product, done an excellent job at design and semi-conductor engineering - a fine job on their marketing. They've certainly had some controversies in their third party licensing and their retail (relations) but they've gotten people to support them, and those are all reasons why they've become a market share leader. It is puzzling with Sony.

I think going back to E3 of last year, I think there have been 5 different executives who have held the title of CEO of SCEA, so that's a little bit of a puzzle - suggesting they're not that happy about everything. And, I've heard estimates that they've lost as much as $250 million and they've clearly been in an investment mode trying to build a position. I think going forward even if you move to 64-bit technology and DTV and the Internet - the kind of synergy potential I've talked about, Sony has to be considered to be in a real prime position to capitalize on that. VGA

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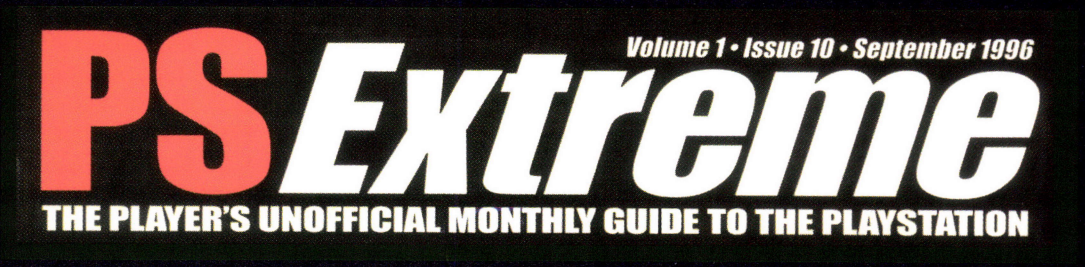

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Movie Stars In Games – FMV/DVD

By Greg Angelo

Over the past two years the videogame industry, especially on the PC-side of the market, has seen a definite rise in the number of titles which utilize full-motion video (FMV) to either enhance or serve as the centerpiece of a game. The dawn of CD-ROM technology precipitated this emergence of FMV-driven products, and the use of full-motion video (for better or for worse) has become almost a standard in any product which hopes to compete in the interactive marketplace of the future.

While many industry insiders initially passed-off FMV as a novelty and a fad, and others continue to speak out against the continuing convergence of Hollywood and the videogame industry, the impact which FMV-based games have on the market cannot be overlooked. Three of last Christmas's best sellers were Sierra's *Phantasmagoria*, Virgin's *The Eleventh Hour*, and Blizzard Entertainment's *Warcraft 2*, all of which utilized FMV as a product-enhancement, the latter of which was a strategy sim but which utilized FMV to complement the game intermittent of levels.

Warcraft 2 is just another in the now near-infinite list of FMV-incorporated titles. Lately, many third party manufacturers have begun to shy away from titles strictly built around video gameplay. Previously unimpressed with games billed as "interactive movies" and dissatisfied with the low quality of computer video compared with television's broadcast quality, the once blatantly exploited vehicle of FMV seems to have taken its place as a game's complement rather than its feature. Currently any major release utilizes some form of FMV in its gameplay. Whether it be an integral aspect of gameplay or merely a cinematic cut-scene, FMV's influence is apparent.

Not all titles which make use of FMV are successful, however. In fact, many turn out to be awful bombs. Only a short time ago companies publicized FMV in their ads to sell their titles, but with so many companies jumping on the digitized video bandwagon and facing the ever-present criticism of awful acting in FMV products, manufacturers and developers are turning in ever-greater numbers to the use of legitimate and recognizable television and film personalities to act in and subsequently promote their product.

One of the first Hollywood personas to appear in a heavily marketed multimedia entertainment title was Mark Hamill, probably best known for his role as Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* trilogy and also for his work in cartoon voice-overs in television shows such as *Batman: The Animated Series*. *Wing Commander III* marked what was probably the first and certainly most definitive attempt at merging games and movies, and the use of actors such as Malcolm MacDowell and John Rhys-Davies, as well as Hamill, was an unmistakable draw to consumers. Hamill was eager to involve himself with *Wing III* in 1994 and equally ready to act in its number one-selling sequel this past winter. "It's just something that's fascinating to me," Hamill states. "I really underestimated the

...manufacturers and developers are turning in ever-greater numbers to the use of legitimate and recognizable television and film personalities to act in and subsequently promote their product.

popularity of the genre and the number of people who play the games."

Hamill also notes the taboo aura surrounding videogames as an obstacle to more actors becoming involved in such projects, and while he feels that working in games market is simply "another part of the process of pretending that involves actors," there are not a great many acting professionals who share the same viewpoint. One company which has managed to secure big-name actors where others have failed is Take 2 Interactive, whose choppy point-and-click, *Hell*, might have done horribly had it not featured Grace Jones and Dennis Hopper, among others, as key characters in the game. And while *Hell* did not fare excessively well in the computer marketplace, it did do fairly well for a game of its caliber and decently in the rental market as well, no doubt in part to its famous headline actors. Take 2 recently released another title, *Ripper*, featuring Christopher Walken among its cast.

The appeal which celebrity has for gamers is not isolated simply to the adult demographic, either. Activision's upcoming release, *Muppet Treasure Island*, based upon this past spring's feature film, uses the dollar draw of Jim Henson's Muppet characters, as well as Hollywood star Tim Curry, to promote the title.

Eric Johnson, Activision's Vice-president of Marketing, sees the enhancements of utilizing celebrities in multimedia as having a two-fold benefit, improving the overall quality of a game and adding to its ability to be successfully marketed. Eric states, though, that "technology in games has not advanced enough to facilitate involvement of big-name Hollywood talent in games." In the short term, Eric believes that high-quality character actors will be used by game developers - a much more economically feasible alternative for game producers.

Like many marketers in the business, Eric feels that the quality of a product, rather than the names of its supporting actors, should be a company's main focus. "If we can add an actor to a game," Eric states, "it serves as icing on the cake, but it should not constitute a game's essence." Still, Eric says that the use of recognizable characters in games constitutes a big market draw. "The buyer has an idea of what they'll be getting if they buy the product."

The surge of such celebrity-based products does not seem to have reached its peak yet, either. The DVD standard for digital video, making it possible to store nearly two hours of broadcast-quality FMV on a single compact disc, has been adopted by both hardware and software developers alike. Aside from a noticeable consumer interest in software titles making use of the DVD standard, the possibility of FMV games looking just like television or film will unquestionably draw an even greater number of Hollywood actors who previously believed that film and videogames are two different things. The DVD standard hopes to merge the two extremes and accomplish what developers have been trying to achieve for years, bind the two mediums unequivocally.

The Bottom Line: While it cannot be stated that every game which features Hollywood actors is going to be a blockbuster seller, (far from it in some cases) it can be said that a game which has a cast of recognizable actors will generally do better than a similar title which does not. The recent upswing in celebrity-centered titles has not yet reached its pinnacle, though, and one can expect a greater number of titles which even more closely resemble feature films and which have as their main selling point the incorporation of big-name Hollywood actors. Chances are, however, that this trend will gradually decline, as companies find more impressive and economical methods of attracting audiences, as DVD becomes a standard, and as the gaming audience itself begins to demand more for their money than simply a name and a face. **VGA**

The DVD standard hopes to merge the two extremes and accomplish what developers have been trying to achieve for years: bind the two mediums unequivocally.

VGA RATINGS SYSTEM

A One of the best selling games for that particular platform. Great sound, graphics, playability, etc. This title will grow wings and fly off the shelves of any retail/rental store.

B A great game that is just lacking in some areas. It will sell well and bring in the masses, but just not to the extent of an "A" title. Retailers should make sure to buy this product deep enough to satisfy their individual store demands with some to spare.

C A good game that will sell about "average" in terms of sales. It is lacking in a few departments, therefore not worthy of a "B" rating. However, this is still a quality product.

D A game that is unsupported by the manufacturer, lacking in quality and generally should have stayed in development longer. This category may rent occasionally but will not sell well to anyone other than a "platform fan." Poor gameplay, bad plot and just better than an "F" rating.

F A product that never should have been considered, much less released. This is a thoroughly unimpressive title that will only become an inventory nightmare. Only at drastically discounted prices could this category sell.

FYI As a courtesy to those readers who use our magazine as a guide in making purchasing decisions for their stores, we have made our review section as up-front and honest as possible. However, one should be aware that once products are reviewed and rated, we also extend a similar level of courtesy to the manufacturers. Titles which receive a rating in the D or F categories are faxed/e-mailed to the respective publisher, who is then given the opportunity to "pull" the reviews. As a good rule of thumb, one may consider avoiding products not reviewed in any current issues of Videogame Advisor.

Title: Star Gladiators
Platform: PlayStation
Genre: 3D Fighting
Size: CD
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Available: November 15
Wholesale: $48.95
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: B

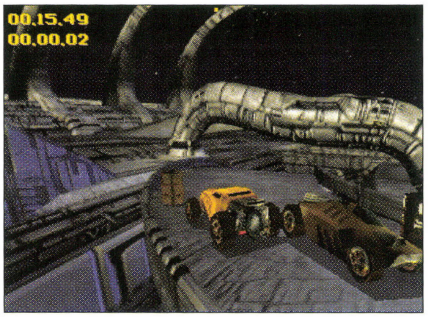
Right after I finish praising Capcom for sticking to the 2D fighting games (see review of SF Alpha 2 in the August issue), they go and make a 3D fighter. Even though the artificial intelligence is pretty weak (I beat the game on myt second try), the rest of the game is solid.

Star Gladiator is above average for the fighting genre. There are 10 characters from all over the galaxy to choose from. As you would expect, each character has its own special moves, animation, characteristics, etc. The actual gameplay is better than the standard (Battle Arena Toshinden), but not quite as good as the current best (Tekken 2).

The game should have better than average sell-through than most fighting games and with good reason - brand association. Capcom's name is pretty strong right now with Resident Evil relaunching (and still climbing the TRSTS) and Street Fighter Alpha 2 selling well. Additionally, there's the marketing that Capcom will be putting behind this product. If they market this game heavily (as would appear to be the case), you would do well to carry it.

Bottom Line: *Star Gladiators is a good, although not great, game. Challenges this Christmas include several new entry publishers in addition to the veterans. But with Capcom's name, a strong P.R. push and teems of marketing behind it, this title should sell well.*

-Ed Lewis



Title: Megarace 2
Platform: PC CD
Genre: Shooter/Racing
Size: 2 CDs
Publisher: Mindscape
Developer: Cryo Interactive
Available: September
Wholesale: N/A
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: A-

In an industry where the success of an original title dictates a mandatory cloned sequel, usually churned-out at great speed and a pale comparison to its predecessor, it is refreshing to see that Mindscape has taken its best-seller of 1994, Megarace, and updated it in all respects. The result of which was to attain a truly original product firmly rooted to its origins but which takes advantage of high-end hardware and enhanced PC technology.

A true graphically-simulated adrenaline rush, Megarace 2 puts players in the role of "The Enforcer," a gritty, hard-drivin' mercenary competing in (witty and eccentric gameshow host) Lance Boyle's crazed idea of entertainment, where the only prize is the gamer's continued existence. Players race across six different and highly rendered race tracks, fighting to win and blasting other competitors away with their armored race cars.

The tracks are skillfully rendered and highly detailed. Fans of the first game will notice that many new options are available; cars can now be customized to players' specs, racetracks follow multiple paths, and the computer's artificial intelligence (AI) is extremely high.

Bottom Line: *A worthy sequel in all respects, Mindscape is ensuring the success of Megarace 2 with heavy print advertising in the consumer pubs, game demo discs, on-line promos and a customer-oriented direct mail campaign.*

- Gregory Angelo

Title: Diablo
Platform: PC CD
Genre: Action/Role-playing
Size: CD
Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Available: September
Wholesale: N/A
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: B

Ever-growing software developer Blizzard Entertainment (makers of what was hailed by many to be the best strategy game of 1995, Warcraft II) run hot on the heels of their fourth quarter success with Diablo, a fantasy action game with very unique gameplay and an extremely original look.

In Diablo, players partake in a quest for vengeance - their character being the sole survivor of a massacre that killed all in the medieval village - who descends into the labyrinths below the village on a journey which will bring them in contact with over 100 enemies in a 3D-rendered landscape. The plot finally climaxes with the demonic power that wrought the original devastation upon the peaceful village, Diablo.

This game has already received heavy coverage and support from PC enthusiast publications. It would appear that both press and consumers alike are starting to take notice of the, until recently, little-known developer, Blizzard. Now that Warcraft II has brought the company such notoriety, expectations for the saleability of this title are high.

Bottom Line: *Blizzard has their work cut-out for them in repeating the success they enjoyed last year. With solid consumer magazine support, decent marketing and good general awareness this title may be the sleeper hit of this quarter.*

-Gregory Angelo

Title: MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries
Platform: PC CD
Genre: Strategy/Shooter
Size: CD
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Activision
Available: October
Wholesale: N/A
MSRP: $49.95
VGA Rating: A-

The MechWarrior franchise continues in what Activision promises as the best and final chapter in the MechWarrior 2 series, Mercenaries.

Taking to heart the feedback of players of the original, Activision has made Mercenaries - a prequel to MechWarrior 2 - an incorporation of all the facets of gameplay that devotees of the original asked for. Players will not notice a completely new game. Diehard fans, however, will notice that Activision has tweaked the cockpit controls, simplified keyboard commands, and added graphical details such as shadows, smoke trails, and added texturing on objects.

Additional features such as the ability for players to customize their Battle Mechs, scavenge the battlefield for replacement parts, and a quick play feature - as well as modem network play - make this the most thorough MechWarrior installment to date.

Bottom Line: *Despite apparent oversaturation of the MechWarrior series in only one year since the original sequel's release, each new installment of the MechWarrior franchise has consistently been a top seller. Activision's promotional campaign for this final chapter in the series encompasses the full spectrum of enthusiast print ads, demo discs, a hefty P.R. push, and strong on-line awareness.*

- Gregory Angelo

Title: Impact Racing
Platform: PlayStation, Saturn
Genre: Driving/Shooting
Size: CD
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Funcom
Available: Q1 '97
Wholesale: $49.00
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: C

There's not too much variety to be had in the driving game genre of late. There would appear to be two distinct classifications; there are the serious, yet dull, driving sims or the monotonous "cyberpunkish" shoot-em-ups. Impact Racing is one of the latter.

Impact Racing emphasizes shooting over driving. In most instances, all that matters is that players at least FINISH the race. Don't worry about the time, just blast as many of the drones around as possible. If gamers blast enough drones, they get a more powerful weapon so that it's easier to destroy the other cars. There is no build up to anything, you just drive and shoot for the thrill of it. If that was the point, it would have been better if Acclaim had made something on par with Singletrac's classic Twisted Metal. This is a very basic game, almost like shareware for the PSX - even the tracks are simple. There's not even a penalty for crashing into the wall, you just bounce.

Acclaim is bringing out a lot of titles and it's unlikely that this one will get a sizable share of the marketing money. This season's best bets for Acclaim appear to be Turok and NFL Quarterback Club - and they know it. That is clearly where the marketing emphasis will go and not toward smaller titles like Impact Racing.

Bottom Line: *We're coming up on the second most competitive time of the year (post holiday) and this game has neither gameplay nor substantial marketing behind it.*

.-Ed Lewis

Title: Banzai Bug!
Platform: Win 95 CD
Genre: Flying
Size: CD
Publisher: Grolier Interactive
Developer: Gravity, Inc.
Available: October
Wholesale: $40.00
MSRP: $49.99
VGA Rating: C+

Seeking to diversify its line of PC software, Grolier Interactive, probably best known for their bestselling line of CD-ROM encyclopedias, will release *Banzai Bug!*, a game that is part flight-sim, part strategy, and part comedy.

As Banzai Bug, the player battles robotic enemy insects, bratty children, and other enemies in an attempt to drive a family from their home and rule the abode with the house's fellow insects.

Game levels include locations throughout the house varying from the kitchen, the attic, and family living room. Each level gives the player a different goal – an object to get, a task to accomplish – all in a combined attempt to assemble the dreaded "Stinkulator" – the machine that will finally drive the family from their house once and for all.

Featuring unique gameplay, standard flight sequences with unique twists, and original levels with varying purposes, *Banzai Bug!* is an impressive effort on Grolier's part and quite simply a fun title.

Bottom Line: *An entertaining title that will appeal to many, Banzai Bug! will hurt from a slim print advertising campaign. Given the departure from their previous title releases Grolier is most definitely moving in the right direction, but awareness will hold them back.*

- Gregory Angelo

Title: Torin's Passage
Platform: PC CD
Genre: Adventure
Size: CD
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: Sierra
Available: September
Wholesale: $39.00
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: B-

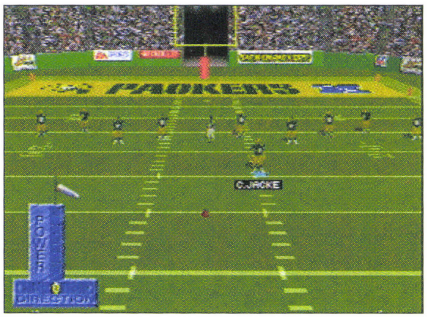
I've never been personally impressed by Sierra's games, as I think they tend to get bogged-down in some stupid aspects of the game. For a while, the *King's Quest* series tried to kill you as frequently as possible – which was, to say the least, not very much fun. Sierra's games always have some rough edges that show through no matter how hard they try. It's as if no one ever thought out the ideas to their bitter end.

Torin's Passage is aimed at an audience that's not quite young nor old, but an elusive range in between. The gameplay is classic adventure style which could appeal to the more mature player, but the game's animation and dialogue is definitely aimed at a younger demographic. The result is a confusing combination of target audiences.

If game designers try the cute angle, they have to walk a fine line between appealing and annoying. If they succeed, as in Mario 64, it helps move the game along, in terms of both gameplay and sales. Then again, if they don't succeed, players will be impatiently clicking the fast-forward button so that they can get to the next puzzle and the reverse "gameplay/sales" result will occur.

Bottom Line: *Sierra has built up a solid name and reputation, due in large part to their . Additionally, Al Lowe is known for his previous games which, when combined with their marketing will guarantee some sales, but don't expect this one to last.*

– Ed Lewis



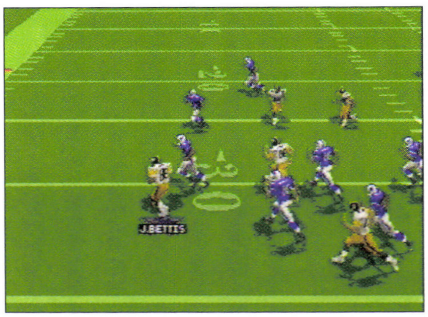
Title: Madden NFL '97
Platform: PlayStation
Genre: Sports
Size: CD
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: High Score/Tiburon Ent.
Available: Mid-September
Wholesale: $46.95
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: A

With Madden NFL '97, EA Sports proves once again that good things come to those who wait. Focusing on the solid play mechanics and the core graphical style that made the cartridge games so popular, EA has delivered a game that takes advantage of the PlayStation's powerful graphics processor and CD-ROM storage capabilities without getting bogged down with bloated FMV cut scenes and long load times.

While the graphics are sharper, with a larger playing field and more fluid animation, and the QSound-enhanced audio best described as dazzling, the basic game itself hasn't changed much from the last cartridge incarnations. Freed from memory limitations, however, the developers have been able to expand some of the more popular features. Over 100 real teams have been included, from current rosters to Super Bowl and All-Time Greatest teams. Every NFL stadium has been accurately rendered and Madden himself returned to help develop over 300 plays.

Bottom Line: *While more evolutionary rather than revolutionary, Madden NFL '97 will please fans of the series with its familiar, fast-paced gameplay and updated graphics and sound. Younger players will be put off by the game's tough A/I, but the title's target market will appreciate the increased challenge.*

– Jeffrey Tschiltsch



Title: Madden NFL '97
Platform: Saturn
Genre: Sports
Size: CD
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: High Score/Tiburon Ent.
Available: Mid-September
Wholesale: $49.00
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: A

Simply put, Madden NFL '97 for the Sega Saturn is as near an exact copy of the PlayStation version as the hardware will allow. From the opening intro animation down to the load times, it is virtually impossible to tell these two games apart unless you play them side-by-side.

All of the features of the PlayStation version are here: real players, multiple camera angles, over 100 teams, up to 8 simultaneous players, and so on. Graphically, the PlayStation game bests the Saturn disc by only the slightest of margins; the minor dithering during the introduction sequence tips us off that the Saturn isn't using quite as many colors as the PSX. As a result the Saturn version is missing some of the PlayStation's graphical subtleties, such as transparent information screens and anti-aliased bitmaps that smooth out the rough edges on the players. In the Saturn's favor, the game animation seemed to run slightly faster on Sega's box, giving the impression that the control was tighter, especially in the running game.

Bottom Line: *Madden NFL '97 on the Saturn is every bit as good a game as it is on the PlayStation and both will benefit from the same marketing campaign. Expect your past Genesis customers who've upgraded to 32-bit to snap this up as soon as it's released.*

-Jeffrey Tschiltsch

Title: SlamScape
Platform: PlayStation
Genre: Driving/Shooting
Size: CD
Publisher: Viacom New Media
Developer: Viacom New Media
Available: October
Wholesale: N/A
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: B+

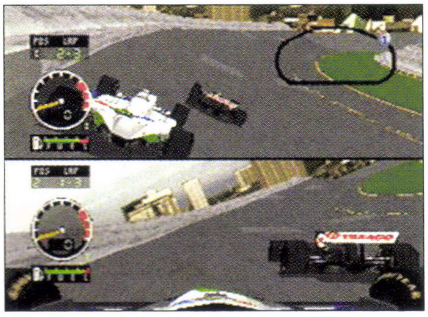
SlamScape is the thinking man's shooter. This game is much more complex than it needs to be, but that's the allure of it. Seldom does anyone try to make a game with a brain. The problem is the risk: will the gamers get it? Hopefully they will, because this game is good.

There are four levels in SlamScape. It doesn't sound like much but these levels are big and filled with enemies. The game is fast-paced, and yet it's still smooth and understandable (it runs at a beautiful 60 frames per second). There are a good variety of enemies from the cute Shreddybears to the annoying helicopter things that like to pick you up.

The best part are the bosses. They have a sickeningly good sense of where you're going to be. This means you have to just get better and better at avoiding them. I never got too good at it (I made full use of the invincibility code the producer was kind enough to give me), but if I had some more time, like a week or so, I could see myself getting very into this game. This is definitely not one of those "a minute to learn, a lifetime to master" kind of games, but it's enthralling none-the-less.

Bottom Line: *The MTV tie-in and soundtrack by God Lives Underwater will undoubtedly help. However, it's the game that should really pull in the interest of the consumer pubs and consumers.*

-Ed Lewis



Title: Andretti Racing
Platform: PlayStation
Genre: Sports/Racing
Size: CD
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: High Score/Stormfront
Available: September 6 1996
Wholesale: $47.95
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: A-

Racing games have proven to be extremely popular on the PlayStation; titles like Ridge Racer, Destruction Derby, Wipeout and Twisted Metal exploited the system's powerful graphics engine and brought arcade-quality racing action home. With Andretti Racing, EA Sports enters the crowded field with a superb title that has enough unique features to help it stand out on the shelf.

First off, Andretti Racing includes two distinct types of racing: Indy car and Stock car. The game has captured the physics of the two different racing styles so that in a sense it is really two games in one.

Another key feature is the game's split screen racing mode, which lets two players race head-to-head without two PlayStations, two TVs and two copies of the game like link-cable games require. Those fortunate enough to have all that equipment can still use the link-cable mode and race up to 4 players simultaneously via two split-screens.

Bottom Line: *With superb graphics and sound, a wide variety of game play options and one of the strongest licenses available for the sport, Andretti Racing is a game that will practically sell itself. Regardless, EA has planned an aggressive marketing campaign that will ensure strong sales throughout the year .*

-Jeffrey Tschiltsch

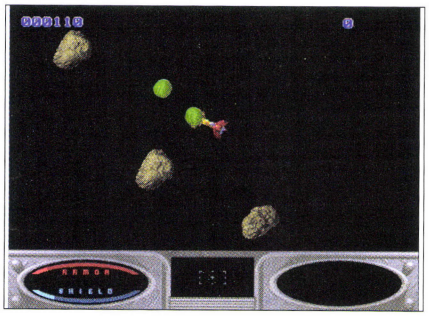
Title: Final Doom
Platform: PlayStation
Genre: 3D Shooter
Size: CD
Publisher: Williams
Developer: id Software
Available: Now
Wholesale: $48.00
MSRP: N/A
VGA Rating: A-

The final installment of the *Doom* series, appropriately titled *Final Doom*, has finally been ported over to the PlayStation. This version offers 64 new levels of similar gameplay which has captivated millions of gamers since the release of the original, over three years ago. The biggest asset this title has, interestingly enough, also the only problem that it has - it is, essentially, more of the same game. While the new levels are extremely well done, there's just not much that's new, and that, again, is this title's only drawback.

As far as the selling potential goes for *Final Doom*, well, quite frankly, it's *Doom* - second in worldwide sales volume only to *Myst*. Every platform that has been graced by the original has seen the title appear on it's top ten TRSTS column. FD, as the closing of the *Doom* saga (with the notable exception of the upcoming *Doom64* - now delayed until January), Final Doom will undoubtedly, follow the same path... it's *Doom*!

Bottom Line: *Our ad director is fond of saying, "Heck, you can wrap-up a ham sandwich and have the Doom label on it, and you'll have a best-seller." The only detraction from the purity of that statement is that Final Doom is a sequel, although Williams is well aware of that fact and intends upon marketing it appropriately. Expect solid marketing and great sales.*

-Adam Ellsworth



Title: Astrorock
Platform: PC/Win 95 CD
Genre: Action/Arcade
Size: CD
Publisher: Atlantean Interactive
Developer: Atlantean Interactive
Available: October
Wholesale: N/A
MSRP: $38.95
VGA Rating: C-

Slowly but surely, game developers are gaining a better understanding of how best to utilize the Windows 95 operating system. While the DirectX technology that allows data-heavy games to work is far from perfect and perhaps a bit overblown, Atlantean Interactive's Astrorock is a sign that games are headed in the right direction.

In Astrorock, which at first glance appears as a glorified Asteroids of years past, players pilot a small starcraft whose mission is to destroy globs of green alien goop while avoiding such dangerous perils as asteroids, spiked satellites, and alien spacecraft.

On the plus side, the game does feature a host of weapons, a strong soundtrack, and beautifully 3-D rendered spacecraft and objects - however small may be an understatement. Network play is an option as well.

While the game is entertaining, its degree of difficulty and lack of any real storyline place Astrorock on the same plane as many shareware releases. But it is titles such as this that pave the way for bigger and better things in the future.

Bottom Line: *A decent initial venture for a fledgling development squad, Astrorock loses its entertaining sheen rather quickly. Marketing is best described as minimal at best. Still, smooth graphics and addictive gameplay merit some shelf or rack space. Stock this title minimally should you have the demand.*

- Gregory Angelo

Title: Zapitalism
Platform: PC CD
Genre: Business Simulation
Size: CD
Publisher: Lavamind
Developer: Lavamind
Available: Now/Q4
Wholesale: N/A
MSRP: $34.99
VGA Rating: C+

Simulation games seem to be on the upswing over the past few months. The release of titles such as Capitalism and Afterlife have added new vigor to what was a seemingly dying genre of videogames. New age game developers Lavamind here add Zapitalism to their line of games.

Zapitalism presents an interesting and lively twist to the usually drab world of financial simulations. As one of five entrepreneurs on a remote Caribbean island recently opened up to trade, the player is asked to maintain a store and accumulate wealth while buying and selling a strange array of products ranging from artificial chest hair to salt-lick pillars.

The game is actually quite fun and addictive, and Lavamind's "no manual" approach to instructions allows players to jump right into the game and allow the tutorial to gradually teach the rules. The play is not overly complex either, with players allowed to make control decisions without getting bogged down in business jargon.

Bottom Line: Zapitalism is a great business simulation; it is both accurate and fun to play. There's only drawback: Lavamind traditionally uses its Internet site as the exclusive sales/marketing center, waiting to see how the game fares before allowing retailers to stock it. This, and an all-too-apparent lack of advertising will prevent this game from becoming a hit.

- Gregory Angelo

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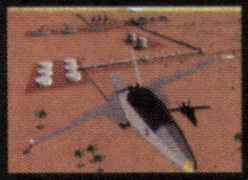

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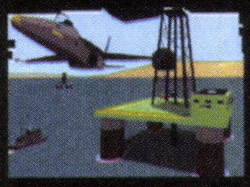

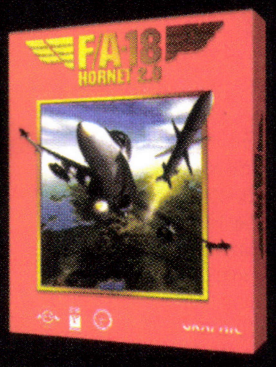

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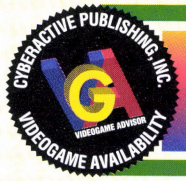

RELEASE SCHEDULE

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Product Title	Manufacturer/ Publisher	Genre	VGA Rating	EST Ship Date	SRP
GENESIS					
Adventures of Dizzy	Gametek	Side-scroller	C-	TBD	
Arcade's Greatest	Williams	Comilation		September 15	
BASS Masters Classic: Pro Edition	THQ	Fishing		October	
Cosmic Spacehead	Gametek	N/A	C-	TBD	
Flintstones	Ocean	Side-scroller		TBD	
Man Overboard	Gametek	N/A		TBD	
Micro Machine 1	Gametek	Racing		August 15	
Micro Machine 2	Gametek	Racing		TBD	
NBA Hangtime	Williams	Basketball		November 15	
Psycho Pinball	Gametek	Pinball		TBD	
Sonic 3D Blast	Sega	Side-scroller		November 7	
Ultimate MK3	Williams	Fighting		October 15	
Vectorman 2	Sega	Side-scroller		November 2	
X-Woman The Sinister Virus	Sega	Fighting		November	
Mac					
Body Voyage: Reproduction	WEA	Edutainment		September	
Drowned God	WEA	N/A	P	October	
Maximum Surge	Acclaim	Interactive Movie		TBD	
Mission Ooze Control	WEA	N/A		October	
Primal Rage	WEA	Fighting		TBD	
Prize Fighter	Acclaim	Fighting		TBD	
Qin: Tomb of Middle Kingdom	WEA	Quest		August	
Rise of the Robots II	Acclaim	Fighting		TBD	
Simpsons Cartoon Studio	Fox	Edutainment		August	
Where's Waldo	WEA	Edutainment		TBD	
Zone Raiders	Virgin	Arcade Driving/Shooting		September	
N64					
Blast Dozer	Nintendo	Action/Adventure		TBD	
Body Harvest	Nintendo	Strategy		TBD	
Buggie-Boogie	Nintendo	3D Shooter		TBD	
Creator	Nintendo	Strategy/"God" game		TBD	
Crusin' USA	Nintendo	Racing		November	
Doom	Williams	3D Shooter		January 15, 1997	
Freak Boy	Virgin	3D Shooter		November	
Golden Eye 007	Nintendo	Adventure		TBD	
Gretzky II	Williams	Hockey		November 15	
Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball	Nintendo	Baseball		TBD	
Killer Instinct 2	Nintendo	Fighting		November	
Kirby Bowl 64	Nintendo	Racing/Action	P	September	
Legend of Zelda 64	Nintendo	Role-playing game		TBD	
Mission Impossible	Ocean	3D Adventure	P	November	
MK Trilogy	Williams	Fighting		October 15	
NBA Hangtime	Williams	Basketball		November 15	
Pilot Wings 64	Nintendo	Flying	A-	September 29	
Robotech: Crystal Dreams	Gametek	Flying/Adventure		November	
Star Fox 64	Nintendo	Flying/Strategy		TBD	
Star Wars: Shadows	LucasArts	Interactive Movie		December	
Super Mario 64	Nintendo	3D Adventure	A+	September 29	
Super Mario Kart 64	Nintendo	Racing		TBD	
Top Gear Rally	Kemco	Driving		Spring 1997	
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter	Acclaim	3D Adventure	P	November 22	
Ultimate MK3	Williams	Fighting		December	
War Gods	Williams	Fighting		February 15, 1997	
Wave Race 64	Nintendo	Racing		October	
PC					
Abduction	Gametek	Adventure		November	
Albion	Blue Byte	Role Playing	B-	September	

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Product Title	Manufacturer/ Publisher	Genre	VGA Rating	EST Ship Date	SRP
Alien Trilogy	Acclaim	3D Shooter		TBD	
Assassin	WEA	N/A		September	
Baku Baku Network	Sega	Puzzle		September 5	
Body Voyage: Reproduction	WEA	Edutainment		September	
Bug!	Sega	3D Action		August 30	
Chill Manor	Simon & Schuster	Quest		October	
Circle Of Blood	Virgin	Adventure	B	September	
Close Combat	Microsoft	War/Strategy	C-	Available	
Corpse Killer	Acclaim	Shooter		TBD	
Daytona USA	Sega	Racing		October 31	
Deadly Skies	JVC	Flying/Shooter		January 1997	
Diablo	Blizzard	RPG	B+	October	
Die Hard Trilogy	Fox	Adventure/Shooter		September	
Drowned God	Inscape	Puzzle/FMV	P	October	
Elroy's Costume Closet	Headbone	Edutainment	B	September	
Emperor Of The Fading Sun	Sega	Strategy		November	
Final Doom	GT Interactive	3D Fighting/Action	A+	August	
Interstate 76	Activision	Driving/Shooting	P	September	
Jedi Knight: Dark Forces 2	LucasArts	Shooter		TBD	
Lemmings Paintball	Psygnosis	Strategy	C-	August	
Magellan	V-Tech	Edutainment		October	
Mass Destruction	BMG	3d Shooter		April 1997	
Medalworks	Sega	N/A		November	
MDK	Playmates	3D Shooter	P	December	
Mission Oose Control	WEA	N/A		October	
MotoX	WEA	Racing		TBD	
Noir	Cyberdreams	Adventure	P	October	
Outlaws	LucasArts	3D Action		TBD	
Phantasmagoria 2	Sierra On-Line	Quest	P	September	
Pie Jackers	Simon & Schuster	N/A		November	
Pinball Construction Kit	21st Century	Pinball	B-	October	
Prize Fighter	Acclaim	Fighting		TBD	
Pro Pinball	Acclaim	Pinball		TBD	
Quake	GT Ineractive	3D Shooter		TBD	
Raw Pursuit	JVC	N/A		October	
Red Baron 2	Sierra On-Lone	Flying/Combat	P	October	
Richard Scarry's The Best Rding Pro.	Simon & Schuster	Edutainment		October	
Sega Rally	Sega	Racing		December 10	
Simon the Sorcerer 2	Psygnosis	N/A		TBD	
Simpsons Cartoon Studio	Fox	Edutainment		August	
Snow Crash	Viacom	3D Quest	P	November	
Sonic CD	Sega	Side-scroller		October 15	
Sonic Schoolhouse	Sega	Edutainment		October 15	
Spaceship: Pythagoras	Simon & Schuster	N/A		October	
SSN	Simon & Schuster	N/A		November	
Star Control 3	Accolade	Role Playing	P	November	
Star Trek: Borg	Simon & Schuster	Interactive Movie		November	
Strange Place	Simon & Schuster	N/A		November	
The City Of Lost Children	Psygnosis	3D Adventure	P	November	
The Pill Book	Simon & Schuster	N/A		October	
Virtua City PD	Sega	3D Shooter		October 31	
Virtua Fighter	Sega	Fighting	P	September 5	
Voyeur 2	Phillips	Interactive Movie	B	August	
Whats My Story	Acclaim	N/A		TBD	
World Series Baseball	Sega	Baseball		August 30	
X-Men: Children of the Atom	Acclaim	Fighting		TBD	
X-Wing vs Tie Fighter	Lucas Arts	Flying/Combat	P	November	
PLAYSTATION					
Aeon Flux	Viacom	3D Shooter	P	November	
AD&D Iron & Blood	Acclaim	RPG		October 3	

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Product Title	Manufacturer/ Publisher	Genre	VGA Rating	EST Ship Date	SRP
Adidas Power Soccer	Psygnosis	Soccer	B-	September 15	
Aerial Striker	Atlus	3D Polygon Sci-Fi Shooting		October	
Alone in the Dark	THQ	3D Quest	B	August 9	
Alphastorm	Psygnosis	Flying/Shooter		September 15	
Arcade's Greatest Vol. 2	Williams	Compilation		November 15	
Area 51	Williams	Shooter		September 15	
Armed	Interplay	Strategy/"God" Game		TBD	
Athanor	Psygnosis	N/A		November 15	
Ball Blazer Champions	LucasArts	Action		November	
Batman Forever Arcade	Acclaim	Side-scroller/Fighting		September 15	
BattleSport	Acclaim	Sports/Combat		September 15	
Black Dawn	Virgin	Helicopter Combat Arcade		October 15	
Bogey: Dead 6	Sony	Flying		August 6	
Breath of Fire III	Capcom	Fighting	P	TBD	
Broken Helix	Konami	Action/Adventure		December	
Bubble Bobble	Acclaim	Puzzle		September 5	
Bubsy 3D	WEA	3D Adventure		November 19	
Buster Brothers Collection	Capcom	Puzzle		October 15	
Burning Road	Playmates			October 15	
Casper	Interplay	Adventure		September 10	
Castlevania: The Bloodletting	Konami	Action/Adventure		Spring 1997	
Chaos Control	THQ	Shooter		TBD	
Chronicles Of The Sword	Psygnosis			September 15	
City Of Lost Children	Psygnosis	3D Adventure/Quest		October 15	
Clandestiny	Virgin	Mystery Adventure		TBD	
Comman & Conquer	Virgin	Action Arcade Shooter		November 19	
Contra: Legacy Of War	Konami	Action		November	
Crash Bandicoot	Sony	3D Adventure		September 3	
Crow: City of Angels	Acclaim	3D Adventure		December 1	
Crypt Killer	Konami	Gun		Winter 1997	
Cybersled	Namco	3D Shooter		November	
Dark Forces	LucasArts	Doom Clone		November	
Dark Sun	Data East	RPG		September	
Deadly Skies	JVC	Flying/Combat		January 1997	
Death Crusader	Gametek	N/A		TBD	
Death Drome	Viacom	Action		November 18	
Death Trap Dungeon	EIDOS	Adventure		December 15	
Destruction Derby 2	Psygnosis	Racing	P	October 15	
Die Hard Trilogy	20th Century Fox	3D Adventure/Shooter	A-	September	
Disruptor	Interplay	3D Shooter		October 15	
Discworld 2	Psygnosis	Quest		November 15	
Doom	Williams	3D Adventure		November	
DragonHeart	Acclaim	Fighting/Adventure		September 26	
Dream Knight	Jaleco	N/A		November	
Dream Team B-Ball	EIDOS	Basketball		August 12	
Duckman: The Legend Of The Fall	Playmates	Quest		January 1997	
Epidemic	Sony	N/A		October 1	
Extreme Pinball	Electronic Arts	Pinball	C+	Available	
Fade To Black	EA	3D Adventure	P	October	
Fatal Fury	Sony	Fighting		December 5	
Final Doom	Williams	3D Shooter		December 15	
Floating Runner	THQ	Platform/Action/Adventure		October 15	
Formula 1	Psygnosis	Racing	P	November 15	
Formula 1: Post Season	Psygnosis	Racing		February 1997	
Fox Hunt	Capcom	Interactive Movie		October 15	
Ghost In The Shell	THQ	Platform/Action		September 15	
Golf - The Final Round	Konami	Golf		August	
Grand Slam '97	Virgin	Baseball		October 15	
Grid Runner	Virgin	Action Arcade		October 1	
Heart of Darkness	Virgin	Action Adventure		October	
Herc's Adventures	LucasArts	Action Adventure		November	

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Product Title	Manufacturer/ Publisher	Genre	VGA Rating	EST Ship Date	SRP
High Velocity	Atlus	Racing	C+	September	
Impact Racing	JVC	Racing		March 1997	
Incredible Hulk	EIDOS	3D Adventure		November 15	
Int'l Track & Field	Konani	Sports	B-	August	
Island of Dr. Moreau	Psygnosis	Interactive Movie		January 1997	
Jajamaru	Jaleco	N/A		September	
Jet Moto	Sony	Racing		November 15	
Jumping Flash 2	Sony	3D Adventure		August 20	
Jupiter Strike	Acclaim	Shooter		December	
Killing Time	Acclaim	3D Shooter		September 15	
King Of Fighters	Sony	Fighting		September 17	
King's Field 2	ASCII Entertainment	Role Playing	P	November	
Kumite: The Fighters Edge	Konami			December	
Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny	Virgin	Adventure/Role-play		TBD	
Legends Football 97	WEA	Football		November 12	
Lemmings	Sony	Puzzle		November	
Lethal Enforcers 1 & 2	Konami	Gun		December	
Lost Vikings II	Interplay	Adventure		November 23	
Lomax in Lemmingland	Psygnosis	Side-scroller		October 15	
Machinehead	EIDOS	N/A		October 15	
Madden '97	EA	Football	P	November	
Magic: The Gathering	Acclaim	Puzzle		December 1	
Magzone	Trimark	N/A		TBD	
Major Damage	Capcom	Action Adventure		TBD	
Marvel Super Heroes	Capcom	Fighting		TBD	
Mega Man 8	Capcom	Side-scroller		TBD 1997	
Megami Tensei	Atlus	Action/RPG		December	
MK Trilogy	Williams	Fighting		October 15	
MLB Pennant Race	Sony	N/A		August 20	
Monster Truck Rally	Psygnosis	Racing		October 15	
Mortal Kombat II	Acclaim	Fighting		TBD	
Museum Vol. 2	Namco	Compilation		October 15	
MVP College Football	Data East	Football		Septmber	
Myst	Psygnosis	N/A		November 15	
Nanotek Warrior	Virgin	Action Arcade/Shooter		November 15	
Namco Museum Vol. 1	Namco	Various Titles	B-	August 6	
NBA Hangtime	Williams	Basketball		November 15	
NBA In The Zone 2	Konami	Basketball		November	
NBA Jam Extreme	Acclaim	Basketball		November 1	
NFL Full Contat Football	Konami	Football		TBD	
NFL GameDay 97	Sony	Football		November 15	
NFL Q Back Club 97	Acclaim	Football		August 29	
NHL Face Off 97	Sony	Hockey		November 10	
Oblivion	EIDOS	N/A		December 15	
Obsidian	Rocket Science	N/A		TBD	
Open Ice Hockey	Williams	Hockey		November 15	
Pitball	WEA	N/A		October 29	
Pro Pinball	Acclaim	Pinball		TBD	
Pro Pinball	Interplay	Pinball		October 1	
Project Overkill	Konami	Action/Adventure		September	
Quarantine	Gametek	3D Shooter		TBD	
Rally Cross	Sony	Racing		December 5	
Raw Pursuit	JVC	N/A		February 1997	
RazorWing	Sony	Flying		TBD	
Rebel Assault II	LucasArts	Action/Adventure		November	
Red Asphalt	Interplay	Racing		February 15, 1997	
Reloaded	Interplay	Shooter		December 1	
Ridge Racer Revolution	Namco	Racing		September 15	
Road Rage	Konami	Driving		January 1997	
Robotron	Williams	N/A		November 15	
Rodney Matthews	Psygnosis	N/A		January 1997	

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Pg. 13

Product Title	Manufacturer/ Publisher	Genre	VGA Rating	EST Ship Date	SRP
Samurai Shodown III	Sony	Fighting		October 8	
Sentient	Pyygnosis	N/A		October 15	
Shadoan	ReadySoft	N/A		September	
Slam Scape	Virgin	Action		September	
Sol Power	Atlus	N/A		September	
Soul Edge	Namco	Fighting		October 15	
Soviet Strike	EA	Playing/Shooting	P	October	
Space Hulk	EA	3D Shooter/Strategy	C-	August	
Space Jam	Acclaim	N/A		November 15	
Spawn	Sony	Fighting/Side-scroller		November 15	
Spider	BMG	Action/Adventure		February 1997	
Spot Goes To Hollywood	Virgin	Arcade Style		October 1	
Star Fighter	Acclaim	Flying/Shooter		August 29	
Star Gladiator	Capcom	Fighting	B	November	
Street Fighter Alpha 2	Capcom	Fighting	A-	October 21	
Strike Point	American Technos	N/A		May	
Suikoden	Konami	RPG		Winter1997	
Super Kick Boxer	THQ	Fighting		October 15	
Super Motocross	Acclaim	Racing		October 15	
Super Puzzle Fighter	Capcom	Puzzle		January 1997	
Swagman	EIDOS	N/A		November	
Syndicate Wars	Electronic Arts	Strategy/Shooter		TBD	
Tekken 2	Namco	Fighting	A	August 27	
Tempest 2000	Interplay	Shooter		October	
Tempest X	Interplay	Shooter		December 1	
Tenka	Psygnosis	3D Shooter		March 1997	
Tetris Plus	Jaleco	Puzzle		September	
The Divide: Enemies Within	Viacom	Action/Adventure		November 4	
The Fallen	Psygnosis	N/A		January 1997	
The 11th Hour	Virgin	Interactive Drama		TBD	
The Space Bar	Rocket Science	N/A		TBD	
Tobal No. 1	Sony	N/A		November 15	
Tomb Raider	EIDOS	3D Shooter		November	
Twisted Metal 2	Sony	3D Shooter		October 22	
Virtual Pool	Interplay	Pool		TBD	
VMX Racing	Playmates	Racing		December 3	
VR Baseball	Interplay	Baseball		TBD	
VR Golf	Interplay	Golf		October 15	
VR Pool	Interplay	Pool		November 15	
VR Pro Pinball	Interplay	Pinball		October 15	
War Gods	Williams	Fighting		February 1997	
WC Racing: Track Attack PS	Spectrum Holobyte	Racing		TBD	
WC Racing: Vette	Spectrum Holobyte	Racing		TBD	
Werewolf: The Apocalypse	Capcom	RPG		March 1997	
WipeOut XL	Psygnosis	Racing		October 15	
Wing Commander 3	Electronic Arts	Interactive Movie/Flying	B-	March 1997	
WWF Arcade	Acclaim	Wrestling		November 15	
X-Men: Children/Atom	Acclaim	Fighting		September 26	
2Xtreme	Sony	Sports		October 15	
3-Decathlon	Virgin	Sports/Arcade		November	
SATURN					
AD&D Iron & Blood	Acclaim	RPG		September 15	
Alien Trilogy	Acclaim	3D Shooter		August 8	
Alone In The Dark	THQ	3D Quest		August 6	
Area 51	Williams	Shooter		September 15	
Armed	Interplay	Adventure		November 1	
Assault Rigs	Sega	Combat/Driving		December 10	
Batman Forever Arcade	Acclaim	Side-scroller/Fighting		September 15	
Battle Monsters	Acclaim	Fighting		August 22	
BattleSport	Acclaim	Sports/Combat		September 15	

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Product Title	Manufacturer/ Publisher	Genre	VGA Rating	EST Ship Date	SRP
BioHazard Five	Acclaim	N/A		TBD	
Black Dawn	Virgin	Helicopter Combat/Arcade		October 29	
Blazing Heroes	Sega	N/A		October 8	
Bubble Bobble	Acclaim	N/A		September 5	
Bubsy 3D	WEA	3D Adventure		November 26	
Bug Too!	Sega	3D Adventure		November 21	
Buster Brothers Collection	Capcom	Puzzle		October 30	
Casper	Interplay	Adventure		September 17	
Command & Conquer	Virgin	Combat Strategy		October 29	
Contra: Legacy Of War	Konami	Action/Adventure		December	
Crime Wave	EIDOS	Racing/Shooter		September 30	
Crow: City Of Angels	Acclaim	3D Adventure		December 1	
Crypt Killer	Konami	Gun		Winter 1997	
Cybersled	Namco	3D Shooter		TBD	
Dark Savior	Sega	N/A		November	
Daytona Champ Edition	Sega	Racing		November 26	
Deadly Skies	JVC	Flying/Shooter		March 1997	
Decathlete	Sega	Various Sports		July	
Descent	Interplay	3D Shooter	B+	TBD	
Destruction Derby	Psygnosis/Sega	Racing		August 13	
Die Hard Trilogy	20th Century Fox	3D Adventure/Shooter		September	
Discworld	Psygnosis/Sega	Quest		TBD	
Dragon Force	Working Design	Strategy/RPG		September	
DragonHeart	Acclaim	Side-scroller		September 26	
Dream Knight	Jaleco	N/A		November	
Dream Team B-Ball	EIDOS	Basketball		August 12	
Fighting Vipers	Sega	Fighting	P	October 15	
Fox Hunt	Capcom	Interactive Movie		October 15	
Frankenstein	Interplay	Adventure		October 15	
Grand Slam '97	Virgin	Baseball		October 15	
Grid Runner	Virgin	Action arcade		October 1	
GT Basketball	Gametek	Basketball		November	
Heart Of Darkness	Sega	Side-scroller	P	November	
Herc's Adventures	Sega	N/A		November	
Hyper 3D Pinball	Virgin	Arcade		October 15	
Impact Racing	JVC	Racing/Shooter		March 1997	
Incredible Hulk	EIDOS	3D Adventure		November 15	
Iron Man	Acclaim	N/A		August 22	
Iron Rain	Sega	N/A		Delayed	
Jajamaru	Jaleco	Action		September	
Killing Time	Acclaim	3D Adventure		September 15	
Krazy Ivan	Sega	Flying/Shooting		September 26	
Kumite: The Fighter Edge	Konami			January 1997	
Legends Football '97	WEA	Football		November 26	
Lemmings 3D	Psygnosis/Sega	Puzzle		TBD	
Loaded	Interplay	Action		September 23	
Lost Vikings II	Interplay	Adventure		December 1	
Machine Head	EIDOS	N/A		October 15	
Magic: The Gathering	Acclaim	Strategy		December 1	
Major Damage	Capcom	Side-scroller	P	TBD	
Marvel Super Heroes	Capcom	Fighting		TBD	
Mass Destruction	BMG	3D Shooter		April 1997	
Mega Man 8	Capcom	Side-scroller		TBD 1997	
Micropose Football	Sega	Football		TBD	
Mortal Kombat 1&2	Acclaim	Fighting		October 15	
Mr. Bones	Sega	Adventure		September 24	
MVP College Football	Data East	Football		September	
NBA Jam Extreme	Acclaim	Basketball		November 1	
NFL '97	Sega	Football		November 19	
NFL Full Contact Football	Konami	Football		TBD	
NFL QB Club '97	Acclaim	Football		August 22	

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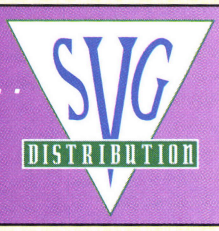

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Product Title	Manufacturer/ Publisher	Genre	VGA Rating	EST Ship Date	SRP
Nights	Sega	Adventure	A	August 20	
Olympic Soccer	EIDOS	Soccer		August 6	
Powerslave	Playmates	3D Shooter		November 15	
Prize Fighter	Acclaim	Fighting		TBD	
Project Overkill	Konami	Action/Adventure		January 1997	
Pro Pinball	Acclaim	Pinball		TBD	
Pro Pinball	Interplay	Pinball		October 24	
Raw Pursuit	JVC	N/A		February 1997	
Return Fire	Williams	Strategy/Combat		September 15	
Sacred Pools	Sega	Interactive Movie		November	
Shandoan	ReadySoft	N/A		September	
Shining Wisdom	Working Designs	RPG		TBD	
Sonic X-Treme	Sega	3D Adventure		November 7	
Space Jam	Acclaim	N/A		November 15	
Spike	Sega	N/A		January 1997	
Spot Goes To Hollywod	Virgin	Side-scroller		October 1	
Star Fighter	Acclaim	N/A		August 15	
St. Fighter Alpha 2	Capcom	Fighting		October 21	
Super Motocross	Acclaim	Racing		October 15	
Super Puzzle Fighter	Capcom	Puzzle		January 1997	
Supreme Warrior	Acclaim	Fighting		TBD	
Swagman	EIDOS	N/A		November 15	
Tempest 2000	Interplay	Shooter		November 19	
Tempest X	Interplay	Shoter		November 15	
Tetris Plus	Jaleco	Puzzle		September	
The Space Bar	Rocket Science	Action/Mystery	P	TBD	
Three Dirty Dwarves	Sega	N/A		October	
Tomb Raider	EIDOS	3D Adventure		November	
Varuna's Forces	JVC	N/A		February 1997	
VF Kids	Sega	Fighting		August 27	
Virtual On	Sega	3D Shooter		November 12	
VR Baseball	Interplay	Baseball		TBD	
VR Golf	Interplay	Golf		November 19	
VR Pool	Interplay	Pool		February 15, 1997	
VR Pro Pinball	Interplay	Pinball		October 15	
VR Soccer	Interplay	Soccer		November 15	
Werewolf: The Apocalypse	Capcom	N/A		March 15, 1997	
WipeOut	Psygnosis/Sega	Racing		TBD	
World Wide Soccer '97	Sega	Soccer		October 29	
World Series Baseball II	Sega	Baseball		September 17	
WWF: In Your House	Acclaim	N/A		November 15	
3-Decathalon	Virgin	Sports		November	
SNES					
Arcade Classic	Williams	Compilation		September 15	
Breath of Fire 2	Capcom	N/A		September 9	
Brunswick: Tournament Of Champs	THQ	Bowling		May 1997	
College Football	THQ	Football		October 15	
Maui Mallard	Disney	Side-scroller		November 11	
Mr. Do!	THQ	Arcade Classic		September 15	
Ms. Pac Man	Williams	Arcade classic		September 15	
MSH War of Gems	Capcom	N/A		November 20	
NBA Hangtime	Williams	Basketball		November 15	
NHL '97	THQ	Hockey		October 15	
PGA European	THQ	Golf		September 15	
Pinocchio	Disney	Side-scroller		November 11	
Sim City 2000	THQ	Strategy		October 15	
Street Fighter Alpha 2	Capcom	Fighting		October 14	
Toy Story	Disney	Side-scroller		October 14	
Ultimate MK3	Williams	Fighting		October 15	
Urban Strike	THQ	Action/Shooter		October	

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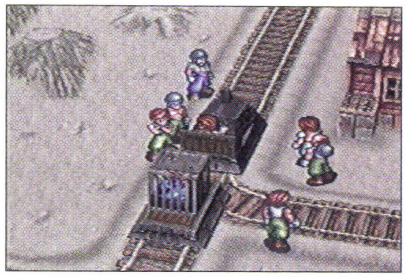
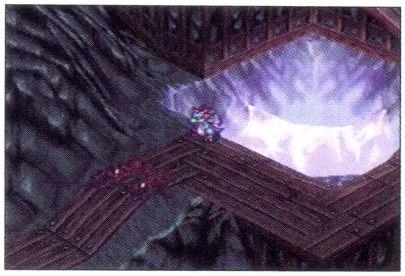
PREVIEWS

Breath of Fire 3

Platform: PlayStation
Genre: RPG
Size: CD
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Available: March '97

Written by: Ed Lewis





There have been few RPGs available for the PlayStation - it's such a shame. The PlayStation should have tons of RPGs available for it... there should be a glut of them. As it is, we generally have to rely on hand-me-downs from the Japanese parent companies. Publishers in a land where RPGs are given their due respect.

Breath of Fire 3 is one of these games. It's a traditional Japanese game (i.e.. cute as all heck) which is not exactly the best thing, but it should do for now. The graphics are wonderfully 3D, which looks outstanding when you move around, but the characters are 2D - who's gonna' notice.

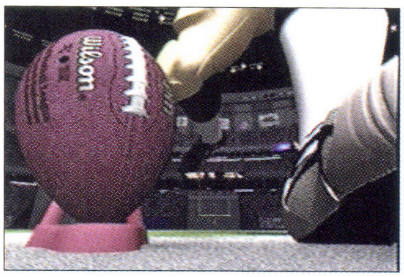
The storyline is this: Gamers play as a baby dragon who has just been released from a crystal. After frying the guys that save them (don't worry, it's still cute), players try to go off into the world to fight and burn up the humans all along the way. And, I'm fairly certain of this, the whole thing will be cute as the dickens!

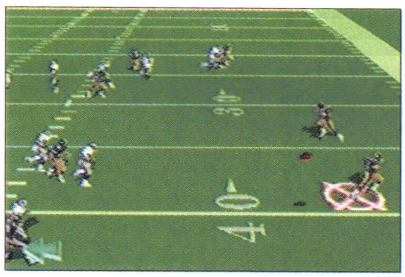
Ahh, if only we had some American programmers designing some hip new RPG while listening to the latest Nine Inch Nails release. Oh well, Breath of Fire 3 looks good enough to suck in all the RPGamers who are willing to forgive the cute graphics - and Capcom's marketing and P.R. intend to let them know all about it.

Madden '97

Platform: PlayStation
Genre: Sports
Size: CD
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Sports
Available: November

Written by: Greg Angelo





The much-delayed Madden title for the next generation systems, embraced by consumer pubs before its projected original release date over two years ago, finally looks to be nearing completion and football fans will not be disappointed.

After a flashy and rather excessively extravagant introduction, players are given carte blanche access to their football fantasies: Electronic Arts has taken pains to make Madden '97 the most thorough and comprehensive football title to date.

Featuring the same solid gameplay that has made the game a runaway blockbuster on every 16-bit console (and the 3DO), the PlayStation port will offer gamers the opportunity to play in any of 30 real 3D-rendered NFL stadiums and control their favorite players. Motion-capture technology, special hidden teams within the game, and, of course, the running colorful commentary of John Madden, Pat Summerall, and James Brown give the game a true-to-television feel.

Despite the onslaught of sports titles and heavy competition EA is facing, Madden is as close to a sure thing as there is in this industry. Expect to see heavy marketing and P.R. for this game when EA Sports prepares to release Madden '97 this winter.

Turok

Platform: Nintendo 64
Genre: 3D Shooter
Size: Cartridge
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Iguana
Available: November 22

Written by: Ed Lewis

Alas, about half of the scheduled titles for the launch of the N64 have been pushed back to 1997. It seems that many Dream Team members are having a problem with the logistics of the new hardware.

This is good news for Acclaim, as now, *Turok* (also a 3D shooter) will avoid being overshadowed by the delayed release of *Doom 64*. But a lack of competition alone won't be enough, *Turok* needs to have some substance and from the looks of things, it's coming along nicely.

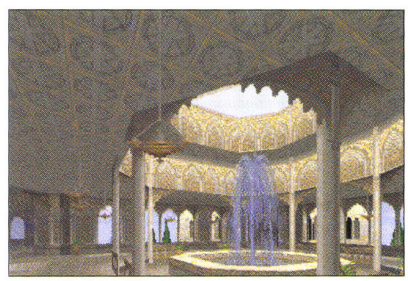
Turok uses all the advantages of the N64 to full effect with smooth graphics and control, but the best part about this title are the weapons. There are FOURTEEN to choose from! They range from a knife to a handheld nuclear reactor. You fire this thing and it pretty much eliminates all signs of life in a mile radius (except your own, of course, because you're *Turok*). All of this makes it more fun to obliterate everything around you. Heck, blow 'em up even AFTER they're dead, just to see the bodies fly. Sadly, the bodies don't fall apart (a la *Quake*), but there's plenty of blood to go around. There will be much carnage in the nrear future.

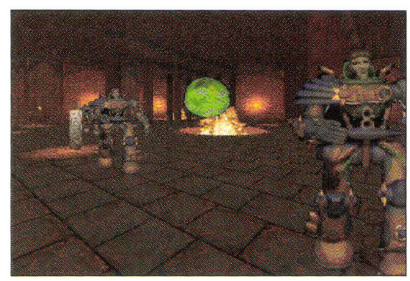
Acclaim isn't hoping to make a lot of money from this title immediately. What they truly want is to win back the respect they had previously in the industry, and this property is a solid move in that direction.

Realms of the Haunting

Platform: PC/MAC
Genre: 3D Quest
Size: CD
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Interplay
Available: 4th Quarter

Written by: Chris Hudak





Interplay's been getting seriously into the 3D thing for a while now, and with the possible exception of one Star Trek SNES title (which I don't think I'll ever fully forgive them for) it's been some impressive stuff. Coming up in the fourth quarter of 1996 is *Realms of the Haunting*, a rather spooky game combining first-person navigation and environments (of the corridor-crawler variety) and third-person cinematic sequences with a weird and compelling storyline based on various visions of the Apocalypse.

The important thing is that this game is creepy. Little touches of weirdness abound; at one point during the demo – hope I'm not giving away any plot points here, but that's what the Interplay demo people get for being vague – I found myself wandering in a weirdly Escher-esque mass of steps, platforms and bridges, like something out of *House of Stairs*. No enemies; no objects; just stairs, everywhere, going nowhere, surrounded by columns and a sort of Magritte sky; the solution of how to escape, when I finally figured it out, was like looking at two silhouetted faces which suddenly resolve themselves into the form of a candlestick. With intriguing gameplay and, hopefully, creative marketing, *Realms of the Haunting* will be one to watch.

PREVIEWS

Drowned God: Conspiracy of the Ages

Platform: PC/Mac
Genre: Puzzle/FMV
Size: CD
Publisher: Inscape
Developer: Epic Multimedia Group
Available: 4th Quarter

Written by:Chris Hudak

What if every bonko, mumbling conspiracy-theory nut you can think of turned out to have part – albeit a small part – of some huge, ghastly truth? This is the question posed by *Drowned God: Conspiracy of the Ages*, a role-playing adventure game with rich SGI-rendered environments, motion-capture characters and game secrets linked by Tarot/numerology-encrypted puzzles.

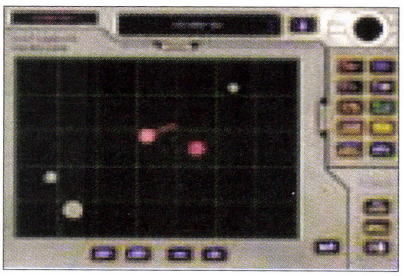
Players discover their 'past incarnations' through numerological formulae and discover that, once upon an age, they played a crucial role in what we call history. Thus, they are chosen to confront an alien race called The Greys – those pale-skinned, big-eyed, silent extraterrestrials so prominently featured in Whitley Streiber novels and random issues of The Enquirer – who have intentionally and with malice aforethought warped the destiny of the human race for their own unknowable ends.

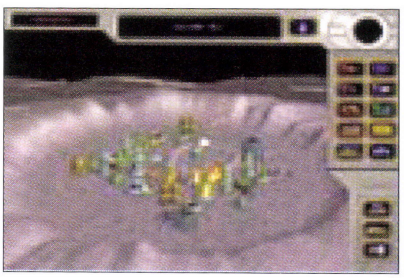
Drowned God has it all: Atlantis, The Bermuda Triangle, Roswell, The Illuminati, JFK, Area 51, the lost work of Da Vinci, the Cargo Cults, and possibly the most bizarre take on Noah's Ark to date. Sound heavy? It is. It is extremely deep, and well-researched, with many puzzles incorporating what contemporary historians believe to be the 'rules' of certain ancient games found in Roman, Mayan and Egyptian ruins. *Drowned God* reminds us of how much we take as fact and how quickly the Babel tower of history falls when we remove certain stones.

Fragile Allegiance

Platform: PC
Genre: Strategy
Size: CD
Publisher: Interplay Productions
Developer: Gremlin
Available: 4th Quarter

Written by: Chris Hudak





Fragile Allegiance may just be the space empire-builder that brings the casual and hard-core gamers together. Seems the Tetracorp group has opened up a new sector of space to free-for-all planetoid colonization. Consequently, it also seems that some aliens invited themselves to the immediate sector and, uh, you can guess most of the rest.

Nothing astoundingly new here, but for an empire-builder, *Fragile Allegiance* is very slick, with a clean, button-based interface. It's a joy to look at: Displays are tight with integrated control panels instead of the standard mushrooming mass of overlapping windows; individual colonies are displayed as clusters of buildings usually grouped together in the depression of a crater, rather than the typical iconic representations of industrial strength, military presence, etc. Up to four networked players (competing with each other as well as with six NPC alien races) may customize the level of resource manipulation required, diving headfirst into serious micro-/macro-management or simply delegating to the AI routines anything heavier than building buildings and moving ships.

Combat, real-time but non-arcade in nature, is conducted between preassigned fleets, in fleet-to-ground actions or in ballistic missile attacks from one planetoid to another. Again, nothing mind-bendingly new, but Interplay has a short history of imparting something like elegance to a game even if it's not the first of its type. *Fragile Allegiance* will be worth keeping an eye on.

PREVIEWS

Z

Platform: PC
Genre: Strategy
Size: CD
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Developer: N/A
Available: N/A

Written by: Chris Hudak

Z is the alcoholic, head-banging, inbred cousin of *Command & Conquer*. The game's opening movie tells the tale of two screw-up robot supply ship pilots, late (yet again) for their scheduled delivery to a combat zone, into which the player is unceremoniously dumped.

Territory, acquired via a Capture The Flag scheme, is divided into 'grids'. 'Construction' as such does not occur, but structures such as robot factories and radar sites may be captured along with chunks of territory. Although the game is largely tactical in scale, these neutral pieces of territory add a strategic element, encouraging players to scramble for position and acquisition before the serious fighting begins.

Neato extras include the ability to snipe enemy troops right out of their vehicles (allowing the subsequent capture of said vehicles) and the ability to blast one's way through obstructive terrain which may be getting in the way. As the battle progresses, robotic grunts in the field make the expected reports ("Let's get 'em!"), as well as the less-expected requests for support ("For Christ's sake, do something!"), and the rather still less-expected direct verbal abuse ("Moron!") as your beleaguered installations get reduced to their component molecules.

Z is a real-time strategy game for the gamer who is not terribly serious – and not overly sensitive to verbal abuse.

Alien Incident

Platform: PC CD
Genre: Quest
Size: CD
Publisher: Gametek
Developer: Gametek
Available: October

Written by: Ed Lewis

One of my favorite games of all time was Day of the Tentacle, LucasArts' sequel to Maniac Mansion. It was an adventure game with a great sense of humor.

Alien Incident seems to be following in LucasArts' footsteps. In the intro, you meet Benjamin Richards and his uncle (who I shall call Uncle from now on). Uncle built a device to do...something ("What does your new invention do, uncle?" "I don't know").

Well, the invention creates a wormhole in space. A large spaceship - manned by a bunch of dim-witted aliens that look like the Pillsbury Dough Boy - accidentally flies through it and it needs to get back. So they send down a few of the dough boys to abduct Uncle with what looks to be a purple pencil (our SVGA monitor broke down today, OK?). Fortunately, they missed Benjamin.

The game then follows Benjamin as he tries to rescue Uncle and get the aliens to go back where they came from.

This game was designed for "beginning adventurers". Kind of a kiddie pool for the adventurously challenged to test their water wings in. It's a noble idea. Experienced gamers will be put off by the lack of difficulty, but it's a fun game regardless. If Gametek puts enough marketing behind this, it should do good, not great, business.

Video & Multimedia Show Calendar

September

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7-9 FOCUS ON VIDEO '96
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416.531.2121

8-10 Winter ECTS
London, England
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9-12 Electronic Commerce World '96
Greater Columbus Con. Center
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9-12 Internet Commerce Expo
Anaheim Convention Center
617.440.2743

17-19 IMA Expo '96
New York, New York
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19-21 E3/Tokyo
Tokyo, Japan
617.534.1202

24-29 LIVE '96: The Consumer Electronics Show
Earls Court, London
0181.742.2828

October

1-3 East Coast Video Show
Atlantic City, NJ
203.256.4700

8-10 CES Mexico '96
Mexico City, Mexico
703-907-7600

November

18-22 Comdex/Fall '96
Las Vegas, Navada
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CONSUMER PUBLICATIONS

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Product Title	Manufacturer	Platform	Magazine	Issue	Rating
Bogey Dead 6	Sony	PlayStation	P.S.X.	Aug/Sept.	B-
Frank Thomas Big Hurt	Acclaim	PlayStation	Game Players	September	C-
Gungriffon	Sega	Saturn	VideoGames	September	A-
Lobo	Ocean	Genesis	Electronic Gaming Mon.	September	F
Megapak 5	MegaMedia	PC	Computer Player	August	B
Olympic Soccer	U.S. Gold	PlayStation	PSExtreme	August	C
Strife	Velocity	PC	PC Gamer	August	B-
Tecmo World Golf	Tecmo	PlayStation	PSExtreme	August	C-
Tekken 2	Namco	PlayStation	Game Players	September	A-
Tetris Attack	Nintendo	SNES	Electronic Gaming Mon.	September	B

Products and magazines featured are selected by the Publisher.

VGA Stock Report

Stock updates of the top videogame industry manufacturers and retailers

Company	Symbol	Closing Price 8/9/96	Closing Price 8/15/96	Annual High	Annual Low
3DO	THDO	7.88	8.00	8.25	7.88
Acclaim	AKLM	7.75	8.50	9.13	7.75
Activision	ATVI	12.75	12.75	12.75	12.50
Apple Computer	AAPL	23.13	22.63	23.13	22.38
Atari	ATC	5.19	5.19	5.19	0.00
Creative Prog. & Tech. Ventures	CPTV	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.00
Disney	DIS	57.13	57.88	58.13	57.13
Electronic Arts	ERTS	30.50	31.69	31.88	30.50
Game Tek	GAME	1.88	2.00	2.00	0.00
GT Interactive	GTIS	23.00	21.50	23.00	21.50
Matsushita	MC	173.38	177.00	179.00	173.38
Microsoft	MSFT	124.50	124.88	125.25	124.38
Sony Corp.	SNE	63.88	64.38	64.50	63.38
Spectrum Holobyte	SBYT	5.81	5.25	5.81	5.25
Symantec	SYMC	11.38	10.63	11.38	10.63
T-HQ	TOYH	5.38	5.00	5.38	5.00
Time Warner	TWX	35.38	34.50	35.38	34.50
ThrustMaster	TMSR	4.75	4.63	4.88	4.50
Viacom	VIA	34.00	32.88	34.00	32.88
Ames Stores	AMES	2.75	2.88	2.94	2.63
Bradlees	BLE	1.25	1.25	1.25	0.00
Circuit City	CC	31.25	31.00	31.25	30.75
Egg Head	EGGS	7.06	7.00	7.13	7.00
Good Guys	GGUY	9.00	8.75	9.00	8.75
Hills Stores	HDS	6.88	7.38	7.50	6.88
K Mart	KM	10.38	10.88	10.88	10.38
Staples	SPLS	19.00	18.25	19.00	18.13
Tops Appliance	TOPS	1.56	1.38	1.56	1.13
Toys R Us	TOY	26.75	29.00	29.00	26.75

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- ❑ Discount Store
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- ❑ Office Superstore
- ❑ Department/Mass Merchandiser

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- ❑ Software Distributor
- ❑ Manufacturers Representative
- ❑ Media
- ❑ Finance/Investments
- ❑ Research/Analyst
- ❑ Educational/Library
- ❑ Consultant
- ❑ Other _____

2. Which title best describes your job function?
- ❑ Executive Management/Purchasing
- ❑ Marketing/PR/Advertising
- ❑ Research & Development
- ❑ Sales
- ❑ Merchandising
- ❑ Store/Department Manager
- ❑ Assistant Manager
- ❑ Other _____

3. Which best describes your business location?
- ❑ Corporate Headquarters
- ❑ Regional/District Site/Office Chain
- ❑ Local Retail Site
- ❑ Other _____

4. Total number of retail locations:
- ❑ None
- ❑ 1
- ❑ 2-4
- ❑ 5-9
- ❑ 10-24
- ❑ 25-49
- ❑ 50-99
- ❑ 100 or more

5. Number of employees:
- ❑ 1-9
- ❑ 10-19
- ❑ 20-49
- ❑ 50-54
- ❑ 55-99
- ❑ 100-249
- ❑ 250-499
- ❑ 500 or more

6. Do you personally influence or authorize electronic entertainment product purchases for your company?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

7. If yes, what do you base your decision on?
- ❑ Advertising (Trade/Consumer)
- ❑ Advice from Reps/Distributors
- ❑ Trade/Consumer Magazine Articles
- ❑ Sales Person Requests
- ❑ Other _____

8. Which of the following does your company offer?

A. Software	B. Hardware
❑ SNES	❑ SNES
❑ Nintendo 64	❑ Nintendo 64
❑ Genesis	❑ Genesis
❑ Sega CD	❑ Sega CD
❑ 32X	❑ 32X
❑ Saturn	❑ Saturn
❑ PlayStation	❑ PlayStation
❑ Jaguar/Jag CD	❑ Jaguar/Jag CD
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❑ PC-CD	❑ PC-CD
❑ Imported	❑ Imported
❑ Other _____	❑ Other _____

C. Other
- ❑ Video Tapes
- ❑ DVD
- ❑ Candy
- ❑ Trading Cards
- ❑ Laser Discs
- ❑ Audio CD's/ Records
- ❑ Magazines/Comics
- ❑ Other _____

9. Please indicate your company's annual gross sales volume:
- ❑ Under $100,000
- ❑ $100,000 - $249,999
- ❑ $250,000 - $499,999
- ❑ $500,000 - $999,999
- ❑ $1,000,000 - $4,999,999
- ❑ Over $5,000,000

10. Do you have access to the Internet in your work?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

11. At what modem/connection speed?
- ❑ 9600+
- ❑ 14.4+
- ❑ 28.8+
- ❑ ISDN
- ❑ T-1
- ❑ T-3

12. Which of the following On-line services are you a member of?
- ❑ AOL
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- ❑ Genie
- ❑ Prodigy
- ❑ Delphi
- ❑ Netcom
- ❑ Microsoft Network
- ❑ Other _____

13. Which of the following publications do you personally receive?

A. Trade	B. Consumer
❑ Computer Ent. News	❑ Computer Player
❑ Computer Retail News	❑ Dimension 3
❑ Computer Retail Wkly.	❑ Edge
❑ Computer Trade Wkly.	❑ EGM/EGM2
❑ Daily Variety	❑ Flux
❑ Dealerscope Mer.	❑ Fusion
❑ Multimedia Mer.	❑ Game Fan
❑ Playthings	❑ Game Imformer
❑ Toy Book	❑ Game Players
❑ TWICE	❑ Game Pro
❑ Variety	❑ Next Generation
❑ Video Business	❑ Nintendo Power
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OFFICIAL VGA/NPD TRSTS REPORT

Top 25 Best Selling Video Game Titles

Ranked On Units Sold "July, 1996"

Last Month	Rank	Title	Platform	Publisher	Average Retail Price
2	1	Ken Griffey Junior's Winning Run	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$60
1	2	Super Mario RPG: Legend of the 7 Stars	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$64
3	3	Resident Evil	Sony Playstation	Capcom	$56
6	4	Triple Play '97	Sony Playstation	Electronic Arts	$50
10	5	Super Mario Kart	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$33
4	6	Donkey Kong Country 2	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$57
8	7	Need for Speed	Sony Playstation	Electronic Arts	$49
20	8	Ms. Pacman	Genesis	Williams Entertainment	$17
**	9	Killer Instinct	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$34
7	10	Battle Arena Toshinden 2	Sony Playstation	Playmates Interactive	$47
**	11	International Track & Field	Sony Playstation	Konami	$45
21	12	NBA Jam Tournament Edition	Super Nintendo	Acclaim Entertainment	$27
13	13	Ultimate MK3	Saturn	Williams Entertainment	$56
**	14	Kirby's Dream Course	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$17
12	15	Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$58
5	16	NBA Shootout	Sony Playstation	Sony Computer Ent.	$52
**	17	Olympic Summer Games	Sony Playstation	EIDOS	$59
15	18	Taz 2: Escape from Mars	Genesis	Sega of America	$20
11	19	NFL GameDay	Sony Playstation	Sony Computer Ent.	$53
**	20	Batman Forever	Super Nintendo	Acclaim Entertainment	$29
23	21	X-Men 2	Genesis	Sega of America	$22
9	22	NBA Live '96	Sony Playstation	Electronic Arts	$51
14	23	Tekken	Sony Playstation	Namco	$48
**	24	NBA Jam Tournament Edition	Genesis	Acclaim Entertainment	$27
17	25	Twisted Metal	Sony Playstation	Sony Computer Ent.	$52

**Not in Top 25 Last Month

Source: The NPD TRSTS Video Game Tracking Service - 9,405 outlets across the U.S.
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THE NPD GROUP, INC.
CUSTOM & SYNDICATED RESEARCH

Top 10 Sports Titles (Video Games/PC Software)

Ranked On Unit Sales, "June, 1996"

Rank	Publisher	Title	Platform	Average Price
1	Nintendo	Ken Griffey Junior's Winning Runsuper	Nintendo	$64
2	Sony Computer Ent.	NBA Shootout	Playstation	$52
3	Electronic Arts	Triple Play '97	Playstation	$55
4	Electronic Arts	NBA Live '96	Playstation	$50
5	Sony Computer Ent.	NFL Gameday	Playstation	$53
6	Electronic Arts	NBA Live '96	Super Nintendo	$56
7	Electronic Arts	NBA Live '96 (CD DOS)	IBM	$43
8	Acclaim Entertainment	"Frank Thomas ""Big Hurt"" Baseball"	Super Nintendo	$35
9	Acclaim Entertainment	"Frank Thomas ""Big Hurt"" Baseball"	Playstation	$47
10	Sega of America	NBA Action	Saturn	$60

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Top 10 Best Selling Video Game Titles

Based On Items Introduced In 1996 Only

Ranked On Units "July, 1996"

Rank	Title	Platform	Publisher	Average Retail Price
1	Ken Griffey Junior's Winning Run	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$60
2	Super Mario RPG: Legend of the 7 Stars	Super Nintendo	Nintendo	$64
3	Resident Evil	Sony Playstation	Capcom	$56
4	Triple Play '97	Sony Playstation	Electronic Arts	$49
5	Need for Speed	Sony Playstation	Electronic Arts	$49
6	Battle Arena Toshinden 2	Sony Playstation	Playmates Interactive	$47
7	International Track & Field	Sony Playstation	Konami	$45
8	Ultimate MK3	Saturn	Williams Entertainment	$56
9	NBA Shootout	Sony Playstation	Sony Computer Ent.	$52
10	Olympic Summer Games	Sony Playstation	EIDOS	$59

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Top 15 Video Game Software* Suppliers

Rank	Supplier	Annual 1995 Units Sold	Annual 1995 Unit Share	Jan-June 1996 Units Sold	Jan-June 1996 Unit Share
1	Nintendo	6.4	21.0%	2.0	20.1%
2	Sega	4.5	14.7	1.6	16.2
3	Acclaim (Corporate)	3.8	12.6	1.4	13.9
4	Electronic Arts (Corporate)	3.6	11.6	1.0	10.2
5	Williams Entertainment	2.0	6.5	.6	6.0
6	Sony (Corporate)	1.1	3.6	.6	5.6
7	Capcom	.9	3.0	.4	3.6
8	Konami (Corporate)	1.3	4.3	.2	1.9
9	Disney Interactive	.3	.9	.2	1.8
10	THQ	.3	1.1	.2	1.8
11	Namco	.5	1.6	.2	1.7
12	Virgin Interactive Entertainment	.9	2.8	.1	1.5
13	Interplay	.2	.7	.1	1.2
14	Playmates	.3	.9	.1	1.1
15	Squaresoft	.3	1.1	.1	1.0

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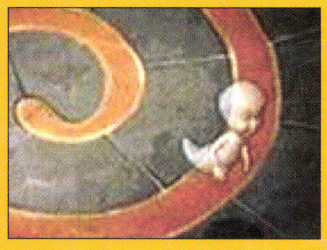
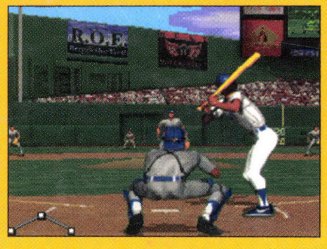


Casper
PlayStation
Interplay

Beyond the Beyond
PlayStation
Sony

Crash Bandicoot
PlayStation
Sony

World Series Baseball II
Saturn
Sega



Pennent Race
PlayStation
Sony

Virtua Fighter Kids
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Sega

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