■ Inside Boss Studios ■ Facing U/64's Phear ■ Major Damage Exclusive

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INSIDE: KILLER INSTINCT 2

The Making of Nintendo's New Fighter

March, 1996
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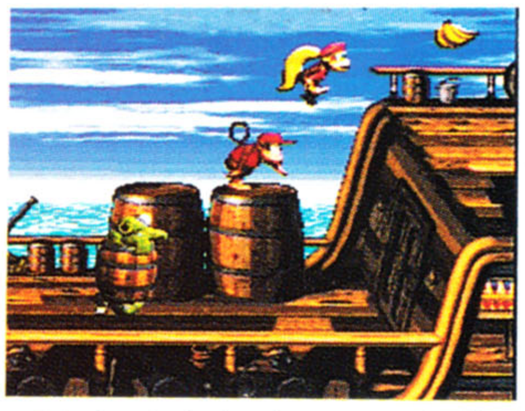
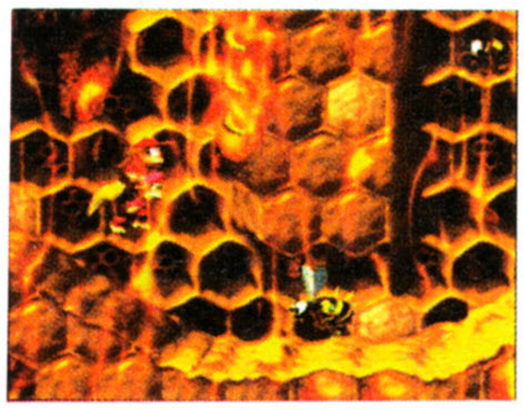


Dixie twirls her ponytail to fly chopper style— talk about a buzz cut!

Guess who's back in town.

Or take his new pal Dixie for a spin — literally. This chimpette flies! There are other special moves too, like the Buddy Toss (please kids, don't try this at home). We even threw in a bunch of multiple endings. But hey, what do you expect from the biggest evolution in history. Except another game that leaves everything else far behind. (Ever been behind a monkey? It ain't pretty.)



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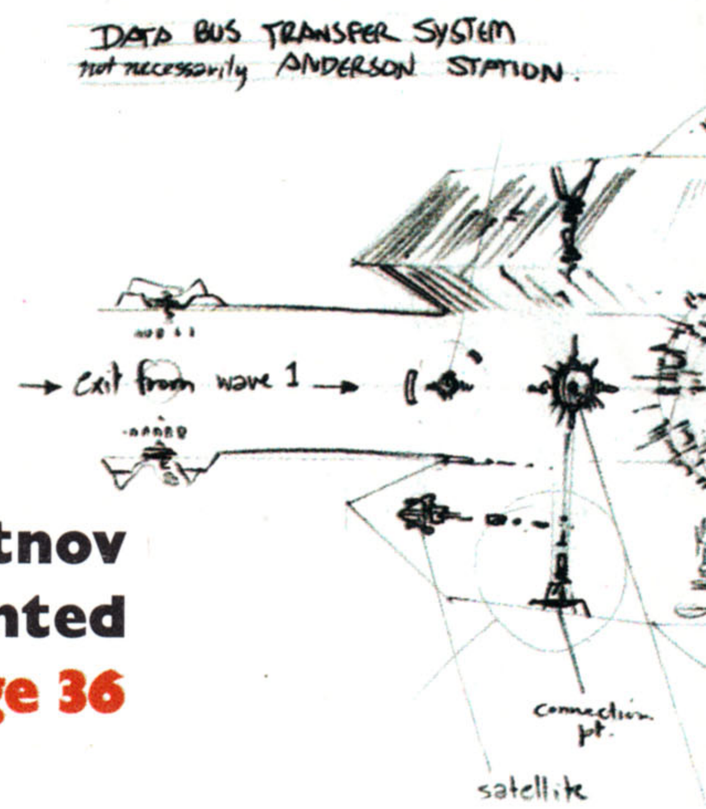

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"My goal in coming here was to make good games with Hollywood production values and have the opportunity to create games with people I wanted to create games with."

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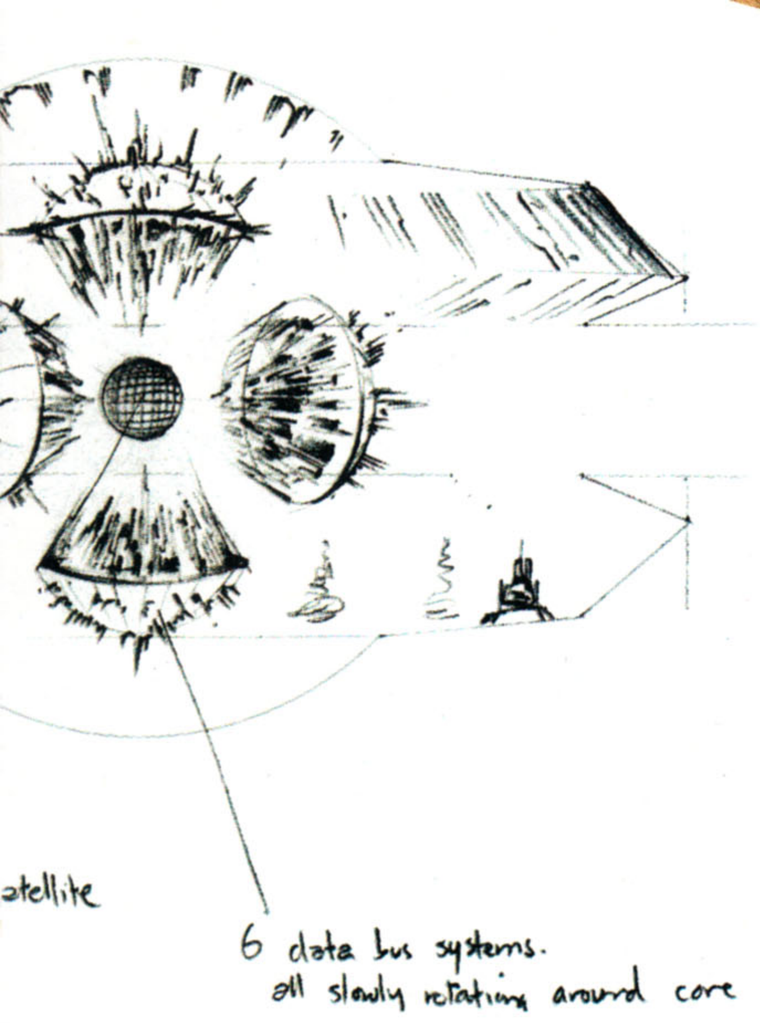

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"...most importantly, Nintendo has addressed the gameplay concerns of players and added both throws and additional types of moves to the game engine."

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Putting the Editor Back in Editorial

If you're reading this, consider yourself one of a dying breed. Most people never bother to read the editorial columns of game magazines, and really, why should they bother? Many game magazines use the space to recall recent history or give its readers bold warnings and brilliant advice: "You might not want to invest in that Jaguar we recommended last year!" or "go and buy a PlayStation! Sony's marketing rules!" I'm personally of the impression that most game magazines' editorials nowadays are trying to sell you something or make you think that the pages you're holding are the words of God translated into surfer dialect.

So let's just skip that sort of twisted dialogue and define what you will and will not see in this new magazine. First, we're not a catalog. It's not our job or goal to give you pretty pictures of every game out there and a convenient telephone number to dial as we tell you to order them all. Second, we make our best efforts to give everyone a fair shake, and even though some people will undoubtedly accuse any magazine of bias, we're asking for your faith that we're just a wee bit more open minded than that.

Intelligent Gamer's FUSION has been created in the midst of times of great uncertainty. Many people see parallels between early 1996 and the fearsome video-game crash of 1984, even though circumstances are radically different: Hundreds of thousands of installed personal computer owners and dedicated game console players today provide a stable backbone for quality games. Bad products almost never have a place in the video-games marketplace, and especially not in times where there's as much development going on as there is today.

Therefore, rather than acting as a catalog or a digest of every two-bit game released throughout the world, this magazine will focus its attention on the most exciting products coming into the marketplaces of North America, Europe and Asia, and other markets if and when the situations warrant. We'll speak extensively with the developers of the games we highlight, giving them opportunities to tell their audiences just what it was that they were aiming for, and make very real attempts to show our readers just how the video-games industry really works. Everyone on *IG*'s staff looks forward to the challenge, and we hope that we'll continue to have your readership in the months and years to come.

Jer Horwitz, Editor in Chief

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Perplexing Policy of Toshinden Sharing

Dear *FUSION*,
As a fan of both video games and the Internet, I've been going through all the gaming pages available on the World Wide Web and have found *IG* Online to be a well-informed source on the video game industry. I hope then that you can answer a question that I haven't been able to answer.

When Toshinden came out for the Sony PlayStation, most people viewed it as Sony's answer to Sega's Virtua Fighter series. It's confusing therefore to find out that Battle Arena Toshinden is being ported to the Saturn and has already debuted in Japan as "Toshinden S." Why would Sony allow one of their exclusive titles to be shown on a rival machine? The company views the Saturn as very much a rival to its PlayStation. Is there a deal or agreement struck by both companies to share their titles?

I am very perplexed by Sony's policy and any information you can find about this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Melvin Carumbana
Seattle, Washington

The industry is changing. When Sony wanted to launch the PlayStation, they had virtually no Sony-developed software in development that could sell a game system, and thus they turned to the industry's best-known third-party companies to make them exclusive games. Many of the companies were afraid to confine huge titles to release on an unknown system, but agreed to give Sony something known as a "six- or twelve-month exclusivity window," a process by which one game system (in this case, the PlayStation) will get a hot new game all to itself for a set length of time. Such 'windows' (time periods) make it possible for Sony to snag 32-Bit exclusives on Williams games such as Mortal Kombat 3 or Namco games such as Cyber Sled, even though Sega or Nintendo might wind up with "six-month" rights to enhanced versions or their sequels.

Bear in mind that Toshinden is only Sony's in the U.S.A.: It was released in Japan by Takara and developed by a company named Tamsoft—Sony never really controlled Toshinden's fate as Sega could with, say, Virtua Fighter 2. No one really knew how huge the game was going to be until writers started to drool over it, and by the time Sega got the game, almost everyone who wanted it had already tried it on the PlayStation. To make the game seem unique, Sega wound up in an agreement with Takara whereby Sega—one year after the PlayStation received Toshinden—released a Saturn translation with new cinematic screens and an extra character.

It's worth noting that Sony and Sega are already allowing their hottest games to appear on PCs, and are planning on letting them appear on competing game machines as well. In other words, you can go out today and buy Destruction Derby, Comix Zone or Ecco the Dolphin for IBM PC-compatible machines, and in a year or two, you'll be able to purchase Sony's older games for the Saturn and possibly vice versa. Most people probably don't remember it, but Sega used to allow some of their key titles to appear for the Japanese PC Engine (TurboGrafx-16 here) after some time had passed—the PCE still has the best home conversion of Shinobi, plus reasonable ports of Outrun, Golden Axe (and a special Golden Axe CD) and Power Drift among others.

Games most often sell best in their first six months and then fade into obscurity. Based on that knowledge, if you convince people that you get the hottest games first and everything else a little later, you might get people to stop buying PlayStations just to play MK3—they'll know that MK3 will be out eventually for the Saturn, and they can go out and get VF2 today, instead. Then, consider that even VF2 sales will drop after six months—at that point, why not release it on the PlayStation and get some more people to buy the game? Sega has not, by any means, announced that Virtua Fighter 2 is coming to the PlayStation, but don't be surprised when that sort of change starts to take place in the next few years as a result of your friendly neighborhood hardware wars.

Slow and Overloaded 32-Bits Bite

Dear *FUSION*,
This is a short note expressing my feelings about the video game industry.

I am basically disappointed with the performance of the 32-Bit video game systems currently on the market. The basic flaw they have is that games take forever to load. Surely Sony and Sega could have foreseen that the real bottleneck to producing good games is that without at least six megabytes of RAM or quad-speed CD-ROM, drive games will lose a lot of their appeal.

It is simply not good enough, and in my view the 32-Bit systems will enjoy a shelf life far shorter than their 16-Bit predecessors. In 1996, they will be crushed by the onslaught from Nintendo and Matsushita.

A.A. El Badini
Via the Internet,
United Kingdom

Quad-speed CD-ROMs and six Megabytes of RAM are still expensive individual commodities, and while they're both obviously desirable for any game architecture, they're also cost-prohibitive at the moment for most low-end consumer gaming applications. If we were to strictly accept your guidelines for "good games," which neglect to consider either the price factor or the actual quality of the software, we'd be hard-pressed to find a winning machine from either Nintendo or Matsushita: even Matsushita's design notes that the combined ROM and RAM of the M2 architecture will be six MB, so there's less RAM in the M2 boxes than you deem necessary. Will Ultra 64 and M2 games be "good?" Obviously, with or without quad-speed drives and even with their respective limited amounts of RAM. Why is that? Both systems will have top-notch aesthetic-generating abilities and games that are fun to play, which is the same reason that the PlayStation and Saturn have enjoyed their successes to date around the world.

PS on the Fritz

Dear *FUSION*,
I purchased a PlayStation the first day it was out (Okay, so I'm impatient). People were complaining about PlayStations locking and saying that FMV from the demo CD was jumpy or not playing at all. Is there any truth to these statements? Should I take back my unit, and if so, what do I have to do to make sure that I don't get a bad one again?

Frank Dutkiewicz
Via the Internet

If your unit is operating properly, there's no need to take it back to the store—unless you're looking to challenge a company's return policy, that's true with any game system you own. If, on the other hand, your PlayStation chronically (on several software titles) stutters when displaying video sequences, you may well have a defective machine. PlayStations carry 90-day warranties, and you can reach Sony's repair hotline at 1-800-345-SONY to receive information on their repair and replacement services.

communications

Interactive Movies: Bad Games, Good Idea

Dear *FUSION*,
I have a little problem with magazines which say that interactive movies such as Wing Commander 3 (and all CD-interactive movies you can think of) aren't really interactive. I admit most of them are poor, but that is not the issue. Break it down: Interactive movie = movie (cinema quality; then again, even the first silent movies were called movies, right?) and interactive (you can interact with it and make your own decisions). The degree varies from very interactive (Under a Killing Moon) to not so interactive (Phantasmagoria), but to say that Under a Killing Moon and Phantasmagoria aren't interactive movies is totally wrong. Most people have attacked the games not because of the concept, but because most of the games are pretty bad.

Which brings me in to the other issue I am concerned about: Wing Commander 3 got very varied ratings, and most of the magazines which knocked the game complained that you need a Ninja Pentium to run it in SVGA, although they admitted that the game was actually quite good in VGA mode. Excuse me? If they had excluded the SVGA option, would that have made it a better game? As far as I am concerned, and I think many people agree with me; when you have more options, you have more freedom. And let's face it, there are a lot of 17- to 18-year-olds who have Ninja Pentiums and love games like WC3. The same with FIFA '96—it got a bad write-up from a European magazine because it "had too many" viewpoints, which somehow made it less playable. Hey! Why don't you choose the same view you had in FIFA '95? This really ticks me off. Thanks for your time.

Tobbe Olsson
SWEDEN

Dealing with the issue of interactive movies first, just think about the people who review video games professionally: Most of them are not looking for plots or stories, they're looking for action and great special effects. In the 1980s, a title such as Dragon's Lair was impressive technology. But today, you would be hard-pressed to find any video game magazine that heaps praise on software where you watch a movie and press the joystick now and then. Full-motion video games—with rare exceptions—have not evolved considerably, and the marketplace appears to have only a mild interest in that sort of software.

On the subject of options in games, we would clearly prefer to have more options available in any game we play; that's not open to debate. While we can't speak for other game magazines, any criticisms of extra options found in our pages will come from these roots: If the options are ill-conceived or improperly implemented, we may well knock them, as the programmers in most cases should have known better, but common sense dictates that we'd never fault a developer for including an SVGA Mode or extra options above and beyond the industry's norms.

Torn Between Two Systems

Dear *FUSION*,
I am a very experienced gamer and, up until now, have always stayed on top of new gaming technology. I have a SNES, Genesis, and a fairly fast PC, and am now considering buying a new video game system. I have decided to get either the Sega Saturn or Sony PlayStation, but the NU64 is constantly looming on the horizon. I am leaning toward the Sony because right now it seems to have better games, but the Saturn has one thing that Sony will never have, Virtua Fighter 2. I would really like to own this game but am not prepared to purchase a system for one game. I would like your suggestions on what system you think is better and which has the most potential to be a long-lasting system with lots of game support. Thanks.

Donald Melanson
New Brunswick, Canada

Your question is a commonly asked one primarily because there is no safe answer that impartial magazines can give their readers: One system's higher market penetration doesn't necessarily translate into higher quality and a lower price doesn't always equal a better value. If you have to have a machine today, you can rule out the Ultra 64 for sure—rent a PlayStation and/or Saturn from a rental shop and see which you prefer. If the Ultra is worth considering, it's up to you to decide which system has the best potential to provide you with either several years of value, sheer processing power or a solid handful of excellent software. If you can find a machine that has a bunch of games you want, that's the machine for you. But otherwise, use history and horsepower as your guide.

Sony has no long-term track record for supporting video game products yet, but the PlayStation seems to be appropriately supplied with good software at the moment. Sega has a mixed record: The Genesis has been beautifully supported, the Game Gear and Master System enjoyed reasonable support, and the Sega CD and 32X were barely kept alive. The Saturn is in good shape today though, and Sega has an instructional Developers' Conference scheduled in mid-March to help programmers get more out of the machine. Nintendo's track record is pretty good, but not perfect: The NES and Game Boy were clearly kept alive past anyone's expectations, and the Super NES has been amply supported with good software since the beginning. The Virtual Boy and their Japanese-only Disk System have been pretty disappointing, though to their credit Nintendo released the latter machine outside of Asia (the best titles were released as cartridges elsewhere). Panasonic and the 3DO Company has had modest success with its first machine and pledges to do better with its successor, and Atari has clearly fallen on the hardest of times with the Jaguar after seeing similar problems with machines from the Atari [130]XE to the Lynx hand-held.

Which machine is the most powerful? Without listing the full spec sheets, both Nintendo's Ultra 64 and 3DO's M2 are at the top of the list in 3-D abilities, but they're not on store shelves yet. The PlayStation has a strong balance of great 3-D ability with above-average 2-D capabilities, and the Saturn has an equivalent balance of great 2-D abilities and above-average 3-D. Both the 3DO-compatible machines and the Jaguar are average 3-D and 2-D platforms, and Sega's 32X is a bit below both machines in overall power. With all of these facts in mind, sit down and figure out which factors are the most important to you as a consumer and, if all else fails, wait a little while and reassess the situation. Playing your new game machine will be great, but you can afford to hold back until you're certain to be satisfied with your purchase.

communications

The Koopa and the Hedgehog: Slow and Steady wins the race

Dear *FUSION*,
I just wanted to know if you know if the Saturn 2 is going to come out any time soon. I am one of those people who bought the Saturn in May when it was released, and I sorely regret that day. NO NEW GAMES came out until September, so I was really steamed. Then I saw the PlayStation. I am just about as impressed with the PlayStation as I should have been with the Saturn —very impressed. I have always been a Nintendo fan, and I subscribed to the Nintendo magazines for about seven years. Frankly, I decided to stick with Nintendo because though Sega and Sony might come out with their systems first, Nintendo always pulls through with the best system. So I have decided to sell my Saturn and get a Nintendo Ultra 64 and a few games. I just wrote this letter to voice my anger at Sega for letting down a whole lot of people by releasing the Saturn without putting any effort into it: You just threw in some chips and called it "the next generation!"

Erem (Exasperated) Boto
Via the Internet

Let's give some long-overdue and much-deserved credit to Sega: First of all, they were doing U.S. consumers a favor by releasing the Saturns early—sure, it was supposed to give them a strategic advantage over Sony, but many hard-core Sega lovers wound up saving several hundred dollars they might have otherwise spent to import gray-market Saturn machines, and in the process received the first North American-compatible Saturn hardware. If Sega had released zero North American hardware prior to September, they would have followed an easier, more firmly established hardware launch pattern, but they chose to hit the market early. In addition, Sega hurried several major game translations to the home market: Considering the time game development normally takes companies, Virtua Cop, Virtua Fighter 2 and Sega Rally hit homes in near-record time and impressed many audiences with their quality.

It's not fair to deem the Saturn just a box full of poor chips as some snotty game magazines might have you believe. The Saturn is a very strong hardware design, but it excels at 2-D graphics at a time when consumers are more anxious to test the waters of 3-D worlds.

With that said, the more coordinated and thorough PlayStation launch was more impressive to the average consumer, and the pre-holiday buzz generated by the September PS debut was enough to give Sony a solid hardware lead at the end of the year. As 3-D games are beginning to steal the limelight from the likes of Sonic the Hedgehog, Sega is retooling their most popular characters for use in 3-D adventures, and Nintendo (as we're sure you know) has done the same with Mario and their other hot commodities. To directly answer your original question: Sega is always working on next-generation hardware, and we've been told by reliable sources that they are in fact collaborating on their next project with Matsushita, the parent company of Panasonic, which now owns 3DO's M2 technology. In the past, Sega representatives have told us that their next machine was likely to be a dedicated home virtual-reality console, but the potential deal with Matsushita leaves open the very real possibility that a Saturn upgrade is in the works...

The Mystery of the Missing Mystaria

Dear *FUSION*,
Is there any truth to the rumors of a Mystaria licensing problem? Could this explain the lack of Mystaria in stores?

Scott Kurinskas
Via the Internet

Sega has indeed encountered problems with the release of their first American Saturn RPG, Mystaria, as the result of a legal dispute that began only a short while after the first copies of the game left warehouses. In Japan, the same game is available under the original name Riglord Saga, but Sega opted for some reason to change the English-language title to the hokey "Mystaria." As it turns out, another RPG company (namely TSR, publishers of the Dungeons and Dragons paper-based role-playing games, among others) had already dreamed up the same brilliant name and legally protected it for their use.

Some copies of the game were made available in stores before Sega stopped its early shipments —apparently, the company wasn't aware initially that the game had left warehouses. As a result, a handful of lucky people (including a few ecstatic IG editors) are holding on to what might be a future collectors' item. At press time, Sega has been attempting to end the dispute with TSR and will either wind up re-releasing the game with new packaging or shipping the remaining copies with TSR's blessing under its current name. Maybe, just maybe, someone will have learned through this silly process that video game RPGs deserve a wee bit more dignity than that afforded by a name such as "Mystaria."

Mature Gamer Wants His RPG

Dear *FUSION*,
Let me start off by saying that I am a huge RPG fan. I have even gone so far as to purchase Japanese RPGs for the Super Famicom knowing I can understand barely any of the text. As the proud owner of a Sega Saturn, I am quite peeved at Sega of America for not releasing any worthwhile RPGs. Sure we have Ghen War and Mystaria, but those really aren't the kind of RPGs that I like. What I would like to know is whether Sega of America is ever going to change their "policy" of leaving us mature gamers out in the cold when it comes to good RPGs such as Magic Knight RayEarth? Thanks,

Chris Noel
Roswell, Georgia

That's a fair question. Because of their heavy emphasis on text, role-playing games require plenty of translation time and, perhaps more vitally, a company's faith that the games in question could possibly become break-through software. Standard RPGs rarely perform wonderfully in the American marketplace, whereas action-adventure RPG titles such as the Legend of Zelda have been perennial best sellers here. Sega opts to carefully pick and choose the RPGs they'll release, allowing companies such as Working Designs (see our News section) to pick through the remaining games and pay for the "privilege" of spending the time and money to translate and market a game to a potentially disinterested audience. By that means, Sega bears no responsibility here for the games' success or failure, and they get a reasonable licensing fee in the process. And if the third-party translator sells the game, that's just fine: Sega picks up royalties on every copy sold. Will they change their policy? Let's put it this way: It became their policy for the reasons mentioned above, and if the reasons change, so may Sega.

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Software Control Out of Control

Dear *FUSION*,
Can you think of any positive effects of today's console makers' attempts to control the content of software for their hardware platforms? It seems that the old argument that this is done to prevent poor-quality software from flooding the market (re: Atari 2600) doesn't really hold water. The PC market, which is completely open to all development efforts, has shown some of the most innovative, high-quality software to date (Doom, Lemmings, NASCAR—the list goes on). Are other motives at play, or are the hardware vendors really just trying to ensure quality games?

Mike St. Clair
Cincinnati, OH

At the absolute minimum, a hardware maker's control over their platform's software content helps to insure that the hardware maker picks up the all-important licensing fees which keep the company going after it makes huge investments in the production of a new game machine. Beyond that, 3DO, Sega, Sony or Nintendo's control allows some standards to be imposed industry-wide on the contents of games—while censorship is an extreme and impermissible example of what's possible, content ratings would never have been feasible with-out the existence of several dominant licensors within the industry.

Quality games? Well, we've seen our share of stinkers on consoles regardless of the supposed standards out there for released software. And by the same token you're right about PCs—there have been quite a few incredible titles released by companies that have never produced games for the likes of Nintendo and Sega. As nearly every new console is pushing to get the largest library of software on the market, quality standards have dropped and the industry has paid somewhat: Only the best titles seem to be selling and the others aren't doing too well. Does it really hurt to have 16 different fighting games to choose from rather than two or three hand-picked by a supposedly benevolent corporate Juan Valdez? That depends on your perspective. From where we stand, it looks as if the worst developers will be in the worst shape and the best ones will have to improve to stay competitive. That's a pretty good situation for consumers, as well, though they may have to depend on reliable media outlets (such as your friendly neighborhood Intelligent Gamer) to sift through the piles of games forthcoming as a result.

Choosing Sides in the Console v. PC War

Dear *FUSION*,
Who do you guys think will win the PC vs Console war? While I think that the consoles have it locked up, PC 3-D cards haven't been too successful. Even the highly hyped 3-D Edge (Nvidia-based) card is getting almost no support. Then there's always the sound portion; computer sound boards are really no match for the ones in consoles.

Jeff Domago
Liverpool, NY

They're currently completely different markets. Consoles are generally one-fourth to one-twentieth the cost of a computer and are thus targeted toward a different audience. Traditionally, computers require huge up-front investments and seem to catch up with consoles at just about the time the consoles are ready to move up to the next stage in graphics, though in recent years computers have been coming closer to parity with the best that game consoles have to offer. Role-playing and strategy games have additionally enjoyed success on personal computers that they have not to date experienced on consoles. While the software for these two markets has become increasingly similar in recent days, most industry experts agree that there really isn't a 'war' being fought there...yet.

With the impending introduction of $500 Internet terminal consoles and the limited past success of $700 multimedia/game machines (ahem...3DO), PCs and consoles may in fact be approaching a time when hardware companies will—like VCR and Walkman-manufacturing brethren—instead draw their price distinctions between machines that can read and play back and ones that can do those things and write. We'll have to wait and see.

Quality Information and Pictures, too!

Dear *FUSION*,
Well, it looks like you guys have moved up in the world, and I can say I knew you when...well, not really. Nonetheless, it's great to know that we'll now have a quality mag in print form and not just be able to use them for the pictures. As long as you guys keep up the quality coverage you had on the 'net, I'll be happy to buy your mag each month.

Danny Miskin
Beaconsfield, Quebec, Canada

It's been a tremendous ride so far and we're anxious to get your feedback on our first printed edition of Intelligent Gamer's Fusion! Be sure to write us at our new address so we can hear what you think!

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Atari Upheaval

Atari Cuts Back, Shifts Focus

PC Division Created; Apparently No New Jaguar Games to be Contracted

1972 Nolan Bushnell founds Atari, and the original arcade Pong is released.
1976 Warner Communications purchases Atari for $28 million.

1977 The Atari 2600 VCS is released. Perhaps the most successful cartridge-based system ever. A measly 4K limit is overcome through creative programming.

1979 The Atari 400 and 800 8-Bit home computers hit the market, sporting 8K of RAM and a 6502 processor.
1982 Basically an Atari 400 without the keyboard, the Atari 5200 is released near the same time as its next-generation competitor, Colecovision.
1984 The Atari 7800 is shown, but shelved until a few years later due to the collapse of the home video-game market.
1984/5 Atari is split in two: Atari Computer, marketing home computers and consoles, and Atari Games, making arcade games only. Warner holds onto the arcade division, and sells the computer business to the Tramiel family, founders of Commodore. Later, the arcade division markets home games under the Tengen name, eventually becoming Time Warner Interactive.
1985 Atari releases the 16-Bit line, starting with the Atari 520ST. Its 512K of RAM is based around Motorola's 68000 micro-processor, and is meant to compete with Amiga and Macintosh.

1989 Released around a $200-250 price point, the Lynx, a portable color game system acquired from floundering Epyx, has difficulty gaining market share against the technically inferior, but cheaper Game Boy.

1993 Atari's 64-Bit Jaguar game system is released. Unenthusiastic game developers and retailers prevent mass-market success.

Evidence has been mounting for several months that Atari has been on the verge of abandoning their 64-Bit Jaguar game system in favor of personal computer and/or multiplatform game development. In what will likely qualify as the most confusing three months in the history of a major game hardware company, a spokesperson for Atari has confirmed several major corporate changes at press time: Ted Hoff, Atari's President of North American Operations, has resigned, and Jack Tramiel, the Chairman of the Board, who had been very much in the background for the past couple years, has renewed his active involvement in the company. In addition, Atari has laid off a number of employees, including Ted Tahquechi, who had produced a number of Jaguar games and was the producer for the upcoming Phase Zero.

Don Thomas, an Atari spokesman, commented that he did not expect these cutbacks to affect upcoming Jaguar releases, and noted that games being produced by laid-off employees will be reassigned to remaining personnel. Notably, the layoffs will remove familiar staff members from projects near release, forcing some internal re-evaluation of games in progress.

Only days earlier, Atari had announced the creation of a new software division entitled Atari Interactive, which was formed to oversee development of Atari games on a variety of platforms, including the Jaguar, PC, and Mac. The first four games released will be CD-ROM conversions of the Jaguar titles Tempest 2000, Highlander, Flip Out! and Baldies, all slated for the first quarter of this year. Further games are slated to be released throughout the year. Despite a press report which indicated that Atari intends to abandon much of their development altogether, Atari claims that its new Interactive division will not be affected by the cutbacks. Jon Skruch and Larry Pacey, who oversee Atari's Jaguar and PC developments respectively, both remain at Atari.

Additionally, plans for PlayStation and Saturn translations of Tempest 2000 were said to be under way prior to Atari's latest shake-up.

Thomas confirmed that Jeff Minter, programmer of Tempest 2000, the Virtual Light Machine and the much-anticipated Defender 2000, has left for another company. *Intelligent Gamer* has learned that Minter is working with former Atari and Flare U.K. designer John Mathieson on a new project, which appears to include the development of software for a system not under the Atari banner.

Following the first string of Atari layoffs in November, *IG* Online spoke with developers who indicated that Atari did not plan to contract out any new Jaguar games. In a subsequent interview, Mr. Thomas denied the charges on Atari's behalf and claimed that the company intended to continue to contract out Jaguar games to outside companies.

As of today, it continues to appear that the developers were correct: Jeff Minter was quite possibly the most popular Jaguar developer, and independently obtained evidence indicates that Atari had no plans to contract out another Jaguar project to Minter, or anyone else for that matter.

High Voltage Software, who are responsible for White Men Can't Jump, Vid Grid, NBA Jam: Tournament Edition and Ruiner Pinball report that Atari has not contacted them regarding any further Jaguar projects. Moreover, Beyond Games, coders of Ultra Vortek and supposed developers of the sequel to the widely acclaimed Alien vs. Predator, have stated that Atari has dropped the contract negotiations for that game, and that Atari has not been responsive to proposals for a conversion to the Jaguar of Beyond Games' Lynx hit BattleWheels.

According to sources familiar with Atari's future plans for the Jaguar, the company intends to release 24 nearly finished titles at a rate of two per month over the next year, after which point Jaguar development will have ceased. Games formerly scheduled for early 1996 have recently been bumped to accommodate the freshly spread-out schedule.

-Brian Osserman

"Ted Hoff, Atari's former president of North American Operations, has resigned, and Jack Tramiel, the Chairman of the Board...has renewed his active involvement in the company." Ted Hoff

Sony Body Count continues...

In their second major executive change since the E³ debut of the PlayStation, Sony Computer Entertainment has announced that Martin Homlish, president of Sony's American Computer Entertainment division, is leaving his post to take on other ventures within Sony.

Homlish hastily assumed the post vacated abruptly by Steve Race, who has since become an executive with Spectrum Holobyte, amidst speculation that Sony was shifting to tighter Japanese control over the company's North American operations. In what appears to be confirmation of the earlier reports, Shigeo Maruyama, currently an executive vice president of Sony CE in Japan, has been named chairman of SCE and will shuffle back and forth from Japan to the United States to perform duties within both his Japanese and American SCE divisions.

In other Sony executive news, Olaf Olafsson, a long-time Sony technologist and visionary who fought alongside Steve Race to keep the PlayStation's launch price at $299, has just resigned from his most recent post. Formerly president of Sony Interactive Studios under Race, Olafsson was moved months ago within the company, away from direct PlayStation responsibilities and into a figurehead position as chairman of a technology strategy unit. Ironically, corporate pressures within Sony have now caused the company to lose both of the executives thought by many to have been key to the PlayStation's 1995 North American 2:1 rout of the Saturn.

Martin Homlish

Goldstar Halts Production of 3DO-Compatible Players

Despite its continuing struggle to hang on in the marketplace, Lucky Goldstar Electronics has dropped its full backing for the 3DO Company's 32-Bit standard. Citing Matsushita's recent acquisition of 3DO's M2 chipset technology as one reason, LGE is discontinuing all production of their 3DO System 32 multiplayer package and will attempt to sell its remaining hardware stocks over the next few months. The company also blamed lack of profit on its $199 U.S. machine.

LGE's move leaves Panasonic/Matsushita as the sole continuing supplier of hardware for the 3DO platform. According to an LGE spokesperson, the company has already laid off five employees from its game development staff and will relocate those displaced. LGE Vice President James Ireton told *Consumer Electronics* that the company will focus attention toward other areas of multimedia, to attain leadership status by means of set-top boxes, cable modems and their recently acquired Zenith unit.

Ireton, who joined LGE from Sega in late 1994, candidly spoke to *CE* about the difficulty of promoting a system that wasn't capable of competing in the marketplace with dedicated console makers and wasn't willing to make the full investment necessary to launch M2-compatible hardware.

You may remember the company slashing its hardware price to $199 just months ago while still bundling in roughly $100 worth of software. In the *CE* report, Ireton was quoted as saying that the company loses over $100 on each 32-Bit player sale. He added, however, that LGE will continue to ship hardware and software, and has inventory to spare—in fact, enough to last until May.

LGE is not the first manufacturer to pull out of the next-generation war, nor are they the first 3DO partner to declare the 32-Bit Opera standard as faltering: Creative Labs stopped production of their 3DO Blaster card some months ago, and other companies have scaled back their 3DO Opera plans or opted not to enter the market whatsoever. It remains to be seen whether or not LGE will continue to pursue development of an M2 upgrade for their current users.

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EA and Sony: Strong Ties Weakening?

When EA announced its fall 1995 lineup for the 32-Bit systems, it was noted that Electronic Arts had Sony PlayStation versions of all of their popular sports games slated for release well before the Sega Saturn versions of the same games. The reason for that? Sega already had a strong in-house sports development team that EA viewed as a serious threat. On the other hand, Sony's in-house development was, at the time, an unknown at best. So the decision was simple; release titles on the Sony machine first since the competition wouldn't be as stiff.

So what happened? Why did EA apparently blow their big chance to dominate the 32-Bit sports market? Contrary to many reports, Madden and NHL were not shelved because of anything that Sony did; rather, it was a case of the games not being up to the level of quality that EA wanted to project.

NFL GameDay has established itself as the undisputed champion of football sims. Madden who?

The PlayStation NHL '96, for example, was reportedly based on the similarly ill-fated 3DO NHL '96, which strongly resembled the Genesis version with the addition of multiple camera angles. The situation with Madden was similar; the gameplay mechanics were not as elegant as they had wanted them to be, and so the game, which was designed from the ground up on the PlayStation, was cancelled, fairly late in development.

Still, there is a rumor we've been hearing that we think we should report. Reportedly, Sony gave EA preferential treatment as a licensee, while EA's part of the agreement was to release a certain number of games per year. Unfortunately, release dates slipped, and EA was only able to deliver a fraction of the number of games they had agreed to. The end result? Sony has rescinded their preferential treatment, and now EA has status as an ordinary licensee, with the same limits on number of releases per year. Unfortunately, we were unable to confirm this part of the saga, since neither company would say anything about it.

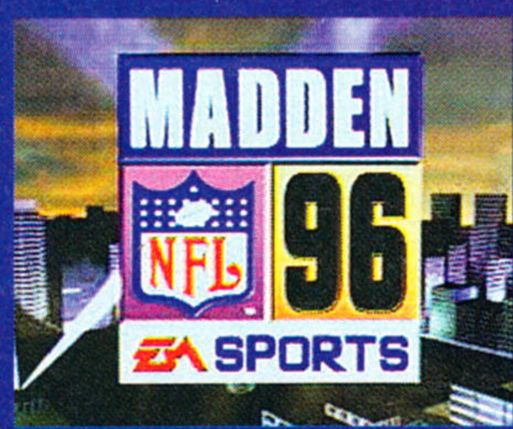
What happened to Madden?

EA Sports is taking it on the chin from gamers for delaying the release of Madden '96 for the PlayStation and the Saturn. What really happened is the question many people within the industry and those who enjoy EA's most celebrated gridiron matchup are asking.

Citing game quality concerns, EA delayed both Madden and NHL Hockey '96 for the 32-Bit systems. We've uncovered the real reasons behind the delay.

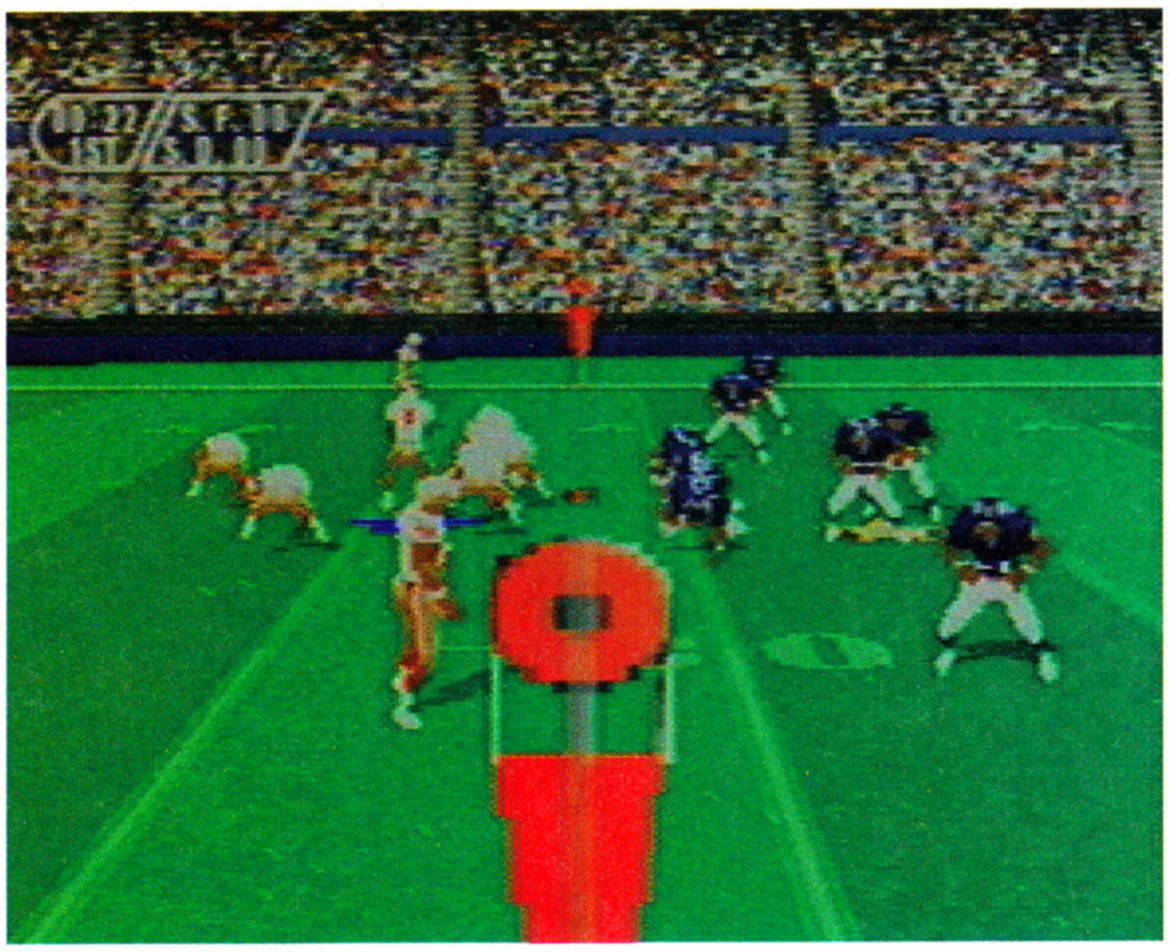
According to inside sources, there were two reasons why the games were pushed back.

The main reason was that two of the producers on Madden left Electronic Arts and went to different companies. The second reason is that Sony found an "A" bug in both games during their approval process and wouldn't pass the games through, even with assurances from EA that the bugs would be fixed. This stymied EA Sports' marketing plans and caused delays. Was Sony just trying to prolong the shelf life of NFL GameDay and NHL Face-Off? EA didn't want to play that game, so they opted to delay both of their hockey and football games until the fall of 1996.



"Madden and NHL were not shelved because of anything Sony did...it was a case of the games not being up to the level of quality that EA wanted to project."

Adhering to the same high standards for gameplay and graphics as NFL GameDay, NHL Hockey delivers much of the same superior quality.



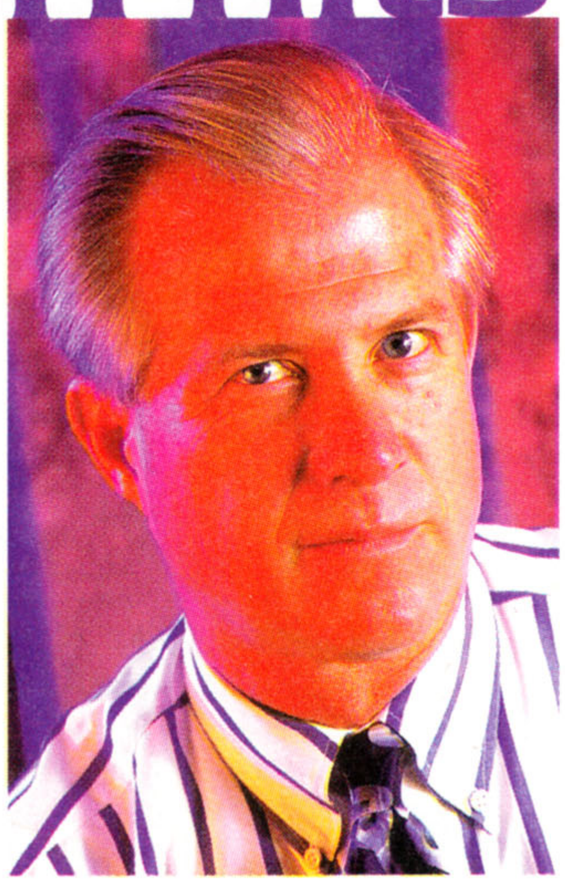
Late in development, reported difficulties with gameplay mechanics forced Electronic Arts to bench Madden Football.

Toshinden hits Sega Saturn

In a move that had been rumored for several months, Earthworm Jim publisher Playmates has snapped up the North American rights to the sequel of Takara's popular 3-D fighting game Toshinden for the Sony PlayStation. As you probably recall, the original Toshinden was reworked slightly and released in English-speaking markets by Sony themselves.

Toshinden 2 features at least six new characters, including Tracy, a tonfa-wielding cop and Verm, a shadowy, gun-toting warrior. The U.S. release is slated for release this summer, although a full review of the Japanese version appears this month in *Intelligent Gamer*. In addition to the PlayStation Toshinden 2, Playmates has also secured the rights to the PC CD-ROM version of the original Toshinden. The game is being developed by Digital Dialect, and adds a few new features such as a new "coin up" feature where a player can announce that they will challenge the winner of the current match. The PC version also supports 3-D accelerator hardware, and should hit store shelves on March 1.

Sega is now mulling an American release of their version of the original Toshinden for the Saturn; however, it appears that their "Toshinden Remix" has hit a snag. Reportedly, in a meeting with several top execs, PR bigwigs and programmers at Sega, Tom Kalinske was shown the Saturn Toshinden Remix side-by-side with the original PlayStation version, at which point he apparently expressed extreme disappointment in the Saturn translation. Sega is apparently now considering delaying its North American release even further to patch up the rough spots, or perhaps even scrapping plans for its release altogether. We'll keep you posted as we hear more.



Tom Kalinske

"Sega is now mulling an American release of their version of the original Toshinden for the Saturn; however, it appears that their 'Toshinden Remix' has hit a snag."

FUSION's gripes with Saturn Toshinden

- **The 3-D backdrops from the original lack depth and thus are not nearly as impressive on the Saturn version.**
- **The transparency effect used for Ellis' costume has been replaced with a pseudo-transparency effect performed using color dithering.**
- **The huge TV on Kayin's stage that used to display the ongoing match is missing in action.**
- **In short, minor flaws, but flaws that should not be there, considering how long after the PlayStation version this version was developed.**

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Sega and Matsushita ready to team for 64-Bit Player

Following many *Intelligent Gamer* Online stories and open denials from Sega of America, the Japanese daily "The Yomiuri Shimbun" reported earlier this month that Sega and Matsushita have reached an agreement to standardize specifications for a brand-new gaming machine to compete directly with Nintendo's Ultra 64 platform. Following the report, both Sega and Matsushita openly denied that they were working together, despite claims from *IG* sources inside Sega of America who assert that a Matsushita M2 development station is currently in Sega's hands.

According to the paper, Matsushita Electrical Industrial Co. had already supplied a newly developed 64-Bit machine to Sega of Japan for "feasibility studies." This 64-Bit technology didn't just come out of thin air: You may recall a substantial deal in late November whereby Matsushita doled out a whopping $100 million to acquire the exclusive rights to 3DO's top-notch M2 processor technology...and you may also remember that Sega and 3DO were reported to have broken off talks when the companies wanted to make the news public at different times: Sega supposedly wanted to keep the news secret until the Saturn's Christmas sales season had ended, and 3DO had wanted an immediate announcement to lift its sinking stock.

The 3DO-Matsushita deal basically relinquished most of 3DO's technology rights to Matsushita, creating speculation that the electronics giant would cruise into the forefront of the video game hardware business within the next year and a half.

> Sega and Matsushita openly denied that they were working together, despite claims from IG sources inside Sega of America who assert that an M2 development station is currently in Sega's hands.

Sega and Matsushita have long been technology partners, and at one point, Matsushita was interested in developing Sega Saturn machines. Now it appears that the two technology giants may aim to develop a yet unnamed product with unified M2-derived specifications by fall '96. The Japanese paper's report also claimed that the two companies plan to ask other video game manufacturers to adopt the specifications behind the new technology, as it will help them reduce research and development costs.

Sega clearly risks alienating current Saturn owners with such a move, as their previous attempts at system upgrades (Sega CD, Sega 32X) have met with mixed results at best. Though both companies have issued press releases denying joint efforts, we'll will keep you posted with the latest news on this story as it reaches the light of day.

-Christopher Drost

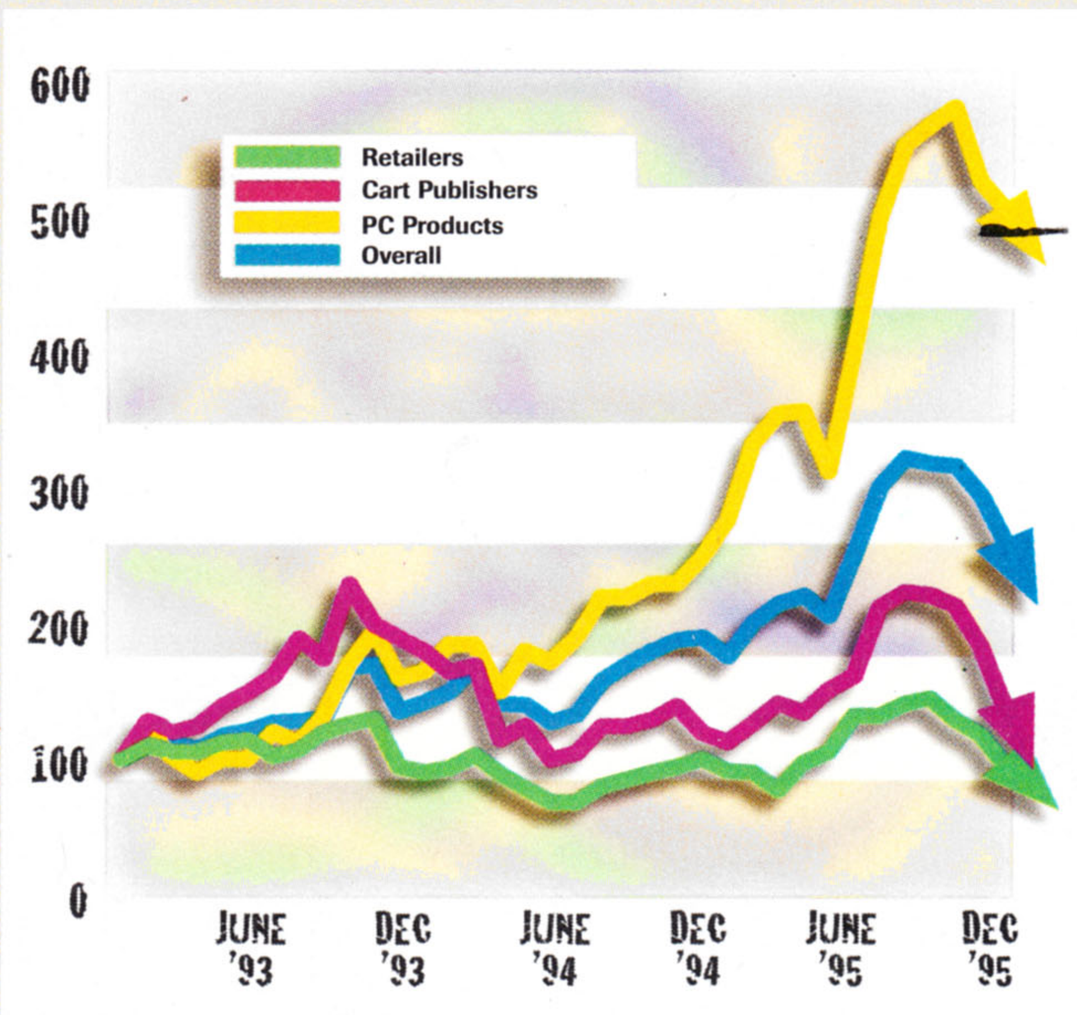
FUSION STOCK MONITOR

Stocks in the *FUSION* index of interactive electronics companies continued to slide in December, finishing down 12 percent overall. Every stock in the index was lower, except T*HQ's. Hardest hit were the cartridge publishers, which fell almost 26% and retailers (minus 20%). Investors sold PC-oriented companies as well, as reflected by a 9% dip in that segment. Prices reflect concern about the holiday retail environment in general, solid but not robust entertainment software sales, supply constraints because of hot software shortages and a perception that PC hardware sales are slowing. The market is also disappointed by lagging upgrade demand for both Win 95 and related products and is paying more attention to network-related opportunities than traditional channels or content providers.

For all of 1995, however, investors in the group did very well. The overall index rose 38% exceeding the growth of both the DOW Jones Industrial Average and Standard & Poors index moves. Retail and cartridges lagged, while PC-oriented stocks jumped 73% for the 12-month period.

Publishers were hit hard during December. Acclaim was down 38% after announcing the need to restate earnings for fiscal 1995. Activision dropped 32% because of macro concerns, Spectrum HoloByte fell 28% because of later-than-expected deliveries, Electronic Arts dipped 18% because of missed dates and Sierra slid 15% despite better-than-expected sell-through of a couple new titles. Retailers were down as well, with Comp USA down 15%, Egghead off 22% and NeoStar 31% lower. Less affected were AOL, off 6%, Broderbund (-6%) and Creative Labs (-9%).

For the year, the big winner was AOL, up 168%, with Activision 120% higher and Comp USA a plus 107%. The losers were Funco (-52%), Egghead (-45%) and Creative Labs (-40%).



Looking forward, we expect several themes to influence investors in 1996. First, what appetite will new PC owners have for entertainment software? Second, can the PC coexist as mass appeal platform with a new major video game cycle spurred in part by the introduction of the NU64? Third, will the internet deliver sustained satisfaction to its users, or will people get bored once they find out how to get there? Finally, will the traditional software retail channel survive a collision on the ramp to the info highway?

-John Taylor, CFA, Arcadia Investment Corporation

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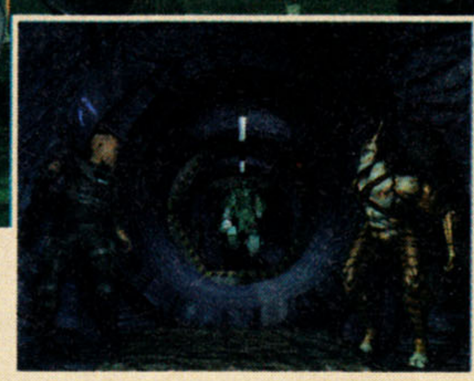

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Mario celebrates 10th birthday

It has now been 10 years since the release of the original Super Mario Bros. for the 8-Bit Nintendo Entertainment System. Ever since then, Mario has been Nintendo's mascot, selling over 120 million games with his likeness worldwide.

Sharp readers will probably note that Mario is actually 15 this year, as he first appeared dodging barrels as a carpenter in Donkey Kong way back in 1981. But back then, he wasn't known as "Mario" until the release of Donkey Kong Jr., where Mario was the villain.

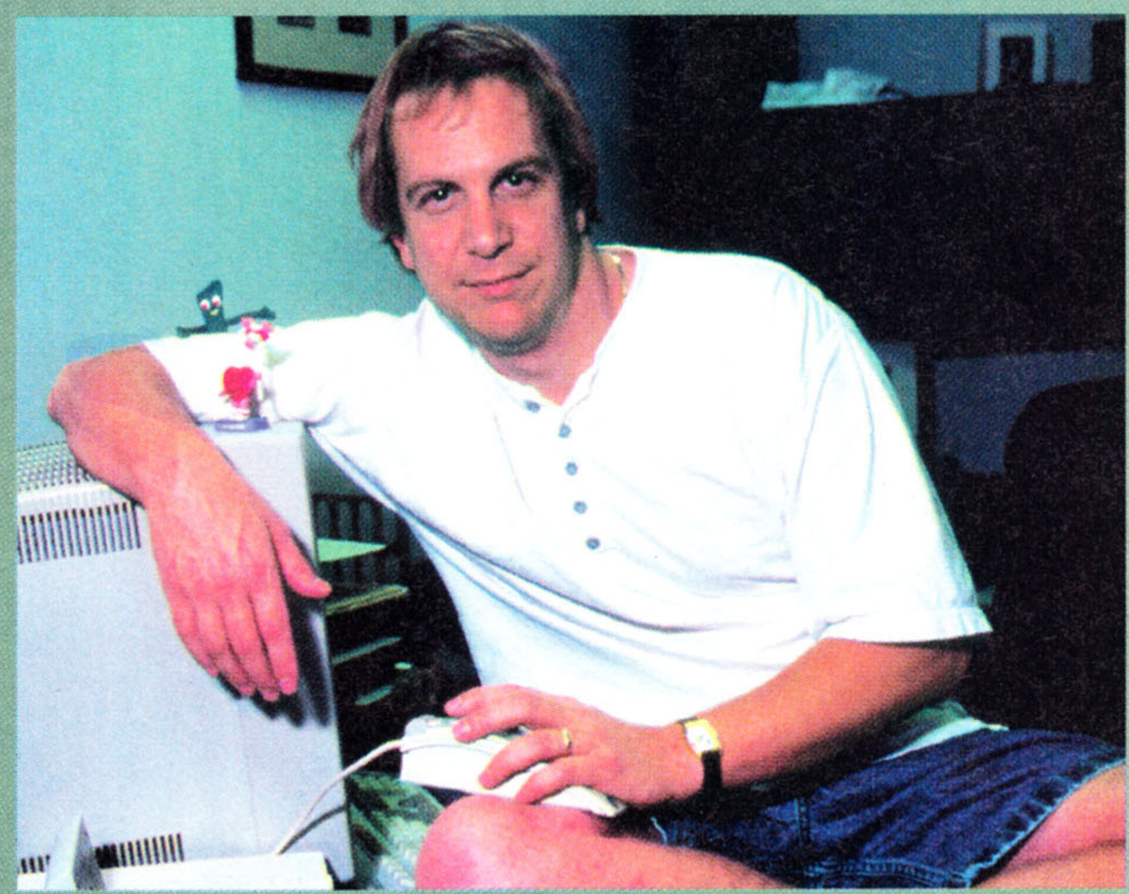
Mario then skipped a game (Donkey Kong 3, featuring Stanley the Gardener; a man whose 15 minutes of fame are apparently up) and resurfaced in 1983's Mario Bros. as a plumber, along with his brother Luigi. Once Nintendo released their Unisystem arcade hardware and Super Mario Bros. in 1985, Mario was easily the biggest star in video games.

Today, Mario is recognized by more American children than Mickey Mouse, and has graced everything from cereal boxes to underwear. Shigeru Miyamoto, Mario's creator, recently celebrated the character's birthday with a small party staged for PR purposes.

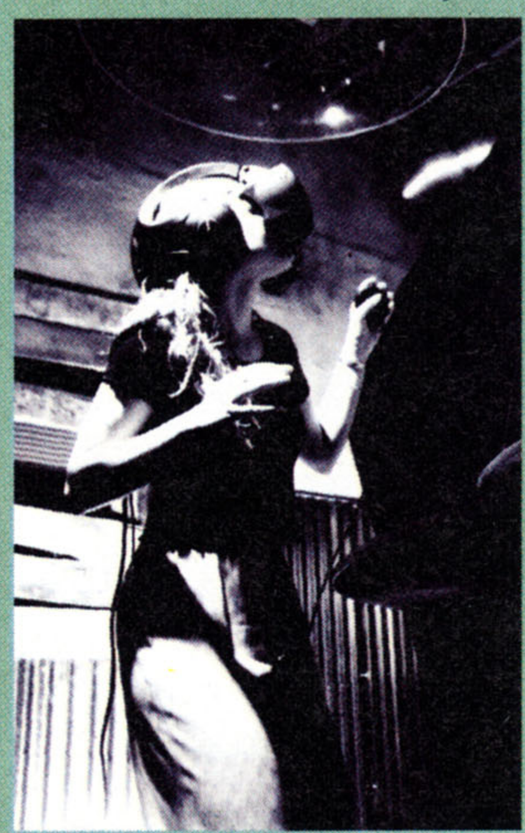
"Today, Mario is recognized by more American children than Mickey Mouse."

Quips&Quicks
entertainment news

A 12-year-old was the big winner in Sega's video game contest. Keolamanaokalahuinui "Keola" Kaula of Albuquerque won a day at Sega headquarters for himself and his family. Along with the tour and ceremony, he also won $25,000, a chance to star in a Sega TV commercial, and his own page on Sega Online. "I was so excited I could not believe I was the winner," said Keola.



Jay Wilbur, id Software, on DOOM copies: "Over the past few years we have seen more and more companies exploiting our success with Doom and Doom II by publishing illegal and shoddy imitations and add-on products. We are vehemently opposed to companies trading on our name and reputation, and will continue to go after them legally to stop them and in turn protect our intellectual property rights." The company won a permanent injunction against Precision Software, and is prepared to take on all add-on level traders and book publishers that use Doom in the title.



The first of four "slam.site" entertainment centers opened in La Palma, Calif., and three more will open in L.A. and Orange County this April. Visitors play CD-ROM and virtual-reality games, compete head-to-head with other players over 100 computers linked by a wide area network, and explore the Internet. "A major community benefit of slam.site is that it provides universal access to breakthrough technologies to the public at large," said Frank Westall, CEO and Founder of the company.

Tom Kalinske, speaking at the Lucille Salter Packard Children's Hospital in Palo Alto, Calif.: "The benefits of video games can go well beyond fantasy escapism.. We now know through the results of responsible research, that there are a number of advantages that can be gained by children who are exposed to video games. First, for many children, video games are their introduction to the world of computer technology...It's this comfort level with technology that will prepare kids for the automated workforce of the future. Secondly, we're all social creatures, and we all acquire social skills in a variety of ways. Today, surveys show that 90% of children want to play video games with a friend...in doing so, they increase social contact among peers. There are also studies that show links between the arrival of a video game system at home and an increase in positive family interaction. For many children, video games can be a social

leveler. It puts them in a realm where players are equal and have equal opportunities to win.... Third, playing with video games can stimulate the cognitive process of discovery." Kalinske's remarks were made at the time of Sega's donation to the hospital.

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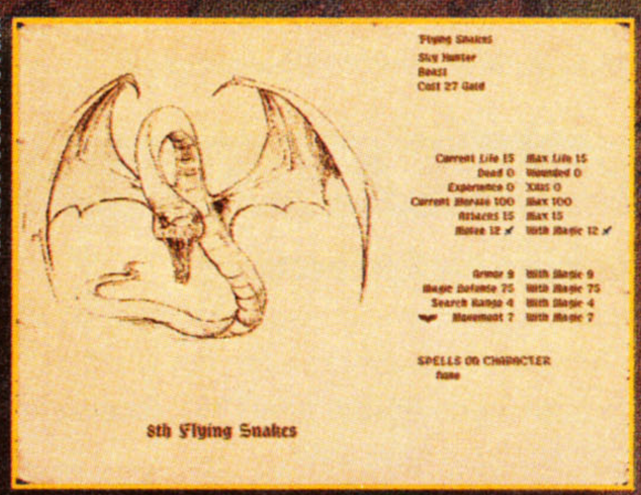

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Bits
bytes & buzz...

There will be 201 winners in Sega Channel's Earthworm Jim 2 **"World O' Worms"** promotion in March; the grand prize is a trip for two to London and Amsterdam, and a visit to the English Wiggly Wiggler's Worm Farm. ■ **Leonard Nimoy** worked with Global MediaNet Corporation on Leonard Nimoy Science Fiction: The Gold Collection, a two-volume set with 40 stories, graphics, sound effects, biographies and backgrounders. It features 1950s and '60s sci-fi, and showcases artwork from the pulp era in a visual time machine. ■ **Martin Landau** will play Geppetto in the live-action Pinocchio game now in production by Powerhouse Entertainment for IBM. Jonathan Taylor Thomas (from *Home Improvement*) will co-star in the CD-ROM. ■ **USA Technologies** will install Credit Card Computer Express systems in libraries, hotels and other establishments. The equipment provides word processing, desktop publishing, Internet access and other services to credit card users. ■ **Starfish Software** introduced EarthTime, a clock designed for Netscape Navigator, to run on Windows. It lets users check the time anywhere in the world without leaving the browser. ■ Netters can earn free online time by shopping on the **FreeRider** service. Users enroll at http://www.freeride.com, then click on ads to learn more. Mail in proofs of purchase for free time. ■ The latest in bar code scanners is the **RSI Ring Scanner** from Symbol Technologies. It works with the 9-ounce WU 1000 wrist-mounted microcomputer. It provides display, keyboard, battery pack and radio for wireless data communication. ■ **NTN Comm.** worked with **MGM Interactive** to develop Bond Trivia via America Online and the NTN Hospitality Television Network. ■

Where no theme park has gone before

Star Trek: The Experience

Paramount Parks and the Las Vegas Hilton broke ground on Star Trek: The Experience on Jan. 24, 1996, in the first step of what they promise will be a new era of theme parks. The attraction, now scheduled for opening in spring 1997, combines simulators, games, virtual reality and interactive video with shops, restaurants and other features, to create a 24th-century playland.

About 500 people huddled on bleachers as temperatures dipped. But the event was worth the chill. After opening remarks by dignitaries from the Hilton, Paramount and *Star Trek*, Jonathan Frakes, Gates McFadden and Armin Shimerman took the stage. They each aimed lasers at a Federation shield in the center of a sand lot. The shield burst into flames, and sparks set afire a circle. Then the circle caved in, in a nice piece of Hollywood-style special effects, breaking ground for the new park, as fireworks and sky rockets flamed overhead.

It was a dramatic moment for Trekkers. As Jane Cooper, president of Paramount Parks, said, "With this attraction, Paramount Parks is bringing to life the one 'virtual' adventure millions of Americans have shared for 30 years."

Star Trek: The Experience will be a multi-attraction site. A museum will feature costumes, weaponry and other props used in the series and movies. A "transporter room" moves visitors to the Bridge of the Enterprise. Next a 32-seat shuttlecraft simulates a journey that surrounds the riders with film images on all sides. A replica of the Promenade houses restaurants, games and shops.

Gary Gregg, president of the Las Vegas Hilton, told the spectators that Hilton will build a futuristic, 22,000-square-foot SpaceQuest Casino, as a gateway to The Experience. It will feature space windows above the casino that produce the illusion of orbiting Earth with scenes of planets, stars, satellites and space ships. Gambling machines will be futuristic in style, all employees will be costumed, and a space-themed bar will provide refreshments.

-Joyce Worley

IG OVERHEARD: RUMORS AND SPECULATION

Attempting to Understand

Nintendo has been everything but candid on the North American release date for the Ultra 64, which has changed from a late 1995 date to less than definitive April 1996.

And rumored North American delays for fall '96 release, spreading since last summer, are seeming more probable with each passing day. Apparently, September '96 is the date Nintendo has told developers for a North American target release...but why won't they confirm it?

Nintendo probably wants to announce its major Ultra delays in increments, perhaps to prevent the media from writing it off as a 32-Bit competitor. The strategy: Announce an April release. By that time, the Saturn will have been on the market in the U.S. for one mediocre year and Nintendo will have succeeded in making the U64 appear only a few months away.

In announcing the April '96 date for developers to have more time to complete and perfect their games, Nintendo neglected to mention in that release that at least half of their major developers did not have their development kits yet. Did they forget? Probably not.

The signs of another delay come partially from the manufacturer of the Ultra 64 processor components, NEC. Sources close to Nintendo state that mass production of the Ultra 64 chipset was very limited in the beginning, when as little as 10,000 pieces a month were being finished using NEC's .35 micron process. Nintendo's sale predictions—in the millions in a single year—exceed this number by far. When demand exceeds supply, people are disappointed and occasionally turn to other alternatives. It is highly unlikely that Nintendo will be able to cover Asian and North American demand with the machines they will have produced in only several months—they would sooner allocate their resources to the Japanese market.

Memory Pack

The cartridge slot on the bottom of the Ultra controller is a mystery no longer. According to Ken Lobb, Nintendo's product manager, the minicartridges that fit into those slots store a maximum of two megabytes of data. This is plentiful for RPGs, sports stats and vast numbers of other configurations. Nintendo has promised to keep the cost of these memory cartridges low.

Compression

How powerful is the Ultra's compression? It's nothing the development world hasn't seen before: the U64 uses JPEG compression. The JPEG image format is one of the tightest formats out there, but let's dispense with the inane 30:1 compression ratio stuff some people are buying into. It's misleading to claim that the average game compression is 8:1 or 30:1, because there has been no data on what it's being compared against. It's like saying you saved 50 percent on your new sneakers, but you don't know its original price, or what other similar sneakers are selling for. A little advice: Ignore technical hubbub you get from people who keep changing their stories every month to reflect the new "truth"; most of the time, they have no idea what they're talking about.

THE WORLD IS YOURS TO COMMAND...

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Microforum's Virtual Corporation, the first totally voice-controlled (keyboard optional) CD-ROM game for Windows® '95, takes you into a cold-blooded world where only the strong survive.

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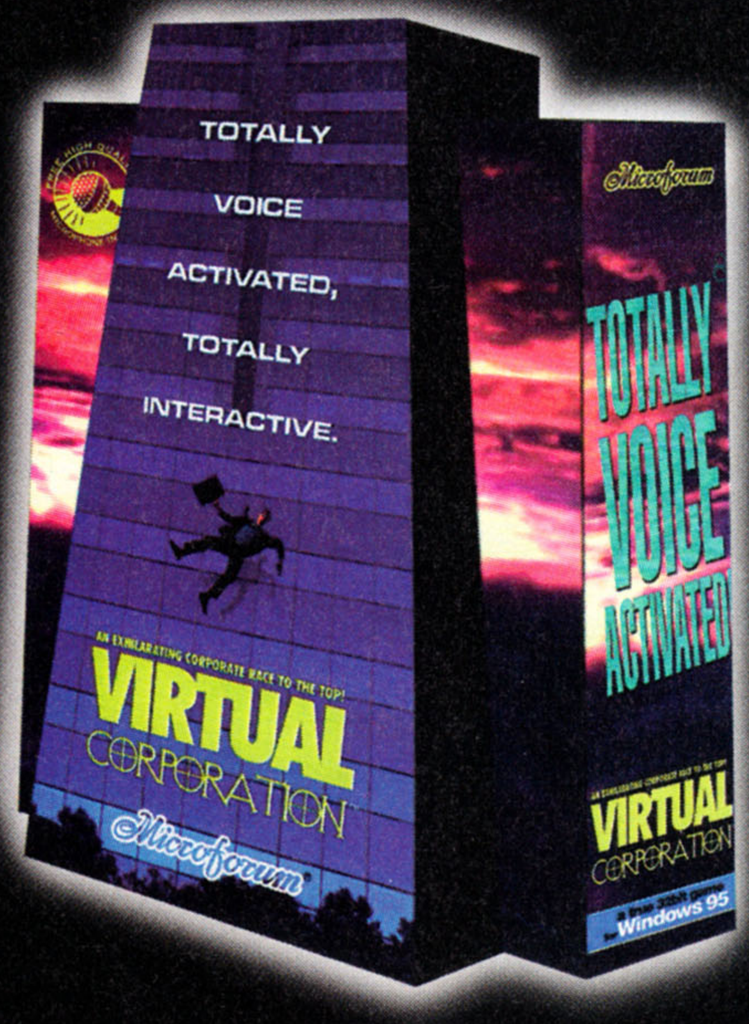
- Actual interactive games within the game itself!
- Challenging and intriguing story scenario
- Free high quality microphone included with game



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HOT top ten...

FUSION counts down the best of this month's games.

Pilotwings 64* will be updated to take advantage of the U64's enhanced graphic capabilities.

11th Hour for the Macintosh, now slated to become a motion picture, provides lots of gore and effects for the graphically inclined.

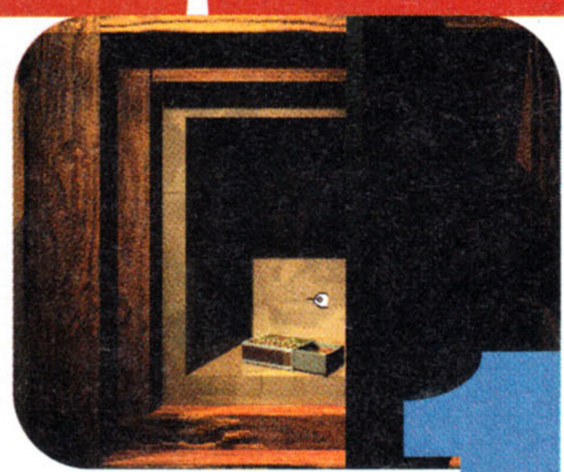
EDITORS' CONSOLE PICKS

1. **Super Mario 64**
   Nintendo/Ultra 64

   Nintendo's play-it-safe title is also one of the best of '96. The plumber gets a 3-D makeover and whole new set of piping that's truly a sight to behold.

2. **Tetrisphear**
   H_2O/Ultra 64
3. **Contra 32***
   Konami/Playstation-Saturn
4. **Pllotwings 64***
   Paradigm/Ultra 64
5. **Resident Evil**
   Capcom Playstation
6. **Panzer Dragoon II**
   Sega/Saturn
7. **Super Mario RPG**
   Nintendo-Square/SNES
8. **Guardian Heroes**
   Treasure/Saturn
9. **Blood Omen**
   Crystal Dynamics/Saturn-PlayStation
10. **Magic Knight Rayearth**
    Working Designs/Saturn

(* Denotes working title)



MACINTOSH GAMES

1. **Myst**
   Broderbund *(last month: 1)*

   Rumor mill speculation of Myst II coming out anytime soon is nothing but grist. The truth is, Rand and Robyn Miller will be lucky to have the game out...

2. **Doom II**
   GT Interactive *(last month: 2)*
3. **Dark Forces**
   LucasArts *(last month: 3)*
4. **SimCity 2000**
   Maxis *(last month: 5)*
5. **11th Hour**
   Virgin *(Top 10 debut)*
6. **Marathon**
   Bungee *(last month: 7)*
7. **Links Pro**
   Access *(last month: 9)*
8. **Star Wars Rebel Assault**
   LucasArts *(last month: 4)*
9. **FA-18 Hornet**
   Graphic Simulations *(Top 10 debut)*
10. **Descent**
    Interplay *(Top 10 debut)*

PC GAMES

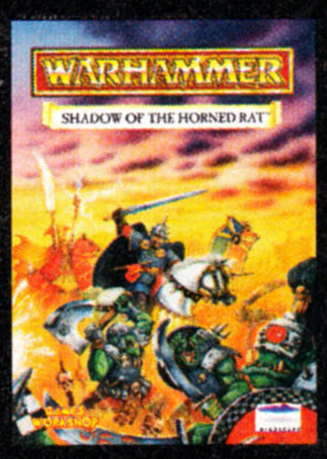
1. **Myst**
   Broderbund *(last month: 1)*

   ...by Christmas time, '96. But heck, the original is still as popular as ever, knocking Doom II back into the number two slot.

2. **Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness**
   Davidson *(Top 10 debut)*
3. **Star Wars Rebel Assault II**
   LucasArts *(Top 10 debut)*
4. **11th Hour**
   Virgin *(Top 10 debut)*
5. **Microsoft Flight Simulator**
   Microsoft *(last month: 3)*
6. **Hexen**
   GT Interactive *(last month: 2)*
7. **The Dig**
   LucasArts *(Top 10 debut)*
8. **Ultimate Doom Thy Flesh**
   GT Interactive *(last month: 8)*
9. **Front Page Sports: Football**
   Sierra On-Line *(Top 10 debut)*
10. **Monopoly**
    Virgin *(last month: 6)*

Rebel Assault II continues the adventures of Rookie One, with all live-action video cut-scenes and gameplay.

Strange events are AFOOT within the EMPIRE AND the oracles foretell a time of Carnage and WOE... with no shortage of Bloody work for our HARDBITTEN troops, this is to the DEATH, the glory... this is WAR!



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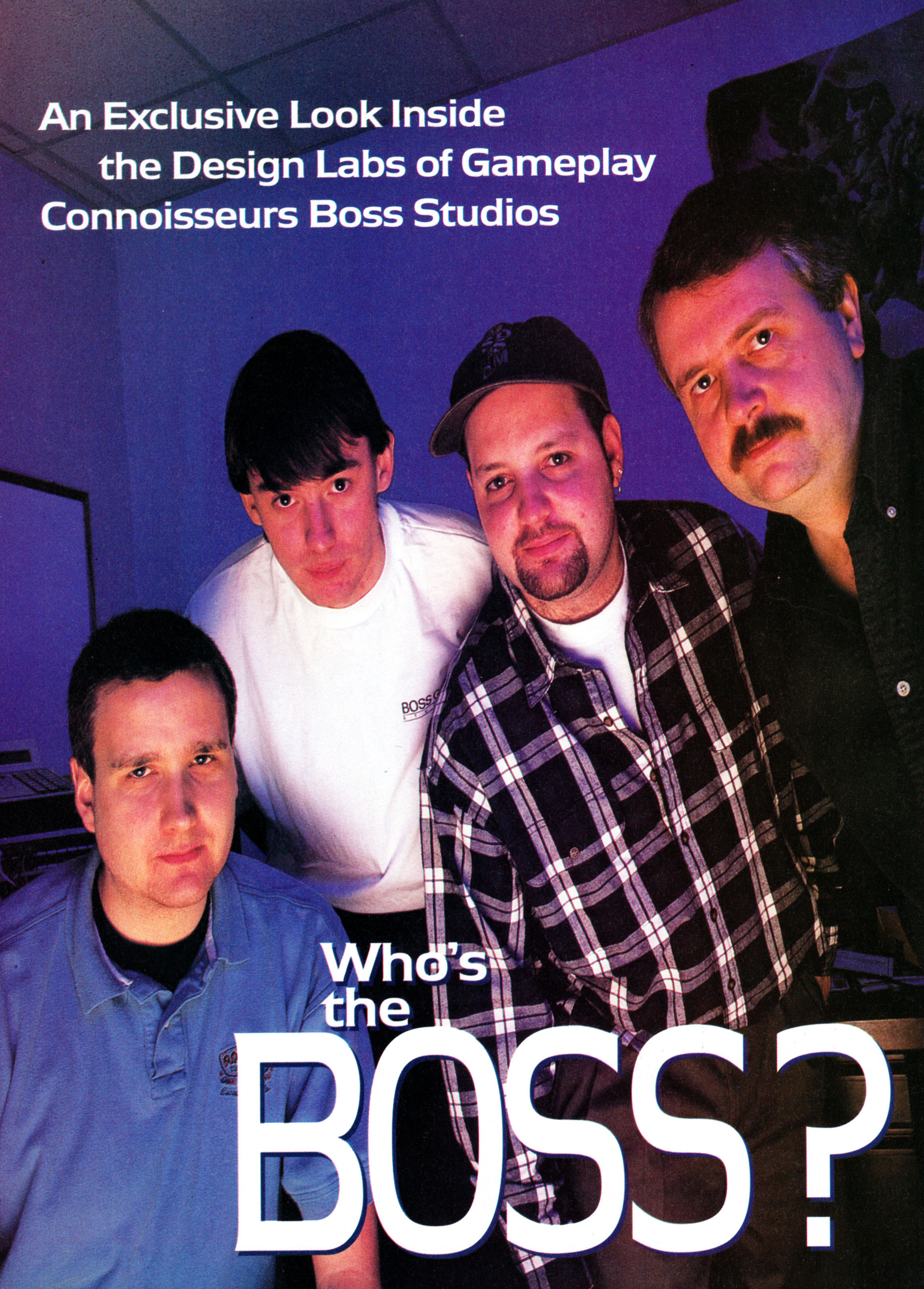
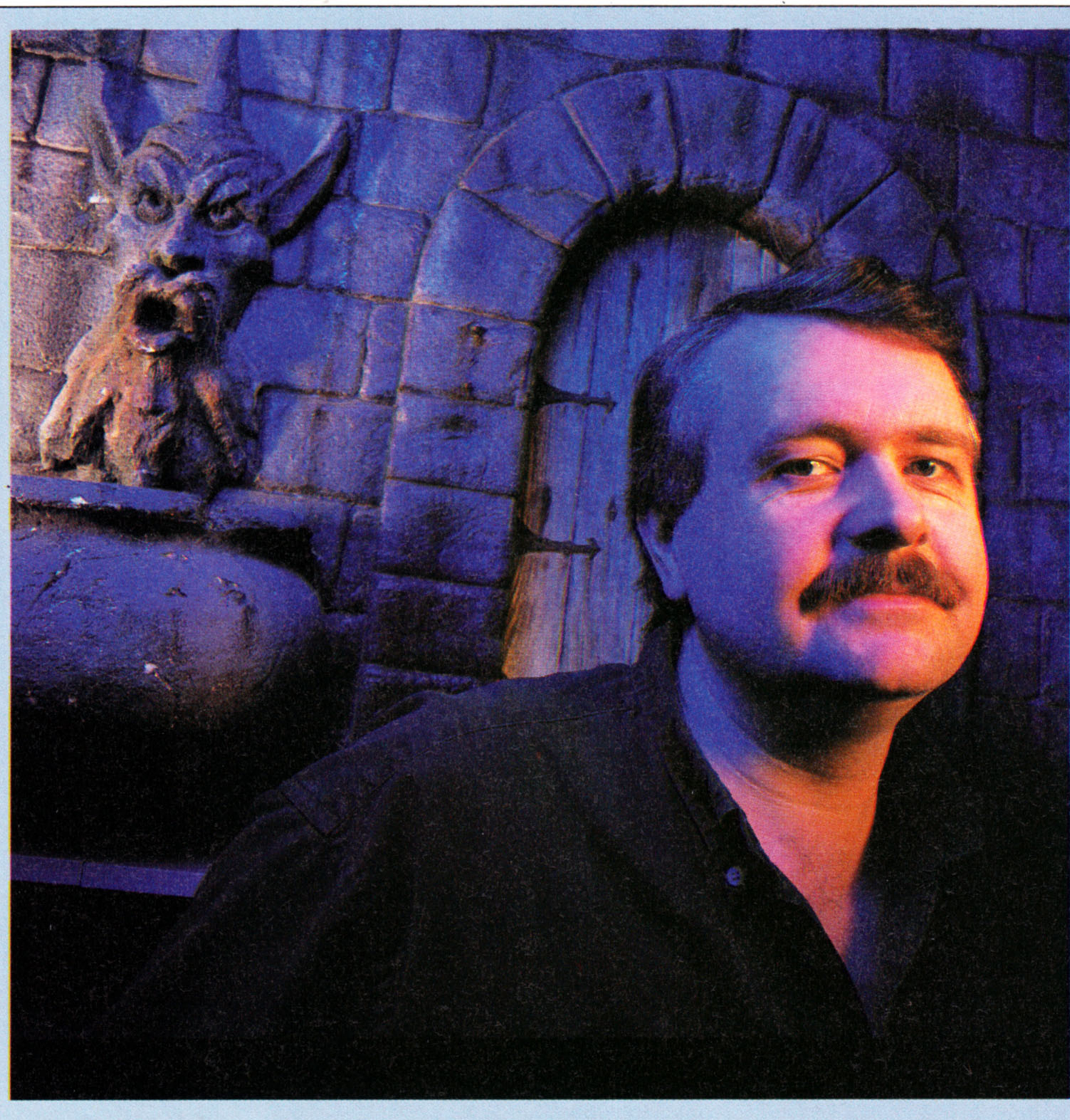
MINDSCAPE®

An Exclusive Look Inside the Design Labs of Gameplay Connoisseurs Boss Studios



Who's the BOSS?

Nestled in the albino confines of a business park in the outskirts of Seattle, among such companies as SquareSoft, Bullet-Proof Software, and T*HQ, Boss Game Studios is quietly working on some of the most promising games coming out in the near future. Nintendo, recognizing their talent and unique teamwork, has signed Boss on as a second-party developer for their ill-fated Virtual Boy, and rumor has it that they're working on an Ultra 64 project as well. *Intelligent Gamer* recently interviewed three directors from this unique company, and also obtained exclusive information on their first three titles, tentatively titled Tank, Adventureland and Kill Team.



Colin Gordon founder of Boss, Head of Support Team

Previous Positions
Head of N. Ireland's Choice Software
Product Manager for Ocean Software
Internal Development Manager and Global Executive Committee member for Virgin Interactive Entertainment Europe

Favorite Games
Warcraft 2, TIE Fighter, Final Fantasy 3, Crystal Pony

***IG*: When each of you came to Boss Game Studios, what were the goals you had in mind?**

Colin: My goal in coming here was to make good games with Hollywood production values and have the opportunity to create games with people I wanted to create games with. The idea of being in Redmond, as opposed to being stuck in San Francisco or L.A., appealed to me as well. Everyone and their uncle are doing the same kinds of things there. That, and the opportunity to earn money, are my motivations for being here.

Seth: My goal was to make games that played well, be able to work on original titles, and have a lot more freedom than I had on the Disney projects. As a personal goal, I'd like to make my next game better than the last one and work from scratch without the Disney license and the crutch of a big marketing push. I also hoped I wouldn't have to work with Rob Povey again, but I guess you can't win them all.

Rob: Basically, Boss gave me a chance to be more involved in the management side of development. In the past, I haven't been impressed with the way the industry's organized in general. I also wanted to get involved with some good games and work with some good people.

***IG*: When you started Boss Game Studios, why did you choose developer status over publisher status?**

Colin: A publisher has to focus on a number of things: They need to focus on developing good games, capturing licenses that work, getting a marketing department together, selling products and distributing them. At the crux of it all are good games, which stem from development. With marketing people, Boss Game would be a very different company. One thing we wanted to sidestep was developing licensed titles. We're all here because we want to create games we want to create.

***IG*: So essentially, you wanted to take a "By Gamers, For Gamers" approach to development?**

Colin: Yes. Games cost a lot to produce and even more to sell. We believe that our funds are better spent on developing games rather than getting them to market. And right now in this industry, a company can go belly-up quickly.

IG: Do you see any disadvantages to being a developer instead of a publisher?

Colin: I guess when you work for a publisher you get a bit more respect from other publishers. Publishers also score more free games. Developers have to buy everything themselves, so they don't get many free games. [laughter] Coming from a publisher to a developer was a big jump, but it's been a nice change overall.

IG: Boss has a unique company structure, right?

Colin: What you're alluding to is our producerless environment. We all clung to the idea of no producers. Producers aren't inherently bad, but some of them are. A producer on a product generally doesn't have a lot of game experience and they often times take charge over the product and exert misplaced creative authority. The four of us have some pretty heated discussions in here, and none of us have the authority to say, "This is the way it's going to be, so shut up." We fight and compromise our way through problems. I think that's important. It's hard on a producer to argue with himself, where the four of us here decide what's right or wrong based on each of our perspectives on the issue.

Rob: The other side of that is if the producer has no creative vision, the product is not going to go anywhere.

Seth: I think we all have a respect for each other's abilities as well, so we can tell where the others fit in terms of their thoughts on games. When we argue, we argue mostly on little things because we're all pretty much headed in the same direction. It allows us to talk about smaller issues for the betterment of the game.

IG: Lately, the industry has taken on a number of trends; like full-motion video. What is your take on some of these trends?

Colin: Full-motion video isn't an evil, it's just overdone. No one wants to pay $60 for a movie when they can see one at the theater for $5 or so. Games and movies are different experiences. Full-motion video can act as a payoff—introduction to the next level, furthering of the story—but it shouldn't be forced on the player.

IG: What are your views on violence in video games and Senator Lieberman's pleas for industry self-censorship?

Seth: I don't believe in censorship of any form in games. If people don't want a game with that kind of content, then they

Company Profile

Date of Birth: Oct. '94 (?)

Number of Employees: 32

Creative Team: 5

Art Team: 12

Technical Team: 11

Support: 4

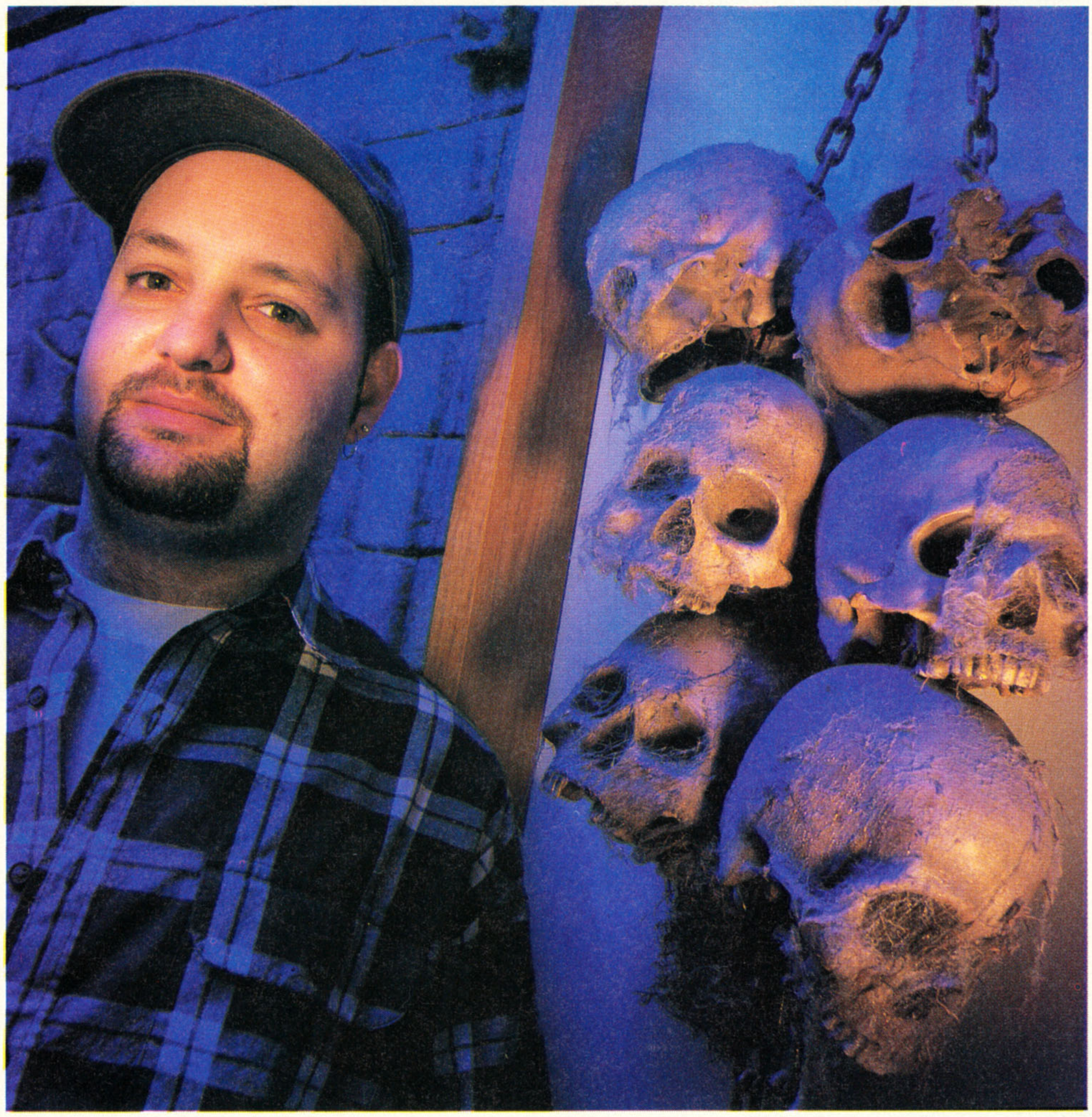
Platforms Currently in development:
PlayStation, Saturn, VB, likely U-64

Company Pets:
Tarantula, two gerbils, part-time Iguana

Company Preoccupations:
Bats, Sinbad, B.O.B., SGIs, PS-Viewpoint and other bad games, Yo-yo'ing, arcade machines, bald people.

Early concept art for Boss' upcoming game tentatively titled Kill Team.

"...when you work for a publisher you get a bit more respect from other publishers. Publishers also score more free games." -Colin Gordon



Seth Mendelsohn creative director

Previous Positions
Former playtester for Virgin
Lead Designer at Westwood Studios for The Lion King

Favorite Games
Street Fighter Alpha, Marvel Super Heroes, Daytona USA, Dracula X, Super Mario World, Super Metroid

won't buy them. I don't have any problem with violence, even extreme violence, but on the flip side, I don't want to make any games centered on violence. Violence is okay as long as it's relevant to the story. Colin has children, so I think his view might be different.

Colin: My view is very similar, actually...as long as publishers provide information and advisories; letting people know about the content instead of restricting people from buying them. Video games aren't cheap enough for kids to buy by themselves. It all boils down to an informed, parental choice. We're not here to right the wrongs, defend truth, justice and the American way or anything like that. As Seth said, we're not going to shy away from violence, but we're not going to throw it in because we can. Violence should fit the scenario.

***IG*: What are your views on the three systems you're developing for?**

Rob: The Virtual Boy hasn't shipped a lot of units. There are actually some interesting things one can do with it, but most of those won't be explored since the system is essentially three years too late. The Saturn and PlayStation are two very different machines...I think we'll see more impressive Saturn games than PlayStation games in the long run. I'm not sure how long the 3-D trend is going to last.

***IG*: What did you think of the Ultra 64 at Shoshinkai?**

Colin: Rob was in a suit at Shoshinkai! Can you believe it!

Rob: I guess the first thing was that I was relieved because no one was showing anything that would blow away what we are doing...

Colin: ...On systems that may or may not be Ultra 64.

Rob: The second thing was if the average gamer is going to be able to tell a difference between it and the PlayStation. Nothing there stunned me. Nothing said to me, "I am significantly better than the Saturn and PlayStation."

***IG*: What were your goals with your first three titles?**

Colin: With Tank, we wanted to explore the Virtual Boy's 3-D gimmick and maybe the link cable. The latter may or may not go ahead, since they haven't shipped the link cable, but the hardware is there and it's much better than the Game Boy's link. You can actually write codes that work.

Seth: The other thing we wanted to do was create a game that didn't require a lot of consecutive time with the Virtual Boy; something you can pick up, play for a bit, and easily come back to later. Tank is more of an arcade-style game.

Colin: We also did not want to do a scaling sprite game, but actually do something in 3-D. We developed a solid-geometry 3-D engine for Tank, and it's been tough. The machine is under par, to be

honest, and we would've liked something faster, but isn't that always the case?

Seth: The final thing we wanted to do was to take advantage of the controller. As an input device, the Virtual Boy's controller is unique and there are a lot of interesting things you can do, but do them in a way that's not contrived and actually makes sense.

***IG*: What kind of polygon counts and frame rates are you getting on the Virtual Boy?**

Colin: It's a really scary number, when you think about it. About 200 polygons at 15-20 frames per second. But since you are in a tank, it's not as noticeable and actually works out all right.

Martin Sawkins art director

Previous Positions
Silicon Dreams, Sega Europe Design coordinator for Graftgold. Also worked on virtual-reality projects.

Favorite Games
Bomberman game series, The Legend of Zelda, action-adventure games

Top 5 Things You're Likely to Hear in the Halls of Boss

5. "Bats are so cool. All of our games will have bats in them."

4. "Jaleel White is on your team."

3. "Full-motion video makes really good games. I read that in a magazine."

2. "Rob hates everything."

1. "We should do a game with Sinbad, because Sinbad just makes every movie better; and hell, it'll probably work with games, too."

***IG*: What about Adventureland?**

Colin: We wanted to create a game that was familiar but different. I think we've done that, and also created something that's kind of creepy, dark and will hopefully intrigue the audience.

Seth: We've also come up with a character that we think is very unique.

***IG*: What type of a game is it?**

Seth: An FMV fishing game...with role-playing elements (grinning).

Colin: Real-time 3-D action. That's all I think I'm going to say right now. We have varying perspectives and different camera angles, but not in the really annoying style of some 3-D polygon games.

***IG*: And the last of the three games, Kill Team?**

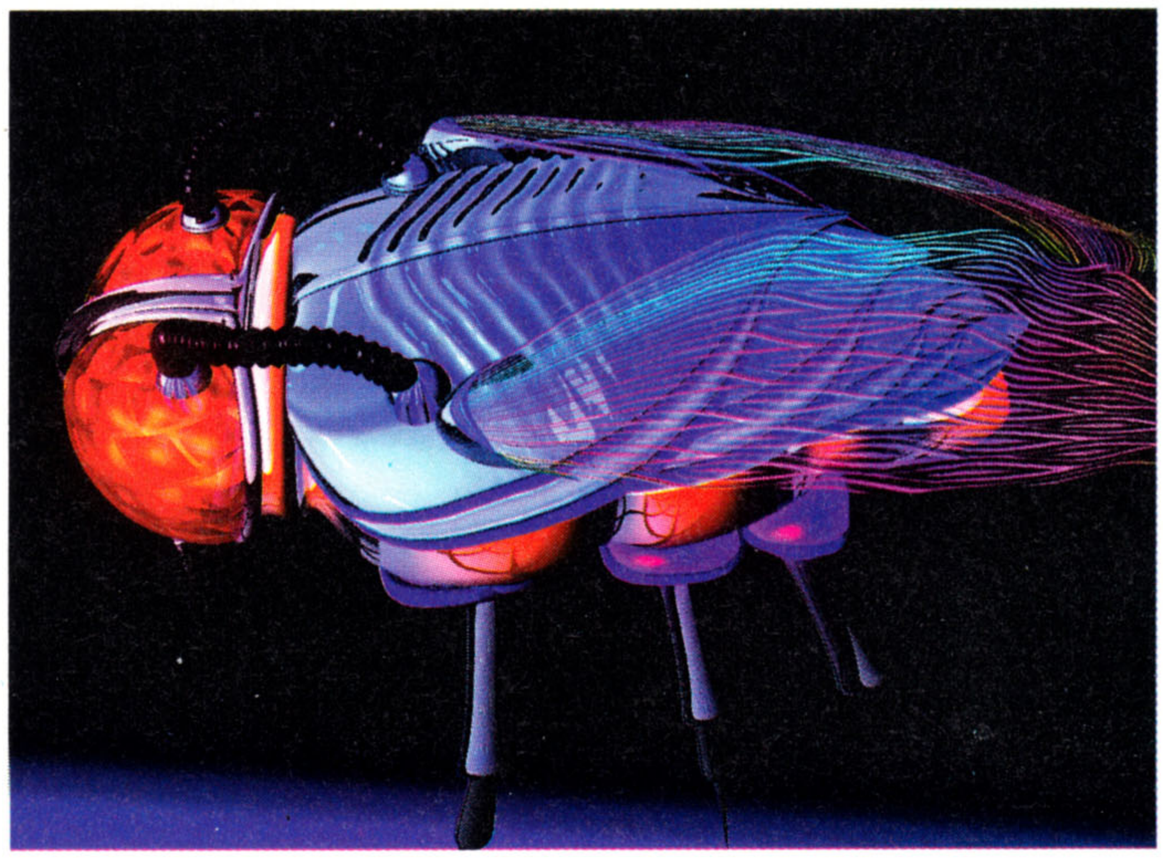
Seth: With Kill Team, we wanted to take a great action game and combine it with an involved story. I don't think that's really been done. Someone who wants to play it just for the action can, while someone who wants to go a little deeper can too; so you get the best of both worlds. The game has multiple paths and depending on what the player does, it'll definitely affect the outcome of the game without making you replay missions over and over for the best ending like Wing Commander. The game will have some RPG elements, but at the heart it's an action game. We're definitely taking advantage of the increased abilities of the PlayStation and the Saturn.

Colin: The other key thing is that Kill Team will have some side-scrolling and top-down areas, 3/4 view stuff, different kinds of vehicles and other cool stuff.

Seth: We wanted to make a game that returned to the great golden days of the NES, like the Bionic Commandos, Castlevanias and other games that played very well. Those games played well, controlled well and had interesting game styles and power-ups: We wanted to take all of those and incorporate them with the new technology.

***IG*: Boss Game Studios is the games division of Boss Film Studios, a special effects house down in L.A. How do they influence your creative processes?**

Colin: Well, those things really worried me when I first came aboard here. That is, what kind of input and what kind of decisions they had in our product. So far, they've kept their distance and acknowl-



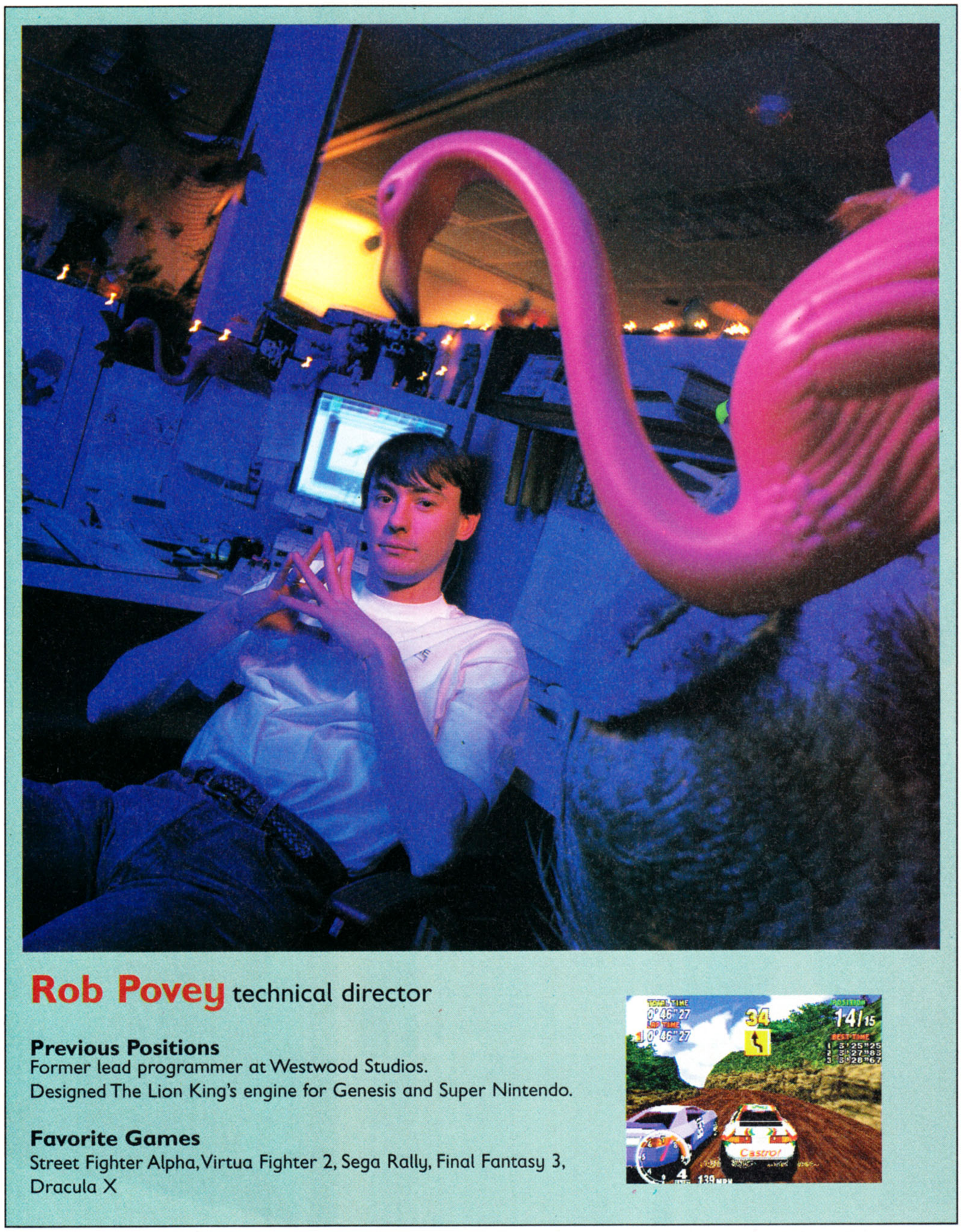
▲ **A graphic of a cyborg-like housefly rendered using Alias, which poses a dangerous threat to players in Boss' Adventureland.**

"People take you more seriously when you have a major special-effects contender backing you." -Colin Gordon

edged that we know games. But they've been really helpful with things like story decisions, camera angles in render sequences, and other movie-type things that we don't have as good of a grasp on, not being movie people. We've also used some of their resources for Adventureland. Boss Film Studios has a proprietary motion-capture system that they built to animate the Sil creature in *Species*. We modified it for our own needs and used it for our character in Adventureland. We will also be doing some live shoots for Kill Team, and we'll be using their greenscreen facilities for that.

The other nice thing is that people take you more seriously when you have a major special-effects contender backing you, especially at Silicon Graphics and other related vendors. If they work well with us, there's always the chance that we'll recommend them to Boss Film Studios. We've been treated seriously by a lot of vendors because of that.

***IG*: Thanks for your time, and good luck in the future.**



Rob Povey technical director

Previous Positions
Former lead programmer at Westwood Studios.
Designed The Lion King's engine for Genesis and Super Nintendo.

Favorite Games
Street Fighter Alpha, Virtua Fighter 2, Sega Rally, Final Fantasy 3, Dracula X

Three characters in development for the upcoming Kill Team which can be chosen as player allies.

Solving the Mystery means Visiting the Dark Pit of your Soul.

"THE NEW GENRE OF INTERACTIVE HORROR!"
–GAME FAN

STARE INTO THE EYES OF MADNESS!

Buried within is a secret to D. Solve the mystery and enter the D sweepstakes at participating retailers.

D PC DEMO available at participating retailers.

3·5·96

"SPINE-TINGLING ACTION!"–EGM

A full moon rises over L.A. National Hospital.

D... the Daughter.

Inside—the father, a doctor gone mad...but why?

D... Darkness.

Outside—the daughter...the innocent, the seeker.

D... Destiny.

You are about to enter the darkness forever!

D... Despair.

With stunning computer rendered 3-D graphics,

D... Delirium.

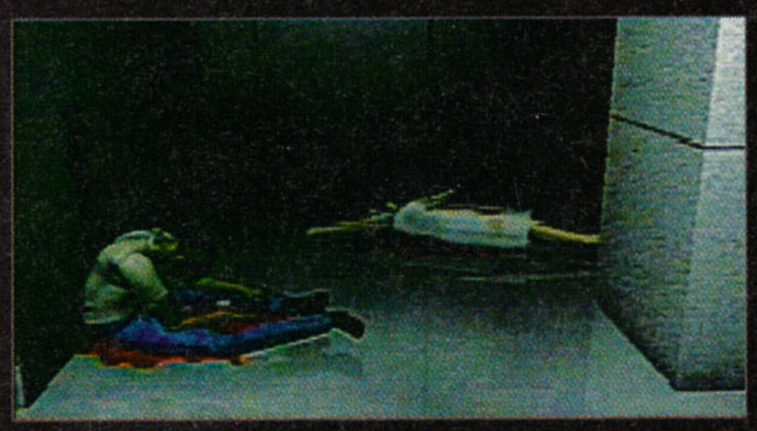
D's descent into the dark pit of your soul is a

D... Death.

tour-de-force of terrifying secrets and challenges.

D... Damnation.

"SLICK, STYLISH, SCARY FUN!"–GAME PLAYERS



DON'T PLAY IT IN THE DARK!

TEEN T AGES 13+ · PC CD ROM · PlayStation · SEGA SATURN

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Acclaim entertainment, inc.

FROM H2O TO PHE

The editors of IG's FUSION were offered the exclusive opportunity to visit with H2O Entertainment Inc. for a special interview to discuss the company's past, present and future. While the H2O name probably means little to you today, rest assured that it will be huge in the very near future: this tiny firm, based in Canada is responsible for what is arguably the most impressive puzzle game ever designed...but more on that in a moment.

As an unannounced member of Nintendo's exclusive Dream Team, H2O Entertainment is a 10-person operation based out of Calgary, Alberta—a place best known for its cowboys, rodeos, oil and gas companies as well as blistering hot summers and -30 degree winters. Located approximately 200 Kilometers north of the American border, Calgary is flanked with memories of the 1988 Winter Olympics, set against a panoramic backdrop of the Rocky Mountains. Considering their location and size, how did H2O luck out and score a monster deal with one of the largest video game hardware and software manufacturers in the world?

Canadian Developer H2O Entertainment Readies World's Greatest Puzzle Game — for the Ultra 64

Liquid Reality

In early 1993, partners Arthur Wong and Michael Tam were operating a Calgary-based video game \PC sales and rental shop. Says Tam, "One of our employees at the time, Steve Shatford, approached me about this game idea. We looked at some of the conceptual drawings and thought it was a really great idea." Shatford brought in his high-school friend, business partner and programmer Christopher Bailey, and the four began to flesh out the game's concept.

"We got the name H2O from a prankster friend of ours," says Bailey. "Back in 1992, I had this company called Cenesis, and I was working on a project with Steve on the Amiga called Crown of Order, a real kick-ass game for its time. Another guy we were working with thought it was funny to shorten Crown of Order to CO2. The joke became H2O presents CO2." He jokingly adds, "I didn't like the Cenesis name and we gave up searching for a new name for the company—so H2O kind of stuck."

What was "Phear?" *Intelligent Gamer* Editors Jer Horwitz and Anthony Shubert played an early version of the game and describe it as an incredibly unique puzzle game that is essentially the opposite of Tetris: In a completely 3-D environment, the player has to take apart a floating sphere's frame—made up of Tetris-shaped blocks—to get to its inner core. Both *IG* Editors were instantly addicted. The screen shots shown in this article come directly from the Jaguar version of the game—for the Ultra 64, they'll look even better (see below).

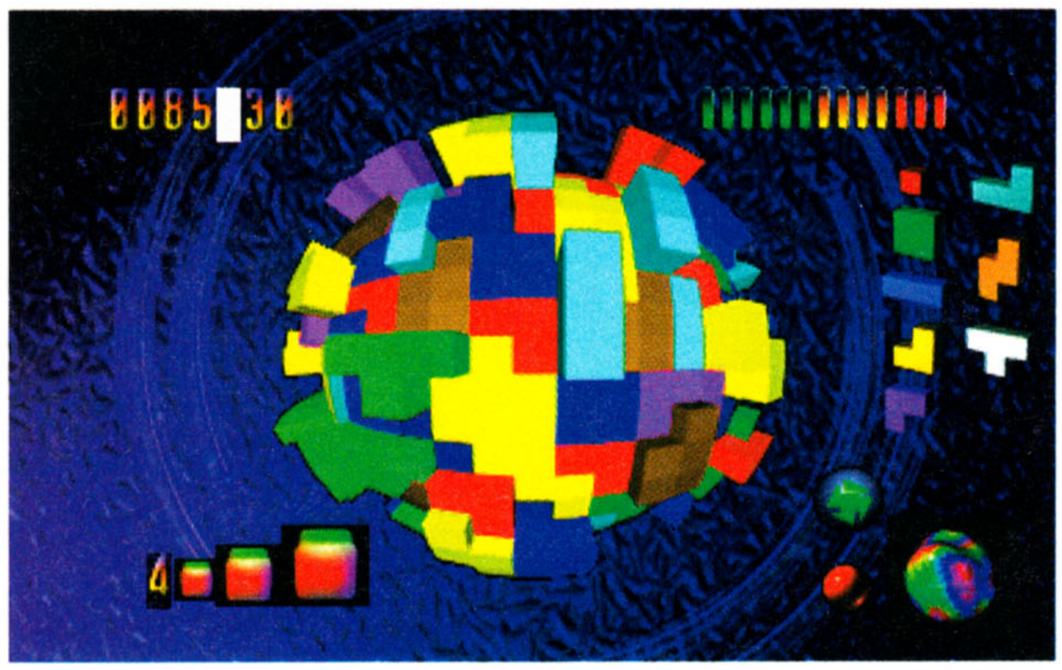
With a liquid dream of bringing Phear to mass-market appeal, Chris started most of the programming while Steve focused on the design. Their desire to build a polygon intensive game in 1993 was a tough call for the newly formed H2O team. "At the time there was no Saturn, PlayStation or 3DO quite yet," notes Bailey. The group decided to go with the Atari Jaguar because "the specifications sounded right."

Meanwhile, inside Nintendo's Redmond, Wash. offices, plans were under way to procure new and unique titles for an upcoming system code-named "Project Reality." These plans caused the formation of the company's TreeHouse Team, a small group whose mission was to hunt down potential developers for upcoming Nintendo projects. Ken Lobb—who has helped with both Killer Instinct and Donkey Kong Country—was put in charge of this new unit with a directive: Track down five or 10 specific genre games worth snagging.

"We were really caught by surprise by Nintendo's announcement not to show our game at Shoshinkai...we've been working in our little shell for so long that this was our first chance to break out and show the world that little bit."

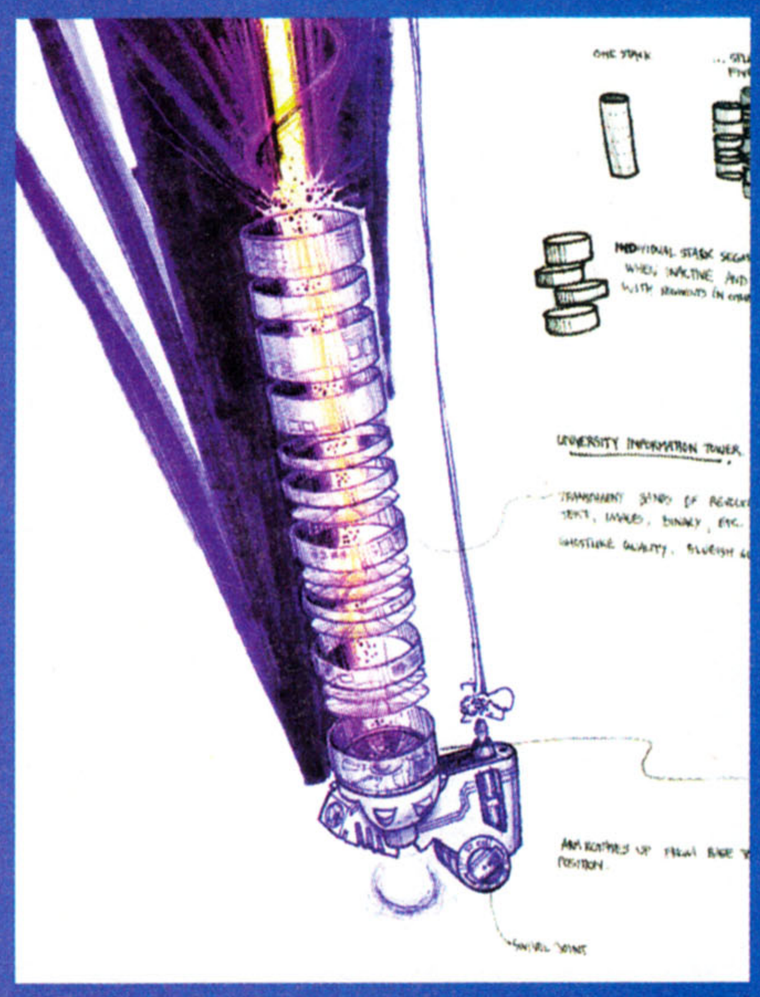
The Deal

According to Michael Tam, between the period of October 1994 and early January 1995, the H2O team had grown by two members—a musician and another programmer. The team was busy preparing for Phear's first public showing at the 1995 Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Says Tam, "Our game was showing at the Atari booth and Darren Smith of Nintendo's TreeHouse team came to us after hearing about our game." At the time, Phear was an entirely playable demo, lacking only

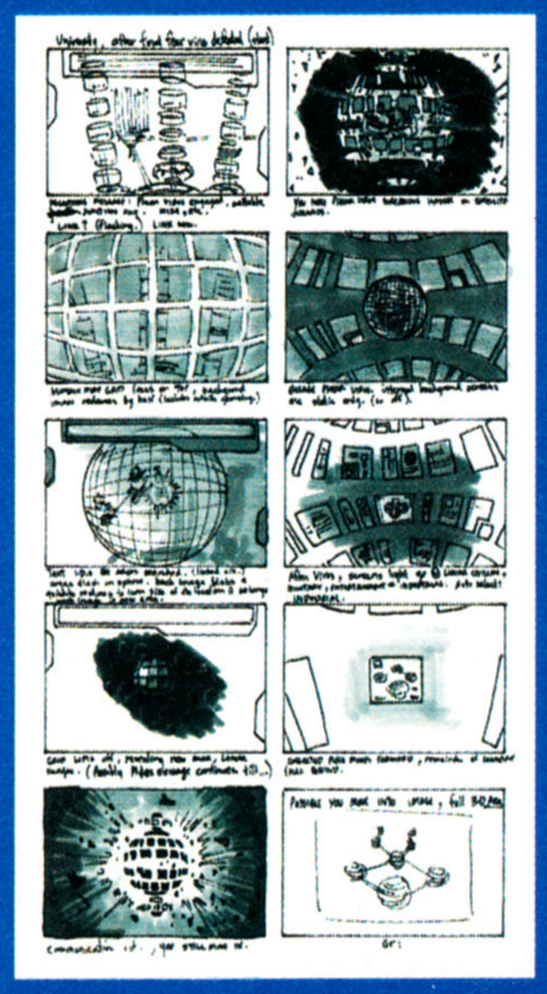


A total core meltdown is nothing to Phear in this early version of the game in which polygonal pieces are stripped away from the orb.

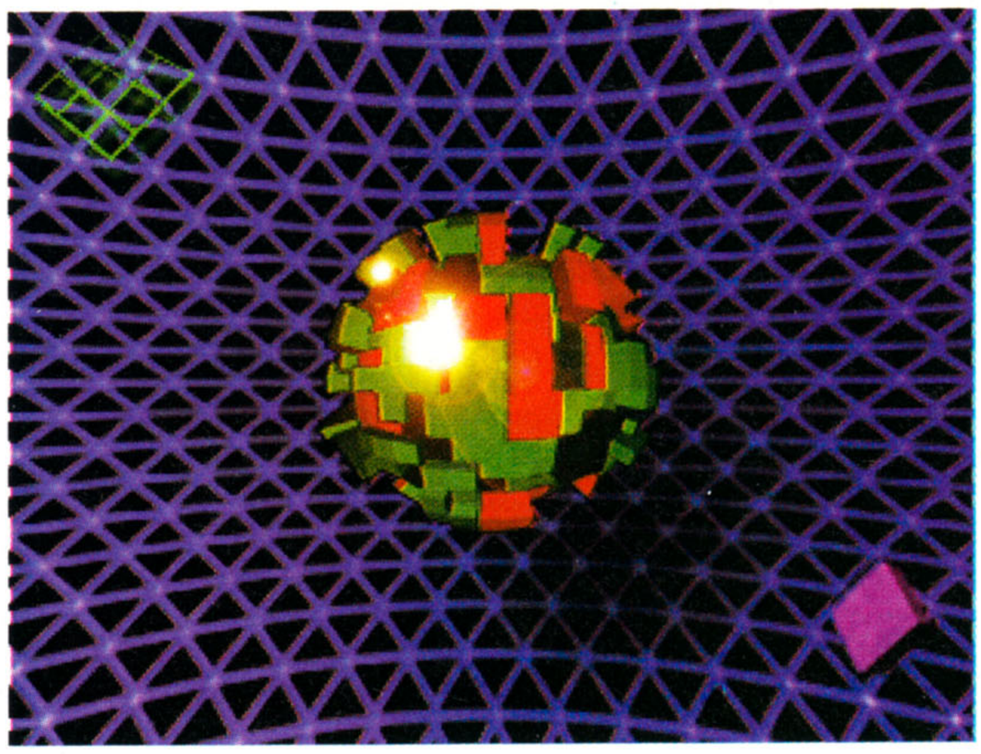
PENCILS TO PIXELS



H2O conceived gates that link to the virtual Internet world of the future.



Storyboard scenes envision post-modern scenarios which just might be a part of the Ultra-version of Phear.



Originally referred to as the anti-Tetris, getting to the core of the sphere may be even more addictive than Elorg and Nintendo's classic puzzler.

music and later stages' background art; players gathered around constantly to try their hand at the one future Jaguar product that seemed capable of selling systems to a huge mass market. Phear was the concept that even Alexey Pajitnov couldn't conceive: It was Tetris re-invented.

How did Nintendo come to see Phear? One story puts it that Hyper Image, developers of Hover Hunter for the Jaguar, turned down a development offer with Nintendo, expressing their desire to continue working as an independent developer. Another says that members of Hyper Image told Nintendo to take a serious look at H2O's game. When asked for the official story, Michael Tam responds with a chuckle, "Hyper Image did some great public relations for us..."

Thus H2O's first product showing was their last. After Winter CES '95, Phear utterly vanished from the face of the earth, and at the time, rumors placed the game in the hands of either Sony or JVC. But H2O had actually been sequestered by another Japanese giant altogether. Phear was removed from Jaguar release lists and H2O became entirely closed-lipped about the fate of what appeared even then to be the world's most addictive and imaginative puzzle game.

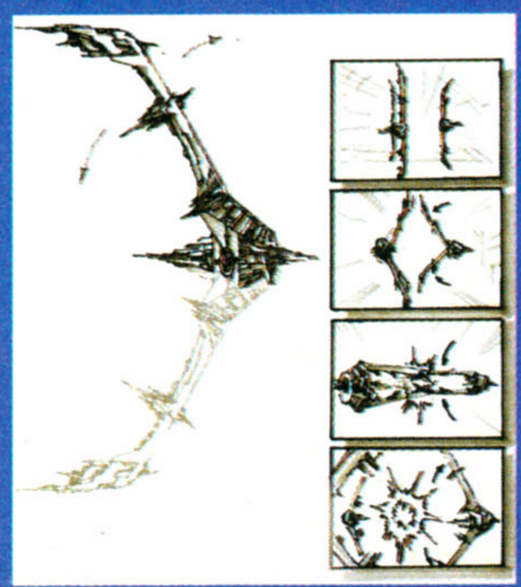
WHAT IS TETRISPHEAR?

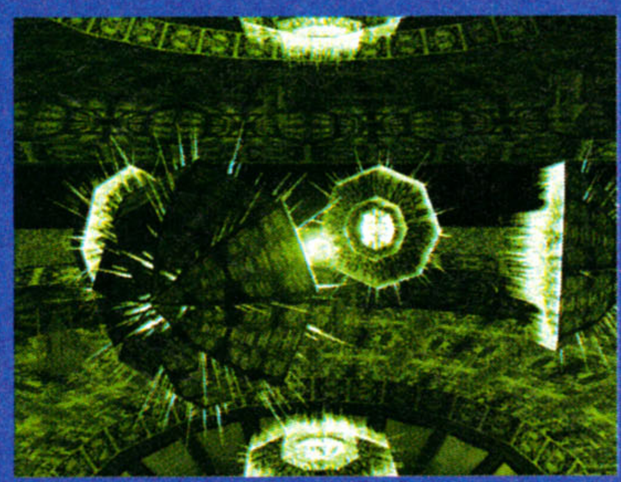
For various reasons, H2O refuses to discuss the major changes that have taken place in the code since Phear on the Jaguar became TetrisPhear on the Ultra 64. It's suspected that some of the company's new staff members have had a hand in beefing up the original design in several key ways. When the Jaguar version was being readied, H2O was considering futuristic themes and techno music tracks from level to level, and rumors following Shoshinkai placed H2O in possession of a thoroughly cyberpunk theme and accompanying techno-industrial soundtrack.

By request of Nintendo, a writer was brought on to develop a story line to add an entirely new dimension to the puzzle-solving action. When the Jaguar version was still being planned, H2O was conceiving a global Internet-like network consisting of nodes and gates. This was to have been left out when the Jaguar cart was planned at 2 Megabytes. With additional storage capacity in Ultra 64 ROMs, has H2O opted to re-insert their Net-hacking theme?

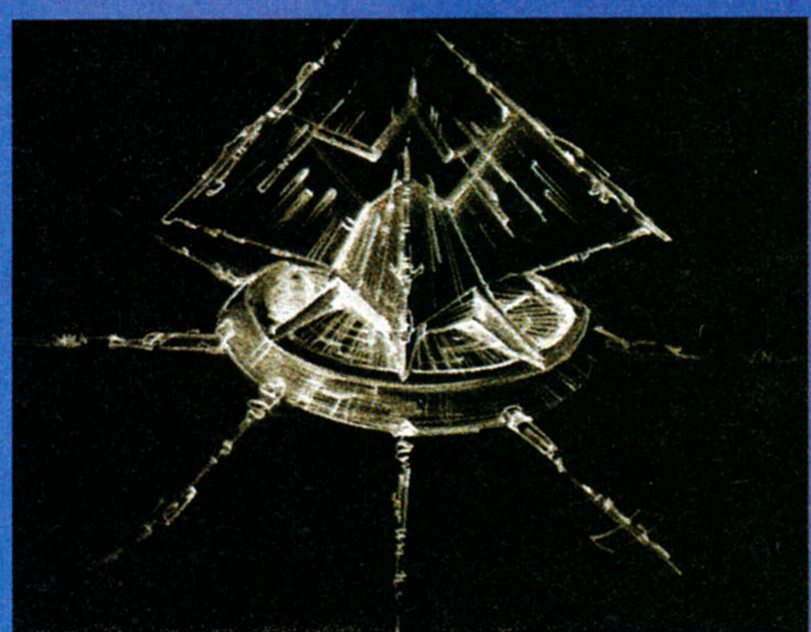
"We think what really sold Nintendo on our game is its ability for great gameplay," says Tam firmly. "When we were at Shoshinkai, Mr. Yamauchi (NoJ chairman) kept saying in his keynote speech the importance behind gameplay, gameplay, gameplay. That confirmed to us what we've said all along: How important gameplay is to the success of Phear. And that's exactly how this game is going to come out, with a strong emphasis on gameplay."

Story details are few and far between, but virtual travel will involve the use of gates and nodes.



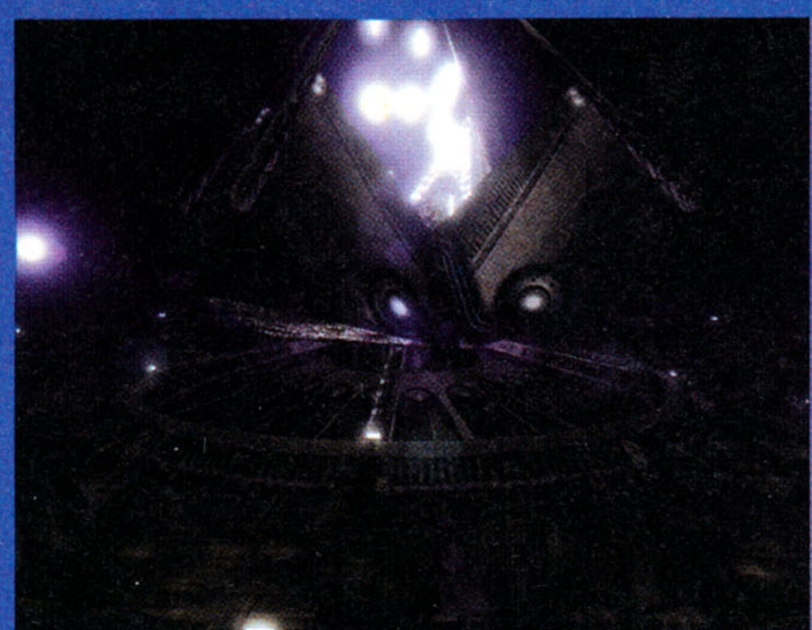


An artist's rendering of what the future internet would look like for a story mode.



H2O's concept began simply enough: Dig to the core of a sphere as it rotates in 3-D.

Today, there is a story that goes along with the object of the game as well.



THE COMPANY

The interesting thing about H2O is the company's average employee age (early 20s) and set of similar personal backgrounds. H2O's people all seem to come from similar backgrounds and like to play the same games; in fact, almost all the programming staff came from the Commodore 64 demo scene, where it was impressive to whip up flashy graphic and sound demos and distribute them as widely as possible.

In a rather upbeat office space, 25 floors above downtown Calgary, many long 10- to 14-hour work shifts are interrupted by Nerf ball fights and paper airplane competitions. Often, pure chaos breaks out in the development lab after a lengthy video game competition in the company's comfy 'A/V' room, where you can find a wide assortment of game systems ranging from Atari 2600 and Intellivision machines buried in a corner to a couple of Jaguar machines, a PlayStation and a Saturn. Killer Instinct, Virtua Fighter 2 and Toshinden top most staff member's lists, although WipeOut has been described by several staffers as being the more impressive game for the Sony PlayStation.

TETRISPHEAR RUMORS

- **In motion, the game will look more like pre-rendered art than real-time polygons because of improved Ultra light-source shading, anti-aliasing and texture-mapping.**
- **Multiplayer support is a strong possibility—the Ultra could easily handle more than one rotating sphere on-screen at once.**
- **Nintendo's influence may push Anime-style character artwork into the final project to help its appeal in Asian markets. The characters will possibly be a part of a story which can be switched on or off.**

The Mystery Unravelled

By mid-1995, Nintendo's Ken Lobb had met with H2O to discuss the features that would be included in a Nintendo version of Phear, and discussed the possibility of changing the name of the game itself to TetrisPhear —an ironic marketing effort that would sell more games while giving the self-proclaimed creators of the "anti-Tetris" a legitimate tie to one of history's most popular puzzles. The paperwork was signed, a hiring spree took place, and H2O came into possession of early Ultra 64 development kits, including a loan of five SGI workstations—two Indigo Extremes, Two Indys and a Challenge S server.

According to just about anyone at H2O, the hardware learning curve is what helped the company understand the inner workings of the Ultra 64. "Nintendo did a really good thing with their development kits," says Bailey. "They had something like 130 developers at SGI working in the Ultra lab, making an absolutely amazing engine for everything. So, when you get your development kit, you get everything, including the hardware and software, unlike the Saturn or PlayStation development kits. Although you can't get at the Ultra's microcode, the system is so fast that you don't need to worry about it."

As November 1995 approached, the company—minus Steve Stafford, who was leaving to start his own company—was gearing up for its first public showing of Phear since its re-incarnation as a Nintendo product. Plans were being made to shuffle the whole company to Shoshinkai, the giant Nintendo trade show in Japan, where the eyes of curious public and prying media were eagerly waiting to catch the first glimpse of Nintendo 64, the Ultra 64's Japanese sister. At the last moment, a decision was made by NoJ chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi to yank a number of titles from the floor.

"We were really caught by surprise by Nintendo's announcement not to show our game at Shoshinkai," explains Tam. "You see, we've been working in our little shell for so long that this was our first chance to break out and show the world that little bit. We were disappointed at first, but then I realized how much sense the decision made on a corporate level."

Adds Bailey, "I think Nintendo's decision was based on past experience from other companies. Trying to show off a game without being able to play it may not have looked so hot for Nintendo or our company." He hastened to add, "I think Nintendo realized that as a puzzle game, our game has a lot of ideas that are extremely unique. Obviously they didn't want to give anyone a head's up as to what we're doing."

It appears as if Nintendo will hold on to TetrisPhear for a global release, once the hardware is available to every market. "We're hoping that we can have our game on the

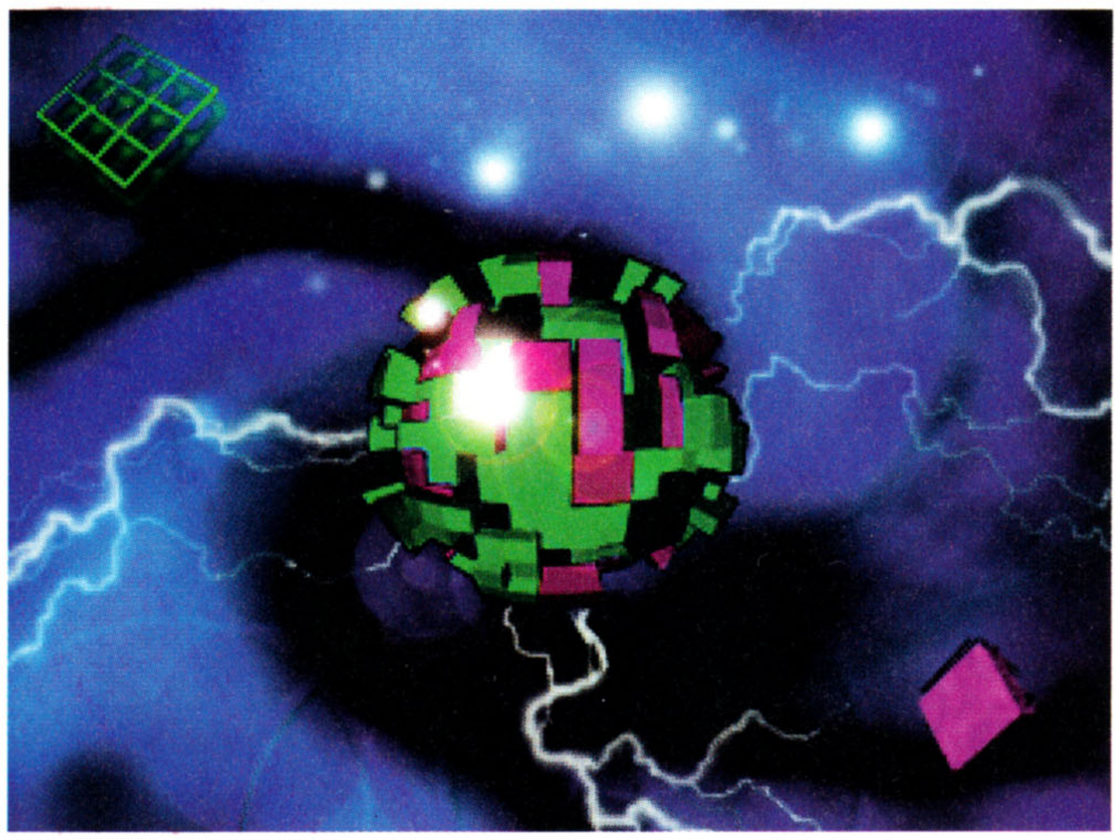
THE WATERBOYS OF H2O
(From Left to Right) Rear:
Michael Tam, Chris Bailey, Jon McBain, Craig Stephens, David Pridie
Front: Roland Longpre, Neil Voss, Russ Kakuschke, Chris Bretz

market sometime around second or third quarter 1996," says Tam, noting that "it's really out of our hands."

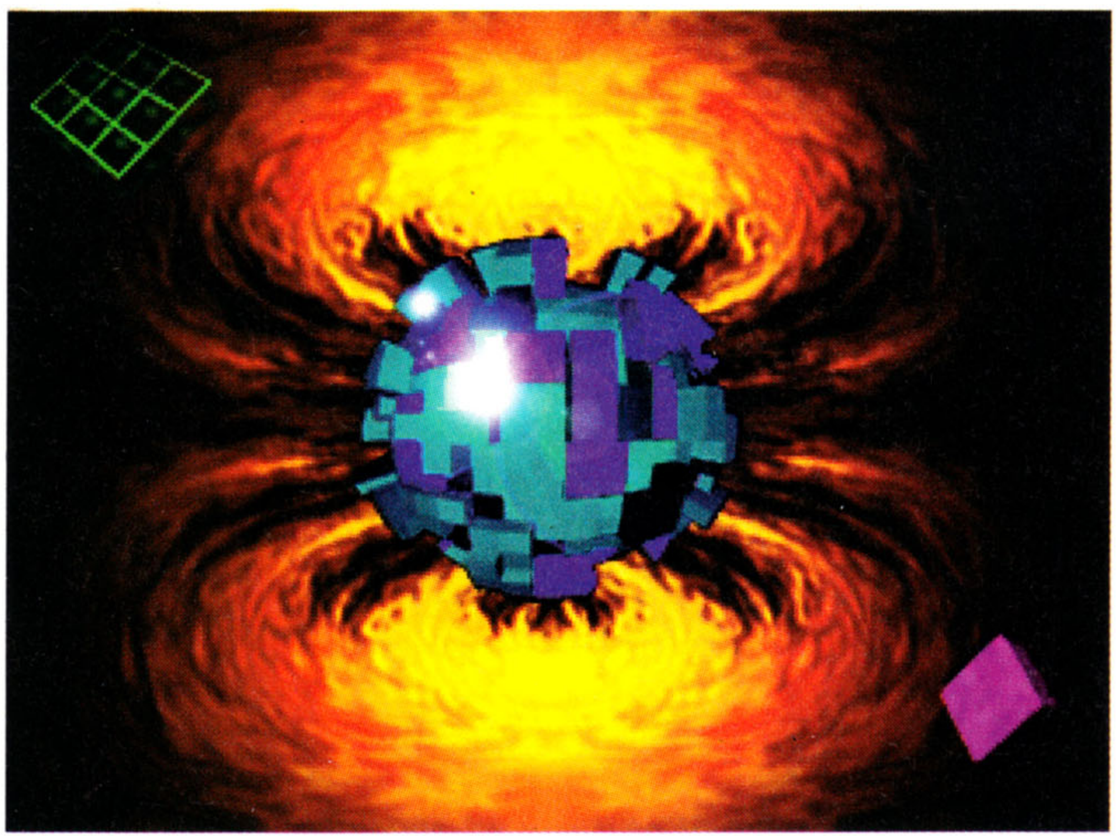
"You have to count on the fact, from game completion to actual release, you need about a two-month window. Also, first-party and second-party titles and the TreeHouse projects go through a lot of time in playtesting, making sure they're all bug free."

As far as future plans go for H2O, the company would like to first figure out how to get around a potential "one-hit wonder" stigma by seeing how the game does on store shelves before doubling their production staff. Says Tam, "We have two other game ideas lined up right now, and all I can say is that they're not puzzle games. What started this company off was a really cool idea...like something that was original and outstanding, something risky because it might become a new concept in games. We're hoping that kind of approach will work, and that's how we'll do our second game."

I think Nintendo realized that, as a puzzle game, our game has a lot of ideas that are extremely unique. Obviously they didn't want to give anyone a head's up as to what we're doing."

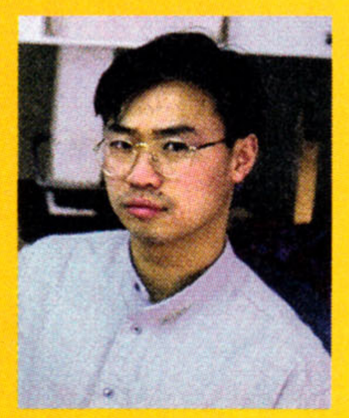


Dazzling backgrounds transport the amazing sphere and anyone who dares to play Phear to other worlds and different dimensions.



After getting hooked on what could be the greatest puzzle game of all time, players will soon get used to these alternate realms.

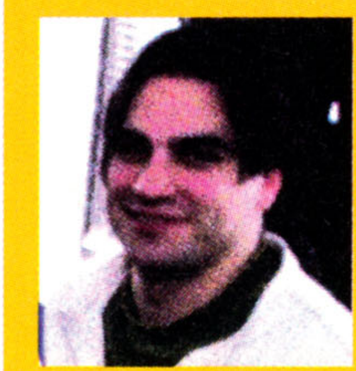
H2O PROFILES



Name: Michael Tam
Age: 27
Job: President and Business Manager
Other: Enjoys original Atari 2600 games, Virtua Fighter 2, Chess games and some silly French titled action puzzle game for the Super Famicom.

Name: Christopher Bailey
Age: 21
Job: Programming Director and co-founder of H2O
Background: Began programming on the Commodore 64 at age 10
Other: The unofficial H2O champion in VF 2 and Killer Instinct.

Name: Roland Longpri
Age: 26
Job: Graphic Designer; designs objects and characters, textures, ideas for story line and game concept. Follow through from early sketches and story-boards to final touch-ups on completed models.
Fave Games: Strategy games such as WarCraft and WarLords are favorites. Some combat games including Toshinden and Virtua Fighter.



Name: David Pridie
Age: 24
Job: Programmer and to agitate everyone in the company
Fave Games: Dune 2, Command and Conquer, Warcraft 2, Ultima Series, Virtua Fighter 1 and 2
Other: Plays a nasty game of pool.

Name: Neil Voss
Age: 21
Job: Director of Music and Sound, duration: one year
Fave Games: Games with *style* and gameplay. WipeOut, Gods, Anything by Delphine and Bullfrog, Nintendo's Yoshi's Island and Hot-Rod by Sega
Other: Claims to be single. Took a sample from musician "Bjork" and tried to use it in the game until a playtester from Nintendo said, "Wait a sec." Now Neil is cruising bars looking for a female vocalist to sing the exact two-second phrase.

Thriller Instincts

Nintendo, Midway and Rare are returning to rock North American arcades with a revamped sequel to the Silicon Graphics-rendered game originally planned for release on Nintendo's Ultra 64.

Rare uses Killer Instinct 2 to showcase the latest in rendering technology and their own internal improvement with older rendering tools. Characters now sport realistic flowing hair—entirely computer generated—and more finely detailed profiles. The new fighting stages, which were formerly little more than scrolling rendered movies, now include introductory cinematics and breakable interactive objects. Rare's trademark superb audio has returned and improved from KI1, as have the in-game sound effects and, most importantly, Nintendo has addressed the gameplay concerns of players and added both throws and additional types of moves to the game engine. KI2 is more ambitious in every way than its predecessor.

What else has changed? Cinder's flame has been extinguished and Riptor has been sent packing—neither character is among the standard player choices in the game. At least four new characters have been added: Tusk, Kim Wu, Maya and Gargus, the game's new final Boss. And combos are easier to master and guard against. *Intelligent Gamer* tracked down a Nintendo spokesman to get the low-down on what is certain to be one of the hottest games of the year.

IG: While Rare developed Killer Instinct 2, how much influence did Nintendo have over the finished product?

It was just a matter of seeing the game as it was coming along and saying, 'Let's work on the animation a little bit. It's a little rough through this area,' but just in a way of play testing, Nintendo had input into the game. I really don't want to give the impression that NoA was developing the game. It really was the guys at Rare.

IG: How soon after KI did production on KI2 begin?

It was pretty quickly. It has been fully in the works from the beginning of 95. I would suggest they had even previously come up with various ideas that they knew they wanted to put into the game, but they really actively started working on it a little more than a year ago.

IG: So they knew they had a franchise-level hit pretty early on.

They were fairly confident, knowing from the initial reactions that KI was doing well. People were being blown away by the graphics and all. And even then, they had a pretty good idea of the things that they wanted to change.

IG: How much input did Nintendo have in character design?

[Laughs] Not a lot. It's a Rare design, and I think that they wanted some more female characters; the idea being that with a small character, you could do a bit more as far as animation is concerned and some interesting new moves. The choice of characters, which ones stayed and which ones left, was feedback from players and the wishes of Rare; what they wanted to see in the new game and the things that they felt maybe they could leave out. One thing that we should point out is that, although certain characters don't seem to be in the game, it may not be the final word as far as the game is concerned, so there's just kind of a hint there.

IG: In KI, there was a problem with lack of throws and easy combos. How did Rare deal with these criticisms?

There were some changes made as far as how the game is played and the strategies behind it, and I think that as far as making the game more active and more offensive in nature, that was one of the things in their minds. They also wanted to make it more challenging in the number of combos. The way that it's set up now with multiple linkers, you're going to have more possibilities for combos than you had before; which is going to be something that should keep people looking for new moves and new combos with the game for a lot longer than in the first game. It's a lot more complex, a lot more offensive, and some of the changes were made specifically to address those things.

IG: With the improved gameplay, what subtle improvements are there that the average player may not notice at first?

One of the things, I don't know how subtle it is, is that as far as blocking or breaking a combo, you had to identify what the other guy was throwing at you, and so you really had to be able to recognize every move of every character if you were going to be successful at this. Now, you just have to basically recognize if he's throwing a punch or a kick. So if it's coming at you with a fierce kick or something, then all you have to do is know you can block it with a punch. So it's a lot easier as far as that is concerned with identifying things. For the average player who just goes in and doesn't spend his life on the machine, that sort of thing is going to be a big help. I think the idea is that you've got these Super moves. It's just a lot more intuitive; the idea of having Super moves and you can see the meter filling in and knowing that once you've got the thing filled up,

B. ORCHID

PLACE OF ORIGIN
New York City

CHANGE FROM KI
Police style Tonfa weapons

FIGHTING POWER
Tonfa Ninjutsu

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
Elizabeth Taylor

FULGORE

PLACE OF ORIGIN
Dayton, Ohio

CHANGE FROM KI
Jenny Craig shaved a few lbs.

SPECIAL ABILITY
Robotic Attacks

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
A very dangerous trash can

you can use the power for a Super move. I think that, for the average player, it is going to make the game more interesting and a lot more intuitive as something that players can pick up on.

IG: So a lot of the changes were to make it more accessible to a wider audience.

I think so. It's going to have the complexities that the Ultimate fighting fans are really going to want, but I think it also has the features that are going to make it more friendly for the average guy that wants to just mess with it and have some fun with his buddies.

IG: You hinted at hidden characters. What other hidden things are there for players to find?

All I know is that there is hidden stuff in it, and character-wise they have done some things. As far as other things, I really don't know. The backgrounds are going to have some interaction with characters, and that's kind of a neat thing; like you might hit something and it might break. As far as what actual things will be interacting with the characters, that's kind of hidden until you actually do it. As far as moves are concerned, we're talking about having as many as a million combo possibilities per character, so in getting through those, you're going to be able to find some things that are pretty unexpected.

IG: One of the most obvious improvements are the vivid backgrounds. How many different backgrounds are there?

At least 18.

IG: There are also some new characters.

We've basically got four new characters. Three of them are regular fighting characters and one of them is a Boss character; that's Gargus. I don't know too much about Gargus at this point. They have been changing some of his moves and honing some things, even though it's in test.

Mya is kind of the jungle woman; she was raised in Central America in the jungle and she uses knives, so her attacks are knife-fighting kinds of things. As far as her moves are concerned, she's got one which is called the Savage Blades, which is five special moves. There's going to be one Super move that is listed on the cabinet for people to learn. There will probably be other Super moves that are going to be available, they just aren't going to be listed; and that's going to be true of all the characters. The other ones that she's got, just to throw them at you, are the Mantis, the Cobra Bite, the Jungle Leap and she's got a good fighting style.

Incredible graphics, pounding tunes and numerous playability enhancements take Killer Instinct to a new level.

Kim Wu, who has kind of an Eastern mystic background, has got a number of kicking moves that are kind of her specialty. One of them is the Tornado-kick, one is the Split-kick, she's got a Fire Flower and the Firecracker is a fireball move. A Super move, the one that's going to be on the cabinet, is the Snapdragon.

Tusk is the third main character. He has a sword, and he's kind of a guy out of time. Somehow, all three of these guys have been brought forward in the story line from the past into the tournament and Tusk is a barbarian dude. Some of his moves are sword-wielding moves. The Backstab is a particularly cool one. The Conqueror is a pretty cool one too, but he has a kick move that's something called the Web-of-Death. The one Super move that's going to be listed is called the Destroyer, and that's kind of a complex move.

Gargus has some really cool moves. He's got some fireball-types and some in-air types of moves. He seems to be able to hover and fly at certain times which is kind of cool.

IG: Why did Cinder, Chief Thunder and Riptor get their walking papers?

It really came from two different sources. Getting feedback from players, and then what Rare

GLACIUS

PLACE OF ORIGIN
4th stone from the sun

CHANGE FROM KI
Tougher build and more alien

FIGHTING POWER
Alien liquefaction and freezing

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
Bob Dole

JAGO

PLACE OF ORIGIN
London England

CHANGE FROM KI
More aggressive

FIGHTING POWER
Ersatz Ninja Swordsmanship

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
Vanilla Ice

KIM WU

PLACE OF ORIGIN
Far East

CHANGE FROM KI
She's new to KI2

SPECIAL ABILITY
Tornado-kick

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
Peppermint Patti

MAYA

PLACE OF ORIGIN
The Amazon Rain Forest

CHANGE FROM KI
She's New to KI2

SPECIAL ABILITY
Knife Attacks

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
Elizabeth Berkley

wanted to do; what characters they felt they could move on to the next stage and the characters they really wanted to concentrate on. Whether or not those characters are actually in this game in one form or another, I'm not going to say.

IG: Did Rare run into any problems making KI2?

I don't really know that there were a lot of problems as such. They really wanted to change everything; and as you've seen, graphically, the moves and the looks of all the characters have changed. Even the ones that are returning. It's an evolutionary step. It's not revolutionary, but certainly you can tell the difference between the first one and the second one, and certainly they've taken a step forward in character graphics, the animations and the backgrounds. They are particularly sharp in this game. The one problem that they always run into is not having the time to do everything they want. That's just part of the industry.

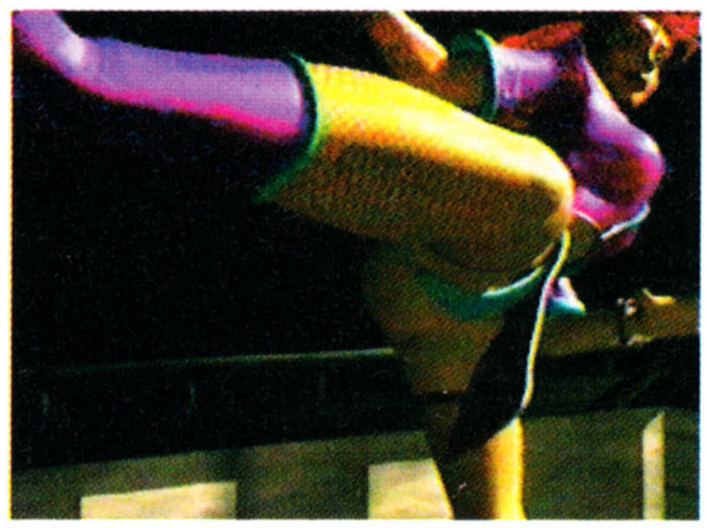
IG: What types of technological advancements helped improve the game?

I think it's more in terms of the tools they've got and the techniques that they use in creating these games. Their familiarity in using the high-end 3-D stuff and the rendering programs. Obviously, using Power Animator, the most recent version has got some neat improvements with the particle physics and all; that allows them to do some neat things.

IG: How about in terms of sound?

Soundwise, it's great. They've got the vocals in a lot of it, and they've really managed to pack stuff in. The technology probably wasn't there before, but they had the time and the will to put it in, and I think the music has always been good in Killer Instinct games, but it's neat having the extra voice and stuff that they put in.

"One thing that we should point out is that although certain characters don't seem to be in the game, it may not be the final word as far as the game is concerned, so there's just kind of a hint there."



Incredible graphics, pounding tunes and numerous playability enhancements take Killer Instinct to a new level.

SABREWULF

PLACE OF ORIGIN
The Black Forest

CHANGE FROM KI
He's Been Working Out

SPECIAL ABILITY
Insane Werewolf Attacks

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
IG's Anthony Schubert

SPINAL

PLACE OF ORIGIN
Ancient Egypt

CHANGE FROM KI
Soul-stealing Power

SPECIAL ABILITY
Ancient Mystical Swordsman

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
Kate Moss

TJ COMBO

PLACE OF ORIGIN
Chicago

CHANGE FROM KI
Snazzy New Duds

SPECIAL ABILITY
Street Fighting and Boxing

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
Apollo Creed

TUSK

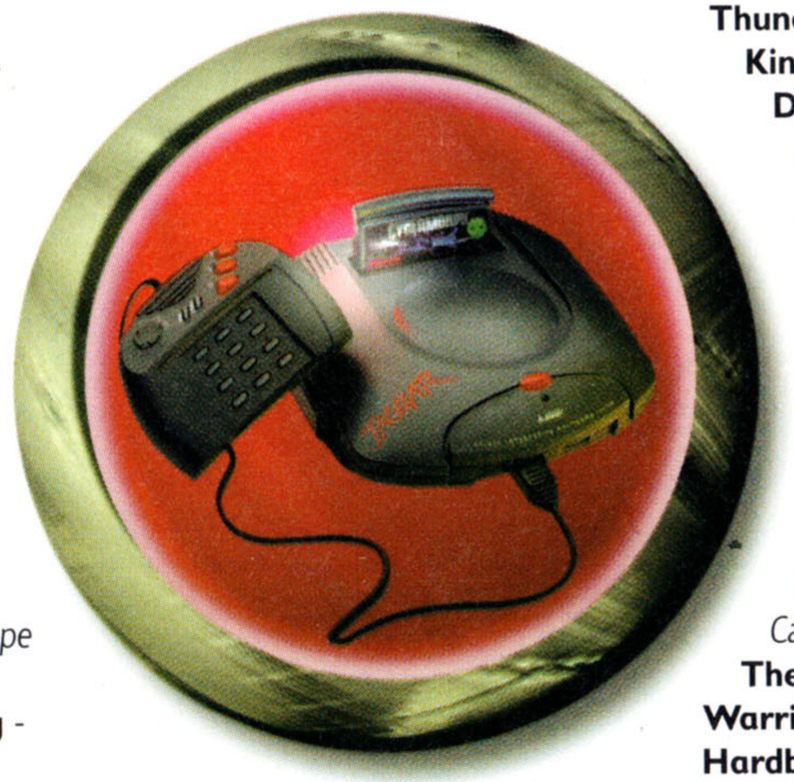
PLACE OF ORIGIN
Ancient Cymeria

CHANGE FROM KI
He's New to KI2

SPECIAL ABILITY
Barbaric Swordsmanship

PEOPLE OFTEN CONFUSE ME WITH
Arnold Schwarzenegger

new releases



RECENT RELEASES

SpyCraft: The Great Game - *Activision Inc.*
Zork Nemesis- *Activision*
HyperBlade - *Activision*
Dragon Dice - *Interplay*
Solitaire Delux - *Interplay*
Command and Conquer - *Westwood Studios*
Rebel Assault II - *LucasArts*
Wing Commander IV - *Origin*
Empire II - *New World Computing*
U.S.S. Ticonderoga - *Mindscape*
The Dig - *Lucas Arts*
Al Unser Jr.'s Arcade Racing - *Mindscape*

RECENT RELEASES

Braindead 13 - *Readysoft*
Chessmaster - *Mindscape*
Rayman Short Version - *UBI Soft*
Revolution X - *Acclaim*
Assault Rigs - *Sony Interactive*
In The Hunt - *THQ*
Krazy Ivan - *Sony Interactive*
NFL Full Contact - *Konami*
Philosoma - *Sony Interactive*
The Hive - *Trimark*
Thunderstrike - *US Gold*
King's Field - *ASCII*
Dark Legends - *Data East*
NFL Quarterback Club - *Acclaim*
Creature Shock - *Virgin*
Shellshock - *US Gold*
Bass Masters World - *THQ*
Championship - *THQ*
Myst - *Acclaim*
Razorwing - *Sony Interactive*
Street Fighter Alpha - *Capcom*
The 11th Hour - *Virgin*
Warrior's of Fate - *Capcom*
Hardball 5 - *Accolade*

FUTURE RELEASES

Killer Instinct 2 - *Nintendo/Rare*
Cruis'n USA - *Nintendo/Williams*
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter - *Acclaim*
Ultra Doom - *Williams*
Pilotwings 64 - *Nintendo/Paradigm*
Top Gun - *Spectrum Holobyte*
Ultimate MK 3 - *Williams Entertainment*
Red Baron - *Sierra Online*
Creator - *Nintendo/Software Creations*

RECENTLY RELEASED

Street Fighter Alpha - *Capcom*
Maximum Surge - *Digital Pictures*
Cyberia - *Interplay*
Buster Brothers Collection - *Capcom*
Dark Sun - *SSI*
Clockwork Knight 2 - *Sega*
Primal Rage - *TWI*

MARCH

Casper - *Interplay*
Tohshinden - *Sega*
3D Baseball 95 - *Crystal Dynamics*
D&D Tower of Doom - *Capcom*
Prime Time Football - *Sega*
Blazing Dragons - *Crystal Dynamics*
Braindead 13 - *Readysoft*
Dragons Lair 2 - *Readysoft*
Dungeons & Dragons - *SSI*
Fox Hunt - *Capcom*
VR Baseball - *Interplay*
Night Warriors - *Capcom*
Warriors of Fate - *Capcom*
MLBPA Bottom of the 9th - *Konami*

3DO

RECENT RELEASES
Cannon Fodder - *Virgin*
Creature Shock - *Argonau*
Captain Quazar - *Studio 3DO*
Lost Eden - *Virgin*
Cyberdillo - *Panasonic SW*
Cyberia - *Interplay*
MARCH
Deadly Skies - *JVC*
Casper - *Interplay*
Snow Job - *Studio 3DO*
Theo the Dinosaur - *Panasonic*
APRIL
Dragon's Lair 2 - *Readysoft*
MAY
Return to Zork - *Activision*
Varuna's Forces - *JVC*

pc-windows

Entomorph - *SSI*
Return Fire - *Time Warner*
Cybermage - *Origin*
Pitfall the Mayan Adventure - *Activision*
Mechwarrior II - *Activision*
Mortal Kombat II - *GT Interactive*
Hexen: Beyond Heretic - *id/GT interactive*
Top Gun - *Spectrum Holobyte*
Aliens - *Mindscape*
Bad Mojo - *Pulse Entertainment*
Fighter Duel - *Philips Interactive*
Battle Cruiser 3000 AD - *Gametek*
MARCH
Twisted Metal - *Sony Interactive*
Warhawk - *Sony Interactive*
Cyberia 2 - *Xatrix*
Silent Hunter - *SSI*
Ripper - *Take Two Interactive*
Dungeon Keeper - *Electronic Arts*
Duke Nukem 3-D - *Formgen*
Jagged Alliance Gold - *SirTech*
Grand Prix II - *Spectrum Holobyte*
Rise of the Robots II *Acclaim*
"D" - *Acclaim*
APRIL
Hind - *Interactive Magic*
The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes: The Case of the Rose Tattoo - *Electronic Arts*
Blood & Magic - *Interplay*
Chaos Overlords - *New World*

atari

RECENT RELEASES
Fight For Life - *Atari*
Bret Hull Hockey - *Atari*
Defender 2000 - *Atari*
MARCH
World Tour Racing (CD) - *Atari*
Attack of the Mutant Penguin - *Atari*
Robinson's Requiem (CD) - *Atari*
APRIL
Iron Soldier 2 (CD) - *Atari*
Bret Hull Hockey (CD) - *Atari*
MAY
Soulstar (CD) - *Atari*
JUNE
Breakout 2000 - *Atari*
Demolition Man (CD) - *Atari*
Varuna's Forces - *Atari*
JULY
Zero Five - *Atari*
AUGUST
Skyhammer - *Atari*
SEPTEMBER
Phaze Zero - *Atari*
MK3 - *Williams*
OCTOBER
Rocky Horror Interactive (CD) *Atari*
NOVEMBER
Magic Carpet (CD) - *Atari*

playstation

Cyberia - *Interplay*
MLBPA Baseball - *Konami*
Buster Brothers Collection - *Capcom*
Raven Project - *Mindscape*
Darkstalkers - *Capcom*
Dark Sun - *SSI*
Alien Trilogy - *Acclaim*
MARCH
D&D Tower of Doom - *Capcom*
Deadly Skies - *JVC*
Fox Hunt - *Capcom*
Return to Zork - *Activision*
Shanghai Triple Threat - *Activision*
Slayer - *SSI*
Extreme Pinball - *Electronic Arts*
Wing Commander 3 - *Electronic Arts*
Descent 2 - *Interplay*
Gunship 2000 - *Microprose*
Resident Evil - *Capcom*
Top Gun - *Spectrum Holobyte*
Castlevania Bloodlines - *Konami*
Casper - *Interplay*
Fade to Black - *Electronic Arts*
Psychic Detective - *Electronic Arts*
APRIL
Family Feud - *GameTek*
Legacy of Kain - *Capstone*
VR Golf - *Interplay*
VR Soccer - *Interplay*
MAY
3D Baseball - *Crystal*
JUNE
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - *Acclaim*
Magic Carpet - *Electronic Arts*
Rock and Roll Racing 2 - *Acclaim*
Waterworld - *Interplay*

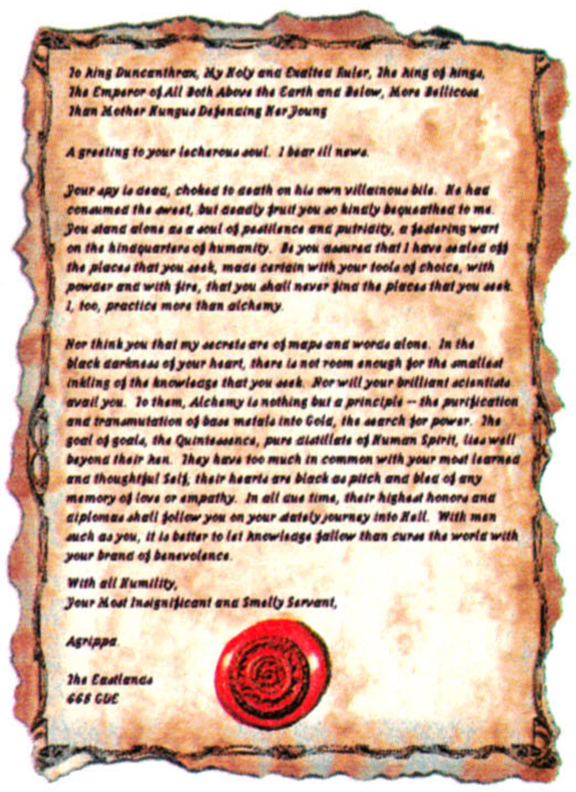
ultra 64

Buggie-Boogie - *Nintendo/Angel*
Robotech Academy - *Gametek*
Monster Dunk - *Mindscape*
Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball - *Nintendo/Angel Studios*
Shadows of the Empire - *Lucas Arts Studios*
FIFA Soccer '97 - *Electronic Arts*
Super Mario 64 - *Nintendo*
Super Mario Kart -*Nintendo*
Starfox 64 - *Nintendo*
Kirby Bowl 64 - *Nintendo*
Wave Race 64 - *Nintendo*
Blastdozer - *Nintendo/Rare*
GoldenEye 007 - *Nintendo/Rare*
The Legend of Zelda - *Nintendo*
Wayne Gretzky Hockey - *Time Warner Interactive*
Final Fantasy VII - *Squaresoft*
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - *Acclaim*
Ace Driver - *Namco*
Mission: Impossible - *Ocean*
SoulStorm - *Virtual Hollywood*
Alien Trilogy - *Acclaim*
Quake - *GT Interactive/id Software*
Stacker - *Virgin Interactive*
Phear - *Nintendo/H20 Entertainment*
Prey - *Apogee/3D Realms*
Dragon Quest VII - *Enix*
Donkey Kong Country 3 - *Nintendo/Rare*

saturn

Guardian Heroes - *Working Designs*
Supreme Warrior - *Digital Pictures*
Congo: The Movie - *Sega*
Return to Zork - *Activision*
APRIL
Deadly Skies - *JVC*
Jeopardy - *GameTek*
NBA Action - *Sega*
Wheel of Fortune - *GameTek*
Wing Commander 3 - *Electronic Arts*
MAY
3D Soccer - *Crystal Dynamics*
Alone in the Dark - *Interplay*
Descent 2 - *Interplay*
Raw Pursuit - *Acclaim*
Project Overkill - *Konami*
JUNE
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - *Acclaim*
Extreme Pinball - *Electronic Arts*
Hell - *GameTech*
Magic Carpet - *Electronic Arts*
Prize Fighter - *Digital Pictures*
VR Pool - *Interplay*
NBA In The Zone - *Konami*
Castlevania Bloodlines - *Konami*

Activision took the time to present the player with an authentic seal of approval.


To King Duncanthrax, My Holy and Exalted Ruler, The King of Kings, The Emperor of All Both Above the Earth and Below, More Bellicose Than Mother Kungus Defending Her Young

A greeting to your lecherous soul. I bear ill news.

Your spy is dead, choked to death on his own villainous bile. He had consumed the sweet, but deadly fruit you so kindly bequeathed to me. You stand alone as a soul of pestilence and putridity, a festering wart on the hindquarters of humanity. Be you assured that I have sealed off the places that you seek, made certain with your tools of choice, with powder and with fire, that you shall never find the places that you seek. I, too, practice more than alchemy.

Nor think you that my secrets are of maps and words alone. In the black darkness of your heart, there is not room enough for the smallest inkling of the knowledge that you seek. Nor will your brilliant scientists avail you. To them, Alchemy is nothing but a principle -- the purification and transmutation of base metals into Gold, the search for power. The goal of goals, the Quintessence, pure distillate of Human Spirit, lies well beyond their ken. They have too much in common with your most learned and thoughtful Self, their hearts are black as pitch and bleu of any memory of love or empathy. In all due time, their highest honors and diplomas shall follow you on your stately journey into Hell. With men such as you, it is better to let knowledge fallow than curse the world with your brand of benevolence.

With all Humility,
Your Most Insignificant and Smelly Servant,

Agrippa

The Eastlands
668 GUE

Zork Nemesis

Activision to release tenth Zork in the series.

On a graphical level, these scenes from Zork win hands-down as some of the most impressive to date.

Publisher: Activision

Platform: Windows PC

Format: CD-ROM

Developer: Activision

Release: March

With Ultima, Wizardry and King's Quest games so often in the forefronts of release charts, people tend to forget that Infocom and Activision's Zork series has spanned 16 years and nine games. This spring, Activision will bring home the tenth game in the series, Zork Nemesis.

Activision's three-year-old Return to Zork was the first game to take place in the Great Underground Empire since Beyond Zork—note the naming trend here—which had been released five years prior. Notable largely for its nostalgia value, Return to Zork featured the short-lived multimedia era's standard complement of B-film actors, full-motion video sequences and point-and-click gameplay. Today, Activision promises to make good on the property it acquired from Infocom, giving Zork Nemesis the impressive technology and quality content Return to Zork lacked.

To that end, Activision is employing a new 360-degree navigation and vision system they call "Z-Vision." This technology will combine 16-Bit animated graphics, 50 minutes of video, and beautiful still backgrounds in an encircling environment. This Windows 95-only title combines the talents of 15 actors under the direction of Joe Napolitano (*Murder One* and *The X-Files*), sound design by Soundelux Media Labs (*Cliffhanger* and *True Lies*), and art design by the illustrator of *Batman Forever* and *The Godfather III*.

This is all very impressive in terms of what the game will look and sound like, but the content is where Return to Zork fell flat, and Activision does not intend to let that happen again. Players will travel to the five different worlds within the surreal Forbidden Lands: The Temple, Monastery, Castle, Asylum and Conservatory.

We'll have more on Zork Nemesis in the near future, but in the meantime, check out these early scenes. *-Jason Cross*

Taking advantage of the technology acquired from infocom, Activision has taken great steps in improving the graphical appeal of the Zork series. Game designers promise the content and gameplay is much improved also.

"Activision is employing a new 360-degree navigation and vision system they call "Z-Vision."

Cinematic standard full-motion video is dispersed liberally throughout the game. Let's hope they're not all B-movie actors.

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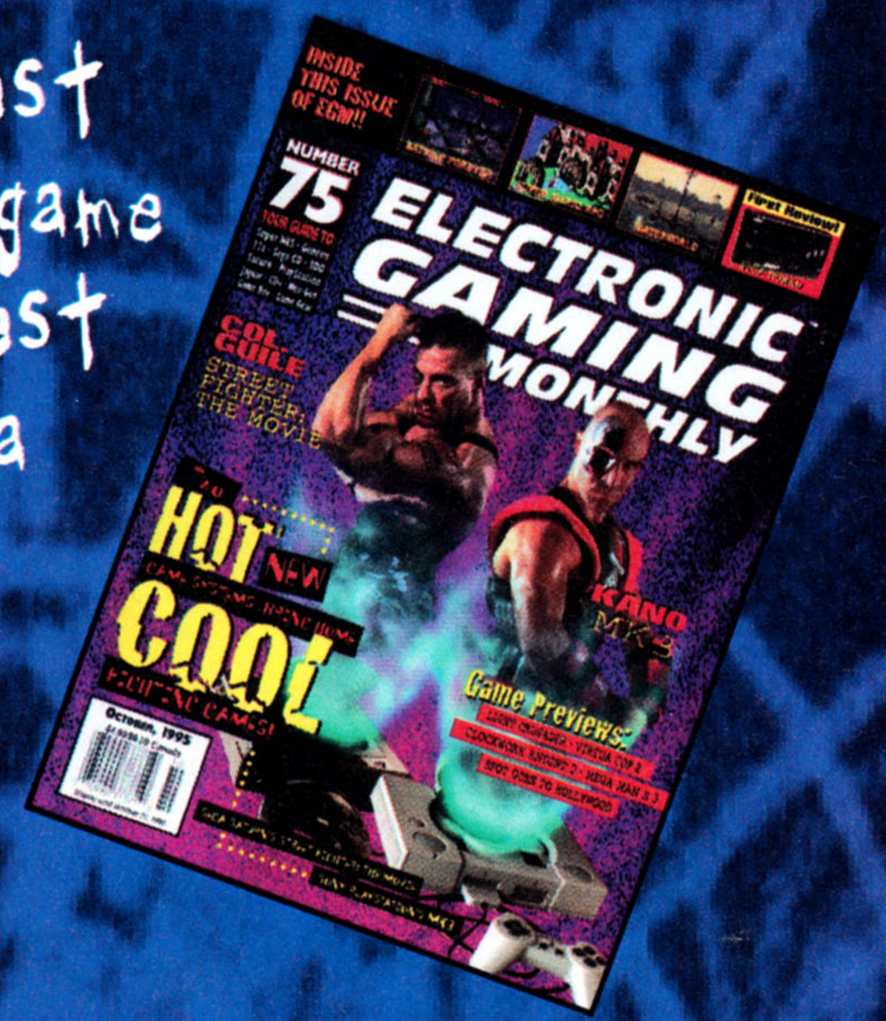

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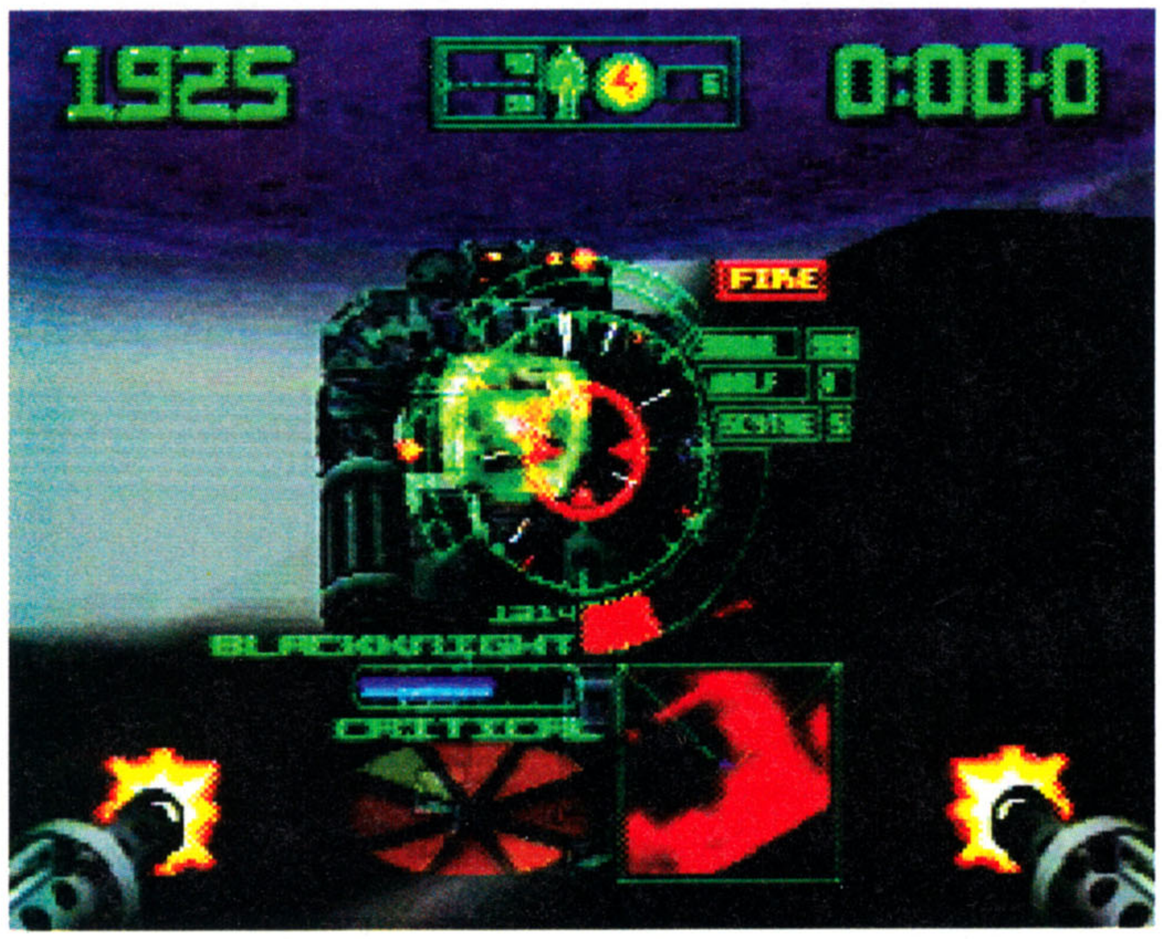
Krazy Ivan

See the world through the eyes of Russia's kraziest pilot

Publisher: Sony CEA
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Psygnosis
Release: February



▲ **Take a seat in the cockpit as Russia's Krazy Ivan takes to the wild blue yonder to save the Earth from certain doom.**

▲ **While looking to destroy shield generators, beware the small attack drones who swarm Krazy Ivan, setting up the Russian pilot for a vicious attack of roving Sentients.**

Psygnosis has topped the charts as far as hype for PlayStation software goes. Luckily, Psygnosis has also proved that they are worthy of at least some of that hype with Krazy Ivan, much in the way they did with Wipeout and Destruction Derby.

Set in a near future, alien robots called "Sentients" have invaded Earth and begun making preparations to wipe humanity from the face of the planet. Odd as it may seem, Russia has the only weapon capable of stopping the menace: a mech. Piloted by an eccentric commander known as "Krazy Ivan," Russia plans on single-handedly saving the Earth from certain doom.

Krazy Ivan's gameplay is similar to a cross between Mechwarrior 2 and Twisted Metal. Selecting one of the five areas of invasion, the armor-clad Ivan will need to defeat all Sentients present in a given setting and then destroy the shield generator in each area. All combat with the Sentients is done within natural "arenas" in the landscapes. To keep things busy, smaller attack drones swarm the general area, and not reaching an arena within an allotted amount of time will result in a visit from The Black Knight, a powerful roving Sentient.

Krazy Ivan is presented in a first-person view through the cockpit of the mech. Again, like Mechwarrior 2, all combat is ranged and players have a wide variety of weapons to choose from. Between each mission, players purchase new weapons and armor with "Energy Cores" claimed from dead machines, but the purchase of weapons is more mandatory than anything else, as going on without better weapons is almost certain death. The weapons themselves come in three categories: guns, missiles and special. Guns start out as machine guns and the like, gradually working their way up to huge firearms such as plasma cannons. Unlike the missiles and special weapons, all guns are kept aboard during the game so players can switch between multiple options at will, something especially useful when a given gun overheats and needs to cool.

Missiles gradually get better as well, but offer more subtle differences such as the number of missiles launched and (later) the added bonus of homing capability. Players can only have one special weapon on board, and usually run along the lines of "instant death" devices for dealing with the attack drones.

Krazy Ivan's graphics, as expected from Psygnosis, are spectacular throughout. The 3-D engine is fast, flicker-free and features some wonderfully textured and shaded objects, namely the huge alien robots. Between each level, movie sequences that can only be described as "quirky" give humorous "insight" on the new Russian mentality, with Western-style jabs concerning Ivan's desire to own a '57 Chevy with fuzzy dice and his love for EuroDisney. Krazy Ivan's sound is far from perfect, but equally far from bad. One nice feature is your ability to select the music's style in the Options Menu, although none of the soundtracks are particularly great. The sound effects range from decent to good, but never go beyond that.

Krazy Ivan's major flaw is its pitifully short length. Sporting a 'whopping' five levels, the game just does not last as long as a good game should, keeping Krazy Ivan from being anything more than a fun diversion. Linked PlayStation mode makes the game a wee bit more worthwhile for those lucky enough to have two PlayStations and monitors. *-Peter Bartholow*

▲ **Bring out the big guns to blow away the Sentients as fast as you can before the monstrous Sentient known as the Black Knight comes out to handily clear the world of Krazy Ivan once and for all.**

The Bottom Line:

Krazy Ivan, like Wipeout, is evidence that Psygnosis is the first big PlayStation developer to be actually worth some of the hype associated with them. Krazy Ivan is a good game in just about every way except one: length.

GRAPHICS: A-
+ Great texture-mapped robots and virtually artifact-free FMV.
- The terrain is a little bland-looking.

SOUNDS: B-
+/- Decent, if somewhat repetitive soundtracks, and solid sound effects.
- Neither are particularly stunning.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ Lots of power-ups and plenty of robots to battle.
- The game does get repetitive fairly quickly.

LASTING POWER: C
- Single-player Mode sports a measly five missions.
+ The link play is a plus for link-capable players.

OVERALL: B

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Skeleton Warriors

Hopping a ride on a runaway mine cart, reminiscent of Pitfall Harry's adventures.

Side-scrolling hack-and-slash revisited

Add a whole new meaning to the term "bonecrusher"

Publisher: Playmates Interactive
Platform: Sega Saturn
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Neversoft Entertainment
Release: Early April 1996

Players begin the loading process of Skeleton Warriors with a little treat: an SGI-rendered movie weaving the cartoon's background lore into dark, handsome 3-D graphics and narration with an overdone demonic voice. For the uninitiated, the aptly named Baron Dark seeks the Lightstar Crystal, the mystical power source for the peaceful burg of Luminicity. Baron Dark manages to steal the crystal, but not without alerting the prince of Luminicity, Prince Lightstar. In the skirmish, the Lightstar crystal breaks in two and releases its vast power, destroying Luminicity. The Baron, now nothing more than an animated skeleton, flees the ruins with half of the crystal. Now, Prince Lightstar seeks revenge against Baron Dark and to reunite the Lightstar crystal.

None of the Bosses are overly difficult to defeat, in fact some of them are quite amusing in appearance including this cowboy-hat-wearing bad boy who goes down after a few swipes.

Despite the relatively involved story for a licensed game, Skeleton Warriors is indeed shallow. The gameplay dips into the horrid clichés exhibited by such abysmal titles as Sword of Sodan—players hack through roughly 20 side-scrolling levels of undead madness. But the game becomes tiring long before the Prince's quest is over.

Most of the enemies are skeletons, and while the method of defeating them is neat at first, the novelty quickly wears off. Players hack the skeletons to bits and collect dropped items before the skeletons have time to reassemble around them. A great deal of the game's relative ease lies here, as items are mostly to add health or mana. Other than his trusty sword, Prince Lightstar has a handful of magic spells at his disposal, with mana use dependent on the strength of the spell. However, any real strategic use of these spells is hindered by the Prince's inability to carry more than two at a time. Skeleton Warriors also tries to replicate a little bit of the Earthworm Jim's "kitchen sink" factor by inserting two 3-D hoverbike scenes between the hack-and-slash action, but both are completely lacking in challenge and originality and add nothing to the gameplay.

In terms of multimedia value, however, Skeleton Warriors is a feast. The dark, moody SGI graphics are richly detailed and the pseudo-3-D layout of the levels a la Clockwork Knight (while completely irrelevant to gameplay) do look nice. The animation could use a little work, however—the Prince moves as if he's in slow-motion, complete with herky-jerky fluidity usually associated with a choicely placed broom handle. SW's hoverbike scenes are executed well with 3-D, texture-mapped terrain and move smoothly, but are wasted on the lack of gameplay. Tommy Tallarico, who deserves his title as "the premier video-game music composer," is in rare form with Skeleton Warriors, giving all 17 music tracks a half-medieval-half-future sound appropriate to the game's setting. The sound effects are passable, but hardly worth being excited about.

Skeleton Warriors suffers from all the symptoms of a licensed game: Great multimedia value coupled with poor gameplay.

-Peter Bartholow

The impressive explosions add some excitement but in the end don't make up for the tired premise on which the game is based.

GRAPHICS: A-
+ Excellent SGI-rendered graphics and... + A nice, if useless, 3-D aspect to the levels, but... - Some of the animation is poorly done.

SOUNDS: A-
+ Appropriate and well-written medieval/future music tracks by Tommy Tallarico, but... - The sound effects are weak and best drowned out by the music.

GAMEPLAY: C-
+ Exceedingly clichéd hack-n-slash gameplay with...
- Little to no variation from level to level, and...
- A failed attempt at mimicking Earthworm Jim's "kitchen sink" factor, exhibited by the 3-D hoverbike scenes.

LASTING POWER: C+
+ Plenty of large levels, but...
- All of them are easy and straightforward and...
- Scroll primarily from right to left alone.

OVERALL: B

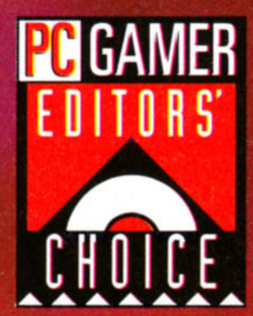
B- Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE"

The Bottom Line:

Marketing people will tell you that licensed games are money in the bank, but any reviewer will tell you that they are rarely anything more than that. Skeleton Warriors is another fine example of development gone astray.

WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS ONLY HEROES REMAIN

"A first rate strategy title."
Computer Game Review



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"5 out of 5"
Computer Gaming World

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Roctor, aol.com

"The graphics and sound are fantastic, but most importantly it is just plain FUN."
Anthony Granada, aol.com

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Major Damage

No one is safe from this muscle-bound superhero's explosive war on crime.

Publisher: Capcom
Platform: PSX, Saturn
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Capcom
Release: May

Bringing some much-needed diversity to Capcom's 1996 release lineup is Major Damage, the first product from the company's new American research and development division, Capcom Digital Studios. The product of an entirely new coding and creative staff, Major Damage transcends modern Capcom fare: you won't find the Major doing a Dragon Punch, but you will see him wielding a blowtorch, machine gun or anything else—in fact, whatever it takes to take down a crime syndicate and defend Retro City.

Many years ago, your older brother Colonel Carnage fought against Lord Fugu, a two-bit crime boss. At the time, Carnage was Retro City's major superhero, but things were about to change: In the middle of their battle, a huge beam of light pierced the clouds, shaking up the Colonel and vaporizing Lord Fugu.

The turn of events left you—Major Damage, Carnage's sidekick—to be the prime crime fighter in Retro City. For 10 years, you earned your reputation as a superhero and became a superstar in the process.

But just as things were getting "safe," Lord Fugu returned! He's not the average Fugu everyone knew and didn't care much about, but a new-and-improved Fugu with new weapons and technology...which he picked up from the aliens who abducted him 10 years ago.

You and Colonel Carnage must defend Retro City through 11 stages of destruction, moving from Crime City (the downtown section of Retro) through factories, to the skies and eventually leading to a showdown with Pixel Pete, Gigaman and Lord Fugu himself.

Capcom's preview was in the pre-alpha stages—noticeably incomplete but displaying some of the game's upcoming features. Rendered entirely on Silicon Graphics workstations, MD's full-screen backgrounds and many of its character animations were in the software, and they both looked very good. MD has the same visual look of Earthworm Jim 2—solid cartoons throughout—but the "interactive backgrounds," where you can transform scenery from unblemished buildings to smoldering and exploding cores of metal, are a great addition.

You'll definitely want to bring a friend along, too. When 20 "Expendabots" are breathing down your neck from the left, right and distant backgrounds, you'll need an extra hand, and you can actually "cover" your partner in MD while he goes off to chase something. If this new gameplay technique works to the extent that Capcom's planning, this will be a major plus for the genre.

▲ **Endorsements keep rolling as Major Damage proves no explosion is too large as he rids the Retro City streets of crime while leaving piles of rubble behind. So sue him.**

"What shooter would be complete without a plethora of weapons."

What shooter would be complete without a plethora of weapons? MD has six available firearms with three power-up stages each, including his trusty Blaster and his Vorp Gun. To add some diversity to the shooting, you can even pick up rocks, boxes of dynamite (which just happen to be scattered around) or even some cars.

Major Damage is not Final Fight, however: Don't expect to find health meters for each thing you go up against, as many things will collapse after one or two shots.

Though most of the components are still in various stages of completion, the music is finished and you'll probably want a copy of the soundtrack. Tommy Tallarico—a man whose name is attached to many of the industry's best soundtracks—does it again with fantastic renditions of everything from classical to 1950s television.

Major Damage is scheduled for May and will be for the Saturn and PlayStation. *-Anthony Shubert*

Behind the Screens at Capcom

Capcom Digital Studios used to be off-limits to the press—such is usually the case when amazing games are in development. As the brand-new American development arm of acclaimed Japanese publisher Capcom Co. Limited, CDS has been working on three titles: the interactive movie Fox Hunt, the rough outlines of a side-scrolling walk-and-punch game based on the Werewolf RPG series, and this title. Major Damage, a thorough spoof on run-and-shoot games, should do for American audiences what the Parodius games did for the Japanese. *Intelligent Gamer* recently seized the chance to talk with two of the major players behind Major Damage: David Friedland, the game's designer who came to Capcom from Accolade and Glen Schoefield, Major Damage's art director who worked at Absolute before coming to Capcom.

INTELLIGENT GAMER: ***What was the original idea behind the creation of Major Damage?***

David Friedland: We all arrived at Capcom Digital Studios about a year ago and they told us, "Make a game, not a fighting game," because Capcom Japan is doing that just fine. That just about left it open to everything else. We really wanted to get into something that hadn't been touched as much. We didn't want to make the 12th football game on the market, or another RPG with two characters, so we said, "How about a good shoot-'em-up?"

Glen Schoefield: Basically, a few of us really wanted to make a shooter. Most of us had played them but hadn't made one.

DF: There's really been a herd mentality on the 32-Bit systems toward "everything has to be real-time 3-D." It's either a driving game or a fighting game. We thought, let's roll the dice. I bet that there's still a market out there for people who want an old-fashioned blow-the-hell-out-of-everything shooter. No one's really taken the time to utilize all of this "whiz-bang technology" on shooters. Your platform games and your fighting games all have rendered 3-D graphics, but no one's taken the time to put that into a shooter. We're going to be one of the first.

IG: ***Who or what inspired the character Major Damage?***

DF: We're all comic-book fans and we looked at the games on the market that used comic characters and we all decided that they were taking themselves way too seriously. We wanted to make a superhero character that was a parody of everything out there today.

GS: If I had to think of who was the basis of the character, I'd have to think back to the days of the old Captain Stern, Dudley Do-Right—the old "big chin" guys.

DF: When we first made Major Damage, he was even bigger in the upper torso and smaller in the lower torso than he is right now. We had to actually scale him back a little because you couldn't even see his legs when we first rendered him.

GS: On the surface, he's your shiny-teethed, big-chinned, strong-jawed, Spandex-wearing hero. But if you look below the surface, he's really a glory hound who's equally as interested in his product endorsements as he is with fighting evil, and he's not afraid to bring down two city blocks to catch a purse-snatcher.

GS: His main tag line is "So sue me." [Laughter. Glen then points to a sketch with entire city blocks destroyed.] In this instance, "The city is saved!"

DF: And you would have thought that in Retro City they would have kicked him out on his butt for all the damage he's caused, but the truth of the matter is that since Major Damage started "fighting crime," tourism is up, crime is down and thousands of unemployed construction workers are now gainfully employed.

IG: *What features are you promoting?*

DF: What we're emphasizing here is that the game is a two-player cooperative game that you can have a two-player simultaneous game.

IG: *How many perspectives will the finished product have?*

DF: Besides your basic 16-direction shooting in the foreground and your basic jump, duck and grenades, you also have enemies in the background. For instance, you'll have "Expendabots" in the windows of buildings, "Helibombers" swooping down from the sky...

GS: ...scaling in 3-D as they come toward you or the screen...

DF: ...you can make your character actually turn his back to the camera and shoot at the buildings in the background.

GS: Plus walking and jumping into the background—you'll see buildings; blow up the buildings. Shoot the buildings.

DF: In fact, that is the main way you get power-ups in this game. Most games, you get power-ups from blowing up enemies—and you can get a few that way too. The important thing in this game is blowing everything up. Buildings, rock face, you name it...you'll see the damage left behind and sometimes, a power-up.

IG: *I guess collateral damage is not an issue here...*

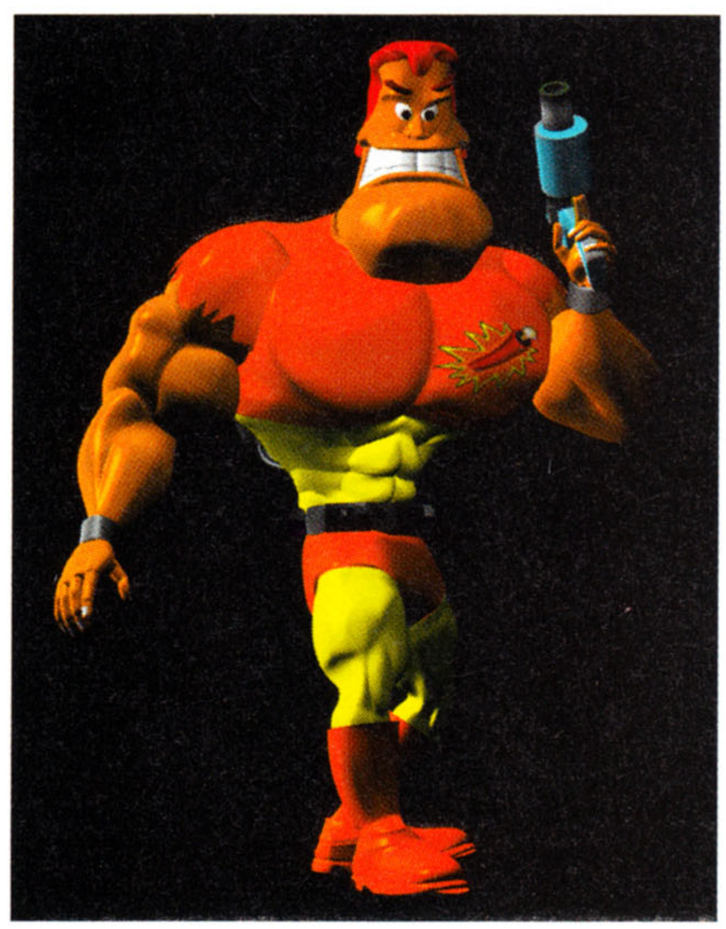
GS: The more collateral damage, the better! [Laughter.]

IG: *How hard was it to code? How are the machines being pushed?*

DF: The game itself is basically 2-D. We're not Bug!, we're not walking into the background like that. We originally thought about that, but when you're in a shooting game, lining [those shots] up would be extremely difficult and not fun. We decided to go with the single walk-line with the turning and walking to add an extra dimension to the gameplay. You do actually have some real-time 3-D stuff going on in the background.

GS: It's two-and-a-half-D.

▲ The Major Damage development team includes, Phil Reed (front left), Glen Schofield, Felicia Reed and Dave Pounders (Back left) Dave Friedland, Scott Baker, Doug Marshall, Amy Bond, Tyrone Depts, Jason Benhaun, Haesuk Pak, Rich Moore and Mark Bell



▲ Art Director Glen Schoefeld's steady diet of comic-book heroes with big chins and shiny teeth inspired the look of Major Damage.

DF: What we decided to do was instead of making the whole thing polygon, we actually did a fully rendered, Donkey Kong [Country] style 2-D rendered world.

GS: We will have some 3-D objects in the game. If he's on a platform, that will be in 3-D. Or going down a shaft...we have it in the game where appropriate.

IG: *Have you encountered any problems with pushing the PlayStation as a 2-D sprite-hunting machine?*

DF: Basically, Major Damage is a Saturn game being ported to the PlayStation for identical release. There will be slight graphical differences, but it won't affect gameplay.

GS: For instance, the Saturn doesn't like having a full bitmapped background the way we have it working. So we're using a combination of 3-D and sprites for it. The PlayStation not only wants a bitmap, but it runs faster with one.

IG: *What about the sound in the game?*

DF: We got Tommy Tallarico to do the music for the game. [Plays a few CD tracks.] As you can hear, he's done a fantastic job. We wanted many different types of music for the game to match the scenes—from rock and techno to '70s disco and those cop-show themes—we're using Yellow Book.

IG: *For those who aren't familiar with the standards, why not Red Book audio?*

DF: Part of the problem with Red Book Audio is that it's single-speed. Both the PlayStation and the Saturn run on double-speed and take about three seconds to shift gears. So, if you're playing a level and finish it while the Red Book is playing, we have to speed the drive up, which takes three seconds, read the data in at double-speed, then slow the drive down to single-speed again, which is another three seconds. So you're talking six seconds, not including data transfer. This is bad. There's also a delay in the restarting of the music when it loops. Yellow Book avoids this by loading the music into memory.

IG: *When is Major Damage due for release, and what's next for CD?*

DF: We're aiming for May for both platforms. Next, maybe a sci-fi game, maybe a Colonel Carnage game (based on Major Damage's older brother).

IG: *A cartoon, maybe?*

DF: Who knows—but it sounds good! Capcom is behind this game big time, and I can't wait to see it finished.

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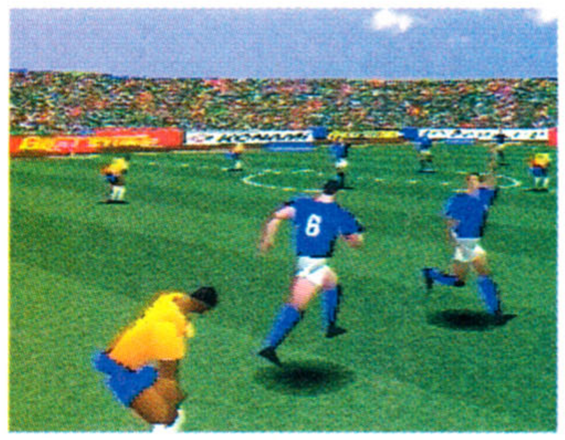
Goal Storm

Konami serves PlayStation enthusiasts realistic 3-D soccer action

Publisher: Konami
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Konami
Release: February

Goal Storm is a translation of Konami's Japanese soccer title Winning 11, a polygonal soccer game which uses a 3/4-overhead perspective to display the soccer field in an exciting side-scrolling format. The field also scales in and out to keep up with the action.

Goal Storm's camera movements are smooth and easy on the eyes. You'll notice immediately that the perspectives seem to be perfect for a 3-D soccer game: The camera will zoom in for close-ups when there's a crowd of players and zoom out when the teams fan out. You have an option to select a fixed camera position, as well. There are also close-up views when there are goal kicks, throw-ins, etc., and the on-screen radar (which can be toggled on and off) is also useful. FIFA games on 32-Bit platforms provide a more cinematic experience, however, which could have been done nicely here.



3-D polygonal characters appear awkward at times but overall the game AI keeps gameplay realistic.

The control scheme is functional and easy to use, though it takes a few minutes to get used to the button layout. Once learned, though, your players have the right moves at their disposal: overhead kicks, headers and all of the standard passes and quick shots you'd expect to find, courtesy of all the buttons on the PlayStation pad. You also have the option to change your team formation and strategy when the computer is handling character manipulation.

Without question, one of the best aspects of Goal Storm is its superior Artificial Intelligence. Unlike most sports games, the computer plays to win—and does it fairly. Even on your own team, the AI comes into play: The CPU will move players into position for you, do a good job controlling your goalie, and more.

The graphics are pretty good, but not terrific. Although the texture-mapped polygonal characters get the job done during the actual in-game action, there are some tiny graphical glitches in some of the close-ups, and the shaded polygons look sort of flat up close. Some nice touches help outweigh the problems though: Realistic national uniforms, multicolored hair and skin and left- and right-footed kicking are just some of the game's superior graphical touches. In-game character movement is also very fluid.

While the sound of Goal Storm is not amazing, it does an admirable job of producing a realistic aural soccer experience. The title screen and menu music is uninspired and not memorable, but the drum music during the soccer match is upbeat though not brilliantly composed. Music changes to reflect turns in the game: Get close to a goal and the pace quickens. Realistic sliding and kicking sounds have been incorporated into the game as well, but the dominating feature of the sound is the British announcer. Clear and enthusiastic, he doesn't have nearly enough phrases and his "goal, goal, (super) goal!" line doesn't come close to the excitement level it needs. FIFA did a better job overall here.

Goal Storm is a very entertaining soccer game. It's the best-playing soccer game available for the 32-Bit system and, most importantly, it's quite fun to play with the superior computer AI. *-Scott McCall*

While Goal Storm could learn a thing or two from the FIFA series of soccer games (such as commentator enthusiasm) those things are immaterial in light of the game's stellar Artificial Intelligence and attention to detail.

GRAPHICS: B
+ Colorful graphics, realistic animation and good camera movement.
- Graphics can glitch in close-ups and overall presentation isn't FIFA.

SOUNDS: B+
+ British announcer is clear and enthusiastic, and sounds are good. +/- In-game music is upbeat but simple, and more FIFA touches could help.

GAMEPLAY: A-
+ Superior Artificial Intelligence.
+ Plenty of easy-to-do moves.

LASTING POWER: A-
+ Computer actually provides a challenge.
+ You can play through a tournament and save progress on the memory card.

OVERALL: B+

B+ Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

The Bottom Line:

Goal Storm is the best 32-Bit soccer game to date. While neither the graphics nor the sound are stellar, the realistic gameplay propels the title to the top. Superior Artificial Intelligence is a major plus.

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Johnny Bazookatone

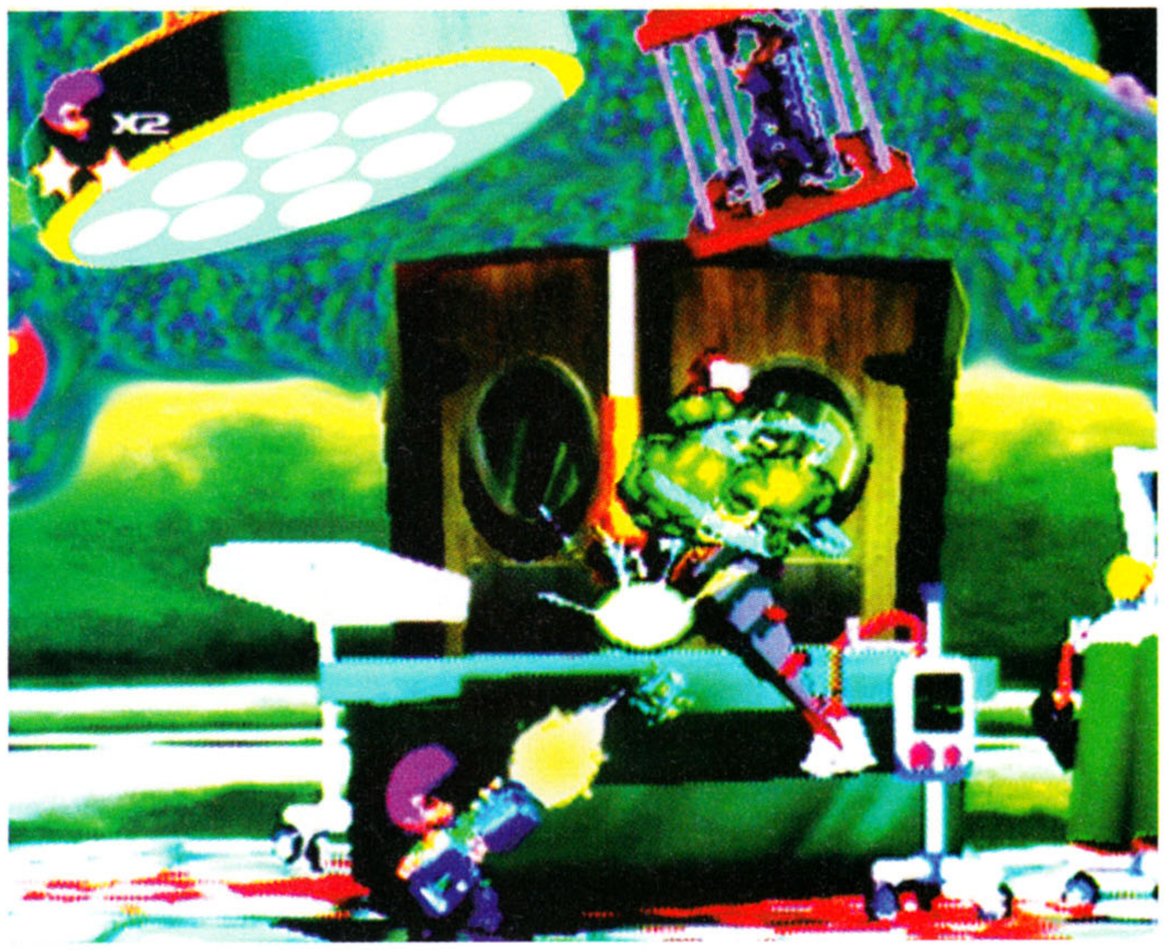
U.S. Gold fuses music and ordnance to blow you away

Publisher: U.S. Gold
Platform: 3DO, PlayStation, Saturn & PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: ARC Developments
Release: February

Johnny Bazookatone centers around that gun-totin' Elvis wanna-be and his attempts to rescue Anita, his "special" guitar, which has been stolen by the evil, jealous Diablo and brought to the pits of hell. Furthermore, Diablo has also absconded with the five greatest living musicians in an effort to stop all music in the world. Johnny can win by solving literally dozens of puzzles, navigating precarious paths and avoiding/destroying some of the most creative characters ever seen in a video game.

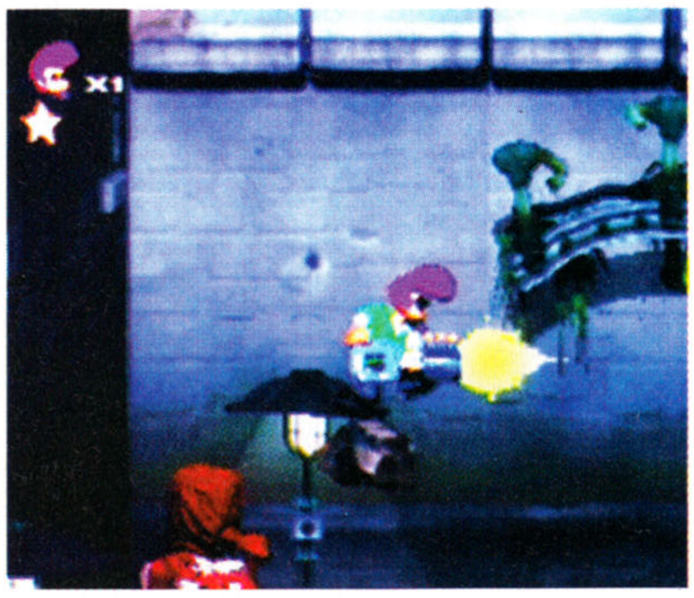
There are five main levels to Johnny's adventure, each with hidden areas, unique opponents and layouts. The first level is "Sin Sin Prison," where you must maneuver through a graveyard (complete with the "obligatory" zombies/skeletons rising from the grave), the prison yard, cell areas, and finally cross the river Styx in your effort to rescue the Jazz genius. The second level puts you in a Victorian hotel, complete with lobby, disco, attic and clock tower. A silly restaurant is the setting for the third level, complete with pigs, headless chickens and other hazards. The fourth level puts you in a hospital... puzzles are the name of the game on this level. The final level is the "penthouse" where you face Diablo himself.

"Only Earthworm Jim has characters that are as interesting."



▲ **Johnny B's originality is quite evident throughout all levels of the game. A hybrid reflecting the themes of the movies *Crossroads* and *Rambo,* Johnny manages to dust countless enemies without mussing his pompadour one bit.**

For a side-scrolling game, Johnny B. offers some interesting combative options. For most confrontations, the rapid-fire cannon works best. But if the player wants a thrill, try the right-arm windmill windup a la Pete Townsend for a big multiradial energy release destroying everything in its path.



At his disposal, Johnny has one primary weapon: the Guitar Gun, a rapid-firing machine gun in the form of a guitar. You can also start "strumming" to power it up to release a cone of powerful sound waves. The longer/faster you strum, the longer the range and more damage the attack will do. Johnny can also perform a "pogo" attack which has a similar use as the cartwheels or barrel rolls that the Kongs do in Donkey Kong Country. In addition to acting as a weapon, the gun also provides a means of almost hovering when jumping if you fire it straight down. The technique of using the gun in this fashion is essential for reaching several areas in the game.

A major difference between Johnny and most platform games is the puzzle-solving aspect: Many times there are objects to collect and give to the correct characters which will allow you to pass into new areas. Teleporters add an additional challenge to the levels, making new places accessible and old ones more confusing to locate. While there are new additions to the genre here, experienced gamers will find that JB does borrow some tried-and-true facets from past titles. Icon collection is a major goal and a three- to five-star lifebar is your limitation. Clearly, the side-scrolling icon-grabbing platform genre has been done before, but Johnny does it nicely.

Only Earthworm Jim has characters that are as interesting and varied as JB's. Some of the more notable characters include Diablo's four right-hand imps: Imp 1 is a Kung Fu expert; Imp 2 is a Roman

GRAPHICS: B+
+ Smooth animation and scrolling, excellent attention to detail. - Nothing revolutionary visually.

SOUNDS: A-
+ Outstanding soundtrack.
+/- Good sound effects, but nothing groundbreaking.

GAMEPLAY: A-
+ Solid mechanics, puzzles and secret areas. - Default controller settings aren't intuitive, and more power-ups or other options would have been nice.

LASTING POWER: B
+ Password option to continue from last world completed. +/- Very challenging, but once you've beaten it...

OVERALL: B+

B+ Intelligent Gamer "RECOMENDED"

MEMORY LANE

FROM the FMV music video intro to the in-game play sequences, there is a lot of attention to graphic detail. All of the enemies and objects have been 3-D-rendered and special effects (such as enemies exploding) are exceptionally beautiful. Most of the levels have at least three parallax scrolling layers. We tested the PlayStation and PC CD-ROM (on a Pentium 75 w/16MB Ram) version extensively and experienced slowdown at only one point in the game which appears to be due to a coding glitch rather than undue burden on the machines.

DEADHEAD:
Bad to the Bone.

In the war of the Gearheads, this guy's M.O. is dead simple: Scare the other toys silly.

Hey, no problem. One glimpse of that fiendish skull, bulging, bloodshot eyes, cracked cranium and clattering jaw and what would you do-introduce him to your sister?

gearheads
a furious war of wind-up toys

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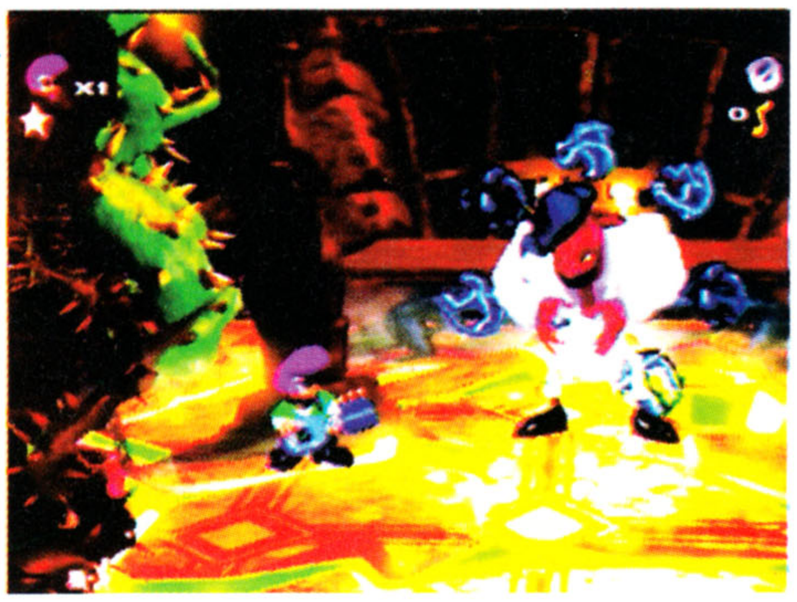


This is no ordinary level Boss. This guy wants your soul just as bad as he wants your life! Just another example of the excellent character development that went into the game.

who has a shield and throws tridents and spears, and Imp 3 is a cowboy armed with six-shooters. The best one, however, is Imp 4, the Sci-Fi imp. He wears rubber Vulcan ears, fires a phazer and can teleport by whipping out his communicator and (I assume) calling for "Scotty." They're hysterical in action.

The facet of this game that grabs you and won't let go—appropriately enough given the plot line of the game—is the audio portion. Each track is crystal clear, and fits with the scene that you are currently in. In your efforts to save the Jazz man on the first level, there is a smooth guitar track; in the Disco, a hot techno beat dominates, etc.

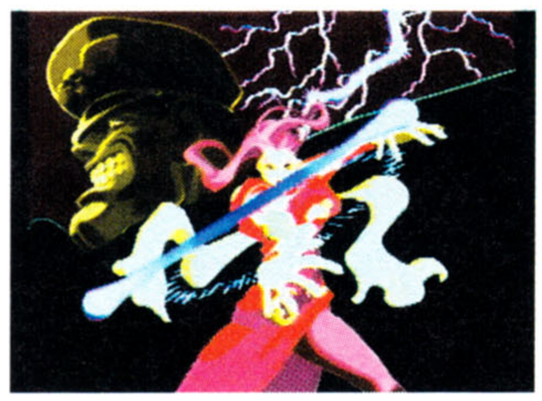
Anything wrong at all? The restaurant-level track, which consists of a cartoony beat but contains an annoying chicken clucking sample—it wears thin after 15 minutes. Of all the tracks in the game, the best one is the opening track, a combo of rock, techno and jazz, where each style becomes the dominant theme at different points in the song.

Johnny Bazookatone is a solid game which has obviously been the object of great amounts of attention to detail. It's definitely worth trying given the amount of time it takes to solve and the fun you will have doing it. *-Christian Svensson*

The Bottom Line:

Johnny Bazookatone is a one-player, 2-D action platformer that is quite reminiscent of the Earthworm Jim series. Both have great depth of gameplay and well-designed characters and levels, but JB takes good advantage of the CD media with exceptional Redbook audio while adding puzzle aspects and sharper graphics.

Street Fighter Alpha



A Japanese style introduction opens with new and old characters engaged in battle

Capcom repackages fighter for another fierce bout

Publisher: Capcom
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Capcom
Release: February

There used to be a time when Capcom had my full trust and confidence with any game releases, whether they were walk-and-punch brawling titles, one-on-one fighters, puzzlers (Buster Brothers), overhead shooters (Varth) or platform action games (Strider, Super Ghouls'n Ghosts, etc.). Today, I feel as if Capcom of Japan is in the midst of a great crisis of confidence: When they release games nowadays, they're not necessarily incredibly innovative, impressive or challenging—they mostly feel the same with lots of new animation and/or a new "theme" becoming the highlight of any new title.

So, when I say that I like Street Fighter Alpha as a game, but I don't respect it as a work of art, I hope you'll understand where I'm coming from. Besides the "new" characters, SFA is an exceptionally derivative and occasionally depressing Capcom effort, with fewer unique backgrounds than any previous Capcom fighter and less playable characters than the last SF2 release (Super SF2 Turbo). On the other hand, it has its own version of Capcom's uniquely balanced fighting engine, it tells some stories which fill in historical blanks in the SF universe, and everything that Capcom bothered to put in here is very solid, though not classic or mindblowing.

There are several differences you'll immediately notice when comparing SFA and SSF2T: Whereas SSF2T had 16 distinct selectable characters and one hidden one, SFA has 10 and three, respectively. Where SSF2T had 16 different backgrounds, SF Alpha only has six, with alternative versions for each background which change most of them only a tiny amount (color palettes, mainly). Backgrounds no longer have multiple layers of parallax scrolling (maximum in SFA is two) or special effects (like the Aurora Borealis found in Cammy's SSF2 stage). If you haven't gotten the point of most of this comparative detail, Street Fighter Alpha could have been a nearly perfect Super NES port in a three Megabyte cartridge, let alone a PlayStation CD-ROM.

As mentioned before, however, what's there is solid. A cheering crowd in Charlie's stage brings back memories of many other Capcom fighters (from Street Fighter II's Balrog level to Final Fight's Boss encounters), and the high level of hand-drawn detail in Chun Li's Chinese Great Wall stage and Adon/Sagat/Dan's Thailand level is definitely reminiscent of the now-aged SF2 standard of art quality. Most of the other stages are bland,

As an arcade port, Street Fighter Alpha is very reasonable: The only major change is the loading time (three- to eight-second delays). SFA for the PlayStation is a superior translation of a less than ambitious game.

BUST A MOVE

FEATURES new to the SF universe include: Rolling on the ground, "Alpha counters" (special combo-breaking moves), mid-air blocking, and multiple triple-level Super Combo attacks, which build upon the super combos in SSF2 by giving each character multiple Super Combo (multihit/multimove) attacks with three different power levels per Super Combo. Characters can also taunt each other (select button), roll on the ground to elude attacks, and activate (if so desired) an auto-defense system which automatically blocks any attack if you're not already in the middle of a move.

GRAPHICS: C+
+/- Nice character art and animation which is on the same level as the aged SF2 series. +/- So-so background artwork and effects.

SOUNDS: B-
+/- Mostly reasonable music which is nothing classic. - Announcer and characters don't say as much as most other fighters nowadays.

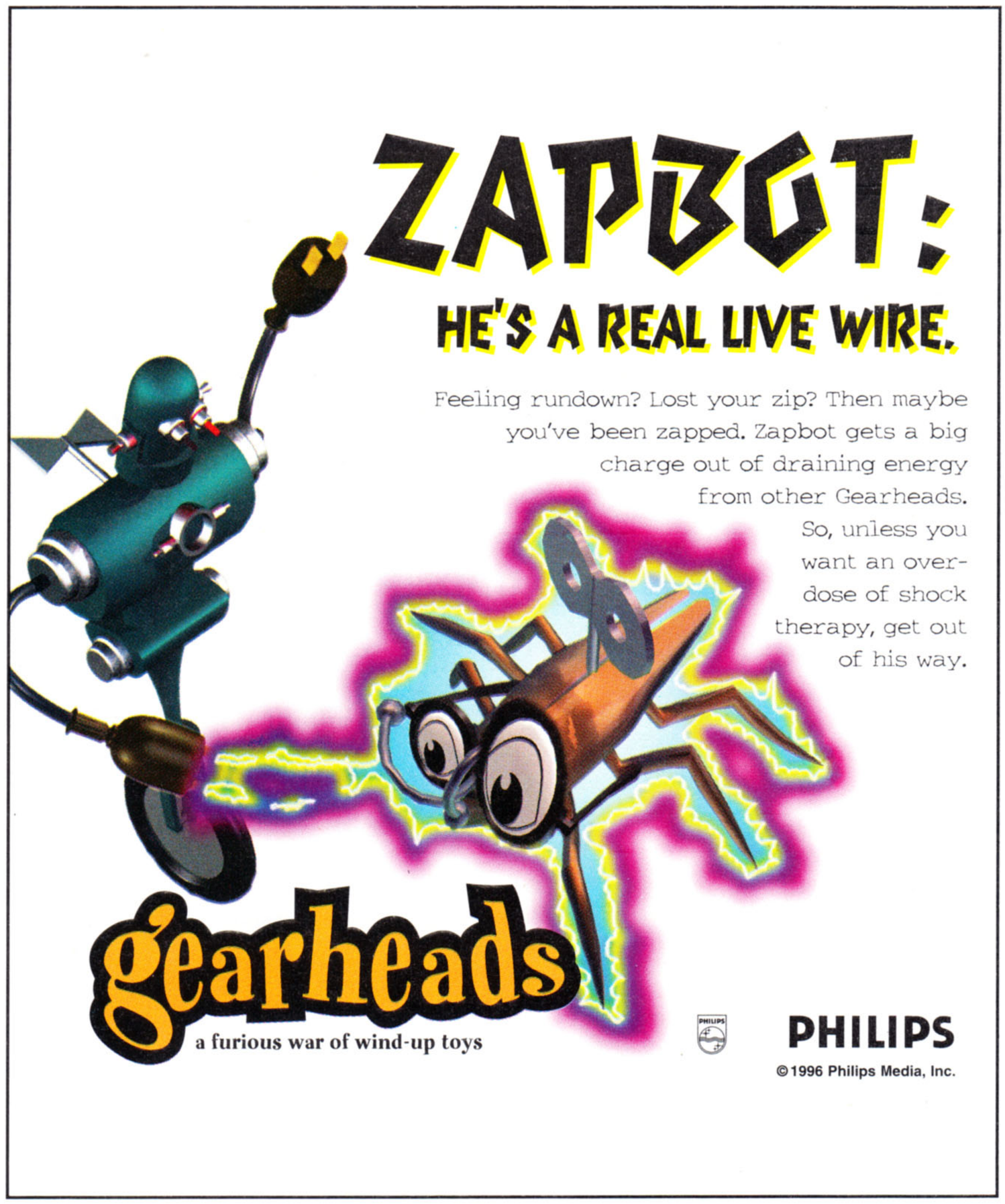
GAMEPLAY: A-
+ Still the king of all fighting game engines in stability—good balance and damage. +/- Characters here are good, but there isn't as much diversity in fighting style as SF2 games.

LASTING POWER: A-
+ Different endings for each character. - Not as many characters as SF Alpha's predecessors.

OVERALL: B

B Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

Though there are less combatants to choose, Street Fighter Alpha still has several interesting character designs to choose from. In general, if the combatants were good in the earlier versions, they are good in Alpha.



STREET Fighter Alpha uses Capcom's recently conceived Japanese anime-quality artwork (first seen in Darkstalkers) for all of the character designs, which replaces the subtle shading and realism of Capcom's traditional Street Fighter characters with a far more cartoon-like appearance. Alpha takes place before the Street Fighter II games, which allows Capcom to jettison such familiar names as Guile, Dhalsim, Zangief, E. Honda, Blanka, Balrog, Vega, Fei Long, Cammy, T. Hawk and Dee Jay without evoking fears in their loyal fans. The characters are replaced with Charlie (Guile's Vietnam-era buddy), Guy and Sodom (from Final Fight), Rose (a relative of a Darkstalker), Adon and Birdie (enhanced from Street Fighter 1). Ryu, Ken, Chun Li, Sagat, Bison and Akuma all return from Super SF2, and a new character (Dan) is a hidden palette-swapped Ryu clone mysteriously linked to Sagat.

and absolutely none of SFA's backgrounds have a theme as dramatic as the red skies over Ryu's old dojo or the fight on Ken's old docks, not to forget the heart-pounding steel cage match in Vega's Spain. Add to all this the fact that Capcom never attempts to compete with 2-D titles such as Samurai Shodown and Art of Fighting with camera scaling, and the visual presentation can at best be deemed pleasantly average.

Character animation is roughly as fluid as it was in Super SF2 Turbo, though the character designs themselves range from better than SSF2T to somewhat below it. Capcom's newest Ryu, Ken, Sagat and Bison artwork is superb: They look tougher and stronger than ever before. As Street Fighter II characters, Guy, Birdie and Sodom would not have passed muster: They are all drawn well, but Guy's attacks are all sort of misplaced Final Fight moves, Birdie is a below-Zangief class British SF1 goon with a chain and grabbing attacks, and Sodom (of Final Fight Mad Gear gang fame) fights with the same Guy-class FF-style grab-and-smack attacks. Adon, on the other hand, looks every bit fitting as a Thai kickboxer (much moreso than fist-friendly Sagat), and the magic-wielding Rose is very appropriate as a relative of the Darkstalker series—perhaps a wee bit out of place in SF Alpha.

On the audio front, Capcom's anthem-like SF2 stage music has been replaced with reasonable but less-inspiring tracks. The best audio feature in Street Fighter Alpha is a music toggle: You can pick from either the chip-quality arcade music or a more modern, remixed soundtrack which sounds noticeably better. All of the characters have high-fidelity voices which are difficult to understand only because of either [a] Japanese speech or [b] muddled English—Charlie's "Sonic Boom," amongst his other voice samples and those of Birdie, make me wish that the old SSF2 "Big Bird" announcer would come back and do some more work for Capcom. On a comparative scale, SF Alpha doesn't attempt to do as much in voice samples as, say, any other recent fighting game.

If you can get past the audiovisual shortcomings of Street Fighter Alpha, you'll find the king of all fighting game engines in sheer stability, if not diversity. Moves do reasonable amounts of damage and characters have more than adequate numbers of regular moves, special moves, and new attacks and defenses. The only major gameplay flaws are the limits and diversity factors: In most titles nowadays, you can "dash" forward and back by tapping twice on the joystick, or jump at different heights based on how long "up" on the joystick is held.

While SFA doesn't press the PlayStation hardware to new heights, and most likely will be even less of a test for the strong 2-D Saturn machine when both U.S. versions are released in February, it's a very good addition to the Street Fighter series mostly because of its enhanced gameplay. *-Jer Horwitz*

The Bottom Line:

Capcom brings their new anime cartoon-style artwork and character design to the Street Fighter universe with mostly positive results. Taking place prior to the Street Fighter II games, SF Alpha combines old SF2 favorites, long-gone Street Fighter 1 characters, a few original people and two fighters from Capcom's Final Fight series. Recommended primarily for Street Fighter II fans.

Need for Speed

Need For Speed's pumped-up frame rate excels game to new levels

▲ A greatly increased frame rate has done wonders for the game's realism. After all, it is "Need for Speed" and while the 3DO version had many qualities the lack of screen speed was a major detractor.

Publisher: EA SPORTS
Platform: PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: EA
Release: March

When the 3DO version of Need For Speed came out last year, some people were initially turned off by the game's ironically slow pace and lower-than-Ridge Racer frame rate. Those who kept playing discovered that the few flaws were keeping many people from realizing that Need For Speed played very well, giving players the feeling of driving cars they probably would never be able to afford.

The forthcoming PlayStation version of this title addresses the speed and frame rate issues to deliver a simulation-like racing experience unparalleled in any other game on a console to date.

In this title, you can drive a Dodge Viper, Chevrolet Corvette, Mazda RX-7, Ferrari Testarossa, Porsche 911, Lamborghini Diablo, Toyota Supra Turbo and Acura NSX.

Like most racing games, there is a decided focus here on the simulation part of driving, in addition to the action-reflex parts most console games concentrate on. Each car in NFS performs distinctly from the rest in areas such as acceleration, braking, top speed and horsepower. For those unfamiliar with the eight autos, EA has included a car showcase feature where a narrator tells you each one's features as you watch video sequences of the car in action.

There are four modes of action for a single player to choose from, two more than the 3DO version. Along with time trials and head-to-head against a computerized opponent—3DO players will be glad to know that the X-Man isn't in the version we've tested—is a tournament mode against the remaining cars and a practice single-race mode on each track. In addition, there are two-player split-screen and PS link-up options, adding to the game's lasting power.

For those not content with the 3DO's three levels, EA has included four totally new levels for the PlayStation. To complement the City, Coastal and Alpine Stages are Rusty Springs, Autumn Valley, Vertigo Ridge and Lost Vegas. Along with a variety of tracks, Need For Speed also gives you the option of choosing the time of day to race in.

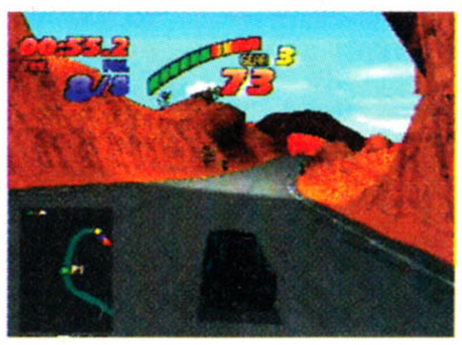
The PlayStation's NFS is speedier than its 3DO predecessor—it appears to run at nearly 30 FPS and has much more vibrant, stable background artwork. Roadside objects seem to fly by, especially if you choose the inside-the-car mode, and there is even a new view inside the car without a dashboard.

Although the game lacks the known gloss of arcade racers such as Daytona and Ridge Racer, many players have come to learn that the 3DO version of Need For Speed (though flawed graphically) is one of the best racers on the market. So far, EA is on the right track to making the PlayStation version an even better experience.

-Andrew Blum

New ▶ "niceties" added to the game are the view from the driver seat with no dashboard and the ability to leave massive skid marks when the car goes out of control.

"The PlayStation's NFS is speedier than its 3DO predecessor..."



Bottom of the 9th

Konami heats up the PlayStation with a powerhouse grand slam

DISASTEROID:
Loves to kick asteroid.

Whenever Gearheads battle, Disasteroid is always laser hot. So, if you need someone to hack holes in your opponent's defenses, Disasteroid's the guy.

gearheads
a furious war of wind-up toys

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We've recently received a 50 percent completed version of Konami's new 32-Bit baseball game, Bottom of the 9th, and a very detailed rendition it is. While it has what you'd expect from a baseball simulation—capability for a large database of player statistics, multiple fields to play on and the ability to hit, pitch and field—it's the details they've added to each of these that make this game interesting.

Publisher: Konami
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Konami
Release: March

When you're playing on offense, the interesting thing is that instead of moving the batter around within the batter's box to determine where he will swing, Konami keeps the batter's legs stationary and makes you target the incoming pitch with a movable cursor within the strike zone. This is actually similar to targeting an incoming enemy on your favorite flight simulator, but it's not as easy as it looks. Additionally, you not only have the ability to bunt or swing, but can also choose to power hit the ball or simply make contact. For running, the game offers the standard four button and directional controls that correspond to the four points of the diamond.

On defense, you not only control the location of where the pitch will go—you also choose from one of six different types of throws (fastball, slider, change up, curve, sinker/screw and ork/palm/knuckle) and how fast the ball will move. When fielding, you can choose whether to throw to the cut-off man or to a specific base. The game also has standard leaping and diving catches.

Graphically, as a 50 percent game, Bottom of the 9th looks pretty good. The detail level and fluidity are pretty good, so with fine tuning, Konami should have a visual hit on their hands.

A few words about the interface: When you're fielding, the camera follows the ball with an overhead view, which it should do; but it follows it so closely as to make it extremely difficult to select and move an appropriate fielder to the ball's future location. Typically, the fielders are far off screen with only their playing position and general direction indicated by an arrow to their current position.

Konami's unique batting feature, in which the player keeps the legs stationary and aims at the ball with a cursor, adds considerably to the game's depth of play.

Another small user interface problem is that during play the screen itself is segmented into three areas. The top-third of the screen is divided into three sections displaying the third base, the pitcher's view of the batter and catcher and first base. The lower two-thirds shows the batter, pitcher and second base from a point of view of behind the batter. This multisegmented view can be quite confusing at times. Konami should really consider Sega's World Series Baseball's example of Single View Mode vs. Multiview Modes.

BOTN will feature a full statistical database for each player and many fields to play on for each region, many of which were already completed in this limited version.

Sound is what you'd expect from a baseball simulator—crowd noise, the crack of the bat, etc. The announcer, however, sounded rather robotic, but this will hopefully improve by the game's final release.

All in all, Konami seems to have a good start on producing a capable and detailed baseball simulator. When the final product is available, look to IG for a full review.

-Brian Vickers

No change in the view options from the first Ridge Racer. Cockpit view still seems to be best.

Ridge Racer Revolution

The pioneer race sim for the PlayStation is back, bigger and better

Publisher: NAMCO
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: NAMCO
Release: February

A classic example of the difference between first- and second-generation software is Namco's Ridge Racer Revolution. This solitaire auto race is more of an upgrade than a true sequel to one of the first PlayStation entries.

The new game is similar to the original, but surpasses it in almost every respect. In the nine months between their release dates, designers and programmers have learned much about the platform and markedly improved their ability to create gameware for it.

Though Ridge Racer Revolution is strictly arcade, it shows the effect of Papyrus' IndyCar and other automobile simulations. Console racing contests used to mean pedal-to-the-metal from start to checkered flag, but this one has some tasty meat on its bones. Drivers who pound the gas in this one are sure to hear the telltale sound the car makes when it rams safety fences, stone walls and other barriers designed to keep the vehicle on the road.

Graphics were one of the original game's chief strengths, but they are significantly better in the new version. The cars are much more realistically modeled, and the scenery is more detailed and lifelike than ever. Namco's latest wisely retains the choice of first person or close-follow perspectives. The spin-out sequence is very convincing. The car holds its image from every angle, a notable flaw in early 1990s racing titles.

The girl who starts the race has a new costume. The previous outfit was more eye-catching. Some will find her too tall and skinny but the artwork itself is more professional.

There is no skill adjustment as such, but well-illustrated menus customize game parameters to fit the abilities of a broad range of virtual Unsers and Andrettis. The challenge remains high regardless of the options, but a fast car on a long, twisted course calls for top-level hand-eye mastery.

While Ridge Racer Revolution may not be the most realistic race sim when compared to others like Need for Speed, it still packs a lot of arcade-style punch.

A new outfit (or lack there of) for the start woman is just one of the changes Namco made for Ridge Racer Revolution.

There are three courses of ascending length and difficulty. The rank newcomer will be hard-pressed to successfully complete even the novice track the first time out of the pit. None of the courses have long straight-aways, so tight turns and abrupt reversals of direction are the rule.

The choice of cars has a major impact, too. Players must look beyond "top speed" and evaluate other factors, especially the handling and grip characteristics of their prospective racer.

The choice of manual or automatic transmission forces the driver to choose between ultimate performance and ease-of-play. Automatic means one less thing to watch while manual wrings a few extra MPH out of the machine.

The on-screen display for Ridge Racer Revolution contains more information than the older disc, yet is even more readable. The lettering is more legible, and the arrangement of the data is so sensible that drivers can sneak a look at the read-outs without sending the car into a retaining wall.

The sound, including voice and music, has more of an edge than in Ridge Racer. Instead of encouraging the player who fails to qualify, Ridge Racer Revolution dares the driver to go for another run.

Fortunately, the tire-squealing action is so compelling that it doesn't have to ask twice.

-Arnie Katz

GRAPHICS: A-
+ The images are right and tight. - People don't look very good, too elongated and awkward.

SOUNDS: A
+ The music is very well recorded with a memorable tune. - The voice-over guy is a big wuss.

GAMEPLAY: A-
+ Drivers control the car, not just ride the gas. - There's nothing very new here.

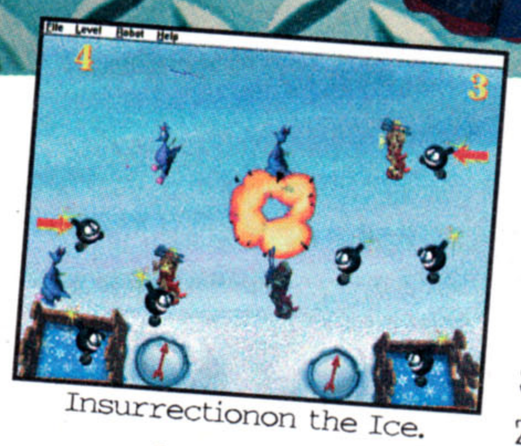
LASTING POWER: A-
+ Racing games are open-ended as a category.- More courses along with variables on the track would be nice.

OVERALL: A-

A- Intelligent Gamer "HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"

War gearheads: is fun.

Fracas on the Factory Floor.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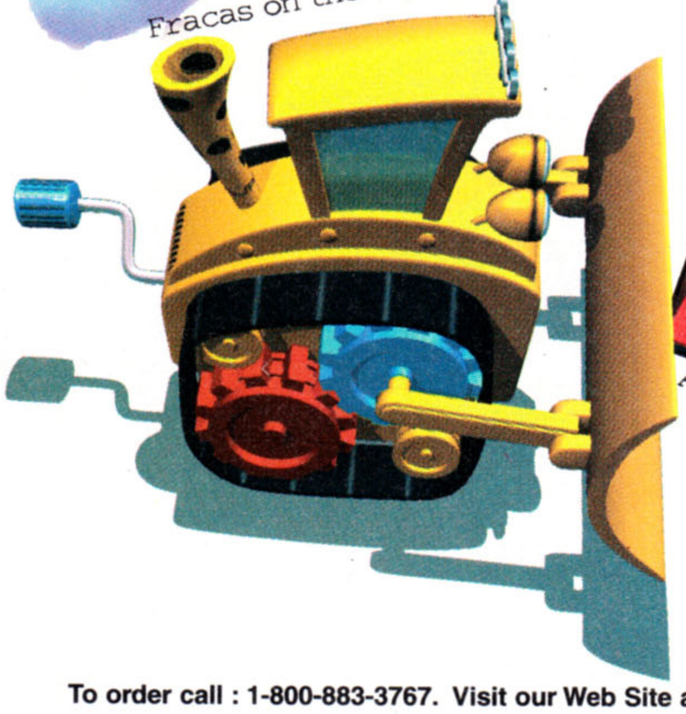

Armageddon in the Garden.

Welcome to the Battle of the Century. Gearheads: A fast-paced, wacked-out, wind-up toybox full of fun. Say hello to Disasteroid, Zapbot, Deadhead, Kangaruffian and company. You'll pick a team for speed, power and maneuverability. Then launch them against an opponent or your computer.

You'll tackle a variety of different environments, each with increasing levels of difficulty. You'd better have a strategy and think fast. 'Cause the one who ends up with the most toys wins.

Gearheads. For grownups who still like to fight over toys. For Windows and Mac CD-ROM.

gearheads

a furious war of wind-up toys

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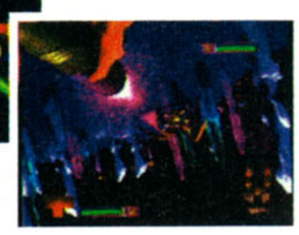
PO'ed



PO'ed players must work their way through 25 levels of the first-person shooter to reach the end.

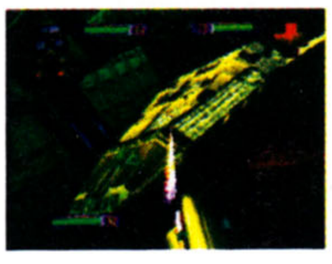
Walking Butts, Nuclear Waste and Bloody Goggles will leave gamers completely PO'ed

Publisher: Accolade
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Any Channel
Release: Spring 96

With the video game industry blossoming into such a high-stakes game, it is undoubtedly becoming increasingly more difficult for the "little guy" to make a dent in the business. It is even more difficult to stay in it.

Despite the difficulties, a talented new development team by the name of Any Channel has done just that. There should be no question of just how small a needle they are in this high-tech haystack when Brian Yen, Any Channel's president and programmer, describes their headquarters thus: "Any Channel didn't exist in a building...if there was any headquarters, it would be many of us hanging around my living room. We had roughly four full-time programmers working on PO'ed, but much of it was constructed by about 10 contractual workers. They completed various pieces and sent them to us through the Internet."

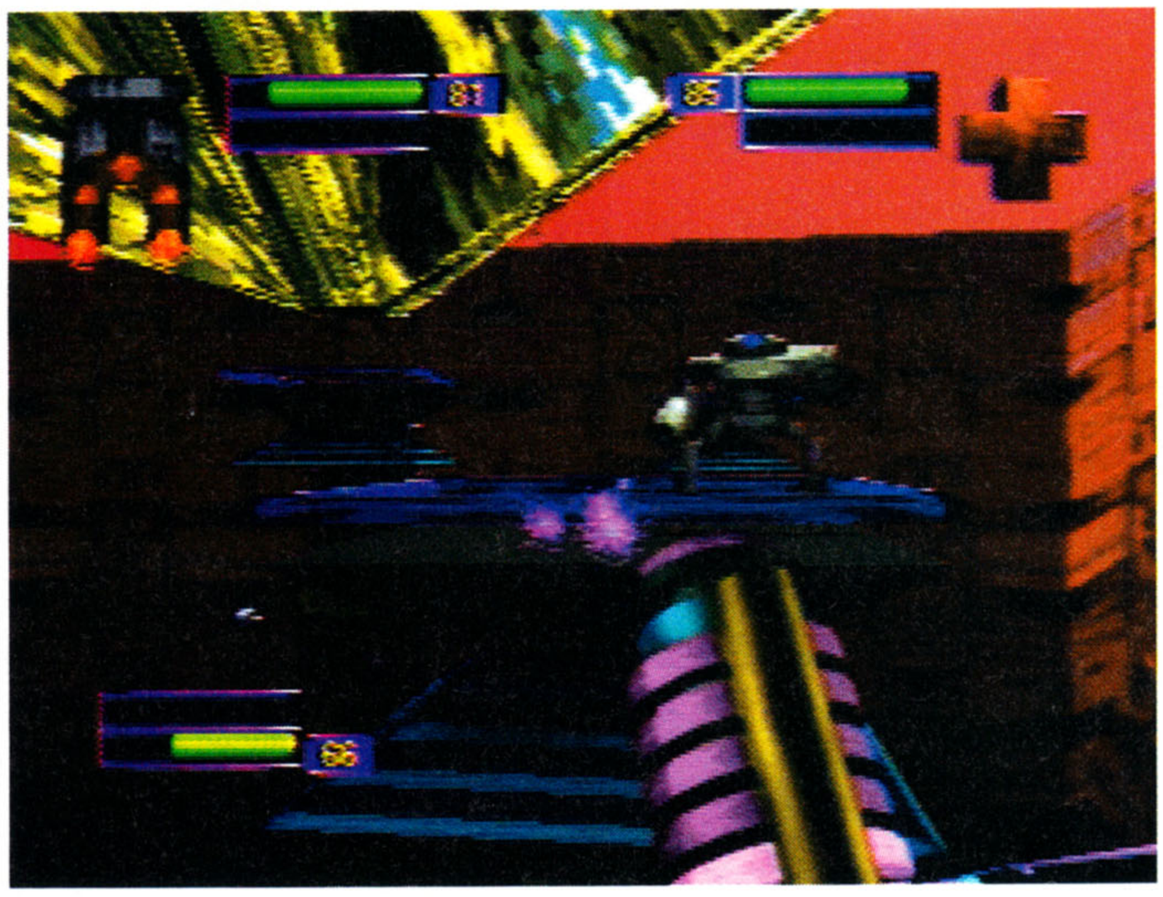
After nearly two years, their first version of PO'ed, which was for the 3DO, had finally hit store shelves. During the E³ show in May, they were noticed and signed by Accolade to deliver an improved PlayStation version. As Greg Williams, producer at Accolade chuckled, "It was obvious they were newcomers. They had no clue about this industry!"



There are many weapons to choose from while making your way through the often bloody experience of Any Channel's PO'ed. Additionally, there are 10 species of creatures to avoid, including a gang of walking butts.

And so PO'ed for the PlayStation was born. Finally past its infancy, *Intelligent Gamer* was able to get a sneak peek at the newest pre-release version of this unique title.

PO'ed is essentially a 3-D action game that follows in Doom's huge footsteps. Fortunately, it is also one of the more unique console "Doomesque" games. The most important feature in this game that sets it apart is perhaps explained best by Greg Williams: "Instead of being forced to roam in corridors and stay confined to the ground, such as in Doom, you are allowed full 3-D movement through the use of a jet pack." Indeed this does add an extra twist, one that would certainly distinguish the title from most other games in the genre.



Frying High: Although Any Channel's PO'ed is very reminiscent of Doom, the main character is a heroic chef whose full-motion jetpack movement allows players to explore much more area than they could confined to ground level.

Perhaps overlooked is this game's warped sense of humor--one that almost seems to dare a Congressman to mount a soapbox in opposition. You don't have to play this game for more than a few seconds to get a sample of what to expect from the Any Channel crew: The first weapon at your disposal is a frying pan, which isn't too extraordinary considering the fact that you are controlling a heroic chef—shades of *Under Siege*. Quickly, you can progress to a nasty drill that muddies up your view-screen with horrific splashes of blood, though the screen is luckily wiped clean after a messy kill by your simulated hand. The defining humorous moment however is when you realize that some of the alien creatures are little more than walking butts. Scary indeed.

Through the long development of PO'ed, the Any Channel team kept in close contact with the Internet, bouncing ideas back and forth on both news groups and the Internet IRC chat lines. Many late nights, members of the PO'ed team could be found moored on an Internet channel, including Nate Huang, "vice president of technology and stuff." After several PO'ed samplers had made the rounds, net-folk weighed in frequently on certain game "issues." Again, the humor struck a chord with its

Tun

Any Channel's tiny development finished a product for the 3DO which competes favorably with much of the system's top software...but can they do it again on PlayStation?

A production team at Accolade is providing Any Channel with the necessary guidance to bring the product to store shelves by this spring. Chris Downed,

THE TEAMS

audience, whether it was positive or negative.

"We actually had [the creatures] fire flatulence, but it got some negative response on the Net. People don't mind blood," notes Yen, with slight sarcasm in his voice, "but stay away from showing flatulence!"

The humor is not an ambitious cloak for a shallow game, however; PO'ed is indeed an interesting first-person shooter. Weapons range from the humorous, as mentioned before, to the creative. By using anything from the frying pan to a flamethrower, you must work your way through 25 different levels while disposing of 10 different types of creatures to complete the game. No two levels are alike, and many take on very odd characteristics and themes. They are indeed ambitious, as many of them are aesthetically compelling, using a variety of transparent textures and interesting level construction. Yen mentions that "some of our levels were [based on the work of] an architect, Soleri, and even one was taken from a dream that one of us had."

"Soleri," the level based on the aforementioned architect's work, features a floating group of cubes that are stationed above a five-pronged sculpture. It may not be the classical backdrop you'd choose for a bloodbath, but it works both within the limits of PO'ed's in-game geometry and as unique artwork in its own right.

"AClogo" is one of the many secret levels hidden in PO'ed. As the title implies, the Any Channel logo features prominently in the level's design; more specifically, it's a large 3-D fluorescent logo on the floor with texture-mapped television broadcast "snow" around the edges to give it a more futuristic slant.

"Spiral" is a very challenging level in which you must battle your way through a very long, spiraling pathway to reach the top of the level. Numerous lifts and moving platforms either help or impede your progress, and it's incredibly difficult to keep your feet on such a narrow path when you are being pounded by aliens from all sides.

"Core." The aliens don't seem quite so deadly compared to the contents of this level. Here, you're fighting inside a huge, multilevel nuclear core which forces you to masterfully use your jetpack to avoid core discharges, radioactive material and generator defenses while jumping from ledge to ledge inside the structure.

"People don't mind blood," notes Yen, "but stay away from showing flatulence!"

The PlayStation version of PO'ed won't be vastly improved over its 3DO predecessor, and though the frame rate has been improved, there are less colors used. Fortunately, the slight loss in color is largely unnoticeable, especially when the game is whizzing about at a smooth speed. The smoother speed is more friendly to weapons such as the "Missile Cam" which allows you to visually steer missiles to their target.

▲ **The Core level will make alien attacks seem like a breeze as they rely on their jetpacks and maneuver their way through the inner core of a nuclear reactor, avoiding discharges, generator defenses and radioactive material.**

Sony's version also contains the necessary addition of a training level to let players adapt to the rather complex controls used in PO'ed—the sheer number of button presses and combinations needed in PO'ed levels are more akin to a fighting game than an action one. Due to the extra RAM available to work with on the PlayStation, better quality sound will grace the game, and perhaps a few extra sampled sound effects will appear as well. Also added is all new ambient sound to help set the mood, audio that was not present in the 3DO version. Disappointingly, this version of PO'ed will still not contain any true music.

Is PO'ed the best in its genre? Not yet, but the PlayStation version is certainly looking like it will shape up to be one of the better alternatives. One thing is for certain, though: This is a great start for Any Channel. The most exciting things are yet to come from this small development group. Although they did say they were beginning work on their next project, which they couldn't discuss quite yet, Brian Yee did say that although there was no Saturn version of PO'ed planned, "the engine for PO'ed was designed and meant to be ported." Could this mean PO'ed for the Ultra 64, M2, or PC? Stay tuned.

PO'ed for the PlayStation is slated for a spring '96 release.

-Kraig Kujawa

ing In

PO'ed Executive Producer for Accolade, has been working with the Any Channel team and Accolade's Greg Williams (Producer) and Kurtis Matthews (Assistant Producer) to establish a more structured network environment for a team that normally works from a house. Small wonder, then, that Any Channel's president and programmer, Brian Yen, refers to himself as the company's janitor, and the company's Nate Huang, is "Vice President of Technology and Stuff."

Rounding out the Any Channel crew are Kenta Williams, the "Executive Director of Artistic Expressions," Stacey Campbell, programmer, and Russell Pflughaupt, technical and financial officer.

Any Channel's PO'ed development team: (From Left) Brian Yen, Nate Huang, Kenta Williams, Stacey Campbell, Russell Pflughaupt, *Center in front:* Greg Williams of Accolade ▶

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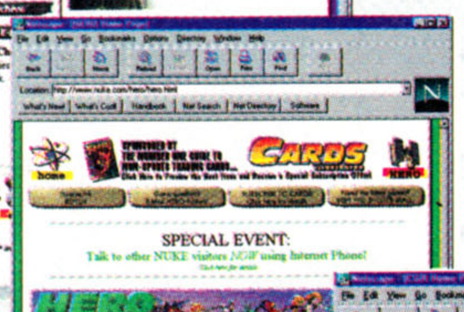

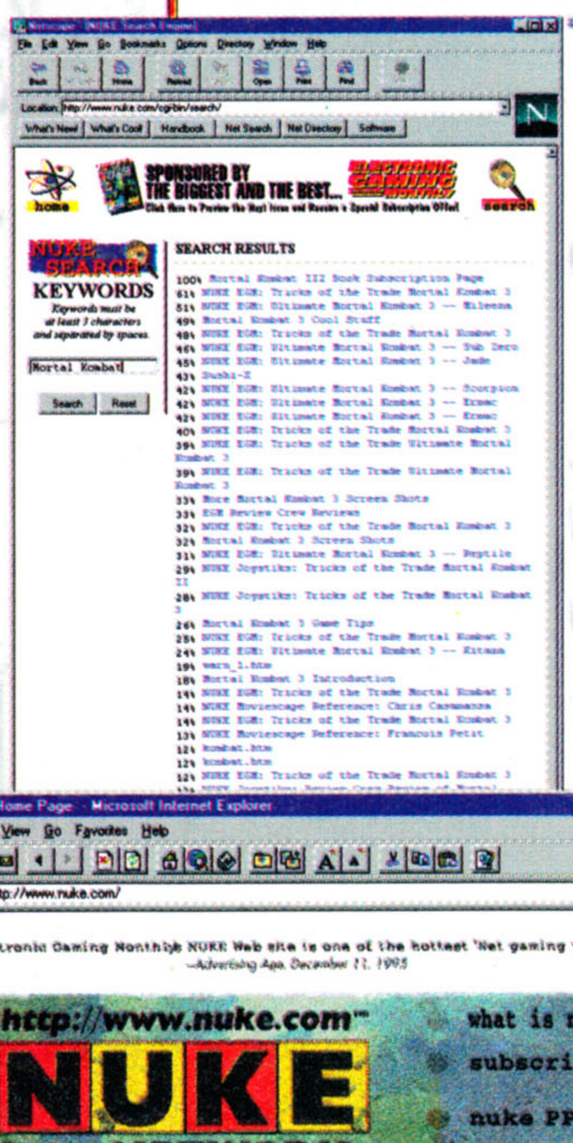

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Battle Arena Toshinden 2

The popular fighting game puts up its dukes for a rematch with the competition

Publisher: SONY
Platform: PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: TAMSOFT/TAKARA
Release: February

Takara's Japanese import Battle Arena Toshinden 2 does not make the world's best first impression: After watching a goofy full-motion video introduction, the first things you'll notice about the in-game fighting are the new grainy, pixelized background graphic textures and occasionally awkward camera motions, which contrast sharply with the crystal-clear artwork and smooth camera movements found throughout the first Toshinden game. Tamsoft, the game's programmers, wanted to improve the game across the board and had hit-and-miss results: Everything that got better in some way is either worse or mildly problematic in another.

Let's start with the gameplay issues. Formerly approximating Samurai Shodown characters in overall versatility, the redesigned Toshinden 2 characters are a blend of SS walking and running attacks with SF2-quality air attacks and Virtua Fighter's "Ring Outs" and "on-the-ground" cheap hits. Yes, someone has finally attempted to integrate all of the best fighting game features into one piece of software. In addition, you get to taunt during matches, you get multiple victory poses and plenty of special moves for each character, plus "Over-drive" meters, BAT2's version of Super Street Fighter II Turbo's Super Combos. Best yet, the special attack motions are up to SF2 snuff on the PlayStation controllers.

The overall feel of BAT2 is similar to Toshinden 1: weapon-fighting seems to take off more damage from an opponent's lifebar than the average punch or kick in Super SF2 Turbo would. Like many of the other fighting games out there, TSD2 lets you chain attacks together and get in-air hits on your opponents with some controlled juggling, and there are new attacks specific to your state of momentum: If you're running, for example, you can do some high-speed swipes with your weapons, and there are still air attacks such as burning-foot kicks and mid-air fire-balls. Action is really always exciting.

Marring the game slightly are a few problems in the game's character manipulation scheme: Characters now take several tumbles on the ground after sustaining a major hit, unfortunately resulting in more "Ring Outs" than before. Certain attacks seem to inflict just a bit too much hurt on your characters, which when combined with the Ring Out deaths ends many fights for various reasons after less than 15 seconds. I've witnessed one-second victories with Uranus against the computer.

▲ **This ain't Daisy May Duke. With looks that kill, she packs a quick, mean wallop proving that it's not all brute force in this game of strategic combat.**

GRAPHICS: A-
+ The best 3-D artwork attempted on a home game to date...
- Marred by camera problems and some low-quality background art.

SOUNDS: A-
+ Very good sound effects and voice samples.
+/- Great music is always stopping and starting.

GAME PLAY: A-
++ New moves, new depth, and faster play. It's just fun.
- Moves do too much damage—some, insane amounts.

LASTING POWER: A-
+ Multiple characters always help this category...
- Endings are all bland text-based stories.

OVERALL: A-

A- Intelligent Gamer "HIGHLY RECOMENDED"

THE NEW BLOOD

TRACY

is a tonfa (baton)-wielding American police woman whose costume is a mix between MK3's Stryker and a hip-hop dancer. With one tonfa in each hand, Tracy c an electrocute her foes and deliver some crazy, devastating midair kicks.

CHAOS

is a sickle-toting Sri Lankan with a cackle and unique fighting style that seems to derive many attacks from animals and bugs. He's absolutely unique in fighting games, making Virtua Fighter 2's Shun Di look relatively tame: Just wait until you see his victory poses.

Now, on the pleasant side, BAT2 has better AI than its predecessor—characters put up a pretty good fight on any level, let alone level eight (the maximum). Increased game speed makes the feeling of combat more intense, as do several new multihit moves which make you feel as if you're doing more than just knocking someone down with one big smack. Knife-wielding Elli—

deemed Turkish in the manual—has a brand-new O.J. attack which would leave any real-life attacker driving away from the scene with his passport and $7,000 in spending cash. Eiji and Kayin have been further differentiated in this version with additional distinctive moves, and all of the older characters have been given a couple of new special moves (in addition to all of their old ones) to make them more interesting. Perfect games in BAT1 earned you the right to fight Sho, a more powerful combination of Eiji and Kayin, and he returns with his old background largely untouched in this sequel.

Plus, there are at least six entirely new characters (see sidebar). There could be a number seven, as well, but he or she hasn't been discovered yet. All in all, the set of at least 15 characters is quite impressive and right where good fighters should be today.

My largest complaint has to be the stop-and-start nature of the entire BAT2 experience—it's as if you're watching a movie with great actors and sloppy editing. In Toshinden 2, the camera opts to point to a person after they fall off the fighting platform—you see the loser for much too long. If no one falls off the platform and you win by emptying your opponent's lifebar, he or she falls to the ground and the camera repositions to show him or her getting up again and pounding the floor in anger. It's just weird. Combine these problems with the fact that the music is always stopped at the end

"...someone has finally... integrated all of the best fighting game features..."

of the round—simply adjusting the volume down temporarily would have been a much better way of handling things—and you have a badly edited game experience.

The character art and background art have both taken steps upward, though. Characters are a bit more detailed than before, and backgrounds are much more three-dimensional than their predecessors. Spear-carrying Mondo now wears a little wooden backpack that opens up on occasion for a fiery surprise, Ellis now wears a sunflower translucent dress, and characters such as Run Go have more smoothly defined muscles. Every background scene now has as much going on as Mondo's complex courtyard or Kayin's futuristic city from Toshinden 1, and none look as Virtua Fighter 1-esque as the old Run Go stage did, for example.

But at what cost? A few of the backgrounds have nice 3-D effects but come across as poorly executed: One stage where you fight in the

center of raging, pixelized water has a gray flat gradient sky that makes the whole scene look unnecessarily 16-Bit. Eiji, whose last stage was ironically amidst some detailed polygonal mountains, now fights inside of a cave with incredibly amateurish flat stalactites. A lot of this is just plain inexplicable, and though none of the backgrounds can compare to the futuristic platform stage in BAT1, there are a few really good stages in the game.

Audio is also a mixed bag. The music is definitely on the same level as that found in Toshinden 1, which is to say very good, but as mentioned before, it keeps on stopping at the end of every round and starting anew. As many fights last for only 20-30 seconds and the average music track runs somewhere in the neighborhood of three minutes, Tamsoft's programming work here is just incomprehensible. The entire fighting ambience generated by the music is totally lost with the starts and stops, and it's hard to appreciate what really is an excellent set of audio tracks. Sound effects are quite good—there are plenty of voices, and all of them are of superb sample quality.

Battle Arena Toshinden 2 is as good a game for 1996 as Toshinden was for 1995, but let's just hope that Toshinden 3 (and/or the American release of BAT2) can appear with a few less annoying glitches.

-Jer Horwitz

MASTER

is a female final boss who attacks with magical swords and Shang Tsung-style multifireball special moves—though she looks gentle and kind, her attacks are pretty vicious.

URANUS

is perhaps the game's most powerful fighter, an archangel with a deadly magical bow. Her attacks are among the most deadly in the game, capped off by a flaming flight pattern with you in her sights. Uranus is the game's closest approximation to the old Gaia.

GAIA

is supposed to be the same warrior from Toshinden 1, except his moves, physical appearance and style are entirely different than before. He still carries a sword and has some powerful attacks.

VERMILION

(aka "Verm") is a wire-thin, shadowy, shotgun- and pistol-toting tough guy with a costume straight out of Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice*. His shotgun blasts are destined to keep you at a distance.

Larger character sprites offer slightly more colorful combatants, making them pleasing to the eye. Perhaps more energy should have been put into the gameplay than the graphics.

Mortal Kombat 2

Mortal Kombat 2 finds its way to the Saturn through mixed reviews of acceptance.

Publisher: Acclaim
Platform: Saturn
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Acclaim
Release: February

It's a well-known fact that big-name arcade titles sell quickly when released for home consoles. Following the expiration of their contract with Williams, whose Mortal Kombat series and NBA Jam titles rocketed into the arcade stratosphere, Acclaim Entertainment was left largely in the lurch for just those sorts of big games. After signing as a Saturn developer, Acclaim opted to translate one of the last Williams games covered under their contract—Mortal Kombat 2—for a platform that had no MK game to call its own. As rumors circulated that Williams was going to push out a port of Ultimate MK3 for the Saturn in early 1996, Acclaim reportedly considered abandoning the Saturn MK2 release...but now it's here.

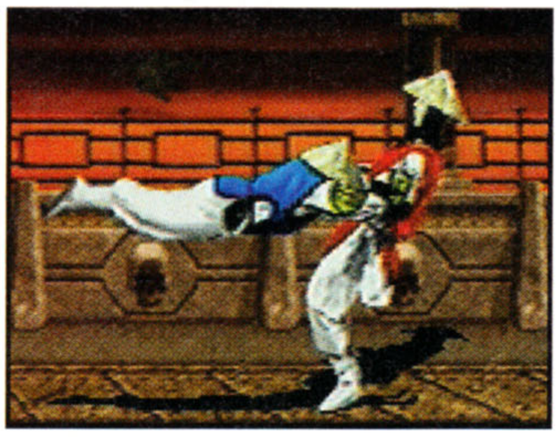
You've probably already watched or played MK2 and are familiar with the cast and crew, which includes 12 playable MK2 fighters and a few mysterious Bosses. The Saturn version doesn't change any of the game's opening cinematics, characters, background parallaxing or gameplay concepts: They're all in the game and looking picture-perfect. As 1993 arcade games go, MK2 looks pretty good. That's the pleasant news.

The bad news: Probe Entertainment, the game's developers, made some compromises to get the graphics looking sharp, namely resulting in somewhat unusual speed and audio situations. MK2 doesn't move slowly, but it does have frequent split-second pauses which load special moves from the disc—they're literally littered throughout every match, but they're not horribly intrusive. Shang Tsung? Like the Sony PS version of MK3, Shang's morphs pause the game (here only for a second or so) and you can use the Options Menu to determine whether the morphs should be prevented altogether, restricted to opponent morphs only, or left arcade-intact. MK2 purists will probably pooh-pooh the delays, so if you're an MK2 fan, any cartridge version is more up to the original pace.

In terms of audio, MK2's soundtrack is chip-generated rather than CD spooled, and the spooky, minimalistic music (while better than cartridge versions) isn't quite up to arcade snuff. At the very least, the music doesn't stop and restart every time you change screens. Sound effects range from arcade-perfect to audibly blemished, and there are some notable voices missing, character select screen names among them. For most people, Mortal Kombat 2 is old news and not yet deserving of nostalgia, but it's here on a 32-Bit platform anyway. While it may be picture-perfect, you might not be so thrilled when you see it in motion and hear the new audio, which if better, would have probably been a good part of the rehashed game's appeal. As it stands, MK2 for the Saturn offers little more than larger character sprites to what Acclaim released a considerable time ago.

-Jer Horwitz

Playing MK2 may be a blast from the past for many fighting game enthusiasts, yet the game still has an appeal to the untold masses who enjoy a good game and don't care if it's not the most current version.



Waiting a split second while the system loads up more information from the disk is not too much to tolerate if the player is an MK2 junkie, otherwise some people may find it a little annoying.

GRAPHICS: B-
+ Large character sprites and multiscrolling backgrounds, all of which are colorful. - Characters don't have as many moves as most of the other good fighters, which limits the total amount of animation you see.

SOUNDS: C+
+/- So-so music that approximates the gloomy arcade tracks, which weren't all that hot in the first place. +/- Reasonable in-game sound effects with crimped and missing voices.

GAMEPLAY: C
+/- Jump, uppercut, special move, jump. Not complex, but reasonable. - Eclipsed by most other fighting games, including its sequels.

LASTING POWER: B-
+ Worth trying a few times for the fun of seeing full endings for the characters...
- ...but feels dated from the first time you pick it up.

OVERALL: B-

B- Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE"

The Bottom Line:

Visually arcade-perfect, MK2 for the Saturn has been released at an awkward time: After the more complex MK3 was released for the Sony PlayStation and after the supplementary Ultimate MK3 was released into arcades. A good translation of an old game.

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Wing Commander IV

Origin banks on $10 million budget to blast sales of Wing Commander IV into Hyperspace

Publisher: Origin
Platform: PC CD-ROM
Format: 6 CD-ROMs
Developer: Origin
Release: February

The Wing Commander titles from Origin have been some of the most popular games in the PC market. Their last installment, Wing Commander III: Heart of the Tiger, integrated a live-action video story using major stars with exciting space shoot-'em-up action, and the result was a hot game and a best seller. It should be no surprise, then, that Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom will have to live up to that impressive legacy and more when it hits store shelves in February. It will also have something else to live up to: an incredible production cost of $10 million, the most spent on a computer game. Was all that money put to good use? Does Origin have a blockbuster hit or an expensive disaster? We got a chance to take this baby out for a test drive, and here's what we discovered.

Since Wing III brought an end to the Kilrathi saga, Wing IV needed a new enemy. Chris Roberts, creator of the Wing Commander series, decided to "make the story a little grayer, a little more interesting." So, he turned to the age-old fear of civil war for story inspiration.

At long last, the war with the Kilrathi is over. With Kilrah destroyed, the Kilrathi have surrendered and you've left active duty to take up life as a simple farmer on a distant planet, but the peace is soon interrupted as turmoil

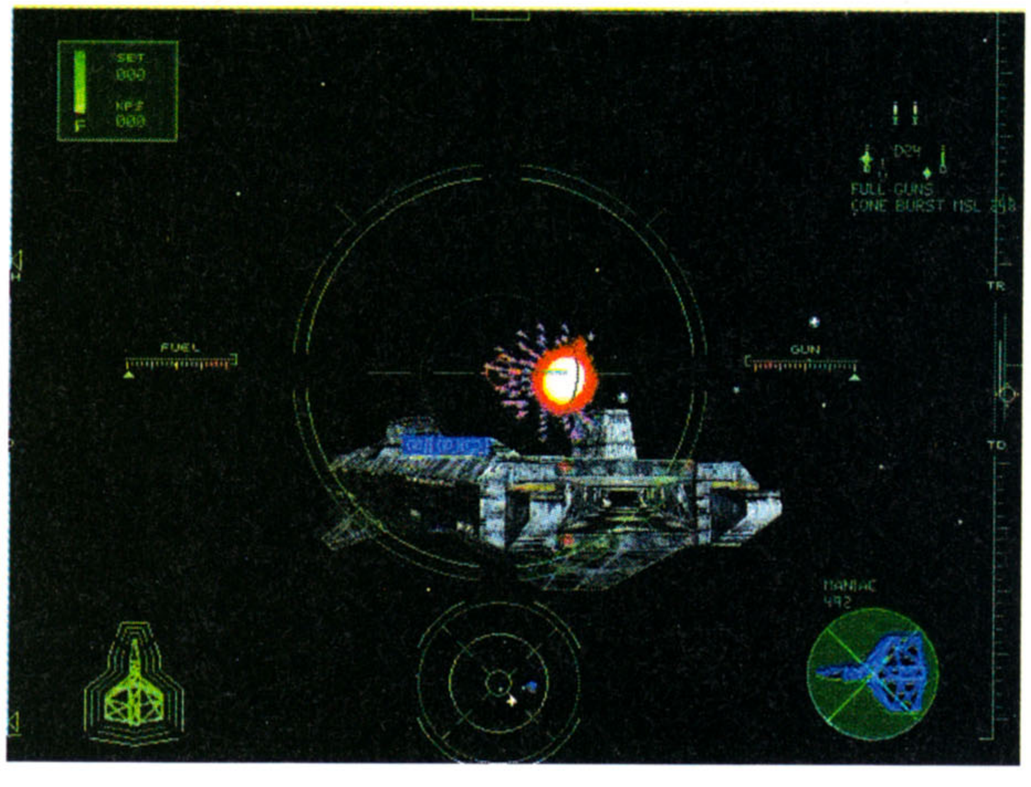
▲ **Origin hopes that big cash spent on top-quality film, extravagant sets and returning talent will translate into blockbuster sales of Wing Commander IV.**

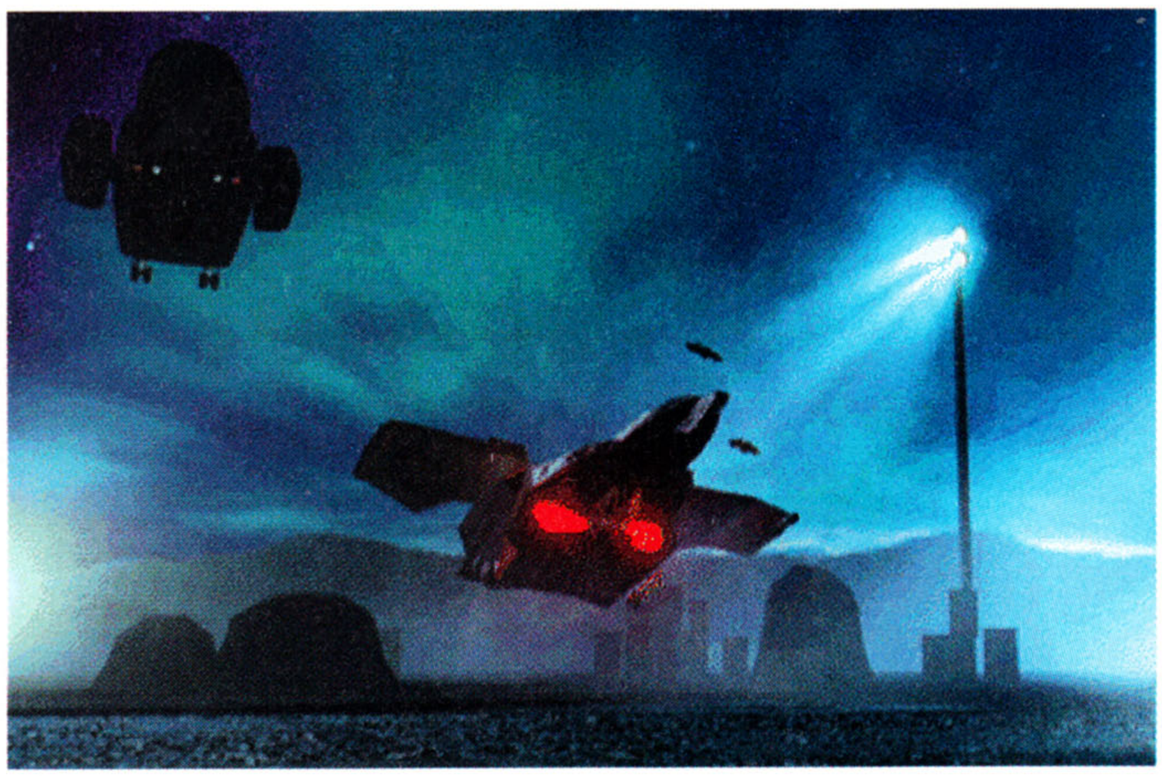
MISTER ROBERTS UNIVERSE

Creator of the famous Wing Commander series from Origin, Chris Roberts has moved from designing and coding games to positions as a Vice President and Executive Producer for Origin. After some success in the British gaming industry, Roberts joined the company in 1987, and a year later he promptly produced Times of Lore, a number-one seller in 1988. The following year brought the first Wing Commander to gamers, and Roberts has had great success and fame ever since. With his newest project, Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom, about to release, *Intelligent Gamer* managed to catch up with Roberts and spend some time talking with this giant of the PC games industry.

IG: What was the extent of your involvement with this project?

Chris Roberts: Well, I came up with the initial design and story. I worked on the script and went to L.A. to direct the live-action





▲ **There's no such thing as peaceful retirement for old wing commanders. When turmoil erupts, the simple life of farming is put on hold for one more adventure.**

erupts on the frontier worlds. Recalled to active duty, you once again take the controls of a starfighter with the fate of the Confederation in your hands. This time, however, your mission may turn out to be the toughest of all as you will have to choose between the frontier worlds you sympathize with and the government you swore to defend. With full-blown rebellion threatening to explode into flames and many lives in the balance, your choices and skill are the only things that stand between the survival of the Confederation and civil war.

Of course, there are more than just story changes for this newest installment. For instance, the entire cinematic portion was filmed with motion picture film, a noticeable increase in quality over video. The filmed portion looks much more professional and realistic, and lacks the standard computer-generated look we've all gotten used to seeing.

As in Wing III, all the filmed parts were directed by Roberts himself, who has apparently impressed the actors with his directorial skill. With the addition of a top-quality professional cast and crew, and the use of real, constructed sets, Wing IV is not far from an actual motion picture. In fact, rumors abounded that there would indeed be a Wing IV feature film released simultaneously with the game. Though this never became a reality, Roberts told *Intelligent Gamer* that the next Wing Commander-style game he does will indeed have a feature film alongside it. "It doesn't really cost all that much more, and it will give me more money to play with for the game."

Almost the entire cast from Wing III has returned for the sequel. Mark Hamill reprises his role as Col. Christopher Blair (the player). Tom Wilson, Jason Bernard, John Rhys-Davies and Malcolm McDowell return as well. Of course, this and the actual sets used in filming are largely responsible for the game's high cost: Of the $10 million spent, fully $8 million was spent on the film portion of the game, with the remaining two million dollars

"The Wing Commander series has always been about story. A good story is a good story is a good story."

▲ **This mission may turn out to be the toughest challenge of all when you are recalled to duty and the fate of the Confederation rests in your hands. Civil war looms as you choose between your sympathies and your oath.**

going toward the software and programming.

In addition, the cinematic story actually plays a much greater role in this game. There are four and a half hours of film in Wing IV (which ships on six CDs). Some of the choices you make actually affect the game. Though you could make a few choices in Wing III, these did not significantly affect gameplay. In Wing IV, however, "you make distinct cinematic choices that significantly change gameplay; you decide which direction your ship takes," said Roberts. This gives the live-action

scenes. Mostly I worked as a producer. I didn't do any of the programming in Wing III, but in this one I've done some. I've been rolling up my sleeves and working with the programmers to fix the bugs.

IG: So what was the difference between this major Hollywood style project and a more traditional game design?

CR: In the live-action, there tends to be a lot of people working in a focused manner—100-200 people working. That takes lots of planning and coordinating. It's very daunting, but it's fun. In a normal project, you would work with a "trainee" team for each game —often kids straight out of college. But here in Hollywood, you've got an experienced, professional crew. It takes away a lot of the limits you're normally facing, and it's a blast not to have limits.

IG: So how do you think games have changed since you put out the first Wing Commander back in 1989?

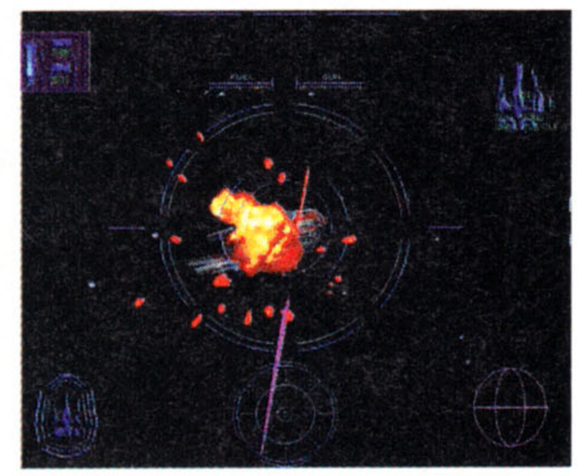
ROBERTS: The production quality has increased; the games look and sound better. It gets closer every year to being completely interactive. For me personally, as a game designer, you mature, you try things out. The designs are more subtle now. It's fun setting the precedents for the industry. We're really still in the genesis of the industry—things are nowhere near definitive yet.

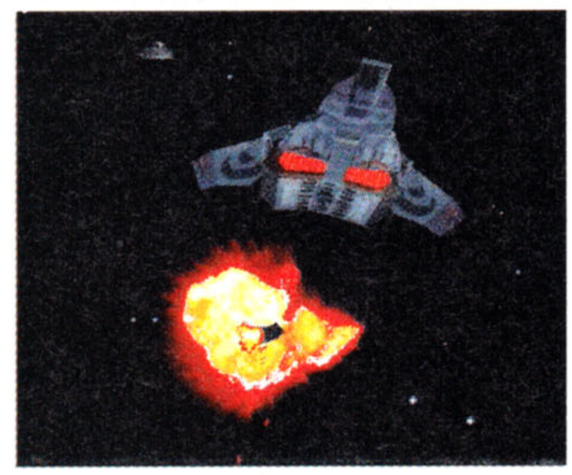
IG: What do you think of the increasing encroachment by Hollywood into the gaming industry?

ROBERTS: Greater competition leads to higher quality. I don't really see it as a threat. Most Hollywood companies just hire a couple of guys, put an interactive on the end of the name, and think they've got a game. It's still got to be a good game, it's still got to be fun. Hollywood has the skills to make great movies; I hope I've got the skills to make great games.

IG: When you first developed Wing Commander, did you ever envision that it would grow into the phenomenon it is today?

ROBERTS: Well, I knew it would be a hit. But if you had told me that I'd be working with stars like Mark Hamill, I'd have said you were crazy. Actually, we'd originally seen Mark Hamill as Maniac; it was kind of by accident he became Blair. When Tom Wilson read for Maniac, he was just so perfect for the role. But we had a hard time casting the lead, so we asked Mark to read for it. He's that





▲ **Tough choices lie ahead as a full-blown rebellion threatens many lives and the future of the galaxy as we know it.**

portion of the game much more significance and usefulness; it's no longer just a series of cut scenes to show off new capabilities and advance the story.

To display the new film footage, Wing IV uses a new movie player that displays 16-Bit video and 16-Bit, Dolby-encoded stereo surround sound. The spaceflight gameplay, however, still uses only 8-Bit stereo audio with no surround encoding. (Martin Galway, the game's audio director, says that their next game will include 16-Bit surround sound all the way through.) As always, the musical score for the game is sweeping and orchestral, and does a nice job of providing an audio backdrop that helps influence players' emotions. The music is dynamic, changing to meet the action onscreen.

The spaceflight graphics have also been improved. Sharper textures have been used, and pixelization has been minimized; capital ships look sharp even up close and show signs of wear and damage. As in Wing Commander III, both VGA and SVGA graphics are available; if you were comfortable with the frame rate of the SVGA in Wing III, you'll have no problems with Wing IV in SVGA. In fact, the graphic engine has been further optimized and provides a better frame rate than its predecessor on the same machine. The cockpit art has been removed and the HUD has been redesigned: The new HUD is better organized and gives pilots a clear, easily readable display of the most necessary information without cluttering the screen–an improvement over the HUD in Wing III.

Wing IV also has better AI than its predecessor. Enemies fly more wisely, and you now have much better control over your wingmen, who have also been given an intelligence upgrade. Though true coordinated tactics are still beyond the scope of this game, computer-controlled pilots do interact with each other more intelligently. Perhaps Wing Commander V will have an AI that will enable pilots to recognize and learn maneuvers executed by the player. Still, the computer is far from dumb, and should challenge players.

Another change for Wing IV is the length and complexity of the game. Wing IV has many more missions than Wing III, and both the story and its effects have much more depth. There is a constantly tense undercurrent as the story unfolds and each character is forced to deal with the haunting specter of civil war and betrayal. The player himself must look beyond the surface and help decide the future of millions of people. Sure, it's a bit unrealistic for one pilot to be so important, but hey, it makes for a more dramatic story. "The Wing Commander series has always been about story. A good story is a good story is a good story," said Roberts.

Altogether, Wing IV is a noticeable improvement over Wing III. It looks better, flies smoother and has a more involved, interactive story. The actors give good performances, and the use of real sets and actual filmstock definitely give the cinematics a realistic look. There are more ships, more guns and generally more features everywhere. Wing III was a true tour-de-force in this industry, demonstrating how effectively movies and games could be merged. Now, Wing IV raises that standard. Though not as revolutionary as Wing III, it should demand attention from hordes of eager gamers.

-Jon Daughtridge

same kind of common-man hero, like Harrison Ford, and that's what we wanted for Blair, so it worked out.

IG: So what projects are you working on for the future?

ROBERTS: Well, there's a product called "Maniac Missions" on the drawing board. As you can guess, it's centered around Maniac. I'm also thinking of doing a multiplayer Wing Commander game, with much better intelligence than Armada [Wing Commander Armada]. My next project is Silver Heart, a point-of-view action-adventure with a fantasy twist. It's based on some of the work of Michael Moorcock. It will be a sort of action equivalent of Wing Commander. Wing V, which will probably be two years from now, will have a new engine from scratch. I want more detail: big asteroids you can fly around, like in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and big capital ships you can fly in, dodging girders and supports and things like in *Return of the Jedi*.

IG: We know you're very busy right now getting ready to release Wing IV. Thanks for taking the time to speak with us.

ROBERTS: You're welcome. It was fun.

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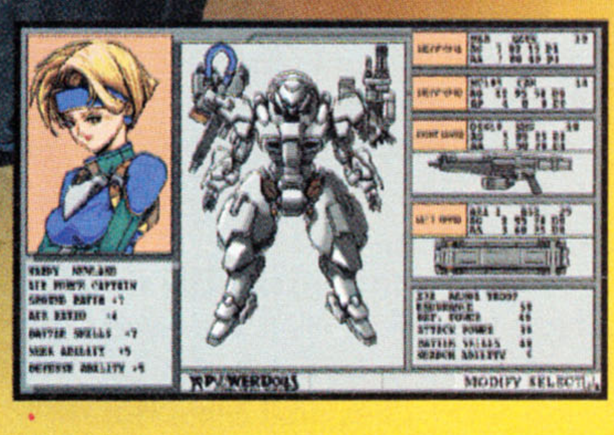

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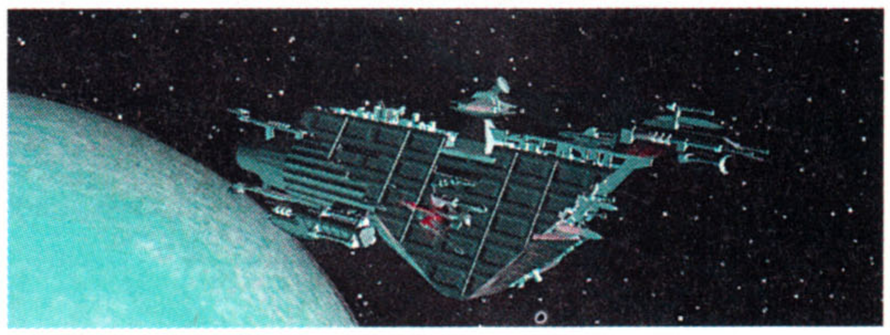
http://www.megatech-software.com

Minimum Requirements: O/S - DOS 5.0, Ram - 4MB, Video - VGA, CD-ROM - 2x, Hard Disk - 5MB, Sound - Sound Blaster & MIDI, Input - Mouse



In their travels, the fleet meets new aliens native to the Kessari quadrant, and another, more militant alliance of aliens known as the Hegemonic Crux.

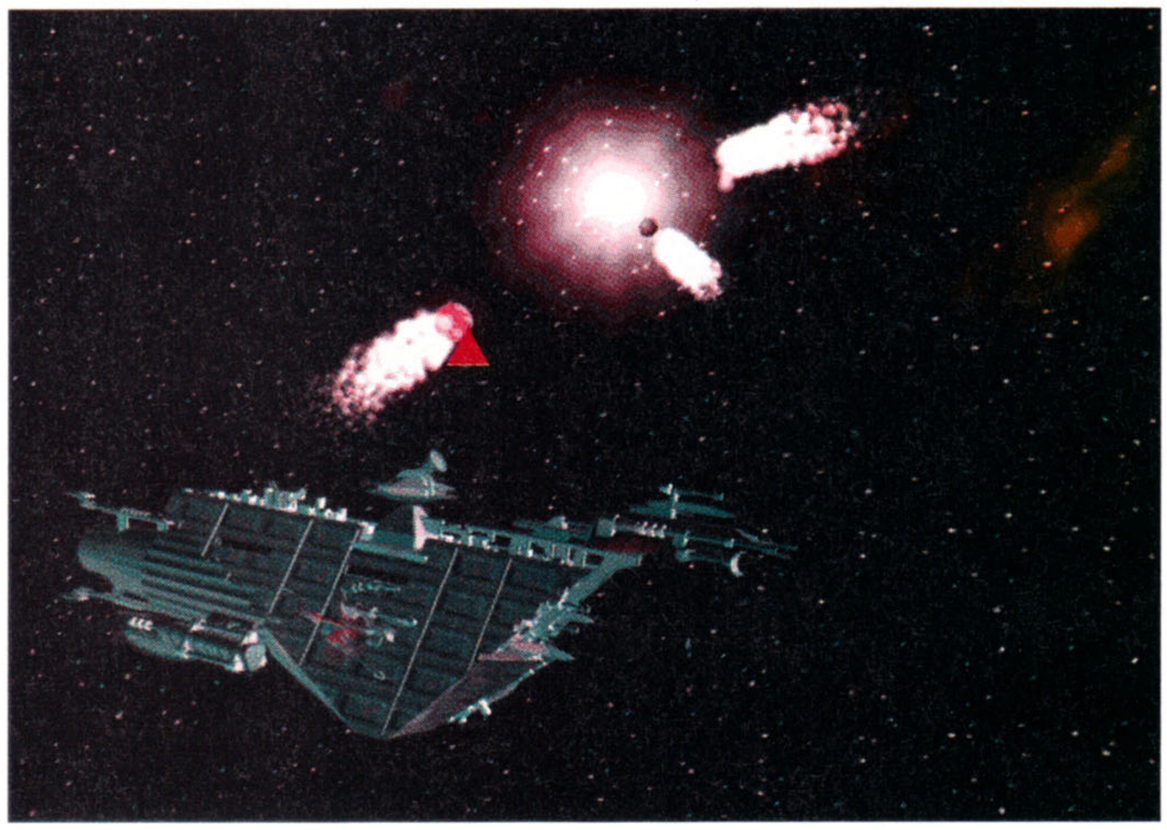
Star Control III

Travel the galaxy to meet exciting new friends and influence enemies

Publisher: Accolade
Platform: PC
Format: CD-ROM
Developer: Legend
Release: May

Fans of Fred Ford and Paul Reiche's Star Control games have waited for the third installment in the saga with baited breath, and from the looks of things, they have good reason.

Star Control III, like its predecessor, promises to blend various styles of gameplay into one polished product. Whereas Star Control offered a weak strategy game and arcade combat, and Star Control II offered an adventure game with arcade combat, Star Control III gives players adventure game elements combined with strategy, resource management, and of course, arcade action.



A key to success in the game is a good head for diplomacy. Race relations affect the outcome of the game as you cruise through the galaxy.

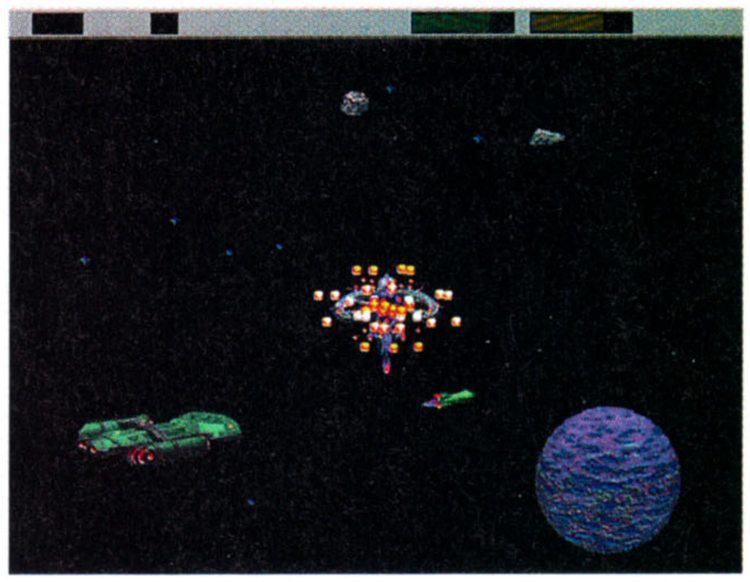
Prepare to explore outer space and do battle with a lot of interesting races.

Fans of the original games will see a number of changes. First, and most apparent is the increase in graphic quality. Featuring Super VGA graphics, SGI and 3-D Studio-rendered spaceships and cinematics, and robotic puppets for the aliens developed by North Hollywood's SOTA FX special effects house, Star Control III is a feast for the eyes, but will be lacking the exceptional digital music of the previous game, opting for an easier-to-port MIDI soundtrack.

Staying true to their reputation, Legend pulls through with a well thought plot. The story begins during the elimination of the SaMatra, an ancient battle platform developed by the mysterious Precursor race. In typical *Star Trek* style, the escape pod containing our valiant captain is pulled into a temporal rift, transporting him briefly to the future. Before being pulled back to the present, he sees an apocalyptic universe literally torn apart. Shortly thereafter, all modes of faster-than-light travel become extremely dangerous due to spacial disturbances emanating from the Kessari quadrant. Using a new technology, the captain that led the defeat of the Ur-Quan in the previous game takes an expedition to this uncharted space to discover the source of these disturbances.

The combat engine stays true to the previous two installments, but fleshes it out in many ways.

Players can play in an overhead view a la the first two games or in an over-the-shoulder view. In both modes, the graphics have been spruced up extensively. The sidebar faces have been eliminated and replaced with less obtrusive, but also slightly less noticeable status bars on the top of the screen, providing more visible area to play. Also new is the increased range of motion available, replacing the 16 turning points of the previous games, making unavoidable misses a thing of the past. The melee mode includes 25 playable alien ships, each complete with its own unique set of weapons with which to spar. Fans of the original may be disappointed with the removal of ships that do not actually appear in the main game.



George MacDonald, lead producer on the project states, "The main things we wanted to do was to stay true to the Star Control legacy. Everybody on the project was a fan of the original Star Control games. We wanted to update everything we loved in the first games with newer technology available today." *-Peter Bartholow*

webrunner: the hidden agenda

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Wizards OF THE COAST

The Space Dude keeps an eye on the evil Dorf as he battles for the future of humankind.

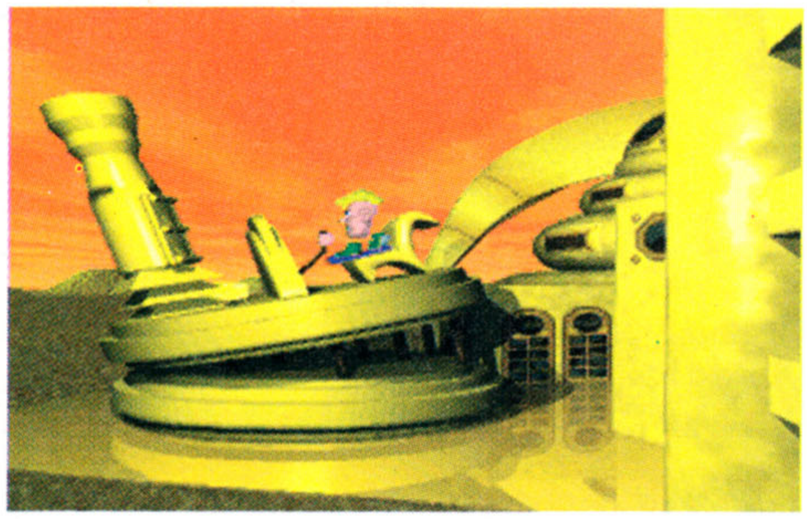
Space Dude

One small step for dudes. One giant leap for dude-kind.

Publisher: Formgen
Platform: PC-CD-ROM
Format: CD-ROM
Developer: Evrywhere
Release: April

A brilliant interface and a smooth play-mechanic help Space Dude survive a potentially entertainment-threatening attack of schizophrenia. This dread malady strikes roughly one computer game in four, but designer Dave Murry's solitaire action-strategy romp succeeds despite its inanely sub-humorous backstory.

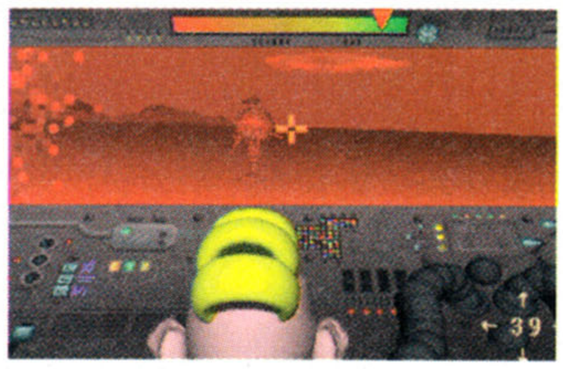
The player, as Space Dude, is the only effective defender against a race of invading aliens who nonetheless permit themselves to be called the Dorf. These vile despoilers have a lock-step strategy for overrunning every species they meet. They land on a blameless planet and head directly for the Golden City in their assault hoppers. Space Dude must repel the tank-like hoppers, battle the spider-like Dorf command ship and defeat their leader, King Dorf.



Space Dude protects the Golden City from his defense post as the evil Dorf and their tank-like assault hoppers look to ravage another planet's species

This is a much less solemn undertaking in practice than it sounds like in theory. Space Dude has some unorthodox tactics, triggered by the command arrows that appear on the screen. Brother Barry Murry's manual purposely avoids describing Space Dude's startling moves, but they won't remind anyone of Tekken.

Playability is Space Dude's outstanding virtue. When the intelligent cursor touches an object on the Strategy Screen, it displays the available actions. Players know immediately whether it's an opportunity to build a defense post, toughen an existing one, attack a hopper or the command ship or try to capture a hopper and turn it against the others. A Tactical Screen appears for the target and avoidance games if Space Dude's decisions lead to armed contact.



Space Dude doesn't try to be SimCity. It's a breeze to play, though winning takes a little more effort. In less expert hands, Space Dude might have degenerated when he designed it into a smirking, unplayable mess. Dave Murry took this game seriously when he designed it, so you don't have to when you play it. *-Arnie Katz*

GRAPHICS: B
+ The graphic layout promotes ease of play.
- Art is serviceable, but not spectacular.

SOUNDS: B+
+ The audio is technically slick and has very few glitches.
- The music fits the light tone.

GAMEPLAY: B
+ A good blend of strategy and action.
- The action sequences dispersed throughout are not very exciting.

LASTING POWER: B
+ This is a good change of pace game.
- It isn't as involving as richer sims.

OVERALL: B

B Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

Dave Murry GAME DUDE

When Dave Murry started Space Dude 18 months ago, his tongue was firmly in his cheek. Best known for the "Art of War" series, Dave planned a new direction. "I wanted a lighthearted game. One you can sit back, relax and have fun with," he says.

"My inspiration was *Road Runner* cartoons," he explains. "The coyote is serious about what he's doing, but what he actually does turns out funny."

Playability, a Murry trademark, figured importantly in Space Dude, too. "I wanted it to be very simple to learn," he says. "You can play Space Dude without reading the manual!" He's especially proud of the indicator arrows that prompt gamers about active keys. "The arrows in the corners eliminate the need to memorize a lot of key strokes," he notes.

To Murry, game development is an ever-changing process. "When I start a game, I always leave room for new things.

"Originally, we had a second guy. He and Space Dude were in more of an adventure, with puzzles to solve and so forth," the designer recalls. "As the game developed, we discovered that the other guy didn't have much use, and that the adventure elements slowed down the action."

Technical shortcuts enlarged the canvas. "We have routines for rotation and scaling that let us use the stretch and squash animation techniques of Disney and others, but save a lot of memory. That let us do more than we expected to in the game.

"I think Space Dude is a better game than I first envisioned," he says. With a track record like Dave Murry's, exceeding expectations is a significant achievement.

THIS MAN'S DYING WORDS WERE "PROTECT ME".

He died while clutching his neck to utter those words, utterly too late. At peace now in his postmortem state, he was a beaten, emaciated man trying to leave the town of Silverload. No one seems to know exactly what befell him, and not much was learned from the delirious rambling that came from his painfully parched lips. He spoke of vampires and vultures feasting on his legs, and something about cannibalistic children. Of course, we don't have a clue as to what he was talking about...

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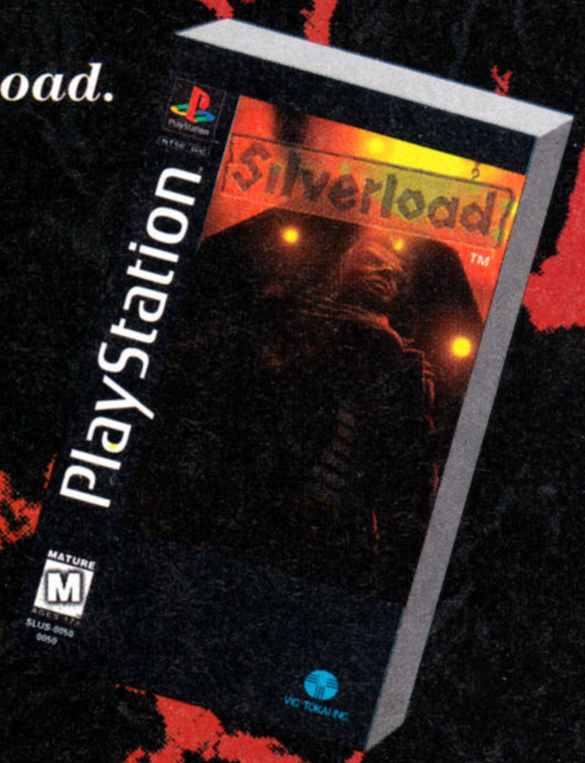
MATURE M AGES 17+



Over Seas

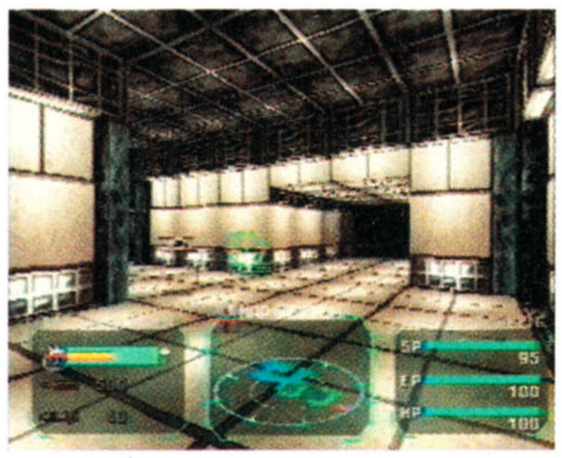
The gaming scene is hotter than ever in Japan, where both Sega and Sony have recently reported healthy sales figures for their respective 32-Bit machines. New titles are showing vast improvements over earlier, first-generation software and there are no signs of any letting up with the onslaught of planned releases over the next few months. Sales for the 16-Bit are still going strong as well. Dragon Quest VI, Enix's incredibly popular RPG for the Super Famicom, reportedly sold through all of the 3 million allotted copies during its first weekend of release in early December—which is, mind you, plenty more copies than even the hottest-selling 32-Bit title to date. With upcoming sure-fire hits such as Super Mario RPG and Square's Front Mission sequel, Bahamut Lagoon, the near-term future of 16-Bit gaming is still looking pretty bright in Japan. Here's a quick look at some of the hotter titles to hit Asian marketplaces in recent weeks for the next-generation game machines.

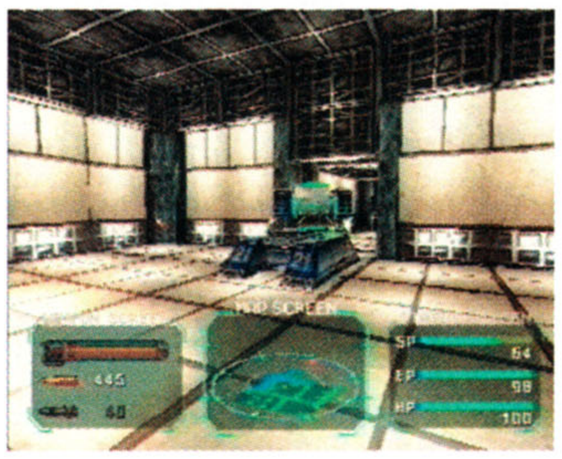
–John Ricciardi

KILEAK the Blood 2: Reason in Madness

(Sony Music Entertainment/GENKI)
Sony PlayStation, Single CD-ROM

The sequel to last year's good but uninspiring Doom clone, Kileak The Blood, offers major improvements over the original; including better graphics, improved gameplay and fantastic cinema scenes. Movement within the levels is smoother with minimal flicker, and the use of light-shading is spectacular. The stage layouts are no longer strictly perpendicular—Kileak 2's level plans are complex and contain a healthy amount of variety. The interface has been upgraded as well: The auto-mapping feature is improved, and is now on screen so you don't have to continually go to the subscreen to view your character's whereabouts. Weapons and Health status boxes are also on screen, and you can carry three different weapons at once: your laser, your main weapon, and missiles. Your mech can now hover in addition to walking, which is perhaps the best enhancement to the game's engine. Hopefully, Kileak 2 will make it to the U.S. sometime this year—watch for it.





Vastly improved graphics is just one of several improvements over Kileak 2's predecessor. Strides were also made in the auto-mapping feature and onscreen status boxes.

Horned Owl

(Sony Computer Entertainment)
Sony PlayStation, Single CD-ROM

Horned Owl is Sony's answer to Sega's hot first-person shooter Virtua Cop. Set in a cyberpunk future (typical of the game's character designer, the manga legend Masamune Shirow), one or two players set off to stop an evil threat armed only with their pistols, some grenades and a powerful mech suit.

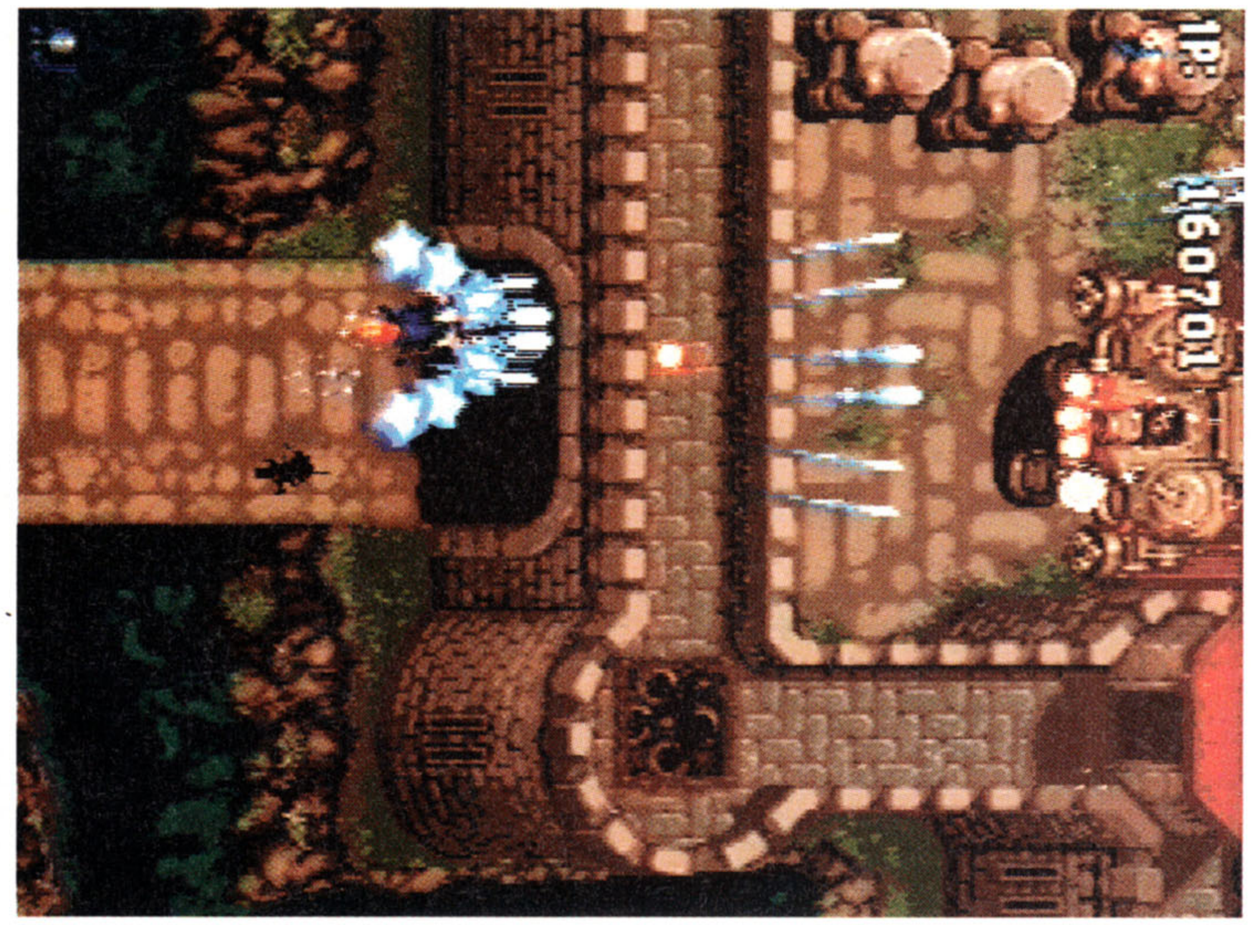
Playable using the regular controller, the Sony Mouse, or Konami's special "Hyper Blaster" light gun, Horned Owl is graphically rich and provides plenty of

Gunbird

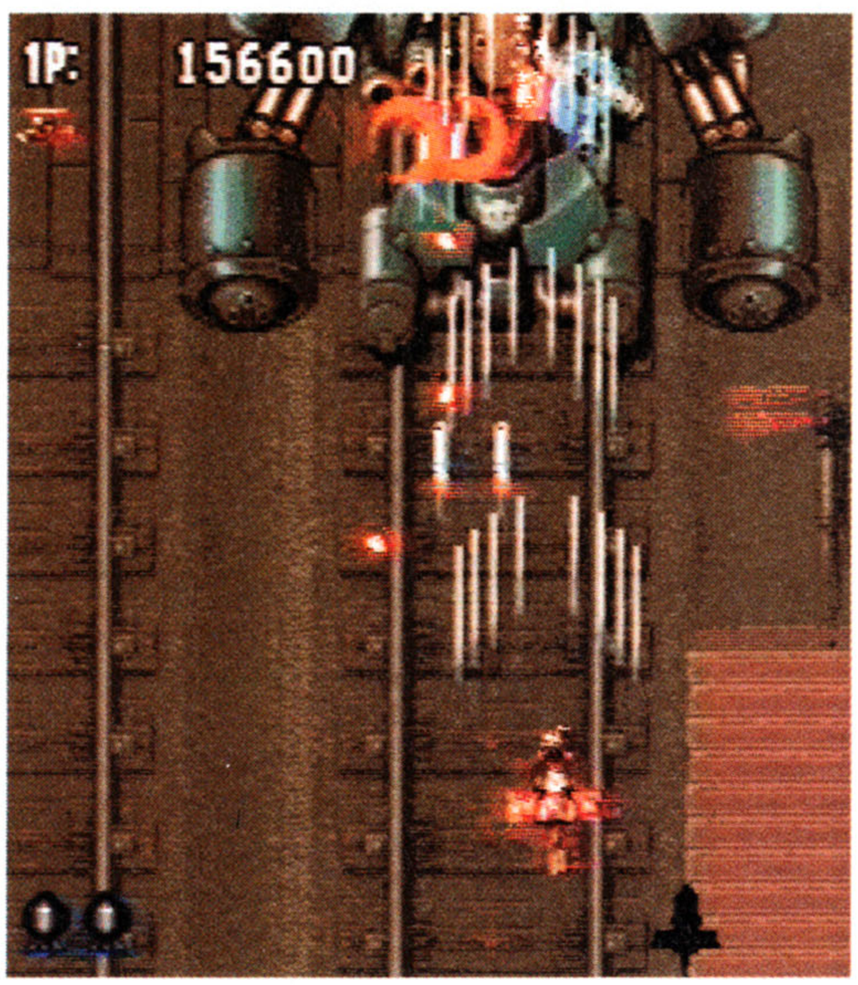
(Atlus/Psikyo)
Sega Saturn, Single CD-ROM

Gunbird is a strange-looking anime-style shooter that has been getting mixed reviews in the Land of the Rising Sun. As a shooter, it's a great game: It has multiple character choices, lots of heavy-hitting action, tremendous firepower, huge Bosses—the works and not a hint of slowdown to be found.

The viewpoint is reminiscent of games such as Raiden and Layer Section; Gunbird is an overhead vertical shooter with highly detailed backgrounds and explosions. However, the one main drawback is that the stages are way too short, and the overall difficulty, like most modern shoot-'em-ups, is far too low. There are some nice features, including an Arcade Mode (for televisions with side-mounting capabilities), and an Illustration Gallery filled with hundreds of pictures of Gunbird characters, including those from an art contest held in Japan in 1995. There aren't any plans to bring this one Stateside yet.



Impressive graphics and huge Bosses highlight this Gunbird's-eye-view shooter from Japan. Despite its fast-paced action; however, the game may be too easy for experienced gamers.



With multiple choices of characters and plenty of explosions, short stages will keep Gunbird from being too challenging. There are no immediate plans for a Stateside release, however.

Darius Gaiden

(Taito)
Sega Saturn, Single CD-ROM

The latest Darius adventure has landed on the Saturn, and fans of the fish-blasting series may be wondering what to expect. Taito's famous shooter series has spawned countless sequels on various platforms, and at first glance, Darius Gaiden doesn't seem much different from the rest. Upon further examination; however, you'll find that there are some high points to this otherwise "down to Earth" shooter. There are plenty of paths to choose from—a total of over 25 stages—and as always, the difficulty level is intimidating (a nice change of pace from most shooters nowadays). The new bomb sucks enemies into a black hole and then destroys them in a vibrant gash of electricity, which looks great, and the soundtrack consists of songs with actual lyrics, making for a truly unique feel. Don't be surprised if Acclaim ports this one over to the U.S. later in the year.

Fish warfare sinks to a whole new level with the most recent and much more difficult Darius adventure for the Saturn.

A bomb blast sucks your enemies into a black hole and obliterates them with a high-powered flash of electricity that is as impressive to look at as it is lethal to its victims.

As a first-person perspective shooter, Horned Owl offers an impressive arsenal of gameplay options. The always captivating Japanese anime is an added bonus as well.

gun-blasting action over five stages of gameplay—animated Japanese anime-style cut scenes keep the game interesting in between rounds.

Horned Owl sports some nice features, such as a Training Mode to practice your aim, multiple levels of difficulty and a Gun Adjust option to calibrate your gun's accuracy. All in all, Horned Owl looks to be a winner, although it's a bit too easy in two-player mode. Currently there are no plans to bring this hot prospect to the U.S.

Terminator: Future Shock

It's the end of the world as you've never seen it before

Publisher: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
Platform: PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Bethesda
Release: January

First off, Bethesda's Terminator: Future Shock 3-D first person perspective action adventure is not another Doom clone. When I first launched the game, I duped myself into the standard Doom-clone orientation in terms of keyboard layout and play mechanics. Frustration set in and interest for the game began to sour. I played around for a few more minutes and the Xngine 3-D graphics engine bolted into the game's core and was disorienting, driving my initial reaction down even further. I also performed a minimum install which occasionally jerked the action to a brief pause whenever enemies approached. After succumbing to enemy fire, I powered down my PC and hoped to make a swap for another editorial assignment. That's the truth.

Once mastering the controls of the hovercraft, spinning and blasting the enemy will become second nature while scooping up ammo and supplies.

While avoiding powerful fire-balls, a quick scan of the scenery shows everything has changed except the smog in this post-apocalyptic Los Angeles.

And yet, there was something compelling me back to the game. Maybe it was the concept of being able to walk, run, drive and fly over an expansive terrain of a devastated, post-apocalyptic Los Angeles. Maybe it was the Terminator mythos. Maybe it was something in that initial game exposure that subconsciously communicated that their was gold just below the surface. Whatever it was, I decided to re-install the game with a full installation (38 Meg HD required) option enabled. I booted it up again and discovered a device that made all the difference in the world—the mouse. Suddenly, my appreciation for the game's control scheme leapt. The full installation had also eliminated the disruptive pause problem. I spent the next 20 minutes unlearning my Doom-based keyboard skills for this new, effective design. It was at that point that I got the Xngine religion. Within the first hour of the game, I had mastered the art of spinning around, taking out advancing mechanized beasts and blasting lumbering hulks of steel behind me. All this while running and scooping up ammo and health supplies in front of me. Just when I had the keyboard/mouse combo figured out, a mission requiring the maneuvering of an armored jeep with a big gun pushed me into another realm of the Xngine protocol. Patience and persistence brought a refined mastery and new level of appreciation for the graphics engine and inventive game objectives.

With the game's controls and keyboard functions memorized, I was immersed into the game's environment. Depth perception, orientation, movement speed and angle of attack seamlessly extended out from the screen through the computer interface. It captivated me in a gaming sphere of a man on a mission. I was awed time and time again by the virtual reality the Xngine team had created for the game. Even toward the end of the game, I still marveled at the scintillating debris plummeting to the ground from a destroyed Hunter/Killer hovercraft as it twirled and rolled into explosive fireballs. The attention to detail in the game is fanatical.

GRAPHICS: A
+ The innovative Xngine driving the 3-D environment provide 360-degree freedom. Cool explosions!
- No high-res (640x480) option.

SOUNDS: B+
+ Clear, stereo effects combined with multilayered sound playback convincingly sets the mood.
- Game interludes are text-only.

GAMEPLAY: B
+ Missions are challenging and fresh, story line is consistent with the Terminator mythos.
- Controls take time to master.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ Game areas beg to be explored even after completing a mission.
- Limited incentive to replay the game once the ending is reached.

OVERALL: B+

B+ Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

CHEATERS ALWAYS WIN!

Few 3-D action games today are released without cheat codes and Terminator: Future Shock is no exception. The game's ending can be reached within minutes at the expense of feeling the tension and anticipation of finding a new enemy or weapon, but they can also be used to heighten the appreciation of the painstaking efforts that went into the design of the game environment. To activate the cheat commands, press the ALT and \ keys, followed by the codes to the right:

Escaping from the futuristic prison camp immediately qualifies players to join the resistance.

BUGS AND BLEMISHES: I did experience a few snags while playing the Future Shock. I would occasionally experience a corrupted save game (not good!) and the game dumped me out to DOS once or twice while entering a building. Also, head-tracking was a slight problem using the Virtual I/O glasses. These and other glitches have since been repaired in a version 1.10 game patch available at Bethesdaís web site, http://www.betsoft.com.

Left/Right sound channels are used extensively to aid with enemy location and pull the player that much deeper into the devastated cityscape. The story line and progress of the missions are also compelling. And like Bethesdaí's earlier Terminator: 2029 title, the objectives of each mission are fresh, original and engrossing. In addition, each mission environment is huge with unique surprises at every turn. The first time I saw HK's materialize from a glowing sphere from nowhere, the game designers echoed my words on the lower-right message screen—now that's what I call knowing your audience!

Players begin their character career as an escapee from the prisoner camps, progressing through the link-up association with the human resistance and the capturing of a Hunter/Killer hovercraft vehicle that is piloted several times throughout the course of the game. Hidden motives of characters are revealed and that fate of mankind rests in your hands, with the final showdown in the Skynet command center providing the game's ultimate pay-off. As players progress through the 17 missions, they will find more than 30 different weapon types, from grenade launchers to plasma cannons. They will face nine different enemy types, including relentless Terminators and the biggest and nastiest machine of them all, the Goliath. That enemy alone stopped me in my tracks as I marveled at its size and graceful movement, locking in on my position and showering me with searing laser fire.

It was at that point that the game reached nirvana for me. Bethesda had recruited me as part of their virtual-reality resistance force. There was no turning back.

Everything about the presentation of the enemies and structures, from the way tank turrets and metal hulks blow up while the base of the vehicles continue to advance to the way radar dishes spin in synchronicity on robot-constructed platforms, to the way the exoskeletons of vanquished terminators burst into shrapnel, to the way your heart races with paralyzing dread as you stare into a highway crater that you have to run and leap over to reach the other side. All these things and more are Terminator: Future Shock.

-Mike Riley

Impressive graphics and Terminator attacks from every angle will keep players coming back for more.

TERMINATOR TIME

Terminator: Future Shock is Bethesda's culmination of three previous Terminator game efforts and its new Xngine technology. Below is a timeline of these titles and a brief description of each:

Terminator
May, 1991
A primitive attempt at providing a 2-D first-person environment from the perspective of either Kyle Reese saving Sarah Connor or the Terminator destroying her.

Terminator: 2029
October, 1992
An effective but static 2-D movement scheme of the human resistance effort to redeem the world from the robot onslaught.

Terminator: Rampage
December, 1993
A 3-D Doom-clone (which was actually released BEFORE Doom), hampered by a lack in coherent, progressive mission structure and average gameplay.

Terminator: Future Shock
January, 1996
The best mission elements from 2029 retrofitted with the impressive Xngine 3-D graphics engine. A winner!

TERMINATOR: FUTURE SHOCK is one of the first games to truly immerse players in a virtual 3-D world using virtual reality headsets. Because of the fluid, true three dimensional design of the Xngine environment, Future Shock is a showcase of head-tracking-head mounted display devices. For the first time, players can move their head in any position and the scenery will respond accordingly. Using the I-glasses from Virtual I/O, the game really comes to life. In fact, after playing the game for over an hour using the Virtual I/O I-glasses headset, I had to sit for a few minutes to gather my senses and remind myself that I was back in the real world-now that's what I call immersion! Future Shock is sure to become a mainstay OEM pack-in with future virtual reality headsets.

garble
Removes the asterisks from the screen when entering the codes.

version
Displays the version of the game being played.

counters
Displays the player's current x,y coordinates on the playfield.

icantsee
Provides players with infrared vision.

bandaid
Replenishes players with full health and armor.

firepower
Supplies players with all weapons and ammo.

superuzi
Supplies players with a secret, devastating weapon with 9999 units of ammo.

nextmission
Flags a complete mission, progressing players to the next automatically.

Slam 'N Jam '96 certainly isn't the most original basketball game, but it is one of the best.

Slam 'n Jam '96

Magic and Kareem reunite to bring their run & gun action home

Publisher: Crystal Dynamics
Platform: Saturn & PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Release: Spring '96

Less than a year ago, Crystal Dynamics made a large splash in the sports video game market with their first "Championship Sports" release, a 3DO basketball game by the name of Slam 'N Jam '95. Sports-starved Saturn and PlayStation owners will be relieved to know that Slam 'N Jam '96, an improved sequel, is headed to their systems in early spring.

Slam 'N Jam '96 certainly isn't the most original basketball game, but it is one of the best. It borrows key elements from several popular basketball games such as the North-South roving, floor-level camera in Konami's Run and Gun and the outrageous commentary and slam dunks made famous by Williams' NBA Jam. Perhaps one of Slam 'N Jam's most original qualities is its ability to prevent the game from solely becoming an up-and-down court slam-fest by adding some realistic elements to the game. Offensive features such as commonly run "isolation" and "pick" plays are available at the touch of a button, in addition to optional defensive double-teaming. Coaching decisions are also required if you're to deal properly with substitutions and fatigue.

As with many cross-platform 32-Bit conversions, the changes and improvements between the new and old versions of this game aren't wholesale, but some of them are significant.

Gliding toward the hoop for an easy two, Earvin Johnson recaptures the nifty moves that netted him the nickname "Magic."

Unfortunately, the major letdown in this sequel is that there is still the conspicuous absence of the all-important NBA license. There are some counter-balances to this loss: The team colors of each city are reasonably intact, as are most of the jersey numbers in the right position—an old trick used for years in many sports video games. Most of the statistics are very accurate also. For example, the player wearing Reggie Miller's number is an outstanding shooter from three-point land, and Shaq's stand-in has a horrible free-throw percentage. The only recognizable names from the NBA are two famous players from the Lakers' glory years: Earvin "Magic" Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Although these legends cannot serve as a replacement for full-fledged NBA licensed players and teams, they do add "championship" character to this title. Nostalgic fans will appreciate the detail in recreating Kareem in his glory, complete with his "Sky Hook" shot, and Magic—now out of retirement—is certainly recognizable with his superb passing.

While offering nothing revolutionary, Slam 'N Jam '96 is a solid basketball title which can satisfy gamers looking for pure action and those looking for a small dose of round-ball strategy. *-Kraig Kujawa*

Magic propels into the air to unleash a three-point jump shot. Kareem (goggles and all) looks on for a rebound. Is that Kurt Rambis moving in on the baseline?

NBA All-Time points leader, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, hangs from the rim after a monster dunk while his quicker Laker teammates get back on defense before their Boston Celtic opponents can regroup.

The frame-rate has been upped from its 3DO counterpart, and all-new color commentary has been recorded by the popular and notorious sports commentator Van Earl Wright. Perhaps the best improvement is the four-player option, which will certainly make this game an absolute blast.

Relatively the same are the graphics which, according to Crystal Dynamics, are "two times as large as 16-Bit games." SNJ'96 still uses scaling flat characters rather than polygonal ones, different from other upcoming 32-Bit basketball titles. Sound improvements don't go beyond the additional Wright commentary; most of the on-court sounds are the same.

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Head-to-Head Internet Gaming More Accessible Than Ever

The Kali

There have been PC games that allow head-to-head competition between PCs for almost as long as PC games and modems have been widely available. The earliest games were mostly flight simulators, allowing two players to dogfight against one another over the phone lines. However, this was never incredibly popular, as modems hadn't yet reached mainstream acceptance, and many of the games which supported modem play were in genres which were not widely popular.

All that changed with the release of id's Doom on the PC in late 1993. By then, the Internet was becoming widely recognized and modem sales were skyrocketing. Far from being a complex, involved flight simulation, the action-packed Doom's support for head-to-head Deathmatch play helped modem gaming break into the mainstream.

Yet gamers mostly wanted to avoid high charges for long-distance calls, and thus most Doomers had to find opponents in their local calling area. Additionally, although Doom supported up to four players in direct-connected network mode, it was only possible to play with two players over a modem.

Jim Knutson's UNIX program Internet Head-to-Head Daemon (IHHD) addressed one of these problems by allowing people with both modems and UNIX accounts on the Internet to play against each other in any game that supported two-player modem play. IHHD works by fooling the game into thinking that the two players' modems are connected directly, when in fact the information is going through the UNIX systems on the Internet. As dial-in UNIX accounts were by far the most common type of Internet access, this meant that nearly anyone on the Net could play against anyone else. The result was a huge increase in the number of opponents available for play across the country, with the added benefit of circumventing long-distance telephone fees. Needless to say, IHHD quickly became very popular, and it still remains a staple product among PC gamers on the Internet.

In the interim, a number of other big games have hit shelves with support for multiplayer play, and Doom II, Heretic, Rise of the Triad, Descent, War Craft II, Terminal Velocity, Command and Conquer and Hexen (Heretic II) are the most popular. Like Doom, all of these support two-player play over the modem, and multiplayer network play, with Descent allowing up to eight players and the others supporting from two to four players. In addition, Descent has support for allowing players to enter network games in progress. The popularity of these games only served to fuel the spread of modem gaming, but there was still no way for most users to play games with more than two players, and since IHHD is restricted to modem use, those with direct network connections could only play games on their local network and not across the Internet.

Jay Cotton's April 1995 release of Kali addresses both of the aforementioned problems and works for any person with a SLIP or PPP account (i.e., a dial-in modem account that gives a home computer an IP address and allows it to run programs such as Netscape and Eudora), a dial-in UNIX account running SLiRP (a program that simulates a SLIP connection), or a direct network connection to the Internet. Kali gives gamers the ability to play multiplayer network games with anyone else running Kali, regardless of where they are, as long as the users have Internet access. DOS and OS/2 versions of Kali are now available, and a Windows 95 version is in the works—the latter should be in beta testing by the time you read this. The OS/2 and Windows 95 versions allow users to play games through Kali while simultaneously using other Internet products.

Kali works by logging the player onto a Kali server, a computer on the Internet which keeps track of network games being played through it. The most popular servers are @central, @castle, and

The Command & Conquer Ladder allows members to play over Kali or IHHD. http://www.wolfenet.com/~kerhop/cc-ladd.html.

Connection

By Brian Osserman

@axxis, although any computer on the Net may be used as a server without any special software; the Kali program itself is capable of setting up your computer as a server if you so desire. Once logged onto the server, the player can join kchat, an IRC-like program which allows players on the same server to talk with one another before starting a game. When ready to play, run the game normally, and it will be fooled into thinking that the games being played over the Kali server are in fact local network games.

A shareware version of Kali is available on the Kali Web page, at http://www.axxis.com/kali/, which has all the features of the full version, and comes with the kchat program, but is set to disconnect the user after approximately 15 minutes of play, forcing them to exit the game, reconnect to the Kali server, and rejoin the game. This allows for pretty good drop-in participation in multiplayer games, but is inconvenient enough to prevent arranged one-on-one or team games. As unusual as it may be nowadays, the fee to register Kali is a modest $20.

Playing over Kali does have its limitations, though: Playing multiplayer network games such as Doom or Descent requires a lot more bandwidth than playing the same games in two-player mode over a direct modem connection. As a result, users of 14.4 modems or below will find themselves experiencing "lag." Other players will move in a jumpy manner, and it will sometimes appear that you are hitting them when in fact you aren't. Worse, regardless of how fast your connection is, anyone in your game using a slow connection will appear lagged to you. As a result, a number of Kali games at any given time have headers along the lines of "28.8+, please," attempting to avoid having any lagged players in the game. Also, although this problem is not restricted to Kali, players using slow computers can also be very lagged.

With that said, Kali does break new ground in many areas, allowing modem players to play with more than one other person across the Internet, and it has established itself as the primary method of gaming over the Internet.

Kali is compatible with all of the major multiplayer games, although the games based on the Doom engine use a bandwidth-intensive system which keeps everyone's computers synchronized, but has the downside that it slows the game down to the speed of the slowest person's connection. As a result, playing these games over Kali can be extremely inconvenient for those with or without fast connections. A program called iFrag is designed specifically for use with these id games, and functions much like Kali in that it allows those with SLIP or direct connections to play multiplayer games over the Net. However, it suffers from much the same problems with lack of bandwidth, and still requires a very fast modem or a direct connection to be playable.

Descent has established itself in its own right as—by far—the most often-played game over Kali. At any given time, there are multiple Descent games going on at the central server, and most times there are at least four. A large variety of levels are used, with classic selections and a number of user-made levels, which are available for download from Interplay's Web site (http://www.interplay.com). As a result, Kali Descent players are pretty much free to log onto the central Kali server and drop into a game any time they want to, and usually with a certain amount of choice in which levels to play on. Of course, if none of the games are quite what you're looking for, it's easy to start your own game. The Descent II Interactive Demo, which has enhanced support for networking, with many more options and features, was released in late December and has quickly established itself as a dominant game for use over Kali.

In the Descent Kali Ladder, players join by e-mailing the maintainer, and start at the top of the ladder with the goal being to move their way down. http://www.oz.net/~ewinkley/dladder/base.htm.

Buzzword

IG's look behind the Wizard's curtain of video game design

What is "Rendering?"

It's the process of creating realistic computer images and models of real or imaginary worlds, and it's never been as easy as it is today.

By Christopher Drost

Why is Rendering Desirable?

Let's say, for example, that you would like to own the world's finest artistic rendition of an apple. You set out commissioning three artists to churn out your thoughts of what this apple will look like, complete with a stem and a single green leaf.

You offer your design team—a first-grader, a high-school arts student and a professional artist—all the tools they think they need to create their masterpieces. Obviously, the child picks up a colorful pack of crayons and a couple sheets of red construction paper. The teen goes for a fine brush, some oil paints and a canvas. The professional, on the other hand, demands that you hand over some clay and some glazes.

Looking over the final results, you find that the first grader's art looks like what you'd expect from an 8-Bit video game system. The waxy crayons yield thick, chunky lines. The red construction paper limits the youngster's ability to accurately produce the green leaf, though the brown stem looks marginal on the red paper. The image is decidedly two dimensional. Similar to the results from a 16-Bit system, the teenager's brush and oil paint combination reveal much greater detail, including some shading. Depending on the artist's skill and creativity, the final image could even appear to have a three-dimensional look on the flat canvas.

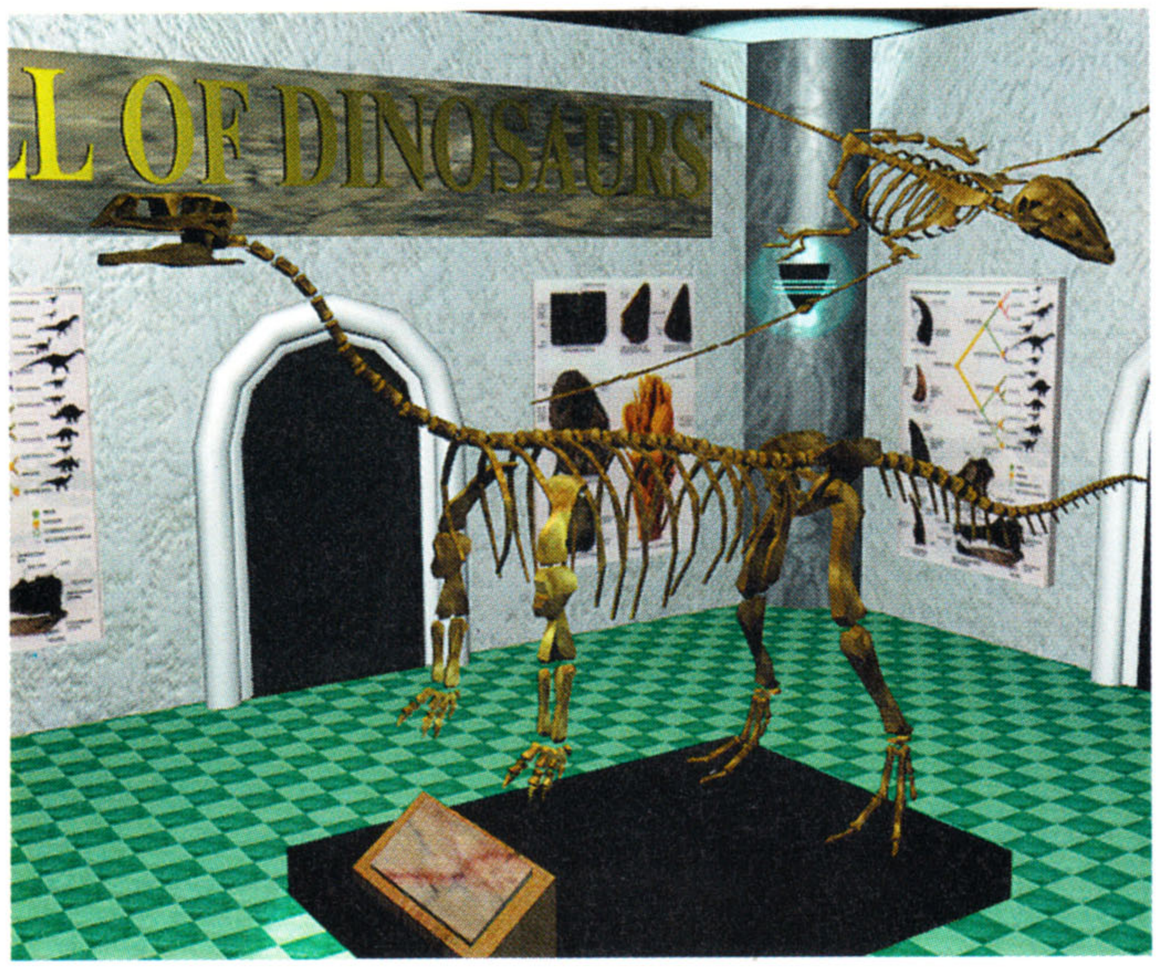
Your professional artist, not surprisingly, has taken the best approach to accurately replicating your apple. Rather than limiting the reconstruction of the fruit to a two-dimensional representation of a 3-D object, the artist has chosen to sculpt the whole complex thing. The final result reveals all the nuances and contours of the original, including a tiny worm hole. Its stem and leaf are created from pieces of colored clay. After some fine glazes have been applied and the clay spends some time in a heating kiln, the artist's apple yields a realistic shine and the final product is now almost indistinguishable from its counterpart.

You see, the ability to calculate the movement of realistic 3-D objects on your television or monitor is what sets the 32- and 64-Bit game machines apart from their 8/16-Bit brethren. A computer's process of taking a simple cube, sculpting contours from it, and applying the shiny textures, lights and shading "glaze" is known as rendering.

Creating Rendered Artwork

Game designers and artists begin by sitting down and sketching out a character or object on a piece of paper. Once the development team agrees on the appearance of the paper image, the image is handed over to a 3-D artist, who is responsible for sitting down at a computer workstation and churning out a **wireframe model** of the character—a transparent image except for its outlines. Just as if you had created an object with pipe-cleaners or wire, the wireframe model can be manipulated, moved, twisted, bent—all in real time on a computer screen.

Some game companies, limited by tight budgets or time constraints, will seek the assistance of a third-party design team to come up with the wireframe images they need. One such company, Viewpoint Datalabs of Orem, Utah (http://www.viewpoint.com) creates and markets technically accurate 3-D datasets—prebuilt and customized wireframe objects for game artists to work with.



▲ **Pre-rendered graphics can be created and used in animation sequences to give a game the illusion of a 3-D environment.**

Next, the wireframe skeleton needs to look solid. The artist could pick a simple color to cover up the wireframe—referring to our apple analogy, the 3-D artist would probably choose a medium or dark red. Alternatively, the artist could choose to **texture-map** the shape, which basically means that the artist will take a flat piece of artwork that looks similar to the skin of an apple and map it (or paste it) onto the sides of the wireframe model. Given the choice, the artist would naturally choose the texture-map route, as this process yields a more realistic result than just a couple shades of red, but the texture-map demands a more powerful computer processor.

Yet the digital apple still doesn't look real—there's no shine. Next, the 3-D artist adds some **shading** and **shadowing** to the scene. Most imaging software allows for light-source shading, which takes the flat-colored or texture-mapped shapes and digitally illuminates the image. The artist may want to add many **light sources** (or just one) to give the object a certain level of realism. **Gouraud shading** smooths out the surfaces and edges of objects so that they look softer, and **Phong shading**—a time-consuming rendering technique—adds realistic lighting highlights to shapes. **Ray Tracing** goes further, having the computer trace an invisible line from a point on the object to the light source, calculating shadows realistically based on the location of the light.

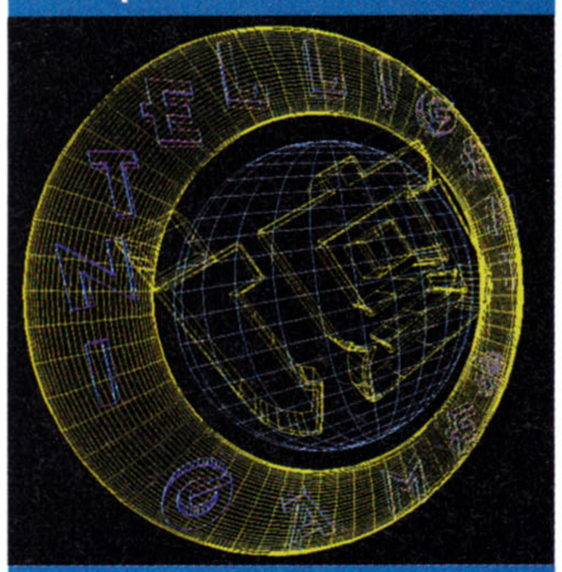
Now that our digital apple is finished, we can move the computer's viewpoint anywhere and view the apple from just about any angle, as if we had moved our head around the apple in real life.

"Pre-Rendering" vs. "Real-Time Rendering"

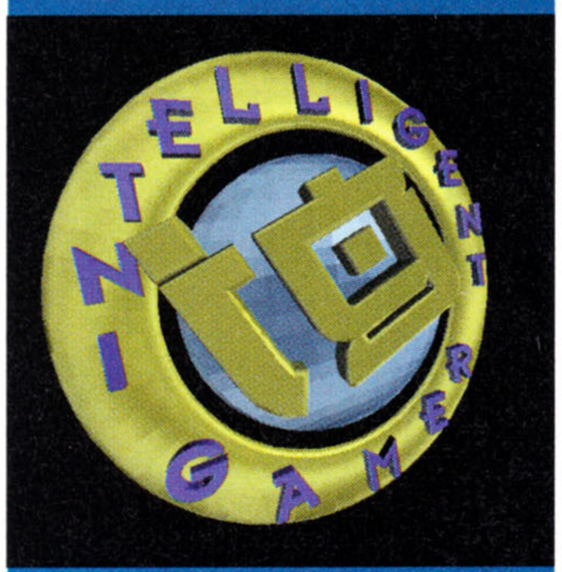
When Rare started work on designing Donkey Kong Country for Nintendo, their goal was to make the graphics of a 16-Bit Super Nintendo game look as detailed and (sur-)realistic as the special effects seen in movies such as *Terminator 2* or *Jurassic Park*. In fact, the special

How To Build A 3-D Model

HERE'S a step-by-step guide to rendering a computer-generated image. We'll use the *Intelligent Gamer* logo as an example.



First, a wire-frame model of the object is created. Once the wire-frame is completed, the object can be viewed from any angle.



Next, color and texture are added to the polygon model.

Gouraud shading smooths out the surfaces and gives an overall feeling of the lighting.

FINAL rendering creates reflections and adds more realism to the image. This final image was also color-enhanced using Adobe Photoshop.

effects for the T1000 liquid-metal robot in *T2* were generated entirely by artists using Silicon Graphics (SGI) supercomputers with each frame of the special effects animation taking hours or days to complete.

The main difference between **pre-rendered art** and **real-time rendered art** is that real-time rendered artwork allows you to change your view of the artwork at any given time. Pre-rendering is the process of designing a very complex animation sequence and having a computer—often an expensive one—do all of the texture-mapping, shading and shadow calculation for use in a movie-like format—you couldn't change your view of Cinder in the home version of Killer Instinct, for example—the artwork there is pre-rendered. In Toshinden for the PlayStation, you can change your camera view and watch any entire arena move in proper 3-D perspective. Toshinden uses real-time rendering made possible by the PlayStation's fast 3-D chipset, but the PlayStation can't generate images as complex as those found in Donkey Kong Country.

The process of animating frames is achieved by moving various points of the wireframe model to other key points for a planned activity. For example, to show an animation of a video game character running, the animator would move the legs of the wireframe from various backward to forward positions. Computer workstations then figure out exactly all the frames needed between these points to create the illusion of running. The computer then does all the work necessary to render the required frames. Programmers then take out certain extraneous frames to conserve memory while still maintaining enough individual images to make the character appear to be walking and not skipping. An object running at 30 frames in one second would look realistic. An object running at seven frames a second would not.

Greg Hermanovic is the president of Side Effects Software—a Toronto, Canada-based firm which markets PRISMS and HOUDINI, two software packages for creating 3-D computer-generated environments. He notes that "game developers often take pre-rendered images and compress them down into some format that will decompress and play back in real time. But basically, you're playing back video clips, often from CD-ROM into RAM and onto the screen in real time. Those images are never to be changed once they're rendered and burnt onto the CD-ROM. You see that with the high-quality flashy openings in games or transitions between scenes."

"That's fine for lots of uses for many games," Hermanovic adds. "That's good for a mountain range, or a drive down a corridor with realistic stuff happening inside. The drive down the corridor is a constant but the sprites or models you see over the rendered clip is what is changing from play to play."

Hermanovic says 3-D polygon games are similar to the rendering process, where one would model something in a wire-frame environment on his or her computer's workstation. "But you're not really rendering anything.

You're taking polygons and applying textures to the polygons, by painting them in real-time one by one or by using procedural texture maps on the surface maps. What you're left with is 3-D geometry, some points and polygons plus a texture map—which is all loaded into the game's code, and then pulled off into RAM."

One of Side-Effects' clients, Namco of Japan, has used the company's software for such games like Ridge Racer and Alpine Racer. "What we find is that most companies will pre-render some scenes and do others in real time. Most game developers create their own tools for managing the loading of graphical code into memory and displaying the 3-D geometry and texture maps. We just provide the basics for the developer to work with. While often it's not as realistic as pre-rendered graphics, it's sufficient for most games."

PRISMS, which among other things exports models, textures, special effects and pre-rendered clips to various game systems, also has the ability to export geometry, textures and images directly to the Sony PlayStation. Clients include Sony, Sega and LucasArts as well as several large Japanese arcade manufacturers. SquareSoft of America recently joined the client roster as well for Ultra 64 development—can you imagine what they're working on? We can...

"In Toshinden for the PlayStation, you can change your camera view and watch any entire arena move in proper 3-D perspective"

◀ **Games like WipeOut, Destruction Derby and War Hawk use 3-D graphics created on the fly.**

Let's Get Ready to Rumble

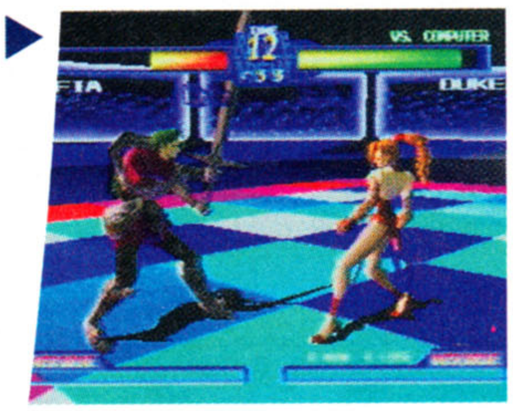
What ignites more violent feelings than Barney and is hardier than a cockroach? The answer: fighting games.

No game format in this one. They're passionately loved by a loyal legion of fans, and they're hated by just about everyone else who ever picked up a controller. Few players are neutral on the subject. Mortal Kombat and Street Fighter are enormously profitable franchises, both in the arcades and the home-consumer market, but there are plenty of gamers who would turn down a free play on the latest coin-op fighter rather than suffer through a festival of kicks, punches and leaps.

And talk about longevity! In a field where game types come and go like snow in Los Angeles, fighting games have admirably weathered the test of time. Hand-to-hand combat console and computer games have stayed at or near the top of the popularity chart for more than 15 years. Compare that to some of the once-popular game styles that have faded into gaming history. Played any good maze-chase games lately?

Data East deserves credit for putting fight games out to the general gaming public. Its Karate Champ arcade machine captured mountains of quarters with the same format—two guys in side perspective executing martial arts moves—that survives to the present day.

About two years after Data East made its big splash with Karate Champ, and a series of sequels as numerous as Capcom's Street Fighter family, the fighting switched from the game screen to the court room. An up-and-coming West Coast computer and video game software publisher, Epyx, released the fighting game World Karate Championship.



Fighting games like Killer Instinct have taken the long-lived genre to a new level.

It's come a long way from Karate Champ, hasn't it? May the violence live on into the next century!

The decision still sparks debate among gaming industry insiders to this day. The ruling favored Epyx, which gained the right to sell World Karate Championship. Epyx went on to become a major provider of action games for the Commodore 64 before falling on hard times in the late 1980s.

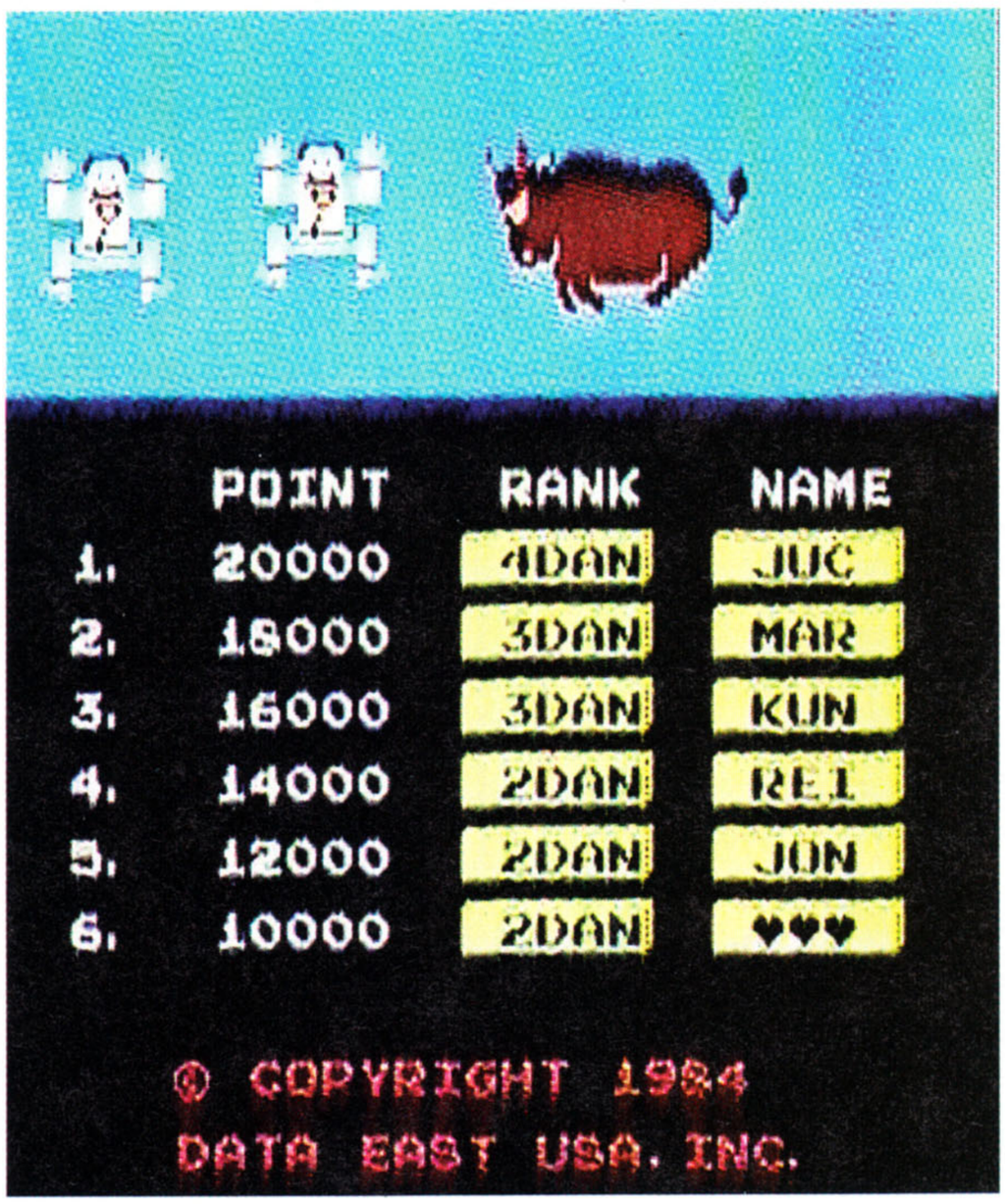
The judge held that World Karate Championship didn't infringe on Karate Champ because it didn't borrow programming routines or duplicate-specific visual images. The deciding factor, it appeared, was the finding that since both games simulated the same reality, that some similarities would be expectable (and legal).

Did it take everyone else a long time to figure what a "Foo Point" was? Maybe the volume on the machine needed to be turned up a bit.

The judiciary has amended its view of interactive electronic copyright several times since then, but the case had an enormous effect on fighting games. The practical effect was to throw the essentials of the fighting game into public domain.

The decision established that the format was no one company's property. A lot of companies jumped at the opportunity to exploit a genre that had already proven a hit with many gamers.

The development of fighting games to the high standard of today's Mortal Kombat 3, Toshinden and Killer Instinct is like watching a skilled jeweler polish a diamond to eye-dazzling brilliance. Through the 1980s and 1990s, designers and programmers have labored to improve every aspect of fighting games while maintaining the core of what makes them so compelling. In an industry in which imitation is the sincerest form of profitability, publishers have worked and reworked the fighting game idea more often than any other format except the side-scrolling platform game.



The interface has probably undergone less change than other elements. The Karate Champ approach is still evident in modern fighting contests. The user pushes the direction control, with or without one or more buttons, to cause the on-screen character to execute a move.

This relative stability is one of the keys to the continuing success of fight games. A few outstanding control schemes have crowded out the lesser candidates to the point that most of the high-profile fighting games have fairly similar command systems. The specific moves differ, but the philosophy cuts across company lines. Capcom and Williams honed their games' command schemes so perfectly that other companies fear to deviate too far from the path they blazed. Other ideas about how to present a fighting game, like Mobius and Karateka, had fans but couldn't win allegiance from the fighting game hardcore.

Lovers of fighting games are the Eric Claptons of the twitch-game universe. Untold hours of marathon gaming have made them the acknowledged masters of the fighting game aesthetic. They can play those buttons like Jerry Lee Lewis pumping into the chorus of "Great Ball of Fire."

These cyber-dragons, mostly males in the 12-16 age bracket, are the lifeblood of the fighting game category. They've invested so much effort, time and ego in gaining expertise that they are reluctant to switch to other game formats where their experience on Street Fighter II Turbo Edition won't do them any good. The top echelon of fighting gamers play electronic games at the highest level of skill and competitive challenge. It's going to take an amazing game to wean them from next year's hot new hand-to-hand fighters. They don't want to descend from that rarified height or give up the inspiring feeling of empowerment when that digital surrogate whips through chains of exquisitely acrobatic maneuvers.

While developers solidified the interface, they constantly extended the frontiers of graphics, animation and sound, made the characters bigger and more detailed, animated them better, provided even more sensational finishing moves and improved and animated the background. Street Fighter and Mortal Kombat were the watershed titles.

Activision's Tongue of the Fat Man typified the 1980s games that utilized more intricate backgrounds than title. Fat Man, which suffered from the narrow scope of the actual combat, staged its fights in front of an array of exciting scenery, including the top of a moving train. This added a few giggles.

Fighting games are so popular that they've birthed an important subgenre, the novelty fighting contest. Clayfighter (Interplay) scored the breakthrough in a niche that also includes Deadly Moves and Primal Rage. Atlantean Interactive just released what could be the ultimate off-the-wall entry, Catfight. If nothing else, its 10 shapely warriors are the best-looking combatants in fighting game history.

Are fighting games riding for a fall? Just as most adults will buy into any evidence that Barney is losing his grip on the kiddies, predictions of the end of fighting games always find receptive ears.

The category's detractors point to the age-specific appeal as a weakness. They contend that gamers will "grow out" of fighting games.

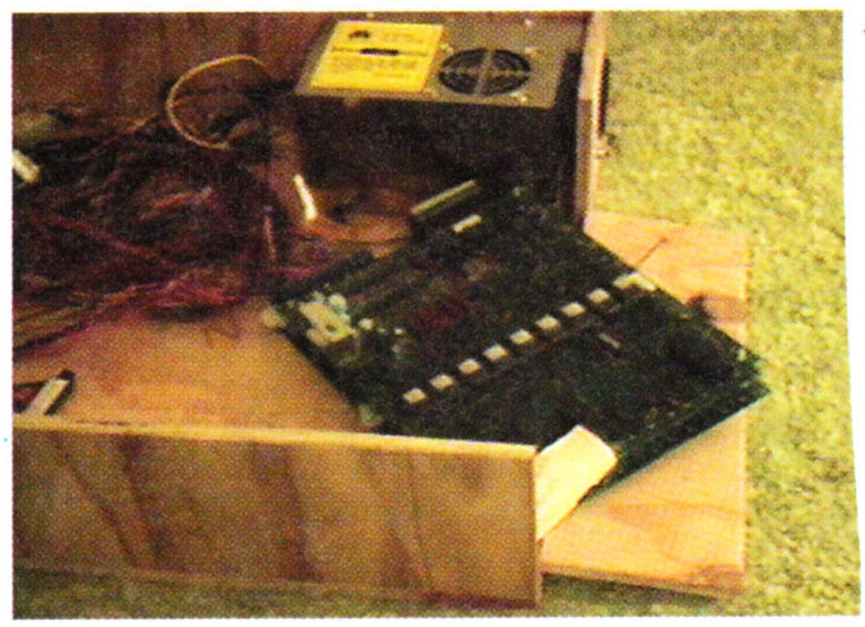
Doubters include some software company executives. The increase in the number of playability-oriented fighting games testifies to publishers' desire to hedge against erosion of the hardcore by trying to make fighting games less intimidating to mainstream gamers.

Even granting that players will mature out of fighting games, a highly debatable point to say the least, it is apparent that new players are getting into the vicarious combat groove. Even in a down console market at the end of 1995, Tekken, Virtua Fighter, Killer Instinct and Toshinden were all among the sales leaders.

All the new 64-Bit platforms are sure to have a showcase fighting game in their catalogs. That guarantees fighting games' amazing popularity, at least through 1997. The long-term outlook is hard to predict, but their track record suggests fight gamers will battle their way into the millennium.

-Arnie Katz

The Chop Shop of a New Generation



These old video games are still worth something; they just need some TLC and a few spare parts.

In the '50s, Hot Rods were the craze for gear-headed youths with a lot of time and a cool set of tools at their disposal. Though you might hate the term "circuit-head," that might be the best way to describe Lee Saito. There's nothing a kid hates more than running out of tokens at the arcade. Lee may hate it more than the average video-game junkie. Instead of wasting his time picking through his mother's purse for loose change, Lee thought it would be more practical to rebuild old coin-op games in his living room. In fact, all the Karate Champ shots in this column were from Lee's Karate Champ CPU board.

Lee Saito has resurrected a number of old games collected from some of the local arcades in Hawaii.

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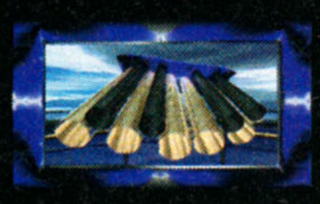

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