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NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

SEX & VIOLENCE

You've grown up. When will your games? Page 54

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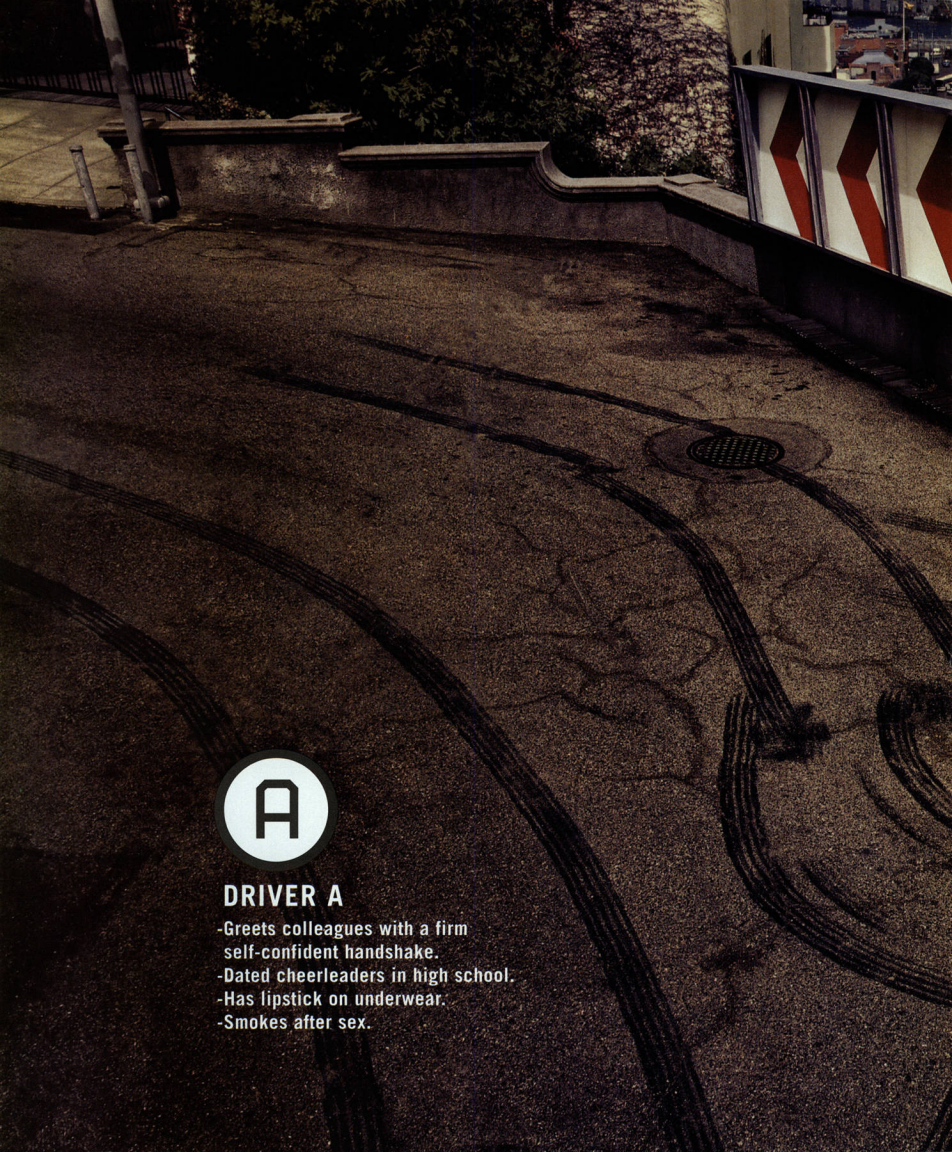

DRIVER A

-Greets colleagues with a firm self-confident handshake.
-Dated cheerleaders in high school.
-Has lipstick on underwear.
-Smokes after sex.

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B

DRIVER B

-Offers a limp and clammy handshake that screams of self doubt.
-Wasn't allowed to date in high school.
-Has superheroes on underwear.
-Apologizes after sex.

Dreamcast

sega.com/msr

EVERYONE E ESRB

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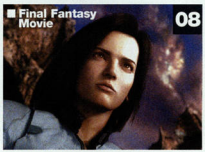

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■ Games are rapidly becoming as sophisticated and adult as the people who play them. But is the rest of the world ready to see that happen?

Special

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■ EDITORIAL

Cover Uncovered

I'm sure a few of you will take offense to the image on the opposite page featuring our favorite industry sex symbols, Ms. Lara Croft and Mr. Duke Nukem. (Yes, it's our parody of the all-too-familiar September '93 *Rolling Stone* cover featuring Janet Jackson.) But the rest of you are probably asking, why isn't *that* striking image on the cover?

Unfortunately, according to our in-house newsstand specialist, some magazine distributors actually refused to carry the Janet Jackson issue of *Rolling Stone*. So we conceded to "censor" our cover so it could be sold on our nation's puritanical newsstands.

For those of you who take offense to the image on the opposite page — I'm sorry, but **Next Generation** was launched to meet the sophisticated needs of hardcore gamers. The majority of our readers are over age 18, and while many of the games we cover are for all ages, I have no intention of compromising the editorial content to be seen as a "kid-friendly" magazine.

This brings us to this month's cover story. How long must the game industry and gamers everywhere suffer the slings and arrows of a naive congress and morality watchdogs before the rest of the world understands that games aren't just for kids anymore? How can the industry grow if it's not allowed to serve new audiences? We throw down the gauntlet on page 54.

Tom

— *Tom Russo*

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News

Game industry news and analysis

■ ROLL FILM...

Games Invade Hollywood

Square's *Fantasy* Becomes Big-Screen Reality

Square, the company that built a stellar reputation over the years as the premier developer of console RPGs, is now on track to stun the filmmaking world. *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* makes its worldwide debut in U.S. movie theaters in mid-July 2001, and in doing so, the 96-minute computer-generated film will not only launch Square's favorite franchise into the realm of Hollywood, it will put Square at the forefront of digital filmmaking.

After being in development for more than four years, **Next Gen** got a sneak peak of 17 minutes of the film during a visit to the Honolulu-based development studio. Though the five finished scenes we were treated to were largely action-oriented, it was obvious the main characters had been animated with photorealistic, lifelike qualities, making the effects of *Toy Story 2*, in comparison, look more like a Hanna-Barbera cartoon. The level of detail is simply unparalleled. Aside from a full range of facial expressions, the characters are rendered with virtual skin so realistic that you can actually see pores and blemishes.

The film is set on a ravaged Earth in the year 2065, after most of the world's population has been destroyed in an alien invasion. The film centers on Dr. Aki Ross (voiced by *ER*'s Ming-Na), a beautiful scientist in search of the seventh spirit. The first scene opens in the dark, crumbled remnants of Times Square at night and finds Aki searching for a mystical life force, which she discovers in the form of a plant. The quiet scene is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of dragon-sized, transparent CG phantom aliens, which suck the life out of anything they come in contact with. In the midst of the attack, a special forces team — led by Captain Gray Edwards (Alec Baldwin) and comprising Neil (Steve Buscemi), Jane (*Frasier*'s Peri Gilpin), and Ryan (Ving Rhames) — swoop in from the sky to rescue Aki. (In a plot move not unlike *The Bodyguard*'s, Gray is assigned to protect Aki, and as you'd suspect, romance blossoms.)

Another scene follows Aki and the special forces as they search for yet another life force on a desert wasteland, where the phantom aliens blend seamlessly with the 3D spacecraft and virtual actors. But

■ **Square Pictures first film, *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, will without question offer CG graphic animation unlike any feature-length film before it**

the most spectacular sequence of the day featured an epic battle between two armies of thousands of entirely different alien creatures.

After the footage played out, the press audience sat motionless in the dark screening room, slightly stunned, hoping to see more.

FINAL CREDITS

While the sci-fi action will certainly draw the crowds, it wouldn't be from series creator Hironobu Sakaguchi if there weren't more at stake than just the fate of the world.

"The film's story takes place in a world full of confusion and destruction," explains Sakaguchi. "There, people are so focused on the death that surrounds them they lose their perception of love. They question their own existence and are crushed by fear, death, and sorrow."

Sakaguchi has spent the past four years in Honolulu bringing his vision to film. During this time, he has also been overseeing videogame production as well,

Continued on page 10

THE INVASION CONTINUES...

Despite the best efforts of filmmakers to derail further game-based movies (remember *Wing Commander*, *Street Fighter*, *Super Mario Bros.*, and *Double Dragon*?), the originality and popularity of videogame franchises keeps Hollywood coming back.

Paramount Pictures has three films in development that are in some way based on a videogame. While Angelina Jolie's stint as Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* has been well documented, the studio is also bringing a pair of books videogames to the big screen. Michael Crichton's *Timeline* and Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six* are both in development. *Timeline* could open this summer along with *Tomb Raider*. All three of these films have franchise potential.

A computer-generated *Tekken* film is in development in Japan. Other films that are back on track after long periods of development limbo are *Resident Evil* and *Doom*. THQ President and CEO Brian Farrell told us he thinks his PlayStation 2 shooter *Red Faction* would make a good movie, and Next Gen has also heard that Hollywood might be interested in bringing Activision's *Tenchu* to the big screen.

On the other side of the coin, Electronic Arts has shored up the videogame rights to both *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. Sierra has grabbed *Gladiator*. Infogrames is working on *Mission: Impossible 2* (why?). And Konami has *Jurassic Park 3* and *The Thing*. While officially unconfirmed, Shiny Entertainment is working on a game based on *The Matrix* sequels, and another hot upcoming film property, *Terminator 3* and 4, was still unsigned at press time.

including the development of *Chocobo's Dungeon 2*, *Final Fantasy IX*, the upcoming *Final Fantasy X* for PS2, and an online *Final Fantasy XI* for PS2 and PC.

One might think that after selling 30 million *Final Fantasy* games worldwide since the series launched in 1987, Sakaguchi would have been content with his career as one of the world's most successful game developers. But when he saw the original *Toy Story*, which debuted in theaters roughly at the same time Square released *Final Fantasy VII*, he was inspired to bring his work to the big screen.

"As big as the numbers have been for the *Final Fantasy* games, we need to have an audience walk into the theater and be able to follow the story," says Sakaguchi. "We have kept the basic themes of the games but have introduced an original story and new characters."

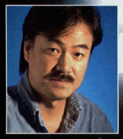
As soon as the first *Final Fantasy* film is completed, Sakaguchi will begin work on a second movie installment, and a script treatment for the sequel has been completed. Thanks to new rendering technology and original proprietary software that the company had designed to create the first film, Producer Jun Aida predicts that the second film should be completed in about half the time. Sakaguchi adds that Aki will return for the sequel, but not necessarily as she's seen in this film. "She could come back as a 16-year-old girl, or any age," he says.

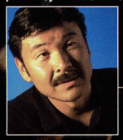
On the gaming side, Jun Iwasaki, president and CEO of Square EA, recently hinted that a new *Final Fantasy* PlayStation game could ship in conjunction with the film's July release. While it likely won't be a full sequel, the game may be a franchise one-off (like *Final Fantasy Tactics*) or some kind of adaptation based on the film.

The marketing blitzkrieg that Sony-owned Columbia Pictures has planned for the film should propel sales of all the *Final Fantasy* games, including the fall release of *Final Fantasy X* on PlayStation 2.

"Right now we're popular in the game industry," Iwasaki told **Next Gen**, "We'd like to become a top entertainment company."

From what little we've already seen, the company is well on its way. — *John Gaudiosi*





■ ***Final Fantasy*** **creator Hironobu Sakaguchi (above) and the film's producer, Jun Aida (below)**

■ **A longtime production tool of the videogame animator, motion-capture cameras were used in production of the movie to secure realistic character movement**

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

In a topic no less talked-about (and ultimately no less tiresome) than the nation's inability to elect a president (although presumably by the time you read this we'll have one or at least rioting in the streets), Sony still faces shipping woes, unable to keep up with the unprecedented demand for PlayStation 2. Retailers are unhappily watching their holiday dollars fly away. Further news is that Britain's launch allocation was cut to four systems, one of which was actually an old Net Yaroze system.

All of this is music to the ears of Sega, which celebrated by creating a catty ad (text: "Our deepest condolences to Sony on their PS2 shipping difficulties," picture: a freckled, red-haired boy sticking his tongue out — see Letters, page 92) and placing it in GameWEEK, on postcards, and if the rumors can be believed, on a truck that drove around EA's swank headquarters in Redwood City, CA.

As much as News Bytes appreciates cattiness, we'd be remiss if we didn't state that basing one's business plan and advertising creative on another company's inability to ship product is — how can we say this gently? — probably not an especially smart *long-term* strategy in our opinion.

But enough about the hardware wars — it's like making fun of a mime, just too damn easy — let's talk about... OK, just one more. After some wonderful back and forth "maybe it won't play DVD movies" talk, Microsoft finally came out and said what we'd all known all along: Yes, the Xbox will play DVD movies.

OK, on to software. For real this time. Despite, in fact, the story's confirmation online by Scott Miller (president of 3D Realms), rumors of 3D Realms'

Sega of Japan reveals its master plan

Dreamcast games on PS2? Dreamcast technology in PCs? Read on...

On Nov. 15 Sega of Japan COO Hideki Sato and other key Sega higher-ups revealed the company's latest plans for Dreamcast. In the face of egregious losses in Japan and third parties abandoning the Dreamcast in all territories, Sega outlined how it hopes to revitalize itself.

Predicting that 3 million Dreamcasts will be online by March, Sega knows that network gaming will be a key advantage going forward. The company will continue to encourage players to go online with virtual tournaments, its online store, and other community-based ideas. In fact, falling squarely into the "never say never again" category, there is even a plan to relaunch the Sega channel via digital satellite in Japan.

Executives also confirmed that Sega would support additional, if largely non-traditional, platforms. The list of possible formats included PDAs, mobile phones, handhelds, automobile navigational systems (?), and "other consoles." The latter suggestion triggered a flurry of questions: Was Sega finally going to cross over and make games for competing platforms? Exact details remain shrouded, but Sega will most likely allow other publishers to purchase the rights to specific licenses on a case-by-case basis. A similar stance back in the 8-bit days brought titles like *Afterburner*, *Fantasy Zone*, and *Shinobi* to NES. In fact, sources close to Acclaim have already revealed that *Crazy Taxi*, *Zombie Revenge*, and *18 Wheeler* are already in development for PS2.

The list of possible future gaming formats includes mobile phones, handhelds, and "other consoles."

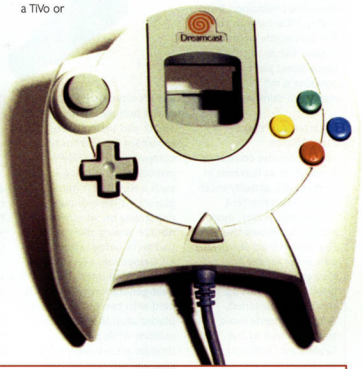
■ Sega of Japan COO Hideki Sato predicts that 3 million Dreamcast users worldwide will be online by March 2001

■ Sega of America President Peter Moore comments, "To me, it still has to be proven that DC in a PC is a viable solution"

Another big announcement heralded the existence of the "DC-chip," a single processor that contains all the functionality of a Dreamcast. It will enable Sega to deploy the Dreamcast as a standard across PDAs, PCs, and possibly even handheld consoles. The PC version (introduced into the PC via a video card and possibly even a motherboard) in particular raised a few eyebrows, owing to the fact that current CD- and DVD-ROM drives can't read Dreamcast GD-ROMs — perhaps inferring a switch to DVD. Although Sega of America executives in attendance (and who had only been briefed on the technology earlier that day) were skeptical such a scheme would be viable in the U.S., it's not much of a stretch to imagine a DVD player with DC-chip technology built in. In fact, Sato speculated on set-top boxes (for instance a TiVo or satellite TV tuner with the DC-chip) that would use a hard drive to store both games and TV programs. And a hard drive for Dreamcast? Sega of America President Peter Moore hints, "We've reached a point where it's becoming viable to release a mass storage device for Dreamcast."

Noticeably missing at the meeting was any new content, Dreamcast or otherwise. Obviously, Sega of Japan is down but not out. It will be interesting to see exactly what tricks the company has up its corporate sleeves that might help Sega come out on top in 2001.

NextGen



long-delayed *Max Payne* being canceled are not true, says publisher Gathering of Developers. So why'd Miller say it was? Apparently out of disgust at the rumor's source. Maybe. Maybe.

And the industry continues to get smaller. Infogrames will swallow Hasbro Interactive for the whopping price of $100 million. What does Infogrames get in the deal? Quite a bit, including all Microprose brands (*Civilization*, *Roller Coaster Tycoon*), the Atari properties (*Centipede*, *Pong*, *Missile Command*, and more), the *Dungeons and Dragons* license, and the exclusive interactive rights to Hasbro board games and toys, including Monopoly, Scrabble, Mr. Potato Head, CandyLand, and Tonka Trucks. The deal is subject to regulatory and Infogrames shareholder approval, and is scheduled to close Q1 2001.

Microsoft and Electronic Arts have finally broken the silence. EA has announced it will support Xbox. We were convinced after talking to EA's Bing Gordon immediately following the Xbox announcement at last year's Game Developers Conference, and it turns out the companies have been working closely all along. So closely, that EA has ordered 500 dev kits and expects to have 10 titles ready in the system's first six months.

Let's end on a positive note for Gamecube. Natsume, the smallest videogame company on Earth, announced it will support Nintendo's next console at Natsume's famously opulent sushi Christmas party. The company has also recently released *Harvest Moon*, its wacky and addictive farming sim/RPG for PlayStation. Now if we can just convince the company to start work on *Pocky and Rocky X*, life will be perfect...

— Compiled by Carrie Shepherd, Executive News Editor, DailyRadar.com

Gamecube Watch

02/01

The Gamecube controller: Seeing isn't believing. But feeling is...

When Nintendo unveiled the design for its Gamecube controller last August, gamers worldwide were understandably puzzled. After all, at first glance the construction of the pad seemed to ignore some major complaints raised with the N64 one — namely a lack of buttons for fighting titles and an odd arrangement of those that were featured. And admittedly the color scheme and look of the Cube controller had even the most devoted Nintendo loyalists comparing it to a Fisher-Price toy. But Nintendo executives remained firm, saying, "You have to feel the Gamecube's controller in your hands to really understand just how amazing it is." Were they right? We think so.

■ **The Gamecube controller — less awkward to hold than it appears on the page — is more comparable in size to PlayStation 2 dual analog controller than it is to the N64 stock controller**

Pictures are no Substitute

The Gamecube controller is not at all as it seems in pictures. It's actually much smaller than the N64 design and, in fact, more closely resembles the PlayStation Dual Shock pad as far as size is concerned. Meanwhile the plastic that makes up the device is a hardened, decidedly sturdy mold similar to that of the Dreamcast controller, and it feels remarkably solid and heavy in the hands.

But it's ultimately the layout of the buttons, analog stick, and D-pad that sets the controller apart from the competition. The N64's joystick was designed in such a way that it made players switch grip positions depending on whether or not the analog stick or D-pad were being utilized. Yet on Gamecube, everything is accessible at once. The next-generation controller is held with two index fingers placed atop the L- and R-buttons while players' thumbs access everything else; the left one handling the D-pad and analog stick and the right working the camera stick and all available face buttons. Imagine how you'd hold an N64 controller to play with the D-pad only. Now imagine that the N64 controller was half the size. Get the picture?

"You have to feel the Gamecube's controller in your hands to really understand just how amazing it is"

Eleventh Hour Changes

Interestingly enough, early prototype Gamecube controllers shipped to Nintendo's elite developers without a D-pad. (Incidentally, the initial design was exactly as **Next Gen** reported in earlier issues.) However, after a load of complaints from second parties about the exclusion of the pad, NCL decided to add one at the last minute — and thankfully so. One of controller's unique features, the Z-trigger, is not located underneath the pad as it was on N64, but can be found on the right shoulder of the device next to the R-button. This new Z-trigger, a late addition by Miyamoto, was cleared only days before Spaceworld 2000.

■ **Yes, he looks like he should be washing dishes at Denny's — but Gamecube Watch columnist Matt Casamassina is the videogame industry's leading Gamecube sleuth. When he isn't missing our deadlines, he is the editor-in-chief of IGN64.com**

Controlling the Future

As **Next Generation** has created a mold of the real Gamecube controller, we are now very familiar with the intricacies of its design — and we're impressed. Everything from the pad's scaled-down size (when compared to the N64 controller) to its oddly-shaped face buttons makes complete sense once you have held the device in your hands. Simply put, it's comfortable and it feels right. And with that said, we're still very curious to see how developers utilize this controller for fighting games. **Next**Gen

■ **Shigeru Miyamoto gives his hands-on presentation of the Gamecube controller at last August's Spaceworld**

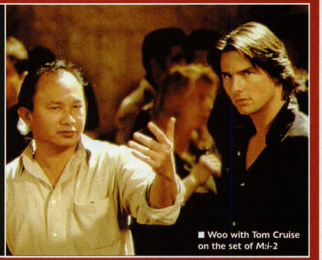
■ TOM RUSSO'S

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

JOHN WOO-ED INTO GAME DEVELOPMENT

Legendary Hong Kong action flick director John Woo (*The Killer*, *Hard-Boiled*, *Broken Arrow*, *Mission: Impassible 2*) has recently teamed up with Rainbow Studios to form a Hawaii-based company called Digital Rim. The director and the developer were introduced through the William Morris agency, which now advises the company. Digital Rim will create digital movies, videogames, and computer-generated imagery for film and TV. According to Earl Jarred, president of Digital Rim and Rainbow, Woo is currently providing creative input into Digital Rim's first character-based action adventure game in early development at Rainbow. Woo and Rainbow are also collaborating on *ArK*, a CGI film in development by Digital Rim at the company's Hawaii office. Rainbow is one busy shop; Jarred explains the company has five next-gen games in development, including a first-party PlayStation 2 title called *ATV Offroad Fury* (see Milestones, page 47) and an unannounced Xbox first-party title.



■ Woo with Tom Cruise on the set of *Mi-2*

OBI — WANT NOT THE PC

The force wasn't strong enough to keep *Obi-Wan*, the spiritual successor to *Jedi Knight*, alive on the PC. Owing to what LucasArts called "limitations of PC technology and quality standards," the company announced it was striking down the PC version with the hope that it can become a game more powerful than we could possibly imagine for an unnamed console. Expect the company to announce the Xbox version sometime early in the new year.

A GALAXY CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

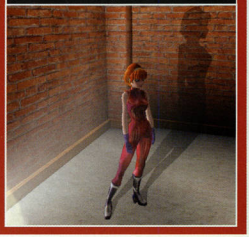
LucasArts also recently explained to the press that the *Star Wars* galaxy may not be so far, far away after all. The series of massively multiplayer games, which is being cooperatively developed with Verant, will be called *Star Wars Galaxies*. The official web site, www.starwarsgalaxies.com, launched on Nov. 30. The first game in the series is expected to go into testing in late 2001.

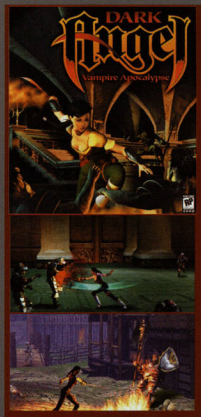
ROCKING GOOD NEWS

If you were really worried about a shortage of next-generation racing games, let us put your mind at ease. After several stalled-out 32-bit attempts, Interplay is bringing its classic racing franchise, *Rock 'n' Roll Racing*, to a next-generation console. No word yet as to which system it will appear on or when it's expected to arrive in stores.

WHO'S THAT GIRL?

It's not all surfing for Australia's Krome Studios. While Krome has just finished up work on *Championship Surfer* (see our review, page 75) for Dreamcast, PlayStation, and PC, the company has another ambitious game in the works. Tentatively entitled *Kat Burglar*, this action adventure game is based on a rather voluptuous jewel thief named Kat and her exploits in everything from jewel heists to high-speed car chases. Kat can be seen here in early prototype form, as Krome is currently researching which next-generation console to target the game for. *Kat* will likely be a 2002 release.





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The X-philes

02/01

Beyond programming support — meet Microsoft's Content and Design Team

Once upon a time, videogames were made in bedrooms and garages, often by heavily bearded freaks, who, between playing late night games of *D&D* and recovering bits of food stuck in their facial topiary, would puzzle the intricacies of 8-bit machine code and three-channel sound — one-man game factories struggling to create scrolling shooters with parallax fields.

Those days are long gone, and their passing is lamented by some. But the fact remains that to get a game out these days, a company needs artists, animators, composers, writers, and others who don't know squat about programming. What happens when these guys get stuck? A C++ reference library isn't going to help. Enter Microsoft's Content and Design Team (CDT).

Up and Running

The CDT is designed to be a central resource for Xbox developers' non-programming-related questions — a help boutique, if you will. The CDT will field not only technical calls from musicians and artists, but also queries regarding design issues — everything from how reflective flesh should be to how best to integrate 3D audio. Beyond the primary help-related functions, which include hosting seminars, the group will also focus on research — developing new tools and sample techniques, and composing white papers.

This new adjunct to the already burgeoning Advanced Technology Group is headed by, and is the brainchild of, 10-year industry veteran Chanel Summers. Summers has been a game producer and designer at a number of companies and until recently was the audio manager of the Advanced Technology Group. Formed earlier this year, the group is already hard at work, taking calls and dealing with requests, and Microsoft has assigned its expert insiders by field. Audio designers have an audio contact, and graphic artists have a graphics go-to guy. In the past, support infrastructures have tended to field questions about purely technical issues — but the CDT can field questions about technique as well as technology.

The CDT is designed to be a central resource for Xbox developers' non-programming related questions

"A lot of the practical advice is driven by the issues art teams bring to us," says Graphics Techniques Consultant Dave McCoy. "So far this has been mostly about which tools take best advantage of Xbox's graphics capabilities. Over time, those will be replaced with questions about how to achieve particular effects. While a lot of the features will be things that artists are used to doing with high-end pre-rendered imagery, it will still take a while for them to get comfortable using them in games.

Scott Selfon, the CDT's audio content consultant, is keen to point out that the group isn't there to regulate or control content. "We are not looking to establish standards," Selfon says. "Instead of trying to apply one solution to all of them, we need to be sensitive to the unique aspects of each title."

Selfon explains that purely developing new standards would be a fool's task. For example, developing a new surround sound protocol would then entail getting every audio manufacturer to add it to their surround decoders.

"The goal of our team is to encourage the use of best practices," he continues. "Instead of establishing a surround sound protocol, we will encourage sound designers to use existing standards to take advantage of multispeaker surround with their in-game audio for the first time."

Going Global

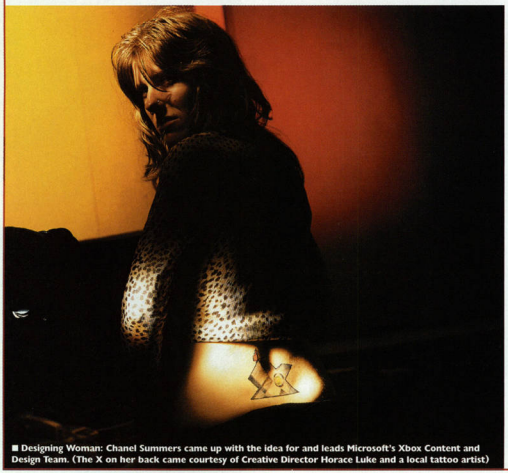
This one-stop advice shop for art, sound, and design should prove helpful to American and European developers. But what of Japan?

"We are building up a team in Japan," says Summers, "who will be sensitive to cultural differences between Japanese and Western art and sound styles."

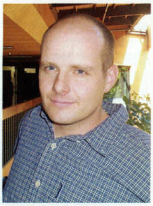
Without question, Microsoft's level of support for the development community hasn't gone unnoticed, and the company is really winning the favor of its third-party partners.

"Microsoft has been nothing short of incredible," says Michael Rubinelli, vice president of product development at THQ. "They have really gone out of their way to accommodate any and all of our requests on all fronts. Launch titles are more of a possibility. The games that we are making will be faster, better-looking, and more fun to play."

While certainly the other console manufacturers have technical support teams, none that we are aware of actually offer artistic support. Regarding Nintendo's creative input, one anonymous console artist put it this way: "Who would I talk to? Nintendo's Treehouse group? They once told me that the lead character in my game ran too much like a girl. It didn't seem to bother them that the lead character was, in fact, a girl." **Next**Gen



■ **Designing Woman: Chanel Summers came up with the idea for and leads Microsoft's Xbox Content and Design Team. (The X on her back came courtesy of Creative Director Horace Luke and a local tattoo artist)**



■ **When he isn't sifting through Xbox developers' trash, Frank O'Connor acts as the Editor-in-Chief of Daily Radar Consoles**

PlayStation 2
SOMETIMES, IN ORDER
TO COMPLETE YOUR JOURNEY,
YOU HAVE TO GO BACK
TO ITS BEGINNING.
LEGACY OF KAIN
SOUL REAVER 2
Dreamcast.
RATING PENDING
RP
ESRB
EIDOS
eidos.com

■ BOOK REVIEW

Understanding Interactivity

Industry legend Chris Crawford explains it like no other

Truly these are days of equal parts miracle and divine inspiration wherein we may stuff our gullets with the interactive chocolate bar (that provides "proactive energy" to anyone lucky enough to choke it down), exorcise our collective boogie fever with Barbie's Interactive Rock 'N' Roll Radio House, and tremble at the demonic bleatings of interactive Furby. In fact, let us pay homage on this day to the adjective "interactive," which author Chris Crawford rightly proclaims has been used and abused to the extent "that the poor term is half-dead now, a pallid, bloodless nothing-burger of a word."

Let the resuscitation begin. Crawford, beyond his talented game designs (which include the Macintosh titles *Balance of Power*, *Trust and Betrayal: The Legacy of Siboot*, and the wargames *Patton Versus Rommel* and *Patton Strikes Back*) is also a former **Next Generation** columnist and the founder of the Game Developers Conference. (Crawford's columns appeared in our issues throughout 1996.) With *Understanding Interactivity* he has cobbled up a highly readable, if slightly dense, treatise on automated interactivity in computing. But the great Catch-22 of Crawford's work is that he must outline and explain his comprehensive work in a completely non-interactive format: a book that desperately wants both a publisher and editor.

Crawford defines interactivity as the cyclic process of back and forth between two actors who engage in thinking, speaking, and listening. This process, he argues, allows for greater understanding between participants and engages the human mind more thoroughly than other pre-established forms of expression. This straightforward thesis, combined with Crawford's conversational writing style and talent for expressing abstract ideas (such as the algorithm as a metaphorical construct) in a concrete, easy-to-digest fashion carries *Interactivity*. To the quick: If you read, you will learn.

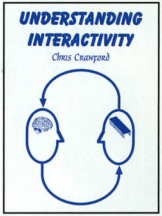
Though the book concerns itself primarily with interactivity as it applies to practical and game-related software creation and calls specifically to designers, Crawford's exploration holds the general appeal that may be found in any well-written piece of text. Still, it will likely only appeal to other game designers and wannabe game designers.

The author deftly blends insight and humor, proclaiming at one turn, "If you can express some deep truth of the human soul in algorithmic form, who cares that your truth is communicated via silicon and plastic?" and then paddles off the deep end to parody textbook chapter summaries by urging his readers to "throw this book across the room. Measure the distance it traveled and the angle of impact. Draw appropriate conclusions in crayon." Heck, Crawford even manages to make the less savory bits, such as an extended discourse on clock-setting methods that overextends its welcome, seem distantly interesting and, in doing so, ensures that this admittedly one-way trip never seriously stumbles.

— *Greg Orlando*

261 Pages
(Some black and white photos)
$30, postage included.
Available through
Crawford's Web site:
http://www.erasmatazz.com/Book/Buy_It.html

■ **Crawford (above) as he appeared as a Next Generation columnist and his book (below) looking appropriately self-published**



HARDCORE

This story goes back to the late summer/early fall before Nintendo 64 was released. I'm a skater, so I generally take pointless risks for no apparent reason. I broke my left arm and wrist in several places scrubbing on a gravel patch after a jump (I narrowly avoided compound fractures because I was wearing a watch). After having my arm and wrist set in a cast, I stupidly chose to go out skating AGAIN and further screwed up my arm — requiring a second cast (and a great deal of more pain). Several days later, Toys "R" Us informed me that the N64s had come in a week early and that I should pick up my reserved console as soon as possible. While at first overjoyed, I quickly realized that I wouldn't be able to enjoy my new piece of hardware with a broken left arm and wrist. But this didn't stop me. I immediately headed out to pick up the N64 along with *Super Mario 64* and *Pilotwings 64* and fired it up as quickly as I could manage. It took a few tries to wrap my left thumb over the analog stick, and I was in agony the whole time. That didn't stop me from beating *Mario* in just over a week, loving every last minute of it.
But those Bowser fights were killer on my left arm; it's now permanently deformed in a slight arch from overworking the surrounding muscle while the bones were knitting. Good physical therapy though!

Chris Raposa
Roseville, CA

Do you have a hardcore story? If so, send it to us. If we print it, we'll send you a free **Next Gen** T-shirt. Email your true tales of gaming madness to ngonline@imaginemedia.com. Please use "hardcore" as the subject line.

■ MEET THEIR MAKERS

RPGers spill out into the real world

Real-life faires for *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online* fans

■ ***EverQuest* enthusiasts made the leap to real life in Vegas**

It's no secret that RPG fans are some of the more hardcore gamers in the videogame industry, but are they fanatic enough to travel thousands of miles for a gathering of fellow RPGers? The answer is an emphatic yes, if separate events hosted by Sony Online Entertainment and Origin Systems are any indication.

Over 1250 *EverQuest* enthusiasts converged on the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas last November for its *EverQuest* Fan Faire. Attendees paid up to $75 to eat, drink, and be merry with Verant President John Smedley, Vice President Brad McQuaid, and other members of the development team. Those who completed the quest were rewarded with the official launch of *EverQuest: The Scars of Velious* expansion pack.

Also in November was the inaugural *Ultima Online* World Faire. More than 1000 *Ultima Online* players from as far away as Japan and Australia met in Houston for panel discussions and workshops on such topics as player towns, political systems, and game balance. Origin also raised more than $5500 through a charity auction benefiting Families of Spinal Muscular Atrophy.

Origin doesn't have a date locked in for the next *Ultima Online* event, but *EverQuest* zealots can already register at www.everquest.com for the next *EverQuest* Fan Faire being held on Feb. 2, 2001 in Baltimore, Maryland.

— *Kevin Toyama*

■ **The *UO* event featured weapons demos and discussions**

PlayStation.2

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"AN AMAZING SENSE OF REALITY...ONE OF SEVERAL MUST-HAVES FOR PS2 LAUNCH"
- GAMER'S REPUBLIC, SEPT 2000

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- NEXT GENERATION, JUNE 2000

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TAR 575BWY 8 ROCKSTAR 575BWY 9 ROCKSTAR 575BWY 10 ROCKSTAR 575BWY 11 ROCKSTAR

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TEEN T ESRB Animated Violence

counterbalance Angel Studios

■ PS2 HARDWARE THAT MAKES YOU SOFT

The Great DVD Remote Roundup

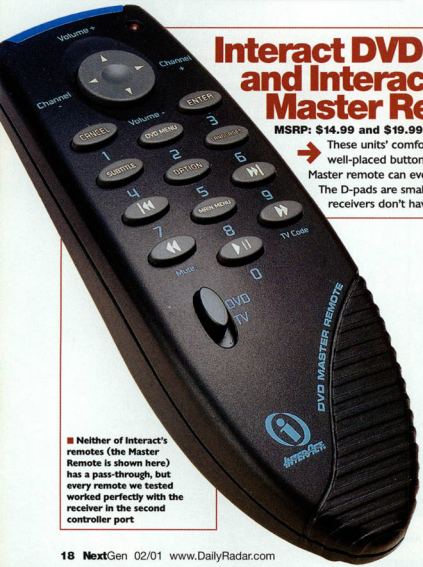
The PS2's DVD playback capabilities are great, but what's the use if you have to get up every time you want to skip a scene or pause a movie? You need a remote, but which one?

■ Early units from Saitek and Interact accidentally transposed the functions of the "stop" and "confirm" buttons, but this has been fixed

Saitek DVD Remote Controller

MSRP: $19.99

This stylish remote nailed the look, which fits right in with the design of the PS2. However, the buttons and D-pad are a bit small and spongy, and there was a tendency for the remote to stutter when you're scanning for a specific moment.



Interact DVD Remote and Interact DVD Master Remote

MSRP: $14.99 and $19.99

These units' comfortable shape, quick response, and well-placed buttons seat them among the best. The Master remote can even control your TV. Two caveats: The D-pads are small and slightly awkward, and the receivers don't have a pass-through for a controller.

■ Neither of Interact's remotes (the Master Remote is shown here) has a pass-through, but every remote we tested worked perfectly with the receiver in the second controller port

Joytech DVD Remote

MSRP: $14.99

This tiny unit substitutes a cheap, bumpy, plastic overlay for actual buttons (our subsequent Intellivision flashbacks were cool, though), and like the Nyko unit (see next page) requires a screwdriver to change the battery and forces you to use the remote to activate the pass-through every time you power up.

■ Joytech's memory-card-sized unit comes with a battery installed. Good thing — you need a screwdriver in order to change it

HERE COMES A CHALLENGER...

As if there were a shortage of remotes to choose from, Sony itself has entered the fray. The company recently announced that Japanese PS2s will no longer come with a memory card but will instead ship with a full-featured DVD remote packed in the box. Additionally, updated DVD drivers (moved from the memory card onto the firmware as in the U.S. PS2) will provide added playback capabilities like slow motion. The remote will also control TVs and VCRs (though at press time, their compatibility with non-Sony equipment had yet to be verified). The remote is also available separately, and although Sony hasn't confirmed yet whether the remote will arrive stateside, it will indeed work with U.S. systems (though the "stop" and "confirm" buttons will be switched).

■ Nyko's remote looks great and comes in both black and very, very blue.

Nyko DVD Remote

MSRP: $19.99

A cool-looking and very comfortable remote, though some of the lower buttons are hard to reach with your thumb. You'll need a small screwdriver to open the battery panel, and the pass-through defaults to DVD mode when you power up, so if you want to play a game, you have to press a button on the remote to get your controller to work.

Mad Catz DVD Wireless Remote

MSRP: $19.99

This full-featured unit adds controls for TV and late-model VCRs. It includes a TV/video button for switching between DVD and real TV (strangely absent on other units) and even comes with batteries, rubberized grips, and glow-in-the-dark buttons. Downsides: It's as big as a seal club; it stutters when scanning (just like the Saitek); and it offers no pass-through.

■ **Unfortunately, no remote can turn your actual PS2 on and off — yet**

Pelican DVD Remote

MSRP: $19.99

Overall, the best unit we tested: It feels good in the hand; the D-pad is incredibly comfortable; and the signal range and response time are second to none. It does force you to remember what the controller buttons do, but that takes all of five seconds. No frills, but no weaknesses either.

■ **Pelican's remote is neither the best-looking nor the most advanced, but there's simply nothing wrong with it**

■ **COMMANDER RELIEVED**

Microsoft acquiring Digital Anvil

Can DA be DA without Chris Roberts?

Microsoft announced it is acquiring development studio Digital Anvil, but it won't gain the talents of Chris Roberts. Roberts, Digital Anvil's CEO since it was founded in 1997, is leaving the company to pursue other interests.

"I'm taking some time off, then looking at opportunities in film and new gaming models," said Roberts, who made his directorial debut with 1999's *Wing Commander* feature film, a project based on his popular PC game. "On the business side, I'm frustrated by how it takes three to four years to create and ship a game. I want to explore new models, such as episodic gaming, that can deliver games faster [to shelves]."

According to the acquisition agreement, Microsoft will publish the PC game *Freelancer* and an Xbox title that was not yet announced as this issue went to press. Digital Anvil is shopping the Microsoft-funded PC games *Conquest* and *Loose Cannons* to other publishers, although Microsoft would reclaim an undisclosed amount of any revenue from those titles.

Despite the extra baggage, Microsoft views the acquisition as a significant move. "Digital Anvil delivers big-budget, ambitious productions that will bolster our offerings on both the PC and Xbox," said Microsoft Vice President of Games Publishing Ed Fries. "In the past, Digital Anvil was over-ambitious with the number of projects it took on, and we'll scale that back so the games it does produce will be epic in scope." — *Kevin Toyama*

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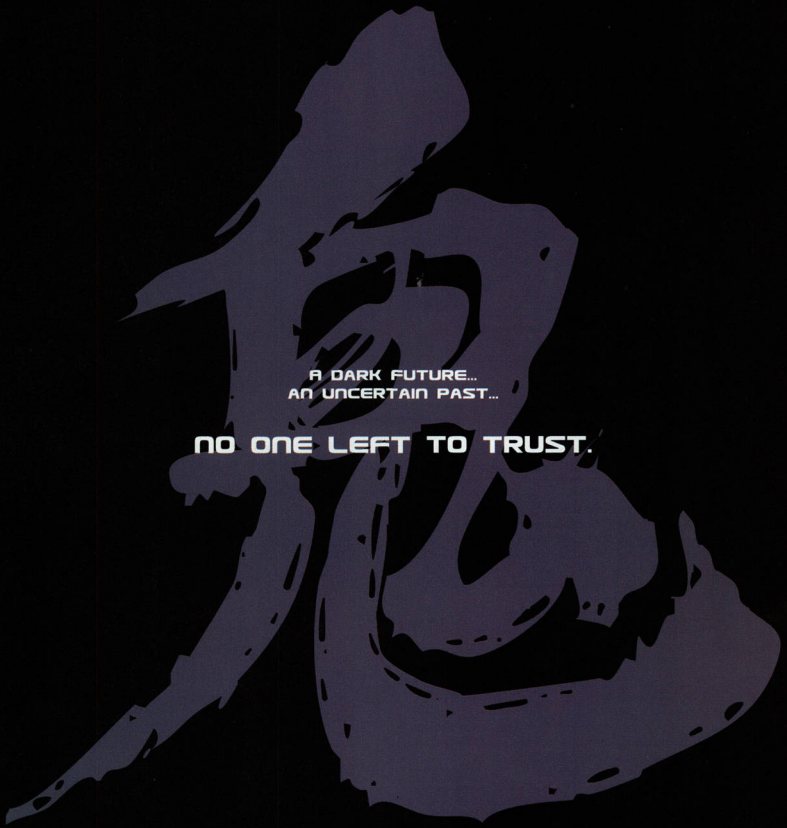

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Mac

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Violence

DARK HORSE COMICS

BUNGIE

Alphas

Next Generation drives to the brink of insanity to bring you the best game previews

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■ PLAYSTATION 2

TWISTED METAL BLACK

■ Publisher: **SCEA** ■ Developer: **Incognito Entertainment**
■ Release Date: **Spring/Summer 2001** ■ Origin: **US**

What evil lurks in the hearts of men behind the wheel? Incognito Entertainment knows

Given the dark gritty feel of *Twisted Metal Black*, it's appropriate that the once-popular car combat series is being resurrected from the ashes of a burned-out franchise. Still, SCEA couldn't have picked a more appropriate developer to revitalize the *Twisted Metal* franchise, since Incognito Entertainment was founded by many of the original *Twisted Metal* team members. And while other developers have staked claims on the car combat genre over the years, the team that started it all hopes to blow these pretenders off the road with their combination of time-tested playability and a dark mood that will frighten and astound you.

"We've basically taken the *Twisted Metal* universe and done our best to imagine it through the eyes of a serial killer," explains SCEA Director/Lead Designer David Jaffe. Characters are all literally asylum inmates and, while you might recognize a few familiar names in the ten initially selectable characters, they're not the same comical caricatures

Alphas

■ Cars absorb different amounts of damage depending on where you hit them, so while you can shoot blindly, more skilled players have an advantage

■ Just like in *Twisted Metal*, the missile contrails set a new visual standard and will amaze you with their beauty

"We've basically taken the *Twisted Metal* universe and done our best to imagine it through the eyes of a serial killer."

— David Jaffe, director/lead designer, SCEA

of humanity that have been done before. These people are killers. They don't know it's wrong to gut puppies, and what's worse, they've been placed in vehicles with big guns. "There is a character named Calypso, there is a character named Sweet Tooth, and there are a number of similarities [with previous *TM* games]," admits Jaffe. "But they're not the same characters, and if these people were real and you asked them about the previous games they'd have no idea what you're talking about."

"It's a much more hostile and disturbing environment and we're trying to incorporate that in everything we do," explains Incognito Entertainment President Scott Campbell. "It's not to say that some hilarious things can't happen, but it's all done in an environment where it always feels like there's something brewing — there's something wicked that's going to happen." Consequently, each of the 13 arenas you fight in (ranging from downtown suburbia to a junkyard) all represent a piece of society that has been left to decay. "We really avoided the wacky, over-the-top locations like in *TM* and *TM 2*," says Jaffe. "We've really put more focus on real locations that are very sad and depressing and sort of threatening."

Of course, the imagery wouldn't be complete without civilians that are out and about, and Campbell promises that not only will each area be populated with the kinds of people you would expect to find in them, but you'll also "be able to interact with them in the way you would want to."

Beyond the look and feel of the game, the team is really concentrating on maximizing every aspect of gameplay. "Our focus has always been to redefine and reconnect with players on the whole concept of a fighting game in cars," explains Jaffe. "We want to reward players a lot more for their skill." One example he gives is that now weapons can inflict different degrees of damage depending on when and how you use them instead of the traditionally simple "hit/no hit" damage model that was used in PSX car combat games. On top of this, a good deal of the weapons in the game will have multiple functions, and players can also pull off special moves like freeze rays or land mines that use energy out of the constantly recharging energy bar.

"We're putting a lot more control in the player's hands in terms of how he wants to play the game and then rewarding the player for doing the tougher and more interesting attacks," boasts Jaffe. "Between the pick-up weapons, the special weapons, and the energy weapons — a good 60 to 65% of which have that whole fighting-game mentality, with degrees of success and

Continued on page 26

■ Each environment is brimming with interactivity. You can even take down the helicopters and planes that fly overhead

GONE ROGUE!

While 989 Studios went on to create *Twisted Metal 3* and *4* internally instead of working with Singletrac again, the team responsible for the first two *TM* games did make one final car combat game for its old company. Titled *Rogue Trip Vacation 2012*, the game features the same car fighting madness that we know and love while mixing it up with some new gameplay mechanics that involve gathering items from different parts of the map. Of course, the cars still represent the wacky design ideals that made *Twisted Metal* so cool. Our favorite: the Oscar Meyer Weiner-mobile that can slap you down with its "hot dog."

■ While the game is dark, the spectacular explosions and weapon effects brighten the environment with their pyrotechnic artistry

multiple functionalities applied to them — you've got a very deep and robust game."

Underneath the explosions and gore brought on by your heavy artillery are some rock-solid driving mechanics, which have been tweaked and tuned specifically to make the game both accessible and deep. Players will be relieved to hear that the wonky, uncontrollably realistic feel of the last two games has been thrown out entirely for a feel that the team is tuning from scratch. "We've always spent an almost disproportionate amount of time making sure that our car dynamics and controls allowed you to play the game and quickly engage in battle," Campbell asserts. As a result, the cars may look realistic enough as they drive around in the game, but rest assured that they control on a hair trigger, and realism has taken a backseat to playability in every situation where it has come up.

The most noticeable improvement to the gameplay is the simple upgrade to 60 frames per second, which, believe it or not, makes a dramatic difference over every car combat game that has come before. "The whole control aspect at 60fps is just night and day [over 30fps]," says Campbell. "With smooth controls, you feel like you're driving a car *and* engaging in combat like in a fighting game. You're always able to throw that quick punch and orient your car but you don't detach yourself from the fact that you're driving."

Jaffe elaborates: "When you're running at 20 to 25 frames per second, you don't know why you dodged a missile — it just kind of happens. But when you're running at 60 frames you think, 'Oh, I can see what happened. I hit this little dip and the missile flew right over my roof.'"

When **Next Generation** saw the game in action, we were amazed — everything moved incredibly fast even at this very

■ The environments are highly interactive. Knock out the ferris wheel's supports, and it will roll off to crush everything in its path

■ Many of the weapons in the game actually have several different uses, depending on the situation

■ Realtime weather effects not only add to the mood but affect your visibility and therefore the way you play the game

■ Many of the cars in the game will seem familiar, but the drivers are now (pardon the term) more twisted and psychotic

early stage, despite the fact that the level was blowing apart around our car, missiles were streaking through the air, and there were at least three AI cars looking to kill us. In multiplayer, the team plans to keep the speed up as high as possible, but Jaffe feels that 60fps with four-player splitscreen is probably too much to ask, so the game will default down to 30 when your three buddies want to play. He was also surprisingly reticent when we asked whether or not FireWire support would be included for networked multiplayer, which leads us to believe that, if such modes are in the works, they're not yet finalized.

Even though there are several months to go before release, the game is already at a stage where it looks and feels impressive. Believe it or not, even the interface was looking polished and did wonders to set the dark mood the team is going for. Hopefully, when released, the game will live up to its dark promises and revive not only the tarnished *Twisted Metal* name, but the entire car combat genre. — *Blake Fischer*

■ **While two-player splitscreen will run at 60fps, the four-player mode will run at 30**

"It's a much more hostile and disturbing environment, and we're trying to incorporate that in everything we do"

— Scott Campbell, president, Incognito Entertainment

■ Moigle requires plenty of attention, but not "feed the Tamagotchi" type of pet care. Says Lead Designer Andy Ashcroft: "Moigle should never be a chore"

■ DREAMCAST

FLOIGAN BROTHERS

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Visual Concepts** ■ Release Date: **March 2001** ■ Origin: **US**

The creators of *NFL 2K1* take the field with a living cartoon

In these days of lurching zombies, "xtreme" snowboarders, and kung-fu-fighting centerfold girls, it seems that there are fewer and fewer games that offer a good laugh. On that merit alone, *Floigan Brothers* would be worthy of notice. However, this title goes one step further, creating a whole new gameplay experience by blending elements of modern 3D adventures, classic, LucasArts-style adventure games, *Looney Tunes* cartoons, and, of all things, virtual pets.

■ Any unique skills (how to play tag, how not to fear spiders) you teach Moigle in this first game will carry over into future titles. Which, of course, don't officially exist

The brothers themselves would be right at home in Roger Rabbit's neighborhood. Moigle, the tiny player-controlled character, is sharp as a tack but short as a fire hydrant and not very physical. Conversely, his lovable brother Moigle is big as a house, has the strength of an ox, and couldn't think his way out of a closet if the door was open. He does however seem to be something of a savant — he can talk to animals, and he's a mechanical genius. The two live in a junkyard, where Moigle is working on a secret surprise invention and from which the evil Baron Malodorous is determined to evict them.

As charismatic as these two are, the real key to the game is the unique way they interact. You'll need Moigle's help, and often his emotions, to complete nearly every task in the game. To get across the creek, you have to make Moigle cry, so his tears raise the water level enough for you to use the floating bridge.

■ Moigle has a huge soft spot for animals, which makes it tough when the Baron's henchmen are cute, cuddly, yet completely evil kitty cats

■ Points are earned by completing tasks or playing one of 12 or so mini-games, such as the gardening (above) or high-five (above right) games shown here. A higher point total will lead to greater respect and cooperation from Moigle

■ Here's a look at the evil Baron Malodorous (below). With art design and gameplay straight out of *Looney Tunes*, this may be as close as games can get to an interactive cartoon

To reach a high billboard, you must pick a fight with him until he loses his temper, at which time he'll crumple you into a ball, pull out a baseball bat, and give you the old Mark McGuire treatment, landing you neatly on the catwalk. Perfecting Moigle's sophisticated, emotion-driven behavior (he loves animals, fears spiders, and even accepts bribes) is what Lead Designer/Project Manager Andy Ashcroft credits with soaking up the majority of the game's ominously long development time (some three years).

While this information definitely piques our interest, the most exciting details are the ones Sega won't talk about. Namely, the fact that this isn't meant to be a one-shot game. Indeed, new episodes of *Floigan* could continue to appear, sending the brothers *Looney Tunes*-style into outer space, the old West, a desert island, or anywhere really. After an initial slip of the tongue, Sega has officially gone mute about this subject, but Ashcroft can confirm, "We want to make a lot of these. I love these characters, and I love the gameplay."

We're a bit skeptical of the overall depth of *Floigan*. It looks quite short and very easy — in most situations, the game tells you outright which mood you must coax from Moigle, and as soon as he's there, a few taps of the action button solves the puzzle for you. Still, what we saw was very entertaining. If gameplay evolves (or, even better, the game comes out at a reduced price, as an episodic game, acknowledged or not, should), the title's unique personality will be more than enough to convince us to tune in. — *Eric Bratcher*

■ Moigle is a faster runner than Moigle, so if you need to get somewhere in a hurry, you may have to piggyback

THE OTHERS BROTHERS

The Floigans are certainly one peculiarly talented family, but let's take a look at some other gifted siblings.

The Smothers Brothers
These actors/comedians/recording artists/vineyard owners were masters of '60s-era comedy. Now, if only someone can tell us what a grown man was doing playing with a yo-yo...

The Brothers Grimm
These 18th-century brothers compiled over 200 incredibly morbid folk tales and yet somehow became heroes of children's literature. Who's in the mood for a story about two starving, abandoned children who narrowly avoid getting cannibalized by a wicked witch?

The Hardy Boys
Sure, these clever young sleuths aren't technically real people, but they had their own TV show. And boy, were they talented — just look at those teeth.

The Jacksons
Michael wasn't the only Jackson son with talent, though he may be the only one with a pet monkey.

The Fiasco Brothers
According to their web site, "The Fiasco Brothers are a bluegrass and traditional band from Albuquerque who gather each September at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas." There appear to be 33 of them, seven of whom are women. They're the next big thing, mark our words...

Mario and Luigi
They run, jump, drive a mean go-kart, and kick turtles like nobody else. True Renaissance men.

■ Much of Moigle's sophisticated AI is inspired by AI research being done at MIT

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■ Smash into this oncoming railcar and not only will your car look really beat up (thanks to some snappy realtime damage modeling), it will also control worse

■ PLAYSTATION 2

SUPERCAR STREET CHALLENGE

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **EXAKT Entertainment** ■ Release Date: **Summer 2001** ■ Origin: **US**

Here, the fast lane is hardly fast enough

■ Most of these cars can easily exceed 200 mph, which raised some interesting challenges when it came to creating the game's physics

By the end of the PlayStation 2's lifecycle it's entirely plausible that there will be a racing game for every kind of vehicle on the planet. *Supercar Street Challenge*, the newest entry into this cavalcade of speedfests, takes players out of the commercial circuits and into the high-powered world of concept cars. It may not be the most significant jump the racing genre has ever seen, but the idea of high speeds and unique car designs may prove a strong lure for racing fans looking for their next adrenaline rush.

Authenticity plays a big part in the racing game equation, and consequently *SSC* will feature ten actual supercars including such notable designs as Callaway's C-12, Modena Design's Zonda C12, and the Fioravanti F100. To achieve the level of accuracy the team wanted with the car models, it has worked extensively with each manufacturer on every detail. "We

Alphas

■ Up to six racers can be on the track at one time, and EXAKT is putting a lot of effort into making the AI seem realistic instead of all-powerful

"Some of these cars can go insanely fast — over 200 mph ... in real life the airbags would probably be exploding in your face"

— Paul Ashdown, president, EXAKT

have taken schematics, blueprints, technical specs, and they have, in some cases, even provided CAD drawings for their cars," claims EXAKT President Paul Ashdown. "We even work with their engineers on specific details so that we can deliver the most realistic car models possible." Players can also come up with their own car designs and implement them in the built-in editor.

One thing the team is adamant about, however, is that great gameplay has to come before absolute realism. In fact, during the development of the game, the team has had to go out of its way to solve control issues that even the creators of *Gran Turismo* didn't have to worry about. "Some of these cars can go insanely fast — over 200 mph," exclaims Ashdown. "For the average player to control cars this fast we have to make the cars slow down and corner way better than they would in real life. We have cars braking at over 3 to 4 Gs, and in real life the airbags would probably be exploding in your face." Ashdown says that the team has spent a lot of time tweaking the controls so that while they aren't 100% realistic, they will feel intuitive and realistic to the average player. "The physics should be real enough to let an average driver get a feel for what it's like to drive a high-performance car at the limit of its performance," he stresses, "even though in real life they'd crash and burn hopelessly."

Cars are only a piece of the overall formula. EXAKT has also spent an impressive amount of time recreating the international venues in which you will compete during the game's Championship Circuit mode. Much like in the

■ The background scenery isn't just gorgeous, it's also a fairly authentic representation of a real-world locale

DENTED!

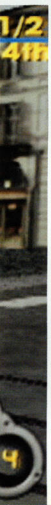
Surprisingly, all of the cars in *Supercar Street Challenge* show realtime deformation when you slam them into a wall — creating dents and sustaining damage that affects the overall control of the vehicle. The team really had to work to get this feature in the game, because usually when making a game with multiple car licenses (like *Gran Turismo*), the licensees prefer that their cars not show damage. Still, EXAKT negotiated hard with the manufacturers and managed eventually to get everyone to agree that showing car damage is an important part of the racing experience.

■ You won't recognize these models unless you're a serious gear-head — most of them are high-concept prototypes. Just know this: They're all very rare, very expensive, and very, very fast

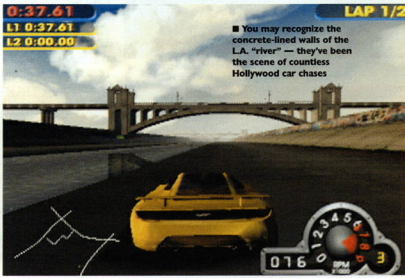
recently released *Metropolis Street Racer*, the team has actually sent out members to each city it's recreating (Rome, Monaco, and Los Angeles are known so far), and the team has not only photographed the streets it wanted players to race on but also videotaped them from the front, rear, and sides of the cars they were driving in. Each city will have multiple track layouts that, though not 100% representative of the real world (gameplay is still stressed over absolute realism), will look and feel like the real thing.

The game is given more of an arcade feel by a number of *San Francisco Rush*-style hidden shortcuts on each track that can help you decrease your lap time significantly if you know where to find them. Still, Ashwood and his crew have added some personality to what has become a racing game standby. "The shortcuts are all inspired by Hollywood-style stunts or tricks — wherever possible from movies featuring the city in question," he points out. "For example, in L.A. everyone has seen a million car chases that end up driving along the concrete banks of the L.A. river, so that was definitely something we wanted in the game." Of course, most of these shortcuts aren't just hidden but also require some skill to use, which will hopefully give advanced players some motivation to go back and replay tracks to shave off a few more seconds.

With its gameplay grounded strictly between *San Francisco Rush* and *Gran Turismo*, *SSC* might very well carve out a niche with gamers who like the idea of realistic racing but lack the patience to deal with the constant crashing and spinouts provided by the more sim-like titles. It sounds like a successful design formula to us. In the coming months, EXAKT will hopefully tune the game to fulfill this promise. — *Blake Fischer*



■ If you know where to go, you can break off the track and take a hidden shortcut to shave off a few seconds



■ You may recognize the concrete-lined walls of the L.A. "river" — they've been the scene of countless Hollywood car chases

■ In *Kessen II*, players can harness the elements with devastating results

■ *Kessen II* bumps up the number of on-screen characters from 100 (in the original) to 500

■ PLAYSTATION 2

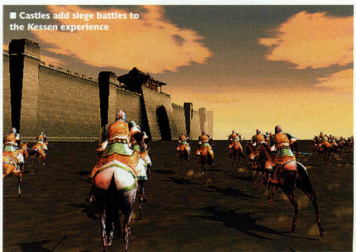
KESSEN II

■ Publisher: **Koei** ■ Developer: **Koei** ■ Release Date: **Winter 2001** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Koei draws outside the lines of history

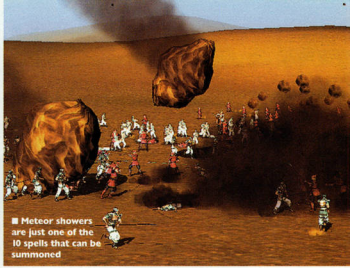
A hundred soldiers in formation on rolling fields of green, archers raining death onto unsuspecting armies, a cavalry racing to the aid of weakened compatriots — *Kessen* used these and other dramatic scenes to create breathtaking impressions more akin to a Kurosawa film than a videogame. As pure eye candy, *Kessen* was tough to beat, and its visual beauty and simple interface made the game accessible by gamers who generally thumb their noses at the strategy genre. Koei aims to recapture the magic it created with *Kessen* in its sequel, *Kessen II*, with better graphics, tighter control, and a dash of fantasy.

Under the rallying cry of "more dynamic, more dramatic," the development team at Koei is using better graphics to drive the action. "Unlike in its predecessor, we're able to display 500 game characters on screen at once [in *Kessen II*]," explains Koei Producer Kou Shibusawa, citing a fivefold increase in graphic



■ Castles add siege battles to the *Kessen* experience

■ Don't bunch up your troops: Fireball attacks wreak havoc on large groups



■ Meteor showers are just one of the 10 spells that can be summoned

complexity. "We think this truly approaches the technical limits of the PlayStation 2 in terms of realtime characters appearing on the screen simultaneously."

Kessen II is set in the Three Kingdoms period of China, roughly 168 A.D. to 265 A.D., when warlords battled each other and people were subject to oppression and war crimes. The game follows feudal lord Liu Bei as he attempts to rescue his love interest, Diao Chan, from a rival empire. No, it's not a reenactment of actual battles as in the first, but rather an original story woven together by the design team. "We wanted to make the game enjoyable even to those who are not familiar with the period," says Shibusawa. "Still, we've added classic elements that [history buffs] of the Three Kingdoms era are sure to recognize and love."

Stepping outside of historical bounds has enabled Koei some design freedoms, as game characters can now use magic, augmenting the weapons at the player's command. This means they can now bring down the fury of the elements on their enemies. "The addition of magic to the arsenal of weapons can change the entire strategy of a battle," boasts Shibusawa. Summoning firestorms or tornadoes can be especially devastating to tight army formations, which is a tactic that should prove popular because neighboring units can now support each other. Individual units act and react in accordance with each other, so instead of the formation of a troop determining the amount of damage inflicted by an army, each individual unit's position will be a factor. By taking into account troop numbers and formations, *Kessen II*'s AI can more accurately calculate a unit's effectiveness.

"We think [*Kessen II*'s ability to show 500 on-screen characters] truly approaches the technical limits of the PS2..." — Kou Shibusawa, producer, Koei

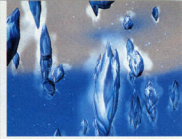
An example of the AI's recognition of individual unit groups is seen in defensive maneuvers. When troops are near each other, their overall defensive capabilities are increased. Similarly, the ability of ground troops to break through an enemy formation increases with supporting units in front and behind.

Koei has also extended game depth by expanding the game's length from 10 stages in

■ Soldiers can take to the air to breach castle walls

■ Got horse? It's a bummer if you're a soldier in *Kessen II* — most travel by foot and get skewered in battles with calvary officers

■ Ice storms can pelt an army into helplessness



Troops can be shot from a cannon and use hang gliders to attack the enemy from above. Really.

Kessen to 30 stages in the sequel. The stages are packed with new environments — in addition to the sprawling countryside scenes seen in its predecessor, *Kessen II* creates epic battle aboard moving ships and around castles. Also added to the game are new specialty units. Shibusawa thinks that new forces such as ballista, military engines used to hurl huge missiles, and elephant troops will deliver added excitement to the game. If that's too conservative for you, get this — troops can be shot from a cannon and use hang gliders to attack the enemy from above. Really.

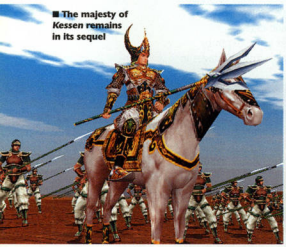
As in real life, success in the game opens doors to opportunity. Battles won will increase players' inventory of spells and allow them to build and use new weapons. Koei hopes this ability to upgrade will further draw gamers into *Kessen II* as they go in search of these new elements.

Koei has addressed challenges that afflicted the first game, such as better control over units. "In the previous version, you were unable to control the troops when using the 'cinematic view' — the battle view that allowed you to get a close-up of the men actually fighting. In the new version, you are able to control the troops from that view as well," promises Shibusawa.

The sum total of changes from *Kessen* to *Kessen II* should make for an appealing experience not just for fans of the first game, but also for those who typically view historical reenactments to be on the dry side. The injection of fantasy through magic provides an opportunity to further showcase the PlayStation 2 hardware capabilities, a result that should create an even more compelling story than the original. — *Kevin Toyama*

VOICE ACTING

If you're an anime fan, the voices you hear in *Kessen II* may sound familiar. The words coming out of Liu Bei's mouth are actually spoken by Toru Furuya, who also does the Japanese voices of *Mobile Suit Gundam's* Amuro Rei, *Dragon Ball Z's* Yamcha, and *Sailor Moon's* Tuxedo Kamen. Furuya is a professional voice actor hired to provide drama and excitement in the game. Think you could do it? Well, get in line. According to Sound Advice, a Chicago-based voiceover-training firm, there are millions of voice actors in the United States, but only a few thousand are able to do voiceovers for a living.



■ The majesty of *Kessen* remains in its sequel

■ As in the original, *Kessen II* features warriors in colorful, elaborate costumes that create a superhero feel to characters and the battles in which they fight

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Alphas

■ Gado the lion (left) was selectable in the first game and hidden in *Bloody Roar 2*, but Xion (left and above) is completely new

■ Rather than impede your view, the arena walls become translucent when characters are close to them

■ ARCADE, PLAYSTATION 2

BLOODY ROAR 3

■ Publisher: **Namco** (arcade), **HudsonSoft** (PS2 Japan) ■ Developer: **Eing Raizing** ■ Release Date: **December 2000** (arcade), **TBA** (PS2) ■ Origin: **Japan**

Who let the dogs, cats, bats, beetles, and lions out?

From names in ancient texts to names of modern professional sports teams, people have likened themselves to animals — the more powerful, the better. So it should come as no surprise that the *Bloody Roar* series' lycanthropic warriors have always captured gamers' imaginations. With this latest iteration, the franchise looks to swoop deftly into the next generation of consoles. Make sure you've had all your shots — the fur is about to fly.

■ Beast forms have greater speed and strength, and they can unlock additional special attacks

The difference between this franchise and any other fighting game out there remains the combatant's ability to temporarily transform into super-charged, quasi-animal versions of themselves, gaining increased speed, greater power, and more moves. This gives the game greater depth, and, as your time is limited, choosing just the right time to mutate into your animal form becomes critical. Each character's special attacks are inspired by their animal type (for instance, the bat uses lots of aerial attacks), which is an element that adds depth to both characters and combat but has caused balancing problems in previous *Bloody Roar* games.

Earlier *BR* titles have also suffered slightly because the characters, despite their awesome talents, somehow still lacked personality. While we can't verify that their charisma has improved, it's undeniable that the fighters look amazing this time around. The graphics are very close to the quality of images in *Tekken Tag Tournament* (though not quite as good as the eye candy in *Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore*) and the characters (both old and new) benefit greatly from much higher polygon counts and increased detail in the rendering. Each brawler's beast form looks much more like the animal that inspires it. Long the tiger simply ripples with sinew and

■ A gauge at the bottom tells you if you have enough juice to transform. Or if you've already transformed, it tells you how much time you have left

■ Jenny the scantily-clad bat will focus heavily on quick, airborne attacks, while Stun is slower but much more powerful

BUILDING THE PERFECT BEAST

Bloody Roar may have introduced morphing were-warriors to the fighting game genre, but it was surely inspired by another certified classic: Sega's *Altered Beast*, which showed up in arcade, Master System, and Genesis versions. The game featured a Conan-esque warrior who was brought back from the dead in order to rescue Zeus' daughter, Athena, from Neff, the evil ruler of the underworld. Throughout the course of the game, the warrior could power up into a werewolf, a weredragon, a werebear, a weretiger, and a golden werewolf.

Each character's beast form looks much more like the animal that inspires it. Long the tiger simply ripples with sinew and muscle...

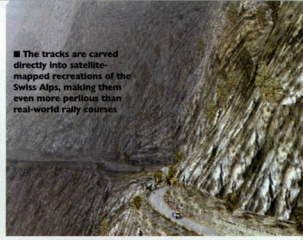
muscle; Stun the insect resembles a gigantic beetle, covered head to toe in heavy armor; and Jenny the bat — okay, she doesn't look at all like a bat — but the extra polygons are evident nonetheless. There is an undetermined number of new characters as well, such as the strangely metallic Xion, who appears to be a mantis or a garden weasel.

Of course, the battlefields have also been given a makeover. In addition to increased background animation, the shape, size, and structure of the combat arenas vary as well. Some stages are narrow and confined, while others are wide and have plenty of room to maneuver.

Bloody Roar 3 will be in Japanese arcades by the time you read this. Although there was still no release date for the Japanese PS2 version at press time, the game is built using Namco's PlayStation 2-derived System 246 arcade board, so the inevitable port should be both quite faithful and quick in coming. An American version will likely come courtesy of Sony, which published the first two games in the series, or from Infogrames, which handles some of HudsonSoft's U.S. distribution. Either way, the roar of battle will fill the air once more, reminding us that you don't become king of the jungle without tasting a little blood. — *Eric Bratcher/Christophe Kagotani*

■ Players can choose to remain in human form or mutate into beast form any time their gauge is full

■ There are four driving models currently being evaluated, ranging from an arcade-y *Colin McRae* clone to a sophisticated model that calculates friction and traction. The final build will likely have elements of both



■ The tracks are carved directly into satellite-mapped recreations of the Swiss Alps, making them even more perilous than real-world rally courses

■ We have yet to see any shots from the standard third-person point of view, but first-person and back-seat-driver cams look to be up and running

■ PLAYSTATION 2

WRC 2001

■ Publisher: **Sony** ■ Developer: **Evolution Studios** ■ Release Date: **May (Europe)** ■ Origin: **U.K.**

Can Evolution Studios create a rally racing game that will actually sell in the U.S.?

What is the appeal of rally racing games? Martin Kenwright, managing director of Evolution Studios, sums it up in a nutshell.

"It's the decathlon for cars," he explains. "They can crash down hills, explode, or reach the end of the stage completely destroyed. There's really no driving experience more unpredictable or frightening than screaming along on a few inches of mud without any barriers, without any safety whatsoever" So far, Kenwright says, developers have ignored this element, designing tracks that are "claustrophobic" invisible tubes, with no atmosphere, emotion, or sense of danger.

Not so with *WRC 2001*. The team used real-world satellite maps to recreate entire sections of the Swiss Alps, then carved rally tracks right into the sides of the mountains. The appeal — not to mention the danger — should be obvious.

"Instead of creating a glass tubeway, let's create the Swiss Alps," proclaims Kenwright. "Instead of bouncing off the rock and coming back onto the track, let's fly over that rock and fall several thousand feet. Instead of crashing into a wall and showing a spark and a broken window, let's physically tear the car in half or deform it." To complement the near-otherworldly track designs, every element of real WRC racing will be faithfully represented, from the cars and drivers to squads of mo-capped fans who'll cheer, sound foghorns, and even crowd the roadways.

Of course, the most important element in the game is the driving model, which wasn't yet implemented. The team hopes to achieve a balance between precise simulation and fun, intuitive driving. If they succeed, even U.S. PlayStation 2 owners will owe it to themselves to try this game. — *Eric Bratcher/Nigel Edge*

■ The spectators are so enthusiastic, they often run out onto the track, though race officials shoo them back to safety. What a shame

MAKING MOUNTAINS OUT OF A MOLEHILL'S WORTH OF MEMORY

To avoid soaking up precious RAM, *WRC 2001* creates its environments procedurally, using a method very similar to the one outlined in the *Drakan* section of the PS2 feature in NG 12/00. For instance, a vast forest can be produced simply by telling the computer to lay down X number of trees with Y density. Likewise, tracks are stored by marking a series of points and recording curvature data between them. In game, the points are plotted, then stock shapes and textures are layered over them and blended. Thus, huge track designs can be stored using very little memory, and the results look more varied and organic than painstakingly hand-designed graphics ever could. For a system whose VRAM is supposed to be a huge liability, the PS2 is turning out some amazing-looking games.

Anytime is a good time for fireworks.

FANTAVISION

These days the word addiction gets a bad rap. Sure, there's a long list of bad influences out there. But an addiction to setting off massive fireworks displays? Only good can come from that.

At first glance, FantaVision is a colorful fireworks puzzle game. Not so fast, my friend. Once you begin capturing and detonating flare after flare, progressing from one difficult city-scape to the next while racing against time and testing your reflexes in a one- or two-player mode your very existence begins to revolve around detonating massive combinations in order to create a pyrotechnic paradise. But you can handle it, right?

PlayStation.2

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ESRB

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Fireworks should never be used without proper adult supervision. Follow all appropriate safety precautions. Fireworks are illegal in some states. Please obey your local laws.

■ The world in which *Legend of Alon D'ar* takes place has four sentient races. Eventually, your party will consist of a member from each race

■ PLAYSTATION 2

LEGEND OF ALON D'AR

■ Publisher: **Game Studios** ■ Developer: **Stormfront Studios** ■ Release Date: **Winter 2001** ■ Origin: **US**

Can Stormfront Studios take on Japan's best and win?

Say what you want about American game developers, but there hasn't been a U.S.-designed console RPG that has come anywhere close to challenging Japan's dominance of the genre. On PlayStation 2, there's already been an attempt to unseat the incumbents (Volition's *Summoner*; see our review in last month's issue), but this challenger, like all U.S. attempts so far, remained a technically and graphically inferior example.

Luckily, some believe the fight is still worth fighting. Stormfront Studios is the latest developer attempting to steal the coveted console RPG crown. If they can succeed where others have failed, it will not only be a great thing for gamers worldwide, but it may also shine a ray of light into a country whose development community has all but given up hope.

A strong storyline is perhaps the most important component of any RPG, and Game Studios Senior Producer Jim Tso is proud of the fact that the emphasis on his project has been placed on creating an epic, larger-than-life feel. "The story really has a lot of elements in it," he says. "We have redemption, betrayal, love, atoning for past sins... things like that."

Players take on the role of Jarik, a young boy whose village has been summarily slaughtered. You're left to find your way in a world that has been partially rebuilt after a magical cataclysm that literally tore it to pieces (at points in the game you can actually look over the broken

■ You won't see any load times, whether you are traversing between different areas of the world or stopping to meet (or fight) an NPC

DOUBLE THE TROUBLE

One of the coolest features in *Legend of Alon D'ar* is the ability for a second player to plug in a controller and join the game by taking over one of your party members at the touch of a button. While the concept is hardly unique — *Secret of Mana* had three-player cooperative play — Stormfront has specifically designed this feature so that players can share their gaming experience with their friends at any point. "The concept behind this," explains Senior Producer Sarah Stocker, "is that we wanted to have a cooperative play mode that allowed you to progress by yourself through the huge, single-player mode, but when your buddy comes over he can just pop in and play with you. And then when he leaves, you still have your single-player game."

■ Jarik isn't constrained to using just a sword — all manner of weapons, including ranged ones, are available to him

edges of the world). Naturally, in the course of exploring the world, you'll meet up with other races — there are four radically different ones, including yours — and new party members. Eventually, you'll discover that you're actually a tiny piece in a much larger puzzle that will determine the fate of the world.

While a lot of time has been spent getting the story right, just as much, or more, emphasis has been placed on gameplay mechanics. According to Stormfront Producer Sarah Stocker, "One of the tenets of this game is that you get to really roleplay and decide what Jarik and his party members become." To accomplish this, the team has given players the option of increasing each character's stats and abilities throughout the game in any direction they see fit — effectively enabling players to create their own classes that match their playing styles. "In our world, swords and sorcery are very equal forces," explains Stocker. "You can become a great and powerful warrior, or you can become a powerful mage, or something in between."

"You really get to roleplay and decide what Jarik and his party members become"

— Sarah Stocker, senior producer, Stormfront Studios

Designer Adrian Earle admits that empowering players in this fashion will be a balancing nightmare, but he feels that the value it adds to the overall game is immeasurable. "It might be easier or harder in certain areas of the game if you take one route or another, but the idea is that you can still win. Next time you play you can play in an entirely different way."

The combat system is also something that the team is working hard on, and the concept they've come up with — a cross between turn-based and realtime — enables you to think about strategy, yet still keep the combat fairly involving. Where the game takes significant steps over the competition is in the fact that battles aren't random. All enemies are plainly visible, and there's no loading or viewpoint shift between movement and combat. Walk up to a monster and, if its AI is set to be aggressive, you'll just pull out your weapon and start to fight. The ability not only to pick your own battles but to jump into combat spontaneously

■ As your character gains levels, you can pick his or her skills, whether they are magic- or melee-oriented. Eventually, your party will be unique to your own personal playing style

■ All monsters are plainly visible on the map at all times so you can always choose whether you want to fight or avoid combat

Alphas

should have a dramatic impact on the game's pace — one that shouldn't be underestimated.

Technically speaking, the game is already well on its way. At the core of the experience is a solidly built terrain engine that will enable you to traverse the entire, immense game world with absolutely no load times. How immense? Lead Programmer Mark Dean suggests, "If you go in a dead sprint and have no encounters, it would take well over an hour."

The team has also taken advantage of the PlayStation 2's strengths by using procedural content generation techniques to spruce up the landscape. "We're trying to add some life," explains Dean. "Wherever you are in the world, there's always something moving. This isn't a static world that looks like a picture." Flocks of birds, herds of small beasts, and swaying plants pepper the screen everywhere you look. Equally impressive is the game's radiosity lighting and impressive water effects, which are oddly reminiscent of those seen in the demos of *Halo* (we aren't, however, going to wager which title will come out first).

■ **Combat is a combination of turn-based and real-time so it's exciting, yet allows for some tactics**

With almost a year to go and a sizeable chunk of the game already running, it looks like Stormfront is well on its way to success. With the technology, storyline, and core gameplay nearly in place, it's now just a matter of balance and tying everything together. Let's hope the team will be able to create a game that lives up to its initial promise and paves the road for other American teams to follow. — *Blake Fischer*

■ **Many of the creatures you meet in the game will only appear if the conditions are right. For example, the zombies pictured above will only rise from their graves at night**

■ The surveillance beams are back (upper left). Luckily, Snake still smokes

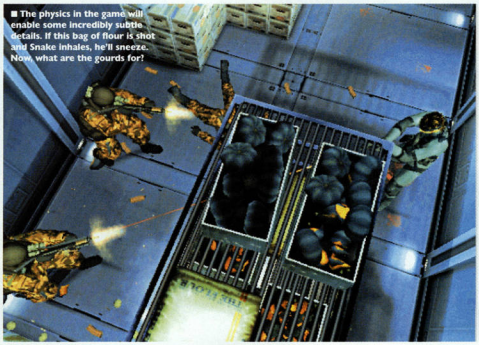
■ The graphics look simply amazing; nearly every scene shows off some new, almost subliminal, yet awesome effect, like the splashes of raindrops off Snake's shoulders or a canvas tarp billowing in the wind

■ PLAYSTATION 2

METAL GEAR SOLID 2

■ Publisher: **Konami** ■ Developer: **Konami** ■ Release Date: **Fall 2001**

"Our boy is right on schedule." Not only are these the first words spoken in the opening cinema, they also perfectly sum up the state of the game itself. We recently peeked at an actual running version, and any suspicion that the in-game graphics wouldn't look as good as the demo movies has been proven wrong. Dead wrong. Gameplay has also evolved — you can shoot from the first-person viewpoint and hide the bodies of tranquilized enemies to avoid detection.



■ The physics in the game will enable some incredibly subtle details. If this bag of flour is shot and Snake inhales, he'll sneeze. Now, what are the gourds for?

■ You begin the game with a tranquilizer gun, but you sometimes have to hide the bodies of guards you've put to sleep

■ Snake, as always, is a master of disguise

Milestones

■ While the game still looks undeniably spooky, main character Dante seems to have plenty of weaponry to help him calm his nerves

■ PLAYSTATION 2

DEVIL MAY CRY

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Capcom**
■ Release Date: **TBA 2001**

We've recently gotten a closer look at this gothic adventure from Shinji Mikami, the creative force behind the *Resident Evil* series. While the game was originally believed to be a spooky, *RE*-style survival horror title with occult references, it actually appears to be much heavier on the action, owing more to *From Dusk 'Til Dawn* than to *Dawn of the Dead*.

■ We're impressed with the camera in the demo movie. It swoops and spins about very quickly but never loses track of the action

■ PLAYSTATION 2

CHORO-Q HG

■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer: **Takara**
■ Release Date: **December 2000 (Japan)**

This super-deformed racing series has been lurking about on PSX and N64 for some time, though it has always been hindered by the driving model's peculiar physics. While only two human players can race at a time, the vehicles will mimic planes, boats, or submarines to accommodate and circumvent different terrain types. We hope this works, but balancing the various physics models won't be easy. Sure, the best case scenario would be great fun, but the worst case scenario pegs this as the next *Pen Pen TrilceLon*.

■ There are over 100 vehicles to choose from, each with multiple forms. This series hasn't been exemplary, but it could be worth trying

■ PLAYSTATION 2

ATV OFFROAD FURY

■ Publisher: **SCEA** ■ Developer: **Rainbow Studios** ■ Release Date: **Q1 2001**

■ **ATVs from Honda, Kawasaki, and Yamaha will be available and can be adjusted for friction, steering, braking, and shock reaction**

If this title looks similar to *Motocross Madness 2*, that's because it shares the same developer (in fact, Rainbow Studios is a first-party developer for both Sony and Microsoft — however that works). In fact, this looks suspiciously like the same game with different vehicles. Players will choose from "more than 12" models of ATV, customize them, and race over 20 different free-roaming "tracks."

■ **As in *MM2*, part of the fun will be performing stunts**

■ ARCADE/DREAMCAST

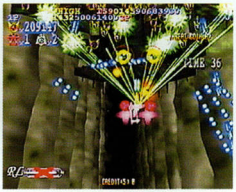
GIGAWING 2

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Takumi** ■ Release Date: **Q1 2001 (Japan)**

Capcom's original *Giga Wing* was an adequate, if uninspired, shooter that clung tightly to the standard shooter formula. The sequel looks to spice things up with a much more vibrant color palette and a renewed focus on cooperative, two-person play, while retaining the bits that made the first game unique — particularly the reflective blast that deflects enemy fire back to its source. A Dreamcast port is already on the way in Japan, so a U.S. release is likely.

■ **We don't expect the solo game to change much, but the visuals look much more interesting than the rather bland original**

■ **Like any old-school shooter worth its salt, *GigaWing 2* is all about firepower. Dense washes of projectiles frequently cover vast portions of the screen**



■ ARCADE

VIRTUA STRIKER 3

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Sega** (Amusement Vision) ■ Release Date: **Spring 2001** (Japan)

Sega's arcade soccer series moves on, this time utilizing the Naomi 2 arcade board. The powerful new board is capable of pushing four times the polygons as the first Naomi, though the graphics work of *Virtua Striker 3* (just now underway) will be focused on creating better textures and smoother animations. Japan's increased awareness of the rules of true soccer has also led to more realistic gameplay, which now incorporates red and yellow cards and off-sides calls.

■ **The rules of the game are now more realistic, as well as the graphics and animation**

■ DREAMCAST

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Secret Level** ■ Release Date: **Late Q1 2001**

■ **In addition to standard Deathmatch and Capture the Flag play, the PC version's Domination mode returns, with support for up to eight players**

With *Quake III: Arena* arriving on Dreamcast, could *UT* have been far behind? The DC version will offer mouse and keyboard support, two- to four-player splitscreen play, and camera and control tweaks (including auto-aim). There are 20 new maps, and more can be downloaded via the Internet. More importantly, the final build should support eight online players at once, twice as many as in the DC version of *Q3A*.

Milestones

■ **You know, the crummy part about an alien invasion isn't really the violence and oppression; it's the way the land and buildings are always transformed into a vast biomechanical wasteland**

■ DREAMCAST

ALIEN FRONT ONLINE

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Wow (Sega)** ■ Release Date: **TBA 2001**

Sega's *War of the Worlds*-meets-*Tokyo Wars* experiment should touch down some time this year, although an exact date is still classified. The game itself is team-based tank warfare between the Triclops (your basic slimy, biomechanical alien conquerors) and the remaining human defense forces. The intriguing part is that whichever side you choose to fight for (and yes, anti-Earthites can choose the aliens), you may find yourself at once playing with both Dreamcast players and players of Sega's full-sized arcade machines.

■ **Up to four players per side can battle it out from home or arcade, and each side has three different unit types to choose from**

■ DREAMCAST

GUILTY GEAR X

■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer: **Sammy**
■ Release Date: **Dec. 14, 2000 (Japan)**

Add one more to Dreamcast's already dizzying array of 2D fighters. Believe it or not, this series has become more popular in Japan than brawlers from Capcom or the late SNK. Far and away the most popular game at TGS, we thought the animation wasn't quite as smooth as it could have been, but the appeal of the gameplay is undeniable.

■ **We're skeptical of the character animations, but the lighting effects are undeniably show-stopping**

■ **As in *Fighting Vipers 2* (see last month's Milestones), the characters in *Guilty Gear X* often fight with unusual weapons: a pool cue, prehensile hair, a giant ectoplasmic claw...**

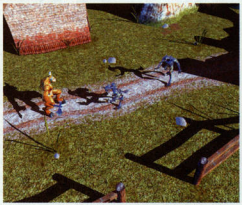
■ PC

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **BioWare** ■ Release Date: **Q3 2001**

■ **The game will ship with a full set of software tools, so aspiring DMs will be limited only by their imaginations**

Part *Baldur's Gate II*, part *Everquest*, but more exciting than either, BioWare's latest project is a 3D, isometric, online RPG that will support up to 64 players per server. Taking *Vampire: The Masquerade's* Storyteller mode one step further, the game plans to break new ground (or rather, return to old ground) by enabling players to play as Dungeon Masters, finally reincorporating the long-absent human facilitator into the *D&D* experience.



■ **As you can see, the Aurora engine is fully 3D, with dynamic lighting and intricate character animations**

■ DREAMCAST

HEADHUNTER

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Amuze** ■ Release Date: **TBA 2001**

Few details are available about this adventure title, save that it adds motorcycle driving segments to what looks like standard third-person action gameplay. The environments look quite beautiful, but the game we saw was rather stiffly animated. Still, with no release date yet announced, there's plenty of time for Amuze to shine it up.

■ **The plot is still under wraps, but with a name like *Headhunter*, you'll probably play a gun-toting badass**

■ **Besides third-person action, there are cycling segments in the game — note the sweet ride below**

■ PLAYSTATION 2

TEST DRIVE OFF-ROAD — WIDE OPEN

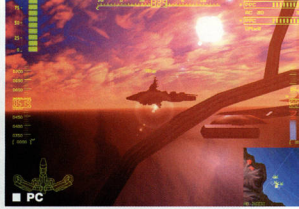
■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Angel Studios** ■ Release Date: **Q2 2001**

Angel Studios is back, with a game that might as well be called *Smuggler's Run 2*. Cosmetically, the games look nearly identical, but this title will focus on racing, not smuggling. There will be 30 courses set in locations like Moab, Utah and the big island of Hawaii, and despite the roughly hewn tracks, the game will naturally retain Angel's trademark free-roaming gameplay.

■ **It's not exactly like *Smuggler's Run*, but it's very, very similar**

■ **It has the same developer as *Smuggler's Run*, so hopefully it will play as well**

■ We can't speculate on the actual gameplay (simply because we haven't played it yet) but the game certainly looks attractive



■ PC

ECHELON

■ Publisher: **Bethesda Softworks** ■ Developer: **Madia/Buka**
■ Release Date: **Late Q1 2001**

From Russia (St. Petersburg, to be exact) comes this near-future combat flight sim that boasts three different flight models: fixed-wing craft, helicopters, and hovercraft. Predictably, there will also be a wide variety of vehicles for the player to pilot, including reconnaissance scouts, heavy bombers, and sleek interceptors. The player will maneuver through 54 missions, divided over two branching campaigns.

■ The game will support up to 16 online players in several play modes, including Team and Deathmatch

■ PLAYSTATION 2

STAR WARS: SUPER BOMBAD RACING

■ Publisher: **Lucas Learning** ■ Developer: **Lucas Learning** ■ Release Date: **Late Q1 2001**

■ A big-headed Darth Maul. It hurts to see the *Star Wars* universe treated with such disrespect. Then again, *Episode One* pretty much ruined it for us already

If you *must* have a licensed kart racer for PS2, this may be the way to go. Gameplay has shaped up considerably since this title was shown at E3, and it has been kept be on the simple side, even for a kart racer (notice this one's coming from Lucas Learning, not LucasArts). It does, at least, offer PS2-level graphics, a decent setting, and reasonably cool characters (albeit with gigantic heads). Jar Jar is back as well (ugh) but you don't have to choose him.

■ Jar Jar's vehicle evidently spews bubbles from its exhaust pipe (above). Bubbles. In a *Star Wars* game. Kill us now

■ If you have a multitap, you'll be able to race with four players simultaneously

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GAMES GROW UP

But is the rest of the world ready?

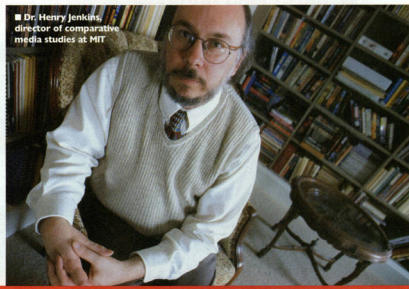
The audience for games is growing up. But when are the games themselves going to do the same? Does the industry itself fully understand the impact it has the potential to make? And when will it stand up to Congress and the rest of the non-believers and demand to be recognized?

We've been watching the game industry for years, and the overwhelming evidence can't be denied — videogames are coming of age economically, technologically, and culturally.

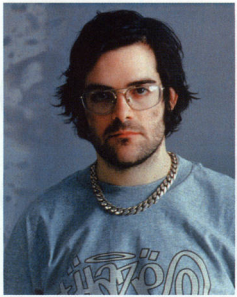
These factors have created an audience that is both hungry for and capable of appreciating more sophisticated and mature content in its games. The problem is that even the game industry's more overt sex symbols such as Duke Nukem and Lara Croft have little or no life outside of running, jumping, and shooting. Isn't it time (as we've tried to imply by our cover, among other things) that we acknowledge that such characters can and should be allowed to run the full range of human experiences? To stop pretending, in short, that they sleep in their polygonal clothes?

According to Dr. Henry Jenkins, director of comparative media studies at MIT, the videogame industry will soon be forced to determine how best to separate out games aimed at younger players from those aimed at adults. "This is a challenge that every medium has faced at one point or another," says the expert on popular culture, "and I think games are rapidly reaching that point."

But don't we already have a rating system, and isn't it working? That depends on whom you ask. It took the Senate hearings of 1993 to get the industry to organize itself under the Interactive Digital Software Association and ultimately establish the Entertainment Software Ratings Board in 1994. Now, over six years later, the government still isn't pleased with the game industry. In the wake of the Columbine



■ Dr. Henry Jenkins, director of comparative media studies at MIT



■ **Rockstar Games President Sam Houser has a personal interest in growing games beyond kids**

shootings and national concern about violence marketed to kids, the Federal Trade Commission conducted a study on violent entertainment marketed to children. The report, released last September, states that of the 118 electronic games with a Mature (M) rating for violence that were selected for the FTC study, 83 of them, a full 70%, were marketed at children under the age of 17 — in fact, the marketing plans for 60 titles expressly included children under 17 in their target audience. The FTC's surveys also showed that unaccompanied children ages 13 to 16 were able to buy M-rated games in 85% of the 380 stores visited.

Certainly this is a cause for concern. Yet the IDSA reports that 97% of people who purchase computer games and 87% of those who purchase console games are indeed 18 years or older — and of those under 18 who purchase games, 84% get their parents' permission.

SOME CREDIT TO CONTINUE

Any head of videogame development will tell you something pretty similar to what we heard from Rockstar Games President Sam Houser: In the next few years, technology will enable a wider diversity of interactive content for consoles. "This will result in some games that strive to be horrifically violent or pornographic," Houser says, "as people will always try to make money out of willful bad taste."

Still, it's doubtful (on the console end, at least) that hardware manufacturers would approve of much violence and pornography. All PlayStation 2, Xbox, Dreamcast, and Gamecube licensees must submit their products to each system's manufacturer for approval. It's a rigid procedure in which the hardware manufacturers can have a product killed at any time, without reason.

There are, however, a few loopholes. "Adult video" company Vivid Entertainment has already announced plans to expand its business to DVD-based game devices and to develop interactive

■ **In *Grand Theft Auto*, players could commit crimes from carjacking to shooting any passerby**

The IDSA reports that 97% of people who purchase computer games and 87% of those who purchase console games are 18 years or older.

■ ***Resident Evil Code: Veronica* raised the horror bar**

■ **Interplay enters the survival horror realm this year with *Run Like Hell*. According to Producer Travis Williams, it will also be as fast and scary as hell**

DVDs that work through the PS2's DVD movie-playback system. And because these products will work in any DVD player and won't tap the power of the PS2's proprietary chipset, Vivid's questionably "interactive" products do not require Sony's approval — reason enough why Vivid's Eric Regan wasn't too shy to tell a European videogame trade magazine last August that "the type of consumers who will initially buy PS2 are young males of ages between 18 and 35. That exactly fits our target market."

Porn vendors aside, we believe traditional videogame publishers think more like Houser. "Games should create an immersive environment that players can lose themselves in," he says. "Some environments, the criminal underworld being an obvious one, necessitate a certain amount of profanity, violence, and humor to create any illusion of immersiveness."

Houser talks the talk, and Rockstar has walked the walk. Maintaining the artistic integrity of *Grand Theft Auto* actually cost the company some sales when it shipped its M-rated PlayStation version. According to Houser, this PlayStation version never received full distribution in a number of countries, including the U.S.

"The game was about criminals," Houser explains. "Criminals can and sometimes do

MAKING THE MONEY

Despite the slow business climate — Sony's lack of PS2 hardware made this holiday season more difficult for the major players — researchers are predicting a boom in gaming in the next five years. According to Forrester research, in the United States alone the games market will grow from $8 billion in 2000 to a whopping $29 billion in 2005.

swear. The swearing or profanity in the game was much less than in many films or any episode of *The Sopranos*, but there remains this ludicrous perception that games are purely for kids, and these same kids never watch TV or movies — that somehow we need to be judged by different rules."

With *Grand Theft Auto 2*, the PlayStation version was the lead platform, and Rockstar wanted full distribution for this sequel — the company felt the game deserved it. So for *GTA2* Rockstar dropped the gratuitous swear words, and the game received a Teen (T) rating on PlayStation.

"We submitted it expecting an M," Houser says, "and the ESRB told us the climate had changed since the original was released and they couldn't justify giving it a Mature rating. We don't feel that we had to make compromises in the content of the game — nor would we ever do that. We just designed it more intelligently for the U.S. PlayStation market. The PC version was aimed at a slightly older audience, and the developer, DMA Design, allowed a little more of their dark humor to come through, so it received the [Mature] rating from the ESRB."

While most developers usually start with an audience in mind for their game, some games receive ratings their developers didn't expect. "I was surprised with the M-rating verdict," says *Giants* designer Nick Bruty. "We designed *Giants* to be thoroughly entertaining for gamers like us and, while we push some boundaries, the game is always comic in tone — never malicious in content. It's hard for me to judge which age is appropriate for *Giants*. That's somebody else's field, but I do feel it doesn't belong in the Mature category."

In *Hitman*, players not only mercilessly execute criminals but may have to kill innocent witnesses as well

THE BLAME GAME

As the videogame market expands its audience, it will likely continue to draw criticism from technophobes and critics. The proof, unfortunately, is in the Columbine tragedy.

"I don't think there's any question that videogames became a media scapegoat in the post-Columbine era," Henry Jenkins says. "I think that there was an enormous anxiety within the culture about digital media in general. Computers were not a central part of the lives of the current generation of parents when they were growing up, but they are a central part of the lives of their children."

According to Jenkins, this "digital gap" produces enormous anxiety, because parents often don't know what's going on when their kids are connected to digital media. Jenkins specifically remembers the week after the Columbine shooting when *The Washington Post* asked the general public what they thought was a significant cause of the shooting. The top answer was the Internet (82%), while the availability of guns was cited by less than 60% of respondents, suggesting that more Americans were afraid of their children's access to digital technology than about their access to, say, semi-automatic rifles. It shouldn't take a professor from MIT to see that something was fundamentally out of sorts with the way the American public responded, but Jenkins does get us to the root of the problem.

"The culture warriors," says Jenkins, "the David Grossmans, the Joseph Liebermans ... were the most successful in mobilizing public opinion — sort of exploiting people's fear in the wake of Columbine. And the result is they were far more effective than, say, gun control advocates in getting public policy discussions started in the wake of that."

While the videogame industry suffered a rather embarrassing public slap from the mass media, videogames were not, in Jenkins' opinion, the real victim of Columbine backlash. "Real fear at the local level affected American teenagers," he says. "Parents became suspicious of their kids because of their engagement with computer games or [the Internet]. Teachers and principals put kids into therapy or punished them for their cultural taste. The videogame industry got some public humiliation, but high-school kids got put into therapy, suspended, and grounded. Long-term, they're the ones who really paid the price."

> **"High-school kids got put into therapy, suspended, and grounded. Long-term, they're the ones who really paid the price."**
> **— MIT's Henry Jenkins on the post-Columbine backlash against computer technology**

Still, some gamers rose to the occasion and defended their interest in games. One case in particular was cited in a *Rolling Stone* article published last November. A teenager from New Jersey, Joe Stavitsky, responded to an essay in *Harper's* magazine that attacked videogames. "I can tell you none of us play videogames to learn how (or why) to shoot people," Stavitsky writes. "For us, videogames do not cause violence; they prevent it. We see games as a perfectly safe release from a physically violent reaction to the daily abuse leveled at us."

The *Rolling Stone* article, for the record, does a wonderful job poking holes in the research the government is using to link actual violence to violent media.

GAMES FOR GAMES' SAKE

The majority of individuals involved in game development are understandably vexed with the public's notion that games are strictly child's play.

"There seems to be this perception that electronic entertainment is only for kids," says Travis Williams, a producer at Interplay. "People couldn't be more wrong." Williams isn't interested in creating games for the younger set, and he isn't alone. "As we game makers get older," he says, "so do our tastes. We are merely speaking to others who are as old as we are."

Formerly a producer for the now-defunct ASC games, Williams was responsible for the extremely creepy, literary, and unfortunately overlooked PC adventure, *Sanitarium*. Now, he and developer Digital Mayhem are hard at work on *Run Like Hell*, a survival horror game published by Interplay for PlayStation 2. While he admits that all games aren't necessarily

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

According to Forrester research, online gaming made its way into 13.5 million households by this year and by 2005 may reach as many as 50 million.

made with specific ratings in mind, "there was a point," Williams says about *Run Like Hell*, "where we threw our hands up and said you just can't have an effective survival horror game if you choose 'the lighter side of terror.' I wouldn't want to buy that game. So I sure as hell wouldn't want to make it."

Considering the success of the *Resident Evil* series and its appeal among the older set, Williams is probably right in his assertion that if he targets a younger audience or brings anything "less scary" to the table, his game isn't going to sell. "*Run Like Hell* is being designed for all the people who are tired of zombies," he says. "The monsters are faster and deadlier, and if we have done our jobs correctly, it should be extremely scary. I wouldn't recommend it to a younger gamer."

Of course, one look at a screenshot makes it clear that *Run Like Hell* isn't meant for kiddies. However, given the way the general public often equates videogames with children's toys, there are games that send mixed messages. Case in point: *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. The game's characters visually project the same family-friendly design found in a Disney or *Mario* game. Yet the game features strong sexual innuendo, profanity, and extreme violence. Conker, the star squirrel, even drinks beer and urinates on its enemies.

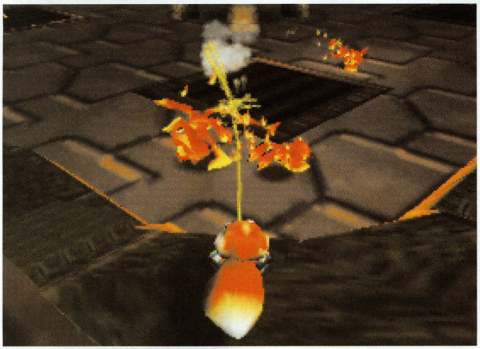
Obviously, the juxtaposition is the joke — similar to a *Muppets* skit that aired on *The Jim Henson Hour* in 1989. In the sketch, Muppet bunnies, spoofing a *Rambo* movie trailer, pulled out M-60s and headbands and began blasting away at hunters and wolves. (The tagline? "Cute has learned to kill!") However, at a time when many culture watchdogs already see games as something of a Trojan Horse, such a product may be ill-advised.

"We have to recognize that much of the Senate and other moral reformers are humor-deprived," Henry Jenkins responds. "They don't recognize hyperbole; they don't recognize irony; they don't recognize black comedy when they see it. And I think that's part of the problem: There is enormous literalization that takes place when you get into one of those Congressional hearing rooms. Having said that, there probably is a danger at the present moment of choosing to develop content that blurs the line between the childlike in appearance and the adult in content."

Still, *Conker* is due out early next year, and Nintendo is firmly behind it, which brings us back to our current dilemma. Can the game industry better ensure that parents know what they're buying, and can it influence just how effective the ESRB ratings are? While many in the industry, like Nick Bruty, feel "the Teen and Mature ratings are too broad," most also understand the politics involved and — publicly anyway — work to support the ESRB.

More importantly, though, practically everyone agrees that once a title receives its rating, that's where the game makers' responsibility should end. "I have no idea how many consumers use the rating system as part of their criteria for buying a game," says Williams. "I know some parents buy games and have no idea what's depicted inside. I don't think that's the industry's fault — we have a rating system. I think that's mom or dad's fault."

"We have to recognize that much of the Senate and other moral reformers are humor-deprived. They don't recognize hyperbole, irony, and black comedy."
— MIT's Henry Jenkins



■ **Pee on flaming enemies in *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. It's not exactly a kids game, nor is it very "grown-up"**

■ **Early demos suggest *Silent Hill 2*'s abstract horror will scare you senseless**

EDUCATING THE MASSES

Since its inception, the ESRB has rated more than 7,000 games, but the group hasn't been particularly successful building awareness for its ratings. The FTC's May-June 2000 survey of parents and children reports 61% of parents were aware of a videogames rating system, but only 37% had more than slight familiarity with what the ratings meant.

The ESRB intends to change this with an awareness campaign that it launched over the 2000 holiday season, when as much as 50% of

"Understand that the ratings are a guide, not a law. If we deny somebody the right to purchase a game, there may be some legal ramifications."

— Jeffrey Griffiths, senior vice president, Electronics Boutique

the year's videogames are sold. The campaign includes magazine advertisements and televised public service announcements starring Tiger Woods. Retail chains have also committed to the awareness campaign. Toys "R" Us, Kmart, Target, and Wal-Mart have instituted a register prompt for M-rated games to help ensure they are not sold to children under 17. Many more national chains will begin displaying ESRB educational materials such as brochures, posters, and shelf cards in stores nationwide. "We go through a very extensive educational process with our employees," explains Jeffrey Griffiths, senior vice president of Electronics Boutique, "with classes and weekly information packages about game ratings and how to educate parents about the rating system. But it's important to understand that the ratings are a guide, not a law. If we deny somebody the right to purchase a game, there may be some legal ramifications. It's not like [minors] purchasing firearms or tobacco, where there's a law in place. We have to be careful not to impose on somebody's right to buy a game."

Although it's doubtful that EB's refusal to sell an adult-oriented game to a minor could result in legal repercussions, stranger cases have been won. The flexible policy probably stems from potentially ill effects to the company image: If consumers got wind of a store being "unfriendly to kids," it could be a business disaster for a retailer. Still, Griffiths explains that EB salespeople go out of their way to make sure a game ends up in appropriate hands. If a child wants to purchase an M-rated game, the salesperson will point out the rating to the child, and check if there's a parent with the child to educate the parent about the adult content. After these options are exhausted and a minor still wants to buy an M-rated game, the corporate line is "use your best judgment."

"Nobody's perfect, but I'm comfortable with our employees' level of awareness about the ratings," says Griffiths. "It's much higher than the salespeople at mass-merchant stores, which don't have the familiarity with videogames that our employees do."

At the end of the day, Griffiths thinks retailers can only be responsible for educating their employees so they can help consumers make informed decisions. Ultimately, his opinion comes back to the one expressed by Travis Williams: It's the parents' responsibility to decide what is appropriate.

DO WE NEED RATINGS?

In 1993, many gamers argued that the Senate made too much noise over the cartoonish, over-the-top violence of *Mortal Kombat*. But it's harder to make that same argument today, given the advances in technology that enable game designers to push the limits of realistic violence. *Soldier of Fortune* specifically comes to mind as a game that captures the gritty, realistic essence of modern combat, doing it so well that even the most battle-hardened gamers can't help but squirm at the gore.

Doesn't the industry need ratings to alert unsuspecting consumers to this kind of content? Do the current ratings need to be better enforced? "Those are separate questions," Henry Jenkins says. "It seems to me that ratings serve two potential functions. One is to educate parents and consumers about the content of material they are thinking about buying. The other is to regulate who has access to that content."

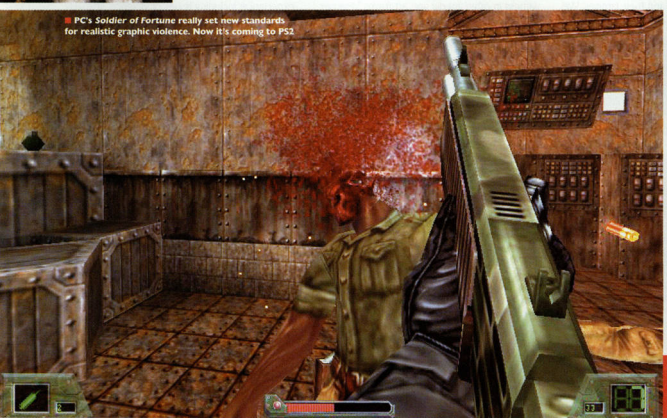
Jenkins believes the game industry's ratings are more detailed than film ratings, but the rating systems could be made more informative for parents looking to make meaningful purchasing decisions. To illustrate his point, he alludes back to film.

"As a parent," Jenkins says, "I could care less whether my son sees nudity on the screen. I am comfortable with the human body, and my moral standards with nudity are not a big issue. On the other hand, racism and sexism disturb me a great deal. However, the current movie ratings code would give an R or NC-17 rating to male frontal nudity, and a Disney film with a G rating can a have racially offensive stereotype embedded in it."

In Jenkins' worldview, a "one size fits all" rating system isn't adequate given the range of questions parents want addressed. And as someone who believes in civil liberties, he's very worried about the enforcement side of that. "What we may not need as a society," he says, "is a uniform set of moral standards that are enforced on all consumers. If we enforce the [current movie] rating systems, we've decided as

DUKE AND LARA — TOGETHER AT LAST?

We'd like to think that this action duo would complement each other perfectly, tangled up in the same adventure like a modern-day version of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. Until recently, it wasn't out of the realm of possibility. Eidos, publisher of *Tomb Raider* and protectorate of Lara Croft, was potentially going to be acquired by Infogrames, the publisher controlling the rights to *Duke Nukem*. Unfortunately, this union wasn't meant to be. Infogrames and Eidos could never come to terms on an acquisition price, and in early December, Infogrames sold its publishing rights to *Duke Nukem Forever* to Gathering of Developers. Well... we can dream can't we? And who knows? As the game industry continues to evolve, anything (we're talking *SNK vs. Capcom*) can happen.



PC's *Soldier of Fortune* really set new standards for realistic graphic violence. Now it's coming to PS2

An M rating doesn't mean a good game. M-rated *Blade* for PSOne (above, below) is mediocre at best

MIT's Jenkins warns that *Sim City* may teach you about urban design

a society that nudity is a problem for all children, and racism is not something worth putting the enforcement mechanism behind."

In Jenkins' view, the other downside to all current ratings systems is that the ratings are purely negative. They tell us whether or not certain potentially objectionable qualities are present in a product, but there are no positive elements cited. A product that might be educational gets no benefit that listing such content might add. "Conversely," says Jenkins, "games that receive an E rating for children can be banal, formulaic, stupid — and there's no penalty attached to that. They're all equally 'good' for kids."

If the ESRB created a rating system that included both positive and negative qualities, parents might find products that are more beneficial for themselves and their families. We can already see the package for *Sid Meier's Gettysburg*: "Caution: This product features strong historical content." Or as Jenkins jokes, "Warning! *Sim City* might teach your kid something about urban design."

But the real irony that Jenkins likes to point out comes at the expense of our civic leaders who would push to enact ratings legislature. "Many of the people in Congress who would advocate a universal rating system," Jenkins says, "don't even believe we can come up with a national set of standards on math performance in the schools because that's such a local matter; it has to be left to local and state government. If we can't come up with nationally standard notions of what good math performance is, how can we realistically come up with national standards of what good culture is?"

POTENTIAL ENERGY

As developers and publishers struggle with the new technology, concoct plans to go online, and decide which platforms are the right ones, it's not difficult to understand why the videogame industry as a community hasn't traditionally focused on widening its audience. But going forward, the rule will likely be this: Failure to grow the experience for core players could result in the quick end to your company. Perhaps that's why Electronic Arts has actually hired Henry Jenkins to give a workshop to the company's top creative people, specifically to work out issues of story- and character-building as they will apply to next-generation games.

The key is to grow the market by giving core players what they want without alienating them. Sam Houser says Rockstar tapped a huge audience of game players over the age of 18 with *Grand Theft Auto*. "They want to play games in the environments and settings they witness in other media and art forms," Houser explains, "rather than the more traditional gaming environments — the cutesy Japanese bad acid trip or the Tolkien-inspired, dragon-infested land. However, all of the cool styling and adult content in the world cannot compensate for duff gameplay. People always sniff out a dud, no matter how cool its soundtrack or how controversial its subject matter."

This past holiday season, games came alive on the cover of everything from *TV Guide* to business/technology magazine *Red Herring*. The promise of new and powerful technology and the potential for online connectivity are finally capturing the attention of the world media — with a positive spin.

"I think we are at a moment when the games industry really needs to take assessment of what its medium is," says Jenkins, "and what its medium could become. You know, the technological breakthroughs that are going on right now open up an enormous space for new creativity and innovation."

Like film, books, and music, videogames have the potential to reflect the full range of human experience, including issues of violence, sexuality, and the emotional and ethical dimensions these issues evoke. At the moment games are still in a relatively primitive state of storytelling, and we fully expect that for a number of years to come they won't be particularly sophisticated in dealing with such subject matter. But to be fair, many films and most television shows these days also deal with such mature subject matter in a pretty adolescent fashion too.

Jenkins is optimistic, however. "I think there is an enormous amount of intelligence and creativity in the games community that is waiting for the opportunity to push deeper into this medium," he says. "I think if the industry is willing to take leadership on that, there's real potential that can be achieved in games in the coming decade."

We're hoping, Dr. Jenkins, that it doesn't take that long.

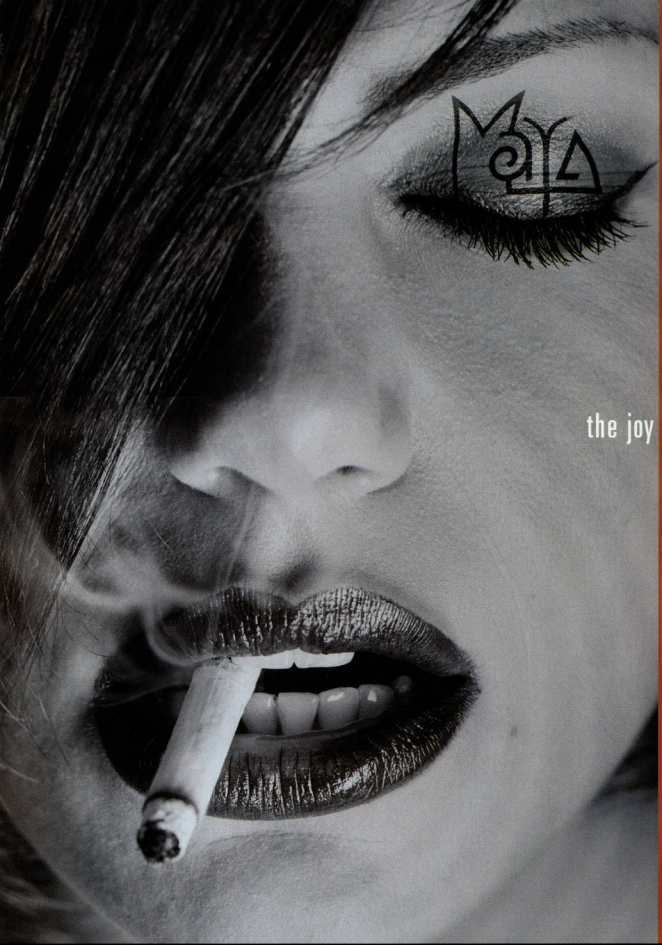
— Tom Russo

(with contributions from Kevin Toyama)

DUKE NUKEM HEADS TO PS2!

While we've known *Duke* was heading to PS2 for some time, our spy at Rockstar Games has revealed a bit more information. In development at N-Space, the game (we're thinking it's third-person again) is set apparently in some kind of alternate-universe version of World War II. The environments are WWII, but the traditional weaponry has been mixed to include some bizarre futuristic weapons. Not everything dressed in a Nazi uniform is a German soldier either — some will be giant lizards. Aside from the fact that the game supports analog control, our spy couldn't tell us when the game would be ready or get us any screens. But "they" managed to deliver this logo featuring several characters from the next game.

PlayStation 2 is enabling developers to create some truly gruesome effects. The fighting in *Onimusha* is very well animated, and very bloody



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that we should go through life
with our eyes wide open.
those people will never see what i see
they will never experience
the joy of sitting in the dark.
a darkness that gives birth to ideas,
when imagination
mingles with inspiration.
it is then that you realize
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Meet Ed Fries, the man in charge of all Microsoft published games and Xbox first-party titles. From his formative years programming Atari 800 games to his 14-year career with Seattle's software powerhouse, Fries has been on the front lines of products such as Microsoft Word and Excel (though not without rewards — a vice president with the company, he's the antithesis of poor). After whipping the company's lagging PC game catalogue into stellar shape these last couple years, Fries' next quest is ultimately his most challenging to date. Will his Xbox first-party games lead Microsoft into the promised land, or will they become the by-products of a washed-up console?

ED'S ODYSSEY

Microsoft's Ed Fries is on a journey fraught with peril. Can he successfully take Xbox games into the next generation against Sega, Sony, and Nintendo?

When we first talked to Ed Fries (pronounced "freeze") last year (Xbox cover story, **NG 08/00**), we discovered that he had put first-party Xbox games into development well before the system was even given the green light. It was the only way, he told us, that he could ensure that quality first-party games would be ready at launch. But it's not hard to understand why Fries isn't afraid to take risks — his logic is bright, engaging, and persuasive.

We spoke with Fries again recently and asked him to comment on Microsoft's strategy behind first-party software for Xbox. In a world where Sony's mantra revolves around its "emotion" engine, where Nintendo seems comfortable to rake in millions selling to a predominantly young audience, and where Sega plunders the online space, we sought an understanding of where Xbox fits in.

Next Generation: Ed, right from the start there's been a not-so-subtle aura surrounding Xbox that suggests adult and mature themes. What sort of adult-themed games are bound for the platform?
Ed Fries: Senator [Joseph] Lieberman notwithstanding, I've got to be careful about what I say, but let's look at the movie business. Let's look at what people 18 and older want to see in entertainment and take something like a *Pulp Fiction*, an R-rated movie. Is that content that should be off-limits to interactive entertainment, but OK for linear entertainment? I don't think so.

NG: Are you saying you're ready to see *Pulp Fiction* on Xbox?
EF: I don't want to do an interactive movie. I want to be really clear about that. But, yes, the themes, the characters, the [*Pulp Fiction*] approach — I think our industry is headed that way. And I think that's a good thing. I think that we need to become more mature in our themes to reach a broader audience and to be more relevant in people's lives.

"Improvements in graphics are almost a crutch for the industry ... for thinking creatively about game design and how to take games forward."

NG: Are we talking full-throttle splatter?
EF: We're finding it's all about how [content is] treated. Take the shower scene in *Psycho*. So would we stab a naked girl in the shower? Well...

NG: Well...?
EF: It's easy to say no. But, you know, if it was done right, it could be so powerful. What matters is, what's the response that you got from seeing that, and why? Did it get across the feeling that the [director] wanted to create, of terror?

NG: Not to put words in your mouth, but would I be right to think that the feelings that you are talking about are the ones we all get from movies?
EF: Let me say no to that, because that would be making the mistake of falling back into thinking that games can only be what movies and stories can be, and I think they can be more than that. For example, as soon as you make the game about playing with other people, whole new doors open up, and whole new possibilities. It's fun to get together with friends and play together and go off on an adventure together, right? Maybe that's a calmer-edged emotion or something. But I wouldn't get that from the movie, at least not *during* the movie. That's one of the reasons I say interactive entertainment is fundamentally more powerful. And so it would be a mistake to limit ourselves to those things from movies.

NG: Still, we seem to be hung up on comparing ourselves to movies — and other forms of expression.
EF: It would also be a mistake to ignore thousands of years of literature and thousands of years of learning about how to make a story and how to take someone on a journey and how to bring them through a climax and out the other side. And how to make them have an emotional response in doing that.

People can get very cynical about it, but the fact is that all entertainment is about trying to reach some kind of emotional response between the creator and the audience, to take them and manipulate their emotions. And in games we sort of only have one direction we push most of the time at only one volume, which is really loud. We need to get subtler about that. We need to get smarter about that.

NG: And what are you doing to ensure that games will be better on Xbox?
EF: That's the big challenge. Improvements in the power of the machine and improvements in graphics are almost a crutch for the industry. It's almost a crutch for thinking creatively about game design and how to take games forward. When you have a next generation of graphics and things just look so much spectacularly better, maybe it didn't matter so much that you were playing basically the same game you played five years ago. But I think we're getting close to the end of that in some ways. It's the death of that false innovation.

NG: What's next?
EF: It's important that we got the technology to

■ **Microsoft Vice President of Games Publishing Ed Fries with Abe, star of the upcoming *Munch's Oddysee*. Fries' group recently acquired the game starring Abe and friends exclusively for Xbox**

Photos by **Karen Moskowitz**

this point where we can start to really compete against movies and TV and real music. But now we have to look broader than we've looked in the past. We have to look out at the whole audience and ask ourselves: What's it going to take to really reach them?

NG: Any solutions...?
EF: We need to catch people the way a movie catches people. We need to suck them in right away, and we need to hold their attention. Some games do that now, but not enough. There are too many obstacles in the way of the players.

NG: Will more accessible Xbox games come at the expense of what the hardcore gamer expects?
EF: I don't think that at all. I have to be careful because when I talk about reaching out to more people, sometimes people think that means leaving the hardcore gamers behind. And I actually think that's the mistake that's been made time and time again.

"I have probably a dozen titles that could come out at launch right now. And of those, maybe four or five will make it."

NG: How do you make the experience meaningful — and appealing — to both camps?
EF: By not forgetting the fundamental thing that makes games great. By not forgetting that they're interactive at their core, that *you're* the star, that *you're* the one making choices, that *you're* in control. That has to be the core of every game. And that's what gamers respond to. But I think we can do things to games that will make them not only accessible to a broader audience but make them better for the hardcore gamers. If we had deeper, richer stories, but we presented them in a way that didn't interfere with the interactive aspect of the game, I don't think a hardcore gamer would say, 'Oh, now it's got a story. I didn't want a story.' *Half-Life* is a great example of that.

NG: How close is the industry to accomplishing that?
EF: People love to say we're like the movie business in the '20s or something. We're still learning how to use the camera. We're still learning all these things, right? So some of that is going to take time, and some of it's going to be the industry being led forward by great designers. Last year at Gamestock I talked about story, but not a story in a linear sense, story in the sense that your game takes place in a larger world. One of the great things about Oddworld is that Lorne Lanning sat down and said this is a quintology. The story's going to happen over 20 years' worth of work, realtime, and have these five main story high points. And he's only passed the first one right now. That's thinking bigger.

NG: You had some pretty harsh words for *Combat Flight Sim* at Gamestock.
EF: I talked about *Combat Flight Simulator* and how the first one we put out was a great simulation of planes and, you know, what happened in the campaign, but we didn't capture what it felt like to be an 18-year-old pilot shipped off the other side of the world and be in that situation and be flying every day. Your job is to go shoot people down. OK, they're the enemy, but they're still people. You go out with your friends, and some of them don't come back. What did that feel like? How can we capture the power of that in our games? Would that make a better experience for the hardcore gamer? I think it would. Would it give us the power to reach out to a broader audience? I think so.

NG: You've talked about game budgets being close to movie budgets. What is your most expensive Xbox game in development?
EF: Certainly one of the most expensive titles that we'll bring out will be *Munch's Oddysee* from Oddworld. We have titles in the $10- to $20-million range, just in the raw development.

NG: Do you ever contemplate Xbox failing?
EF: Well, it is important when we launch that we focus on one audience. You know, we've said the 16- to 26-year-old hardcore gamer. The challenge is to not be trapped by that for the life of the platform but to be able to use that as a stepping stone to get more people excited about Xbox.

NG: Will Bill Gates let you develop for PlayStation 2 or Gamecube if Xbox flops?
EF: I'm sure that he would. There wasn't a restriction for us not to do it before Xbox came along.

NG: What grade does Sony get for its launch?
EF: What grade do they get? Well, Sony has a lot of fans. They lined up all night long to get it, and that shows how passionate their gamers are. [But] obviously, they disappointed a lot of people by not having enough hardware available. And I think they disappointed some people that the software wasn't good enough. So, OK, you want me to answer your question. What grade? I'll give them a — I'm a nice grader — I'll give them a B minus. I don't want to set the bar too high when we have to do it next year. It's easy to be a critic now...

NG: With Xbox's broadband capability, I have to ask: Does Microsoft have aspirations to become an entertainment company?
EF: That's a big question. One of the great things about Xbox, unlike the other platforms, is it's broadband-capable right out of the box.... Take two Xboxes, right out of the box, and connect them with an Ethernet cable and you can network together. And then you can hook it up to your cable modem, hook it up to your DSL provider, etc. There is tons of work to do there, but that's all happening.

The bigger question, does Microsoft want to be an entertainment company? I think the answer to that is no. Do we want to have Microsoft movie studios? I don't think there's anyone here with that ambition. I certainly don't have it. Do we want to have a record company? I don't think so.

NG: Are PC gamers ever going to be able to play with Xbox gamers?
EF: We could do it. We could have them together playing on servers. I'm sure some people will try it. But we think of the markets as being really different. We think of authoring for a television and a game controller as being really different than authoring for a keyboard and a monitor.

NG: Has the games group been given any sort of directive to build a port for each of the PC titles that might work on Xbox?
EF: First of all, that would be my decision, and the answer is no. Definitely not. There are very, very few games that we're going to be porting back and forth.

NG: There are rumors about a Palm-sized gaming device that would work with the Xbox. Bluetooth capabilities, killer app potential...
EF: Would you want me to, like, officially deny it? Or is it — I can neither confirm nor...

NG: Did I ask the wrong, I mean right, question?
EF: We are super-focused on Xbox. My group's actually been approached many times in the past by different parts of Microsoft to do games for CE devices or for phones or for this or for that. And we almost always say no because we're really focused on winning in just a few spaces. That's important. And we've never faced a challenge as big as this.

NG: So, Ed, would you like to tell us what the launch titles will be...?
EF: No. Not gonna happen. I have probably a dozen titles that could come out at launch right now. And of those, maybe four or five will make it. Maybe six. And the rest will need more time to become great.

NG: We've heard reports of a Microsoft beachhead in Japan.
EF: We have our first group in Japan, run by one of Sony's top first-party guys who defected and joined our group. Toshiyuki Miyata has put together some great deals I'm going to really enjoy announcing in the next couple months.

NG: Does globalization mean that games have to have a sort of a vanilla quality?
EF: You make me want to talk about something controversial, so I will. Let's talk about *Pokemon*. Is it bad *Pokemon* came to the U.S.? I don't think so. In fact, I think there's some great things about *Pokemon* for this industry. When I was talking before about the potential of this industry to reach out to a broader audience, to become a mass-market phenomena, well, isn't that what happened there? That thing just exploded. It became something every kid in the country was talking about. It became a world that had all these different ports into it through all these different media. But it was all built up around interactive entertainment, around the set of games. That's what we need to be doing.

NG: Is any part of the previously announced $500-million promotion budget for Xbox allocated for first-party development?
EF: No. It's completely separate.

NG: Is there a move away from PC development at Microsoft?
EF: Right now a lot of our focus on generating new content is going into the Xbox side. So I'd say our PC business will grow a little slower than it would have if we hadn't gone into Xbox.

NG: Is Xbox a PlayStation 2 killer?
EF: The easy answer to the question is: Oh, it's going to be great for everyone — more games, more gamers, more money being invested in making games. And there's a lot of truth to that. But if every gamer has to go out and buy two consoles, I don't think that that's a great thing.

NG: We really believe this is a console war — do you?
EF: Yes, because ultimately someone will get the biggest part of the pie. In this case, wars are great. Think about World War II, OK? When World War II started, they were flying biplanes, planes very similar to the end of World War I. When it ended not many years later, they were flying jet fighter planes. That was like a hundred years' worth of innovation packed into five years. That's what happens in competition. And that's the real benefit for gamers. People are going to be pushed; game designers are going to be pushed; companies are going to be pushed to make advancements along the lines. And hopefully five years from now we're going to see some amazing things. The game equivalent of jet engines.

"Do you honestly think we will win in a space because we're Microsoft, rather than because we make the best games and we make the best game console? ... The only way we're going to win is making the very best."

NG: So is Microsoft innovative enough to be providing those jets?
EF: The big innovation question. Microsoft isn't innovative.... I can only speak from my own experience. In the markets I've been involved with and the products I've been involved with, there wasn't a reason Microsoft should just win. I've seen the many times Microsoft tried to get into things and failed. Take personal finance. It's still a huge fight for us. Let's talk about online services and MSN versus AOL. There's a huge battle going on there. The fact is the market doesn't care that it's from Microsoft.

NG: Tell *that* to the Department of Justice.
EF: Consumers, for the most part, don't buy it because it's from Microsoft. They buy what works for them, what solves their problems, and what makes their life better. Do you honestly think we will win in a space because we're Microsoft, rather than because we make the best games and we make the best game console? I don't think you can say yes to that. The only way we're going to win is making the very best. And so if we do, I guess, yeah, you know, we should get credit for that. In my experience it's the only way we have won. That's the only way to win. **Next**Gen

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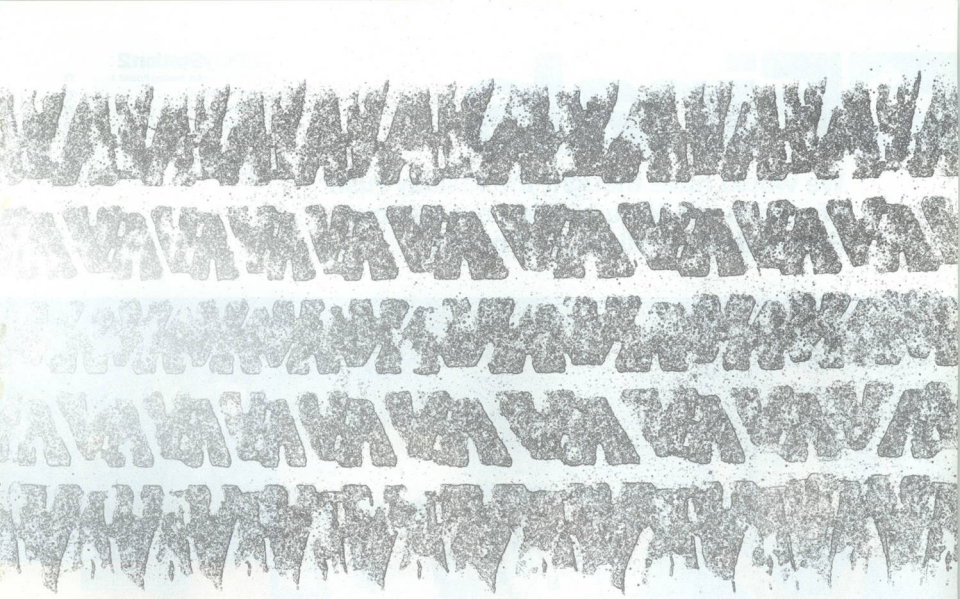

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PlayStation®2

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PICK A WORLD
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Finals

We would have thought the holiday rush of games would've trickled out by now. Fortunately for all of us, it hasn't

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■ *Skies* features a rather unique battle system for ship-to-ship combat, but it's still turn-based, so any RPG fan should grasp it easily

■ One small knock you can make here is that combat spells, while impressive, are also time-consuming and grow tedious after a while

■ DREAMCAST

Skies of Arcadia

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **OverWorks**

Take a gander at the best Dreamcast RPG yet

What an abundance of riches the Dreamcast RPG fan enjoys this month. See page 74 for our review of the top-notch *Grandia II*, but besting even that effort is *Skies of Arcadia*.

The mythical realm of Arcadia is unlike virtually anything seen before, a truly fantastical world where continents float in the air and people travel aboard airborne sailing ships, a place both familiar and strange. It's as visually poetic a setting as you're likely to find — in any medium, anywhere — and much of the rest of the game lives up to the graphic splendor.

Arcadia is currently working through a New Age, after the world was all but destroyed when the previous civilization fell into anarchy and war. Meet Vyse and Aika, friends since childhood and young members of the Blue Rogues, a band of "Air Pirates" who act like ship-bound Robin Hoods, stealing from the wealthy and powerful to help the less fortunate (although they *do* keep some for themselves). When the Rogues come across a young woman being taken prisoner by a warship from Valua, a neighboring kingdom with imperialistic designs on the whole of Arcadia, of course the Pirates sail to the rescue. The young woman is Fina, a priestess on a mission, and (naturally) the fate of the New Age hangs on her success.

In addition to Vyse, Aika, and Fina, however, *Skies* boasts an impressively large cast of good guys and bad. The character designs hew a little too closely to the typical anime stereotypes we've seen too many times before, but most of the cast are painstakingly developed as individuals with deep (if not always original)

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The Finals Rating System

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

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

Denotes a review of a Japanese product

MANAGING THE SPIRIT OF BATTLE

Instead of giving each individual character a measure of spell points, instead "Spirit Points" are generated continuously during combat and shared by the entire party. This effectively limits the number of spells that can be cast during a combat round and presents an interesting resource-management problem, especially during boss battles. Also, new spells are awarded through an elemental system, in which charging a weapon with, for example, the red (fire) element builds up fire experience, resulting in new fire-based spells. In this way, any character can, in time, learn any spell, but there are also magical "Special Attacks" that are unique to each character. Overall, the system is quite nice — not so overwhelming as to require micro-management, and just complex enough to reward tweaking.

Now, if only the battles weren't random and didn't take so long...

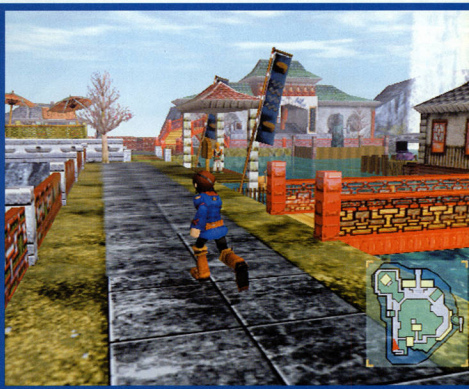
backstories. A great deal of time was obviously spent getting every expression and mannerism animated just right, and as a result these are some of the most likable and attractive characters to come along in a traditional RPG in quite a while (although we confess to still scratching our heads over the way Fina rolls her hips as she walks).

Likewise, while the story doesn't exactly push into new — or even especially dramatic — territory, it does take its share of twists and turns, eventually blooming from its modest beginnings into a suitably epic tale of world-shaking proportions. *Skies* takes up two GD-ROMs, and none of that space is filled up with FMV or even voice samples (every character has a small number of spoken catch phrases, but most of the dialogue is carried through text).

The battle system is likewise interesting (see sidebar), but it's also where the game shows its few cracks. The main problem is the same one that's been plaguing Japanese RPGs for years: The impressive spell effects take forever to play out, which means spending large amounts of combat time just watching the same long-winded spells over and over again. Add in that, as usual, combat occurs completely at random as you move from here to there, and you have a recipe for tedium.

Skies also features a second combat system, used for ship-to-ship (and ship-to-really-big-damn-monster) combat. This is unique for an RPG, but also no less tedious than the hand-to-hand system. Whole minutes can be spent just watching ships maneuver around each other — essentially, cut scenes within a battle. Worse, although your ship is equipped with several smaller guns, typically it boasts one very powerful, battle-ending weapon, which can only be fired when "conditions are right" (and there's nothing you can do to influence those conditions). So most of the battle is spent weathering the enemy's attacks and not fighting back much while you wait for the chance to fire the big gun.

Indeed, it's a testament to how incredibly engaging the rest of the game is that you find yourself just turning off your brain during non-boss battles and putting up with the fact you're going to be attacked every 10 seconds. It really makes us wish for the umpteenth time that some new, less time-consuming combat model would catch on in Japan.



■ **The world of Arcadia is huge, with dozens of meticulously laid out little towns and cities**

■ **The dialogue and character interaction here is very nicely done, both funny and heart-warming, and exceptionally well translated**

■ **In addition, Arcadia also boasts a wide variety of cultures and architectural styles**

Nevertheless, *Skies of Arcadia* stands as a notable achievement. It's a massive, sprawling game to be savored and enjoyed, full of lively characters you won't be able to help but grow attached to. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Despite the problems — which it shares with practically every other Japanese RPG — *Skies of Arcadia* is an impressive, thoroughly delightful game no one should pass up.

■ Although most of the elements from the original reappear, this time around it's lacking some of the spark.

■ PLAYSTATION 2

Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2

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

The bigger they are, the harder they fall

Let's get ready 2 rehash. Midway's second installment of its cartoonish take on the Marquis of Queensbury fills your plate with more pugilists, more detailed graphics, and more modes and mini-games. However, in this case more just means more of the same — and perhaps even less.

All the 3D fighters here are well rendered and seamless. They move and toss fierce blows with fluidity, and every flinch and grimace, every taunt and recoil hold an odd sort of beauty. There are 23 boxers in all, and the varied roster provides lots of opportunity to gleefully embrace the most questionable sort of ethnic stereotypes; the fat-bodied Italian Joey T. is, of course, a Mafioso, and he'll get to battle the jive-talkin' brother Afro Thunder.

Gameplay remains unchanged, save for one rather junky updating of the game's "Rumble" meter. The meter, which fills as you taunt or score a powerful hit, may now be filled three times, which affords you the opportunity to rifle off a ridiculously exaggerated one-hit knockout that sends the other guy flying out of the ring. This little revamp only succeeds in making it exceedingly easy to change the course of a lopsided fight and tends to unbalance play greatly.

■ The "Rumble" meter can now be filled to three times capacity

■ Somehow, this year's version just ain't as brassy as we'd hoped

The rest of the action, warts and all, comes straight from *Ready 2 Rumble*, especially the part where the dumb computer-controlled brawlers decide it's perfectly fine to taunt the opposition while close enough to kiss you. — *Greg Orlando*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2* fills its spit bucket with last year's saliva.

NASCAR 2001

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **EA Sports** ■ Developer: **Electronic Arts**

Offering a smeary blend of chunky graphics, repetitious gameplay, and lackluster thrills, EA Sports' *NASCAR 2001* fails to entertain, either as a realistic sim or as a straight-up racer. Other than its extensive complement of real-world racers and tracks — including the much revered Daytona 500 — the game offers limited options and doesn't do much to capture the interest of those who might be less than enamored with America's most popular sport.

Hitting the road is simple enough — gas and brakes are all you'll need to get started. Four seasons of varying length offer lap after lap, but almost all of the tracks are symmetrical, oval, and flat. You can't really knock the design, since that's the way NASCAR tracks actually are, but with the emphasis on the real world, there's little of the zippy powersliding fun you'd look for in other racers. Since all of the cars (not to mention their drivers) run basically the same, you often find yourself running laps all alone — whether first or last. Sure, this is part of the sport's appeal, but it's also not much fun.

However, even for hardcore sim fans, this game is surprisingly choppy, with bland backgrounds and unstable framerates, smattered with lackluster sound and music. The car models are surprisingly bland and jaggy at the edges. Other than the full intensity palette and hi-res textures, gameplay barely looks and plays any better than a late contender you might find on Sony's *other* console.

■ **Although it captures the "thrill" of the sport quite nicely, that's not enough to compensate for the mediocrity of the rest**

Considering the many stellar titles EA Sports has released for PlayStation 2, it's disappointing to see minimal improvements made to an already limited genre. We're not about to dispute that it's a captivating sport, but when we need our NASCAR fix, we'll just watch it on the TV. Better pile-ups, you know. — *David Chen*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Ultimately as enjoyable as driving in circles, *NASCAR 2001* is neither pretty nor fun.

Q-Ball: Billiards Master

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Take 2 Interactive**
■ Developer: **Kadokawa Shoten**

In order to really stand out from the crowd, a game has to be not only beautiful, but also innovative. While *Q-Ball: Billiards Master* might not be the most amazing game yet for the new console, as far as pool games go, it certainly isn't bad. This is one of the few games to utilize the analog buttons on the PS2 controller — to hit the ball, simply line up your shot and adjust your angles, and pressing a button will make a meter begin to move. Pressing hard on the button makes it move fast, and pressing softly makes it move slowly. It's not quite as visceral as swinging the pool cue yourself, but it lends a little extra touch to the game that helps you feel involved.

■ ***Q-ball* certainly looks pretty, although that's hardly surprising since it's on PS2**

Q-Ball: Billiards Master also contains a whole new type of game in addition to its standard offerings of 9-ball, straight pool, and the like. Called Frozen Game, this new mode requires you to complete various objectives (such as sinking a ball) in such a way that the cue ball comes to rest as close as possible to the "frozen" ball. The mode is highly challenging, and it's a nice change from the typical bar games.

While it's not the most exciting PS2 game available, pool aficionados will likely find it a lot of fun. The graphics are pretty, and the gameplay is a little different while still being approachable. — *Mike Wolf*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: We wouldn't label this a must-buy, but it's certainly worth a look.

■ PLAYSTATION 2

Sky Odyssey

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **SCEI**

Flying through the air with the barest of ease

■ **A pure flight game with no combat to speak of may not be for everyone, but that doesn't make it bad**

Sky Odyssey is one of those unique console titles that will probably appeal to less than half of PS2 owners. It features almost realistic flight physics combined with *Pilot Wings*-style goals: Fly through rings, perform aeronautical tricks, and the like. There are no guns, no hostages to rescue, and no enemies to shoot down. Instead, the emphasis lies squarely on technical flight skills. (We're sure if there had been time, Activision would have added some barns and called it *Barnstorming 3D.*) Is it fun? Well yes, but it's not for everyone.

You can select one of five different modes — Adventure, Targeting, Sky Canvas, Training, or Free Flight — but most will be interested in Adventure and Targeting. Sky Canvas involves painting pictures with smoke, and Training and Free Flight are exactly what they sound like. The Adventure Mode is the meat of the game though. Through a series of increasingly difficult levels (many of which branch), your flight skills will be put to the test, both through navigating rough terrain and working against the clock. Flying these airplanes is not easy, but successful completion unlocks additional airplanes (and other craft) as well as various upgrades.

Graphically, this is average fare. There are a few exceptional details, including outstanding weather effects and a refueling sequence from a moving train. The monotone voice work wouldn't sound less exciting if it were voiced by Ben Stein himself.

This is a good game with an interesting premise, but don't buy it expecting to become a war hero. There are no enemies beyond the clock, the weather, and the terrain. That (along with the level of difficulty) will turn some players off, but those with a passion for flight will not be disappointed. — *Kevin Rice*

■ **There's not a single enemy to be found, but flying through rings is still a serious challenge**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: *Sky Odyssey* is one of those peculiar games that will have half the people loving it and the other half wondering what the commotion is. It's definitely good, but it won't suit everyone's taste.

Real Pool

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Takara**

Call it pool, billiards, shooting stick — players of the game must not only line up the perfect shot that sinks the intended ball, but also put the cue ball in an optimal position for the next hit. True geniuses can plan many shots ahead, and if they pull off the shots, success is inevitable. While *Real Pool* certainly enables you to play pool in a very basic sense, the straightforward, purely mechanical gameplay leaves a lot to be desired.

Playing is as simple as lining up a shot, moving a meter to determine power, adjusting cue stick angles, and tapping a button. The entire process of hitting a ball is purely mechanical, with very little feeling involved other than judging how much power is needed. While it makes the game pretty simple, it also reduces the appeal for anyone who likes to actually feel like they're manipulating the balls on the table.

The game contains most of the usual pool game options — several different types of games and environments — and the overall beauty of the game can't be denied. Still, about the only thing that really makes this one stand out is the special Puzzle mode, in which you have to hit in a certain number of balls in a certain number of strokes on a huge variety of strangely shaped tables. But that's not quite enough to make this anything but a mediocre pool game and one of the least impressive PS2 launch titles. — *Mike Wolf*

■ **It doesn't look too bad, but the gameplay is strictly by the numbers**

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: The uninspired play control and average game modes make this one pool game to avoid.

Surfing H30

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Take 2 Interactive** ■ Developer: **Take 2 Interactive**

Surfing H30 began life in Japan as *Surfroids*, an ugly game by anyone's reckoning that tried to grab gamers' interest with a unique controller and some zany characters. A small finger surfboard comes with the game — much like the finger skateboards that have become popular lately — which you attach over the Dual Shock 2's analog sticks, using your thumbs to control the surfers. An interesting premise, but one that failed because it simply wasn't any fun whatsoever.

Sadly, the U.S. release isn't fun either. The gimmicky little surfboard is still there, and that's cool for about two minutes. But once the novelty has worn off, what's left is a game that's hard to control, uglier than most original PlayStation games, and arguably the worst PS2 game to appear stateside.

Ditching the giant rock monsters and shark-headed weirdos from *Surfroids*, Take 2 went instead with the Gen-X slackers that we've come to expect from games trying to pass as "xtreme." These forgettable hard bodies get the dubious honor of surfing through half a dozen levels that are all practically identical, while doing battle with a camera that spins, flips, and reverses itself with no warning at all. Weather effects that have a negligible effect on gameplay and are almost unnoticeable visually (doesn't rain usually make some sort of impact when it hits an ocean?) join jagged, gritty terrain and terrible water textures to make a game that's just as unappealing to watch as it is to play. — *Daniel Erickson*

■ **Look it's a Nintendo 64 game! On PlayStation 2!**

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: One cute gimmick away from absolute crap.

Silpheed: The Lost Planet

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Working Designs** ■ Developer: **Game Arts/Treasure**

Silpheed is proof positive that pretty graphics just aren't enough to create a mind-blowing shooter experience. On the surface the game seems to have it all: brilliant graphics (although they do stutter at times), a rockin' shooter soundtrack, and some of the most breathtaking FMV we've yet to witness. Unfortunately, while the pieces are all in place, the game itself lacks that certain magic element that would have made it a must-have like *Radiant Silvergun* or *Blazing Lasers*.

It's really the pacing that keeps this from shooter nirvana. Over the course of each level you'll meet with the obligatory swarms of small enemies and giant-sized bosses, but at no point does the excitement level ever rise to anything that gets your adrenaline pumping. You never reach the Zen-like trance that only an exceptional shooter can induce. All you're really left with is eye candy, which only goes so far. Compounding the problem is the power-up system. Instead of the more straightforward grabbing of power-ups, you earn different weapons (none of which are particularly very exciting) that you must then equip at the beginning of each substage.

We must commend the team at Treasure/Game Arts for developing one of the most beautiful games on PS2 (except for the water effects, which are pretty hideous). Yet the magic is definitely missing. In a game as simplistic as a shooter, it's the one thing you must have. — *Blake Fischer*

■ **Looks great, plays... well, not that great. *Silpheed* just doesn't have the shooter goods**

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: *Silpheed*'s got the look, but it's lacking the inspiration that makes a shooter stand out.

■ DREAMCAST

Grandia II

■ Publisher: **Ubi Soft** ■ Developer: **GameArts**

As good as the first time

As the sequel to one of the most beloved RPGs on Saturn (and one of the first games previewed during Dreamcast's Japanese launch), *Grandia II* had a lot to live up to. Yet it's managed to do just that. Like the *Final Fantasy* series, *Grandia II* drops the story and characters from the original, opting for an all-new set, led by the salty, foul-tempered Ryudo.

The game's world is divided between the majority of Grandia's citizens who favor praying to the God of Light, Granas, and others who have fallen to worshipping a darker deity, Valmar. Ryudo believes in neither, but in order to pay the bills he works as a bodyguard who's hired to protect a naïve songstress of Granas named Elena. It's their evolving relationship that makes up the core of the story. However, all of *Grandia II*'s characters are delightful and distinct, thanks mostly to the excellent voice work. Ubi Soft went the extra yard to ensure this by hiring the producer responsible for the vocals in the U.S. version of *Metal Gear Solid*, and it shows.

The only real problem here lies in the fact that the story, though filled with a few nifty plot twists, feels underdeveloped and at times too straightforward. While many of the characters' relationships feel genuine, the story as a whole doesn't flow as well as it should.

But these awkward moments are more than balanced by *Grandia II*'s compelling battle system. Mixing turn-based and realtime elements, the combat engine requires strategy and planning in order to beat tough bosses or to keep from sustaining too much damage in battle. Counter moves can cancel or delay an enemy's attack, and a ticking time meter dictates everything. The interface is so informative that you're able to plot out every single move with ease. *Grandia II*'s unique battle system is its strongest element and will keep you interested even after your 500th fight — no small feat for any RPG.

Visually, the game oozes quality by bringing 2D-like characters to 3D life. With its colorful graphics and highly detailed character designs, there's nothing else quite like it on Dreamcast or PS2.

— Francesca Reyes

■ **Elena is a "songstress" (think singing priestess), and the voice acting is appropriately melodious**

■ ***Grandia II*'s battle system is easily its best feature, breaking the game out of the combat doldrums that plague many RPGs**

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A winner in the RPG beauty pageant that's just clever enough in the battle department to balance out an almost too straightforward storyline.

4X4 Evolution

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Gathering of Developers**
■ Developer: **Terminal Reality**

■ **You can play online against both Dreamcast and PC players, but that's about the only cool thing**

While *4 X 4 Evolution* has many of the ingredients necessary to make it a top contender in the bloated racing genre, there are a few key elements missing. Visually, *4 X 4* has a lot going for it, with well-textured tracks over varied landscapes and a host of officially licensed vehicles. The physics model, at least while the cars are on the ground, does a pretty good job of conveying the feel of driving the various SUVs and light trucks from manufacturers like Ford, Chevy, and Toyota. Things start to go awry, though, once the rubber leaves the road.

In the air, these vehicles behave like gliders, floating as if they had wings. Although supposedly there's an underlying damage model (which can't be physically shown due to licensing agreements), we're unconvinced; if real trucks remained this sturdy after some of the abuse we put them through, you'd never need to buy another one as long as you lived. Collision detection and how your truck reacts to running into various objects is another failing. While it's cool to blast through a wooden fence, it's less cool to come to a dead stop with no other effects when hitting a moving freight train head-on.

What saves this from mediocrity is the mostly smooth online play. Some lag was apparent and there was a bit of warping, but for the most part the game was very playable. Regardless of what combination of Dreamcast and PC racers were involved in a race it was impossible to tell any difference.

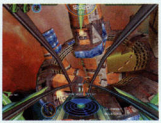
Thanks to its cross-platform online capabilities, *4 X 4 Evolution* is a decent diversion. With better damage and physics models, it could have been something special. *— Rob Smolka*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Other than the online play, this arcade racer doesn't do anything special we haven't seen (and complained about) before.

Bang! Gunship Elite

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Red Storm** ■ Developer: **Rayland Interactive**



■ ***Bang!* is gleefully destructive, but also exists without a single thought in its spacey head**

Digging deep into the thesaurus, Rayland Interactive came up with *Bang!*, a title that has all the vulnerability of *Zap!* with none of the pretension of *Kapow!* It's an unimaginative name that aptly reflects the old-school gameplay of this typical space shooter. You take to the void in a tricked-out star fighter and then proceed to *Blast!* just about anything that moves.

The 19 different levels in *Bang!* have very little variety and generally involve battling wave after wave of invaders. There is a semblance of a plot, but who really needs a reason to fire lasers and particle beams? Especially considering just how fantastic those nine different weapons look. The graphics are first-rate, with wonderfully colorful explosions, ships, and weapons.

In fact, the spectacular visuals are this game's real strength, but the constant firing soon grows repetitive, no matter how great it looks. The enemies offer little in the way of challenge, although some of the smarter ones will duck behind nearby asteroids when under fire. But making those enemies go *Boom!* is all too easy with the simplified aiming for the Dreamcast's analog stick.

It's fun while it lasts, but the single-player-only game doesn't do enough to vary the action. After a while, the same motif of blasting enemies and collecting power-ups settles into a routine. The simple fun and eye candy make it good, but unlike Frosted Flakes, it never really becomes *Great!* *— Jim Preston*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: It reminds us of the charm of manic shooters from yesteryear, but it also reminds us why we don't play those games anymore.

Championship Surfer

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Mattel** ■ Developer: **Krome Studios**

■ **This may be the best attempt yet at translating surfing into a game**

At first, surfing would seem like one of those sports that doesn't naturally lend itself well to videogames. There aren't any rails to grind or courses to be raced. There's certainly a level of competition, but not in the head-to-head fashion that makes for a good multiplayer matchup, and there are no villains to eradicate. Left then with a fairly straightforward sport, the designers of *Championship Surfer* decided to forego the nonsensical icon collecting of Take 2's *Surfing H30* or even the arcade gameplay of Ubi Soft's *Surf Riders*. Instead, *Championship Surfer* attempts to actually recreate the feeling of being in the water and then, thankfully, does a pretty good job of it.

Taking control of one of a half dozen real-life professional surfers, you head for the waves in a game that's more about balance and position than anything else. There's one trick button and two buttons that control how quickly the board cuts through the waves while turning, but everything else is based on where the surfers are in comparison to the break and how well they're holding their lines. Standing up before the swell appears, dipping too far into the tube, or attempting to make jumps where the wave is too weak will all wipe you out in seconds.

There is some concession to arcade gameplay, as the ocean is littered with old crates, barrels, and tourists to avoid. But these seem like an afterthought and don't affect things much. Pleasant graphics and an easy learning curve round out this surprisingly solid game. — *Daniel Erickson*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Easily the best next-generation surfing game so far.

Looney Tunes Space Race

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Melbourne House**

■ **If it looks like a toon and drives like a toon, it must be *Looney Tunes Space Race***

With the possible exceptions of intense constipation and/or collapsed lungs, few things are less intriguing than the proposition of yet another licensed kart racing game. Which makes it all the more impressive that the good folks at Melbourne House pulled this one off.

Looney Tunes Space Race is something of a cross between *Mario Kart* and *WipeOut*, all wrapped in an exquisitely rendered, cel-shaded package. While cel shading has been used before on Dreamcast — most notably in *Jet Grind Radio* and Melbourne House's own *Wacky Races — Space Race* goes one better. The use of pastels and clean, subtle shading gives the game a very distinct look, one that mimics the classic *Looney Tunes* cel-animation style to a tee. And while the environments are a bit sparse, it's worth noting that the game hums along at 60fps without a hitch.

Gameplay involves much of the standard kart racing fare: Tracks are littered with plenty of turbo power-ups and anti-toon weaponry. These utensils of mass destruction cover nearly the entire Acme gamut, from electric laser guns and missiles to pink elephants and anvils falling from the sky. Control with the analog stick is extremely well tuned, and racing around the track is a wonderfully fluid experience.

The only thing that holds *LTSR* back from a fourth star is its unfortunate reliance on "computer assistance." While it serves its purpose — making sure nearly every single race is fought neck-and-neck — we've never appreciated the out-and-out deception it requires. — *Evan Shamoon*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Despite one frustrating design decision, this is a beautifully presented and eminently likable game — and easily the best kart racer on Dreamcast.

■ **DREAMCAST**

NBA 2K1

■ Publisher: **Sega Sports** ■ Developer: **Visual Concepts**

Can Visual Concepts work its magic again?

■ **Despite a slightly flat-looking stadium crowd (note the front row at right), *NBA 2K1* is a visual feast**

With *NFL 2K1*, Visual Concepts showed us that it could take an excellent foundation (established with *NFL 2K*) and mold it into an expertly crafted piece of software. Based on this, expectations for *NBA 2K1* were absolutely sky-high; could lightning strike twice?

Unfortunately, no. While *NBA 2K1* is praiseworthy and improves upon a number of its predecessor's deficiencies, it has a few problems of its own that sadly keep it from the ranks of superstardom.

On the whole, *NBA 2K1* is a lot of fun, especially online against another human being. As in *NFL 2K1*, logging on through SegaNet is a breeze — the interface has been tweaked a bit to make finding a good game even easier — and in most instances, lag is a non-issue.

Going up against the CPU is another story. Learning to play defense is a skill only marginally easier to come by than acquiring actual NBA ability. Be prepared to concede a huge percentage of field goals to your opponent, regardless of your skill level.

Control could also have used a little more polishing. On the positive side, players will now continue to run as they catch a pass on a fast break, and a pass receiver's annoying habit from last year of standing out of bounds has been remedied. However, the combination of some clunky animation blending and a framerate that feels a tad on the slow side robs the game of some of its flow.

■ **The CPU offense is brutal — a frustration rather than a challenge**

Much like its football brethren, *NBA 2K1* greatly benefits from the new Franchise mode. In fact, it one-ups *NFL* by keeping track of career stats. Other cool items include the four playground courts that let you play two-on-two and three-on-three using a mixture of today's stars and NBA legends.

There's plenty to like about *NBA 2K1*, with its brilliant graphics, rim-rattling dunks, and engrossing Franchise mode, and with a few more on-the-court adjustments, it could rise to the top of the gaming heap. We'll enjoy it plenty for now (especially online), but we can't wait until next year. — *Rob Smolka*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Highly recommended, but frankly, we were expecting a lot more based on the improvement of *NFL 2K1* over *NFL 2K*.

Finals

Dreamcast

■ *Resident Evil 2* looks terrific on Dreamcast

■ DREAMCAST

Resident Evil 2

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

Old *Evil* is still good *Evil*

Capcom's classic telling of the Grateful Undead gone amok, *Resident Evil 2*, has already seen action on PlayStation, PC, and Nintendo 64. Now, in the best port to date, it's finally also available on Sega Dreamcast.

Evil 2 for Dreamcast sprawls out over two GD-ROMs and features graphics that have been elevated to the level of the PC version. Capcom has also, thankfully, thrown in a neat art gallery with plenty of pictures, movies, and 3D models, and you can also access the game's rather silly "Arrange" mode (in which a character begins the game with a powerful weapon and infinite ammunition) right from the start. These little extras don't add much to the overall package, but they're certainly a welcome touch.

Resident Evil 2 has aged well and remains a top-notch third-person adventure that's best savored sans lights, with the windows open and the door unlocked. Players control heroine Claire Redfield or, alternately, neophyte cop Leon Kennedy as they attempt to escape from zombie hell. Most of the game takes place in a police station that's more a tomb than hall of justice, and genuine terror awaits, told through a decent (if a bit dense) storyline involving the vile corporate slaughter-house Umbrella and a zombie-birthing virus. With equal parts puzzle-solving and mindless blasting, *Evil 2* immerses you in this horrific world, pitting you against some truly unsettling enemies. Evil remains forever good. — *Greg Orlando*

■ **The gameplay is genuinely unnerving, and the cut scenes are equally horrifying — if you're looking for a good scare, this is it**

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Even this warmed-over death has a delicious flavor all its own.

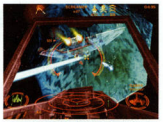
StarLancer

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Crave** ■ Developer: **Digital Anvil**

StarLancer on PC (**NG 07/00**) is a top-notch space sim with intense action and mesmerizing graphics. On Dreamcast, most of the graphics and action are intact, but a good number of controls are missing, and those that did make it are usually hidden in drop-down menus that pull you right out of the action. Digital Anvil did a decent job of trying to fit in as much as possible; rather, the limitation is in the gamepad.

It's a shame too, because there *is* fun to be had. As a rookie in the 45th Volunteers, you fight for "The Alliance." While the missions are a little repetitive and unoriginal, the action is excellent, with enemies, torpedoes, and capital ships whizzing around, but the pesky control scheme will limit the fun for all but the most dedicated. Many missions have time limits or specific targets to destroy, but doing so can be frustrating with no way to match speeds or target the closest enemy.

Online deathmatch is also included, and, thankfully, incorporates GameSpy to make finding a game easy. Deathmatches only hold so much appeal, however, as half the fun of online games is the ability to communicate, and if you lack a Dreamcast keyboard this is next to impossible. It's fun to whack anonymous people out of space for a bit, but with no community, it wears off rather quickly.



■ **Somehow, the PC version of *StarLancer* was a lot better — a gamepad just doesn't cut it here**

While this is a decent translation of an excellent PC game and it has its moments, the gamepad just wasn't meant for this sort of thing. — *Kevin Rice*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: It doesn't give the same intense experience as its big brother on PC, but it's still OK. Just be prepared to wrestle with controls beyond movement and weapons.

Super Runabout: San Francisco Edition

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **Climax Entertainment/Digital Mayhem**

Mindlessly fun and often breathlessly destructive, Interplay's car-wreck opus *Super Runabout* succeeds in spite of its graphics and control issues. There are clipping and collision problems galore, and some of the game's vehicles handle like an oiled sled on ice, but the game remains both eminently enjoyable and highly playable.

The hilly streets of San Francisco serve as *Runabout*'s playground, and you can choose to take the role of cops or couriers, performing goofy missions such as derailing a runaway cable car or collecting fixings for hot dogs. The game encourages the destructively minded to take their vehicles (over 25 are available including a tank, street sweeper, and piggie) and smash them into everything. Collisions are delightfully comic and exaggerated, with plenty of smoke, broken glass, and buckled cars; it's both possible and fun to hurl a motor scooter at a great big bus, watch both vehicles spin wildly, and see the scooter escape with few ill effects.

Question the realism, but embrace the lunacy. The San Francisco streets portrayed here are both true-to-life and highly detailed. A smooth framerate enables you to run through it with style, and there's little or no pop-up. *Dukes of Hazzard*-style jumps and shortcuts galore make it possible for a thorough exploration of all the environments, and who can resist the lure of rocketing through Alcatraz in a tank with a working gun? — *Greg Orlando*

■ ***Super Runabout* is frenetic and fun, and sometimes that's just good enough to be entertaining**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: We left our bumpers in San Francisco and had a fine time doing so.

Xtreme Sports

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Innerloop**

Aside from rare gems like *Xenophobe*, *Xevious* and *X-COM*, it's safe to say that one should be xtremely skeptical of games whose titles begin with the letter "X" — especially when said letter is attached to the word "Xtreme."

Frankly, this one is no xception.

Xtreme Sports involves six different extreme sporting events, including snowboarding, bungee jumping, and off-road ATV racing, mixed together in a series of triple-event competitions. Unfortunately, the game suffers from an overall lack of polish, and this is reflected in nearly all facets you can imagine. The graphics, for example, are breathtaking at times: The well-rendered character models and beautiful, expansive terrain prompted more that one editor to exclaim, "Wow, that looks better than *SSX*!" at first glance. Further inspection, however, uncovers a host of flaws: Patches of muddy textures, clipping problems, and horribly warping surfaces break the game's spell before things get rolling.

Worse, gameplay suffers a similar fate. Some undeniably cool course designs (and the reasonably exciting proposition of triple-event competitions) are marred by spotty control. While some vehicles are better than others, the overall relationship between your thumb and the character's movement is far too stiff. Even more frustrating, we found ourselves getting caught on protruding walls far too often.

■ **Beware the Xtreme — anything with that word in its title is usually anything but**

All that being said, you could do worse than give this a rental and spend an afternoon xploring Mt. Kilimanjaro, Maui, and the Himalayas. Just make sure to pack light for a short trip. — *Evan Shamoon*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Coulda, shoulda, woulda... didn't. Poor texture swapping, muddy control, and sloppy collision detection do not a good game make.

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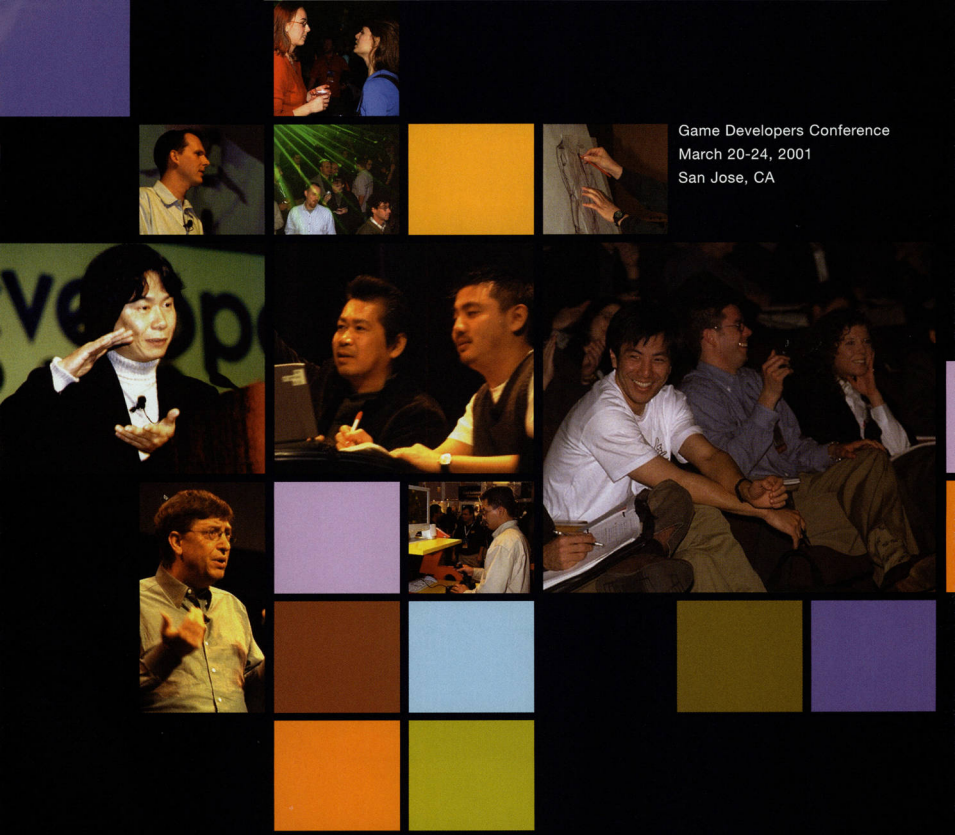

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■ NINTENDO 64

Banjo-Tooie

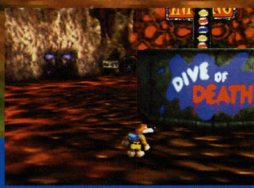
■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Rare**

The continuing story of a bear and his bird

■ Throughout the game, Banjo and Kazooie run into many other characters in trouble. This poor mother has lost her three kids in Witchyworld — help her out, won't you?

A BANJO ON HIS KNEE?

Kazooie is a breegull, a fictional type of bird. "Bree" itself is a term of Scottish origin that refers to a thin, watery soup or broth, so we can assume that Kazooie is a thin seagull. (Are there fat ones?) Banjo, on the other hand, is a honey bear, or a brown bear. Brown bears average 450 pounds in weight. To move quickly or up steep inclines in the game, Kazooie hops out of Banjo's backpack and carries Banjo on her back. Obviously, this would kill any ordinary breegull (or most humans) almost instantly, but does it matter? No. Always remember, kids, games and reality are two different things.



■ We're guessing this is one event that won't make it into the 2004 Olympics

Well, Banjo and Kazooie are back, and they've brought more playable characters with them, including Mumbo (and various creatures he can re-animate) as well as world-specific characters conjured up by Wumba such as a Stoney or a Detonator. It's all done in the same tongue-and-cheek manner that made the original a charmer, and Rare still has the knack for uncommonly cute character design.

After a lengthy intro in which Bottles dies (so much for cute), the adventure begins in earnest. Our fearless bird-and-bear duo sets out to reincarnate Bottles in worlds and levels that are sometimes confusingly huge. Even the hubs of each world are enormous, with tons of places to explore and open up. While size matters (figuratively of course), these places can get perplexing unless you pay attention to almost every detail. And, as usual in a Rare game, many areas require you to go back through them several times, accessing new branches in the path with skills you've just learned. While this adds replay value, some may find this kind of design tedious.

■ When standing on Mumbo pads, Mumbo's magic takes over. One of the results this can have is bringing new playable characters to life, such as this golden giant

Banjo-Tooie pushes the N64 to its graphical limits with wildly varying enemies and textures. There's some noticeable slowdown in particularly busy areas, but none of it hinders gameplay, at least in single-player mode. The multiplayer games — 14 in all — are fun for the most part, but there are occasions when the Nintendo 64 chokes graphically.

And what would a platform game be without a bazillion things to collect and an almost equal number of mini-games and puzzles? *Banjo-Tooie* delivers on this front, as you gather up jinjos, notes, jiggies, coins, Glowbos, and more, and the mini-games range from aerial balloon popping to using Kazooie as a gun a la first-person shooters. In fact, there are so many sub-quests and mini-games that they're almost a game in their own right.

As a whole, *Banjo-Tooie* succeeds at what it sets out to do. There's a ton of gameplay to be found here, and only the most diligent platform game enthusiast will finish 100% of everything it offers. There isn't another platform game lined up for N64 this holiday season, and thankfully, this one fits the bill just right. — *Kevin Rice*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Yet another excellent platform game from the folks over at Rare. Its sheer size may turn off a few, but *Banjo-Tooie* has more gameplay in it than many other similar games combined.

■ Whoops! We ran a pic from *The Last Revelation* — oh wait, no we didn't

■ PLAYSTATION

Tomb Raider: Chronicles

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Core**

Lara's risen from the grave — sort of. Can't you feel the excitement?

Tomb Raider has seen its share of highs and lows, mostly in that order. At one time it was considered the benchmark for a new breed of games, but now its reputation rests squarely on tired sequels and Lara's overly hyped assets. Ms. Croft's most recent outing doesn't do much to bolster the series' sagging status, but it does manage to keep it afloat.

Take everything you know about the series — even if you've only played one of them — then lump it all together and you've got a good idea of how this one works. A "prequel" ("midquel"?) of sorts, this chronicles four of Lara's past, never-before-seen exploits (right now she's "dead," you see). Lara runs, jumps, swims, looks for keys, kills the occasional pack of rats, looks for more keys, and does whatever else it takes to get her omnipresent buns out of otherwise compromising situations.

Controls are still slow and unresponsive, although this series has always (unintentionally, perhaps) emphasized measured movement over fast action. Some new maneuvers include a twist jump, tightrope walking, and rummaging through cabinets, though none of these adds anything significant to the mix. Throw in a skittish camera, unfocused mission parameters, and spotty sound, and everything becomes familiar all over again.

Despite protest from critics and fans, Eidos has run with the same engine again — hammering home one more time that it just can't keep up anymore. Blocky levels, a palette that's mostly shades of brown, pop-up, and intermittent fog make for a look that's totally unpolished, yet totally familiar. Is it all bad? Of course not — it's *Tomb Raider*, after all. But a jolt of new energy or creativity this is not. Next time, perhaps? — *David Chen*

■ The four missions include scouring the streets of Rome and a sinking U-Boat and storming a high-security office building

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Got 'em all? Go ahead — you'll love it.

Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **3DO** ■ Developer: **3DO**

Lock up your green plastic daughters — Sarge's Heroes are back. While Sarge and the boys remain a little too angular for their own good, the visuals have been pumped up significantly since the previous installment, with a wider range of oversized real-world environments and some surprisingly clean texture work.

The level design has also been extensively retrofitted, often charging Sarge and his cohorts with executing multiple, well-scripted tasks within a single mission. Indeed, this *Desert Strike*-esque design goes a long way toward bolstering the title's surreal war-movie atmosphere, with an overwhelmed Sarge often forced to repeatedly crisscross the varied environments in a vain attempt at staving off the ever-encroaching enemy.

Unfortunately, while *Sarge's Heroes 2* is a considerably better game than its dud of a predecessor, there are still far too many flaws for it to stand comfortably against the *Syphon Filters* and *Metal Gears* of this world. Control is mushy and the camera system is frustratingly unpredictable, while the framerate has the unfortunate habit of slowing down to a flip-book crawl at even the merest hint of action.

■ Funny, but the smell of burning plastic in the morning just smells like cyanoacrylates

The collision detection is equally unrefined, transforming minefields from a tension-building exercise in stealth and caution into a profoundly irritating game of chance. In the end, these many and varied failings prevent this latest *Army Men* title from escaping the pit of mediocrity undercutting the promising design work and scuttling what could have been the series' finest hour. — *Samuel Bass*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Better than the first one, but we'll be sticking with *Air Attack 2* for our plastic battlefield fix.

Colin McRae Rally 2.0

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **Codemasters** ■ Developer: **Codemasters**

With games like *Ridge Racer V* for PS2 and *Sega GT* for Dreamcast, it takes a lot of guts to release a racer for the original PlayStation. However, this latest from Codemasters manages to stand up to scrutiny. The original *Colin McRae* raised the bar on console rally racing, and this sequel carries on that tradition. The game has scores of different tracks and cars to unlock, and the courses are deceptively challenging. They look simple, but a great deal of practice is required to earn a position in the top eight, let alone first place.

One of the major criticisms of the first game was that repairs between races were limited by your winnings. This system has been replaced with a time-based garage, which is somewhat more egalitarian. Complex repairs and tuning now take more of your limited time, but major repairs are no longer out of reach of your pocketbook.

Graphically, this is on par with some of the best racers PlayStation has to offer. The first-person mode has a great sense of speed, and for those who don't like any of the preset camera angles, Codemasters has included a scheme by which you can position the camera anywhere you'd like. This is a great feature we'd like to see the entire genre adopt.

■ The dashboard view provides a great sense of immersion

There's even an Arcade mode that lets you race against CPU cars instead of just challenging preset times, but unlike the arcade mode found in most other sim-style racers, it's not any easier. The CPU is out for blood from the starting line. — *Doug Trueman*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A superb racer that has depth, a solid framerate, and high replay value. It doesn't get much better than this on PlayStation.

■ PLAYSTATION

Driver 2

■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Reflections**

The wheelman cometh

■ **Though it's not quite as excellent, chances are still good you'll dig this game as much as the first**

Most of us with a PlayStation and a pulse have a fond spot for last year's *Driver*, a '70s style car-caper title that was as refreshing as it was enjoyable. As an undercover cop, you tore up the streets pulling off Hollywood-style stunts and dodging viciously misguided fellow cops.

Driver 2 picks up right where the first left off (cinematically, anyway) and offers up plenty of the same, with an explosive inter-gang situation taking you from Chicago to Rio. Missions are still clever twists on chase scene favorites (such as tailing the suspect, racing the train, and just getting away), and they're as demanding as ever, if not more so. Equally familiar is the excellent gameplay, which features dynamic driving with simple controls. With short time limits and fierce competition, this game is well suited to the patient and the skilled.

The graphics, however, are more muddy than lush, and the overall look and feel manage to be only a little better than the sum of their parts. There's gritty four-wheeled action staged in grand locales, but sadly those expansive, polygon-hogging city streets take their toll, resulting in stuttering framerates and awful slowdown. Still, you can almost overlook that when weighing it against two discs and over 40 missions to complete.

Other upgrades from the original include several single-round scenarios (like the now classic Chase and Getaway modes), the ability to run around on foot, and a sluggish two-player game, although none of these does much to improve on an already solid formula. While it's not as impressive as its predecessor, it's still great fun and better than most of the competition. — *David Chen*

■ **The levels are pretty, but the framerate sure isn't**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: This should please both newcomers and fans of the first, but it's not nearly as revolutionary or well executed.

Lunar 2: Eternal Blue

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **Working Designs** ■ Developer: **Game Arts/Working Designs**

Given this title's lowly 16-bit origins, it should come as no surprise to discover that *Lunar 2* looks more than a little dated, its tiny iconic characters and limited tile sets harking back to a bygone age. Even so, when taken on its own terms, *Lunar 2* remains a refreshingly colorful and utterly appealing adventure, bolstered by likable characters and anime cut scenes that wouldn't look out of place on a sugar-sweetened Saturday morning cartoon.

In many ways, *Lunar 2* is an archetypal RPG, packed with dungeons to explore, subquests to solve, and more turn-based combat than you can shake a broadsword at. What raises it above the majority of its crypt-creeping brethren is the sheer quality of its design. Every element has been tuned to perfection, ensuring that gameplay remains enchanting to the very end.

The traditional turn-based combat mode has been balanced to the umpteenth degree, raising the challenge with each successive battle, while at the same time ensuring that things never become too difficult or frustrating. Dungeon design is equally impressive, with layouts that tantalize rather than irritate, taking you on fantastically roundabout routes before finally giving up the ultimate goal.

Of course, you can't review a Working Designs RPG without duly noting the attention given to its localization. From the beautifully translated dialogue to the sparkling vocal performances, the entire game smacks of loving care and a desire to maintain the original's elegiac storytelling in the finest way possible. *Lunar 2* may be dated, but every true RPG enthusiast should own a copy. — *Samuel Bass*

■ **Yes, it looks like yesterday's RPG (in fact, it is yesterday's RPG), but *Lunar 2* has still got the goods**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Not one for the technologically fixated, but a brilliant, timelessly charming RPG nonetheless.

Moto Racer World Tour

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **Codemasters** ■ Developer: **Delphine Software Interactive**

Moto Racer World Tour is clearly an effort to siphon off some of the success of *Excitebike 64*. What makes it stand apart from most bike racers is that it enables you to race in both outdoor and indoor motocross events, as well as superbike competitions. But, like most of the bikes it features, this title is mired in muck.

The main problem with *Moto Racer* is the horrible control. The bikes constantly oversteer, and though they can be slightly modified in the garage, the resulting differences are minimal. Stadium tracks are impossible to win on because your bike gets far too much air even during small jumps, forcing you to watch the CPU competitors race by underneath. Perhaps most insulting, the analog control support is technologically deficient — the analog sticks inexplicably shut down from time to time.

The camera only serves to worsen the poor gameplay, as it often swings so wide on a turn that the track is no longer in sight, instead treating you to a clear view of the irrelevant, pixelated background. Even if this had come out at the launch of the original PlayStation, it would have seemed weak. Its release now is absurd. — *Doug Trueman*

■ **With so many racing games available for PlayStation, there's no reason to even look at *Moto Racer World Tour***

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: It's been done before, and better.

WWF Smackdown 2: Know Your Role

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **THQ** ■ Developer: **Yuke's**

The sequel to the first good PlayStation wrestling game in the U.S., *Smackdown 2* takes the original's arcade grappling and backstage exploration, then adds in every mode, option, and specialty match that fans have asked for in the year since. This includes the introduction of tag team moves which are the best we've seen in any wrestling game, ladder matches, tables matches, TLC (tables, ladders, chairs) matches, coffin matches, and the holy grail of deadly mayhem, the Hell in the Cell.

Also improved immeasurably is *Smackdown 2*'s "Create a Wrestler" mode. The original's creation system was by far the worst this side of *WCW Mayhem*. Now it rivals *WWF No Mercy* for depth and originality — there aren't nearly as many moves to choose from as in *No Mercy*'s, but the physical customization is unparalleled. When a game actually lets you choose jaw alignment and biceps thickness, we can't help but be impressed.

Unfortunately, not everything that was hurting got the same love and attention. The Story mode, responsible for much of the original game's hype, is practically unplayable here thanks to some horrible design decisions. While you don't have to watch every match in a card, you do have to watch mini versions of them while the computer decides who won, resulting in a lot of waiting around instead of playing. Compare this to *No Mercy*'s streamlined and involving Story mode and there's no contest. — *Daniel Erickson*

■ **It approaches being great, but *Smackdown 2* will have to settle for just being "pretty good"**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: There are tons of options and great multiplayer matches, but *Smackdown*'s Story mode falls on its candy ass.

■ One of *NOLF*'s strongest points is that it never takes itself too seriously, and the humor is often genuinely, laugh-out-loud funny

■ PC

No One Lives Forever

■ Publisher: **Fox Interactive** ■ Developer: **Monolith**

But hopefully Cate Archer will be around for a long time

If first-person shooters have yet to grow up in the way we hoped they would after *Half-Life*, *No One Lives Forever* is proof that some folks are still trying. This is a real gem.

Set in a mod, *Austin Powers*-style swinging '60s that never quite existed, *NOLF* stars Cate Archer. As the only female operative of the international superspy organization UNITY, she must battle against both the evil terrorist conspiracy of HARM and the sexist attitudes of her colleagues.

■ Meet Cate Archer, superspy extraordinaire and mod '60s fashion plate

NOLF nails its subject, right down to Cate's hip-hugging bodysuit (cue the Emma Peel flashbacks). The many and varied missions use nearly every setting you can imagine from '60s spy movies, from East Berlin and a Swiss chalet to spear gun battles on the ocean floor and zero-G space stations. Gameplay also varies nicely, with a sniper level, tailing a suspect, and one totally unique stage where Cate fends off attackers in mid-air while falling from an airplane without a parachute!

Most missions, however, emphasize stealth over combat. It's a style of game that admittedly may not appeal to everyone, requiring a great deal of thought and patience to sneak past security cameras and guards. But things are rarely boring while you wait for the right moment to slip by, as the guards talk about the dental plans of various "evil" organizations or ask, "What's in all these crates, anyway?"

This misses five stars by a very slim margin. The cut scenes can be tedious (mostly talking heads) and needed some judicious dialogue editing or character animation. The graphics are quite nice, but the LithTech engine isn't very flashy either, and dead guards can disappear into walls.

However, none of this keeps *NOLF* from being a smashing good time. Do not miss this one. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

■ Bring down helicopter gunships with small arms? All in a day's work for Ms. Archer

INTELLIGENCE AND GADGETS

The AI of the guards in *NOLF* is impressive. Although they walk in set patterns, they react to noise and will investigate suspicious sounds (different floor types, by the way, make different amounts of noise). Indeed, one of the few knocks you can make against this game is that sometimes their hearing is almost superhuman.

However, to outsmart them you're given a wide range of cool gadgets, from simple things like coins (toss one and the guard goes to investigate the sound, giving you a chance to slip by) to elaborate mechanical poodles for distracting dogs. There are also gizmos like camera disablers and "body dissolver" for disposing of any inconveniently conspicuous corpses.

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: It may not be in quite the same league as *Deus Ex*, but then, what is? *NOLF* is one ferociously terrific game. Sequel please.

The Blair Witch Project 2: Legend of Coffin Rock

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: G.O.D. ■ Developer: Human Head

Hot on the heels of the first *Blair Witch* game comes *Coffin Rock*, the second in a series of three movie tie-ins published in as many months. Like the first title, *Rustin Parr, Coffin Rock* runs on the *Nocturne* engine, but unlike its predecessor this is mostly action with very little adventuring or puzzles.

■ Turns out the undead are easily dispatched with a few stray bullets

This action-oriented approach to the *Blair Witch* mystery is refreshing at first. You take the part of a Civil War soldier with amnesia, trying to rescue a young girl who's lost in the Burkittsville woods. Interactive flashbacks in which you blast rebels during the war share time with the main story, in which you unload your trusty revolver at specters of the undead. That's right, apparently the Blair Witch's minions aren't so tough and just need someone with a steady trigger finger to show them what's what.

Unfortunately the action is extremely repetitive, with only six different types of bad guys and two bosses to fill out the measly five and a half hours of gameplay. There's no replay value at all thanks to a linear and exhaustingly told storyline (the game would last three hours at most without it), and the *Nocturne* engine, designed for dramatic viewpoints, is a horrible pain while trying to do battle. Fans of the movies who really want to know why five men were gutted at Coffin Rock may want to risk this one for the $20 price of admission, but everyone else can steer clear. — *Daniel Erickson*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Short yet painfully repetitive, even blasting ghosts isn't fun thanks to the wonky camera.

The Longest Journey

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Funcom ■ Developer: Funcom

This point-and-click adventure tells the story of April Ryan, a young woman who discovers she is able to move between two parallel worlds: Stark, which is, in fact, a decaying, 23rd-century Earth, and Arcadia, a medieval world populated by evil alchemists, benevolent dragons, and undersea civilizations. Unfortunately, she also learns that the two worlds are starting to bleed into one another, and only she is in a position to prevent a cosmic catastrophe.

■ Like Piers Anthony's *Phase* novels, this game features two parallel worlds — one bound by science, the other ruled by magic

In the end, the game's ideals only slightly outweigh its execution. The cast is quite well realized, and the story concept is grand, but it's told too slowly and far too subtly to be terribly moving, even in the climactic final chapters. Sound and voice acting are wonderful, and graphics are lush, if jaggy. However, there is no technical innovation, and in a post-*Grim Fandango* world, the rare pixel-hunt is intolerable. Also, Stark is simply unpleasant — filled with rude people and mundane tasks.

Puzzles are hit-and-miss. There are too many FedEx quests, and situations are often made difficult by the game's refusal to outline the included elements. It may present a puzzle without defining what it is you hope to achieve by completing it and often fails to offer any hint that you can interact with a required item. A few tweaks to the dialogue and interface would have made the puzzles seem more like tests of creativity and logic and less like trick questions. — *Eric Bratcher*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: This is a potential epic that seems to have taken tranquilizers. It's still worthwhile, but it's also a little slow, a little dull, and sometimes just doesn't make sense.

■ PC

Sacrifice

■ Publisher: Interplay ■ Developer: Shiny Entertainment

Shiny makes good

■ Look out, because *Sacrifice*'s realtime strategy (flavored with just a little RPG) will knock your socks off — along with a lot of critters' heads

Sacrifice is a veritable feast for the eyes; its orgiastic fantasy conflagrations take place on some of the most creepily beautiful landscapes this side of Salvador Dali. Replete with awe-inspiring spell effects and an impressive array of creatures, there is very little in *Sacrifice* that would fail to impress even the most jaded of PC gamers. Of course, all of these visual fireworks come at a significant cost — *Sacrifice* requires a seriously high-end PC for decent performance.

■ The graphics are among the most unique and colorful we've seen

At first, *Sacrifice*'s strategically charged gameplay seems as unique as its gorgeous visuals, combining spell-based role-playing with some relatively in-depth RTS action. As a sorcerous representative of one of the game's five elemental deities, you must utilize both your own character's magical abilities and a variety of betoothed beasties to gain control over a series of aerial archipelagoes.

While this combination of spellcasting and small unit strategy initially feels somewhat original, in the end *Sacrifice* turns out to be just another realtime strategy game, albeit an exceptionally well-designed one. Despite the game's unique soul harvesting resource system — in which you're often forced to sacrifice your own troops in order to gain power — victory too often boils down to little more than concentrated bouts of creatures rushing in, with the occasional spell cast for good measure.

Even with this caveat, there's no denying that *Sacrifice* is a remarkably entertaining title, with more than enough creature and spell combinations to keep you playing for weeks. With its great visuals, strong narrative thrust, and exceptional online and skirmish modes, *Sacrifice* is a new high watermark in 3D, realtime strategy gaming. — *Samuel Bass*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: While its reach may occasionally overshoot its grasp, there is no denying that *Sacrifice* is an exceptional RTS experience.

■ A fully bustling little Mycenean metropolis — that's what every *Zeus* builder likes to see

■ PC

Zeus

■ Publisher: **Sierra Studios** ■ Developer: **Impression Games**

We built this city on the sweat of 10,000 slaves

It's been five games in the making, but *Zeus* is definitely the crowning achievement in Impressions Games' city building series, which has included such classics as *Caesar* and last year's *Pharaoh*. *Zeus* appeals to a much wider range of players however, so if you've ever thought about the city building series but passed it up, this is the game to try.

First off, the interface is far simpler, and the menu system is much easier to understand than *Pharaoh*'s. This makes for a game that's easier to control and a city building process that almost everyone can understand. There are fewer requirements for top-notch buildings, and fulfilling those requirements is easier than ever — most require just a two-step process or some item or commodity you can acquire by trading with other cities.

The gods aren't as vicious as the Egyptian pantheon in *Pharaoh*, and instead they're much more likely to help. Heroes who respond to the building of a Hero's Hall will deal with mythological beasts and enemies. With a hero or two around, bad guys hit the bricks.

Each campaign is broken up into smaller individual missions that all interconnect. Instead of building up a city and then immediately abandoning it, new cities are built in the form of colonies that usually manufacture a product needed for the home city. Military conquest and defense can be turned over to the AI completely, so those of you who don't care for the combat can simply sit back and watch, concentrating fully on the building and planning aspects. Impressions has even included three sandbox modes: economic dominance, military dominance and an open mode with no goals at all. — *Jason Samuel*

■ Trade is a much simpler process than it was in *Pharaoh*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Overall it's simpler, the gameplay is finely tuned, and most importantly, it's fun. Do not miss.

Rune

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Gathering of Developers** ■ Developer: **Human Head**

Norse mythology would seem like wonderfully fertile soil for growing a ripe, healthy game. It has titanic struggles between fathers, sons, and brothers; heroes with really big swords; and lots of cool monsters. While *Rune* has plenty of those elements, it's also sadly lacking in imagination or long-lasting fun.

You take control of Ragnarok, a young Norseman sent on the vital quest of saving Midgard from falling into the clutches of Loki the Trickster. And while the beginning of the game offers some fantastic aquatic vistas, *Rune* then proceeds to stick its head underground, and it pretty much stays there the whole game. The result is that the beautiful work Human Head has done with the *Unreal* engine is smothered in a palette of browns, reds, and grays shoved through narrow corridors and small caverns.

Even worse, the gameplay consists mainly of slashing through a handful of zombies or goblins to get to a switch that leads to... more slashing and switch pulling. Your melee-only arsenal consists of very similar edged or blunt weapons, and the fighting style is no more sophisticated than sidestepping and clicking the mouse button. The ability to use the severed limbs of fallen foes as a weapon is amusing, but only for a little while.

This is a classic example of beautiful graphics and an interesting story roped into the service of routine gameplay and boring combat. It excels neither as an adventure tale nor as a bloody good action game. It certainly looks good on the vine, but never fully blooms. — *Jim Preston*

■ Somehow, we never pictured Vikings crawling through sewer tunnels and flipping switches to open doors

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: *Rune* fails to impress. The shaky gameplay undermines the first-rate visuals and ripping good story.

realMYST

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Mattel Interactive** ■ Developer: **Cyan**

After seven years and millions of copies, the original *Myst* is a gaming phenomenon unlike any other. People either love the game or they hate it, and neither side understands the other. However, *realMYST* is an update to the original that neither gives fans much new material nor offers anything to appeal to its detractors.

Graphically, *realMYST* is top-notch, arguably among the most beautiful games ever made, and the music and sound effects are a pleasing accompaniment. Unfortunately, the graphics come at a steep price; even on a system well above the recommended specs, the game exhibits terrible framerates while you're walking around the outdoor areas — enough to cause motion sickness. To add to the problem, the controls are uncomfortable and cannot be reconfigured.

Every puzzle is identical to the original. The worlds — or Ages, as they're known in *Myst* parlance — are exactly the same, and the story hasn't been changed in any way either. The game does include one new Age that you can explore once you've finished, but this addition doesn't really offer enough to warrant a full game purchase. Because *realMYST* doesn't do anything new until the additional Age, an experienced *Myst* player can skip straight to the end in about 10 minutes.

To recap what we said so many years ago, the storyline, explained mostly by a library of books and some video, is fine, though it hinges on a game-long red herring and features no real ending. But the puzzles make no sense and consist of nothing but pushing buttons, pulling levers, and hitting switches. With the graphics problems, fans should stick with the original version — non-fans should simply keep avoiding it. — *Carla Harker*

■ Have fun sifting through the clues and completing the puzzles... such as they are

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: With only graphics to stand on, *realMYST* is beautiful, but there's no real substance there.

MONKEY BRAIN CONTROLS ROBOT

Weird but true: Scientists successfully enabled a monkey to control a robot arm 600 miles away using its brain signals. According to Reuters, scientists expressed hope that paralyzed patients might be given the ability to move prosthetic limbs through this technology.

"It was an amazing sight to see the robot in my lab move, knowing that it was being driven by signals from a monkey brain at Duke," said Mandayam Srinivasan, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "It was as if the monkey had a 600-mile-long virtual arm."

Scientists at MIT and Duke University implanted electrodes in the monkey's brain to record brain activity, and from this they determined which patterns corresponded with each movement. They then connected the computer recording the monkey's brain patterns to a robot arm. The signal from the monkey's brain then told the robot arm to move.

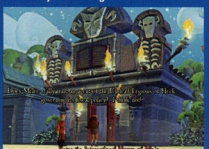
According to Srinivasan, "When we initially conceived the idea of using monkey brain signals to control a distant robot across the Internet, we were not sure how variable delays in signal transmission would affect the outcome ... it worked out beautifully."

Researchers hope that through the technology they can restore some motor function to paralyzed patients.

■ Oh yeah, did we mention that Guybrush and Elaine's perennial nemesis, LeChuck, is also back and badder than ever!

■ An evil plot's afoot to civilize all pirates and open tacky theme restaurants

■ Look a bit familiar? Many locations in *Escape from Monkey Island* have been seen before in previous games, but that's not necessarily a bad thing



■ PC

Escape from Monkey Island

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

It's a jungle in there...

It's been three years since *Curse of Monkey Island*, a game that was pretty funny but was also stuck in the rut of point-and-click adventure game mechanics and rather stupefying puzzles. Perhaps sadly, this fourth in the series does exactly the same thing.

The good news is that, as with every Lucas title, the production values are top of the line. The characters are incredibly well modeled and animated; the voice acting is excellent and full of character; and the dialogue is mostly drop-dead funny. Fans will appreciate the many in-jokes and self-referential humor, as characters from previous games make appearances (the gleefully evil talking skull, Murray — now reduced to hawking a theme restaurant — is a particular standout).

The story is also much stronger this time around, with Guybrush Threepwood and his wife, mayor Elaine Marley, locked in a desperate election against a new mayoral candidate (seems Elaine was declared legally dead while she was away). And worse, they're also fighting a takeover by a conglomerate bent on turning the entire Tri-Island area into a giant, hideously commercial resort.

Escape's engine is lifted almost whole from LucasArts' last great adventure game, *Grim Fandango*, and uses 3D characters over 2D pre-rendered backgrounds. When your character gets close to an object or person that can be interacted with, a list of possible options pops up, and the system works well enough.

Once again, however, most of the puzzles are utterly inscrutable. "Logic" isn't really a consideration here, and at times the clues are so thin they're practically nonexistent. Often you find yourself doing things simply because the game lets you, with no idea why it's important until it triggers an event you had no reason to expect as the result. There are a couple of puzzles (where Guybrush is trapped in a weird, time-warped swamp, for example) that are challenging yet actually make sense, but these are the exception not the rule. And may the goddess help you in figuring out "Monkey Kombat," which is ten times more complicated than Insult Sword Fighting ever was. To LucasArts' credit, they actually include a bare bones walkthrough right in the box, but it would have been better to simply make the puzzles a little less impenetrable.

Still, it's worth noting that even if it's a bit of a slog, it can also be a rollicking good time. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

■ The game's biggest problem is that only a handful of the puzzles really make sense

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: If the puzzles are a good example of why adventure games have been self-destructing for years, the story, characters, and production values show just how entertaining they can be at their best.

■ The graphics are impressive, but this latest sequel is more arcade shooter than sim

■ PC

MechWarrior 4: Vengeance

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

It's more accessible, but is that what you want?

While there was some disappointment with the bug-ridden *Mech 3*, there's definitely little to complain about with this latest installment in the series. Unless you're a die-hard mech sim guy, that is. *Vengeance* has very clearly shifted gameplay emphasis away from the slower, methodical play that marked the previous incarnations, opting instead to go for a fast action feel. A very, very fast action feel. Where battles used to consist of giant, plodding mechs slowly circling each other and blasting away other's legs off, *MechWarrior 4: Vengeance* pitches speedy two-legged tanks into head-on battles.

The graphics engine for *Vengeance* is stunning. Initially, we didn't see much of an improvement from the Zipper engine used in *Mech 3*, but repeated plays and deeper exploration of the game have thoroughly blown us away. Textures are crisp; lighting effects border on disco insanity; and the mech models have enough polygons in them to border on the super-real. Not only are the mechs lovingly detailed with multiple articulation points on the models, they also animate smoothly and beautifully, from the speedy, awkward chicken gait of the lighter mechs to the ponderous stomping of the really big 'n' heavy bastards.

Gone are the days of simply targeting one leg on your enemy and pounding away at it until the unit topples. Not only do the mechs now zip around, but the crippling leg shot has been practically eliminated by the FASA/Microsoft crew. Surprisingly, because of this decision, mech-on-mech combat now takes an agonizingly long time, which doesn't make a whole lot of sense considering the action orientation that the designers have taken. While the speed is a great improvement to the game, the length of time it takes to wipe out an enemy mech is almost unforgivable. Sim purists will complain about the somewhat new direction that the *MechWarrior* series has taken in this outing, but it may result in opening up the game to the more mainstream action gamers who have typically shunned these types of games.

— Chris Kramer

■ The long-range aiming reticule eats up more of the screen than it arguably should

YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY

Take a look back at the very first *MechWarrior*, an EGA DOS game that ran on 286 systems with 640 kilobytes of RAM. Thank the goddess for 3D accelerators, eh!

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Knockout graphics and the new gameplay direction aside, this *MechWarrior* isn't as genre-defining as previous incarnations. A solid game, but not as mind-blowing as *MechWarrior 2*.

21 locations

Arlington, VA*
Atlanta, GA
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Gamer's Guide

You want to know what games are worth your cash and time? Well, you've come to the right place...

Welcome to the Gamer's Guide, your insanely popular resource to what's worth buying and what's not even worth a glance. Each month, we update the list with every game we've reviewed since the last issue and cull out older stuff. Which older stuff? Well, mostly old or bad games, especially PC titles, but aging console titles, too. We leave in just about every title that ever got ★★★★★ though, since they're almost always a good bet, no matter how old they get. (Although it is worth taking note of which issue it was reviewed in, since time and technology march on, and a game that scored ★★★★ a couple of years ago might only score ★★★ today.)

PlayStation 2

title	publisher	rating	#
Armored Core 2	Agetec	★★★★	11/00
DOA2: Hardcore	Tecmo	★★★★★	01/01
Driving Emotion Type-S (Japan)	Square	★	06/00
DrumMania (Japan)	Konami	★★	05/00
Dynasty Warriors 2	Koei	★★★	11/00
ESPN International Track & Field	Konami	★★★	01/01
Eternal Ring	from Software	★★	11/00
Evergrace	Agetec	★★	01/01
Fantavision (Japan)	Sony	★★★★	07/00
Gradius III and IV	Konami	★★★	01/01
Gungriffon Blaze	Working Designs	★★★	01/01
Kessen (Japan)	Koei	★★★★	05/00
Madden NFL 2001	EA Sports	★★★★★	11/00
Midnight Club Street Racing	Rockstar	★★★★	01/01
Moto GP	Namco	★★★	01/01
NFL GameDay 2001	989 Sports	★	01/01
NHL 2001	EA Sports	★★★★	12/00
Orphen: Scion of Sorcery	Activision	★★	01/01
Ridge Racer V	Namco	★★★★	11/00
Silent Scope	Konami	★★★	12/00
Sky Surfer (Japan)	Idea Factory	★	07/00
Smuggler's Run	Rockstar	★★★★	12/00
SSX	EA Sports	★★★★★	11/00
Stepping Selection (Japan)	Jaleco	★★★	05/00
Street Fighter EX 3	Capcom	★★	01/01
Summoner	THQ	★★	01/01
Super Puzzle Bobble (Japan)	Taito	★★★	12/00
Swing Away Golf	Electronic Arts	★★★	11/00
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	★★★★	12/00
Timesplitters	Eidos	★★★★	01/01
Unreal Tournament	Infogrames	★★★★	01/01
Wild Wild Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★	12/00
X Squad	Electronic Arts	★★	12/00

Dreamcast

title	publisher	rating	#
4 Wheel Thunder	Midway	★★	07/00
Armada	Metro3D	★★★	02/00
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes	3DO	★★	01/01
Blue Stinger	Activision	★★★	11/99
Cannon Spike	Capcom	★★★	11/00
Capcom vs. SNK	Capcom	★★★	12/00
Carrier	Jaleco	★★★	04/00
Centipede	Hasbro	★★★	02/00
Chef's Luv Shack	Acclaim	★★	02/00
Chu Chu Rocket	Sega	★★★★	05/00
Crazy Taxi	Sega	★★★★	04/00
D2	Sega	★★★	11/00
Dead or Alive 2	Tecmo	★★★★★	04/00
Deep Fighter	Ubi Soft	★	08/00
Demolition Racer: No Exit	Infogrames	★★★	11/00
Draconus: Cult of the Wyrm	Crave	★★★	09/00
Dynamite Cop 2	Sega	★★★	09/99
Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future	Sega	★★	10/00
ECW: Hardcore Revolution	Acclaim	★	05/00
Evolution	Ubi Soft	★★★	01/00
Evolution 2	Ubi Soft	★★★	07/00
Expendable (Japan)	Rage	★	09/99
F1 World Grand Prix	Video System	★★★	01/00
F355 Challenge	Acclaim	★★★★	01/01
Fighting Force 2	Eidos	★★	03/00
Flag to Flag CART Racing	Sega	★★	10/99
Frame Gride (Japan)	from Software	★★★	10/99
Fur Fighters	Acclaim	★★★	08/00
Gauntlet Legends	Midway	★★★	08/00
Giga Wing	Capcom	★★	11/00
Grand Theft Auto 2	Rockstar	★★	08/00
Gunbird 2	Capcom	★★★	12/00
Hidden and Dangerous	TalonSoft	★★★★	01/00
House of the Dead 2	Sega	★★	09/99
Hydro Thunder	Midway	★★★★	10/99
Industrial Spy: Operation Espionage	UFO Interactive	★★★	05/00
Jedi Power Battles	LucasArts	★★★	01/01
Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2000	Acclaim	★★	01/01
Jet Grind Radio	Sega	★★★★	01/01
King of Fighters (Japan)	SNK	★★	11/99
Legacy of Kain Soul Reaver	Eidos	★★★★	05/00
Magforce	Crave	★★	09/00
Maken X	Atlus	★★	07/00
Marvel vs. Capcom 2	Capcom	★★★★	07/00
MDK2	Interplay	★★★★	06/00
Monaco GP	Ubi Soft	★★★	01/01
Mortal Kombat Gold	Midway	★★	10/99
NFL 2K1	Sega	★★★★★	11/00
NFL Blitz 2000	Midway	★★★★	11/99
NFL Blitz 2001	Midway	★★★★	11/00
Nightmare Creatures II	Konami	★★	07/00
Omikron The Nomad Soul	Eidos	★★	10/00
Pen Pen TriceLon	Infogrames	★★	12/00
Plasma Sword	Capcom	★★	03/00
Power Stone	Capcom	★★★★	09/99
Power Stone 2	Capcom	★★★★	07/00
Psychic Force 2012	Acclaim	★	01/00
Quake III Arena	Sega	★★★★	01/01
Quarterback Club 2000	Acclaim	★	03/00
Rayman 2	Ubi Soft	★★★★	05/00
Re-Volt	Acclaim	★★★★	03/00
Ready 2 Rumble	Midway	★★★★	11/99
Red Dog Superior Firepower	Crave	★★★	01/01
Resident Evil: Code Veronica	Capcom	★★★★★	05/00
Ring The	Infogrames	★	09/00
Rippin' Riders	Sega	★★	01/00
Roadsters	Titus	★★	07/00
Samba de Amigo (Japan)	Sega	★★★★★	08/00
San Francisco Rush 2049	Midway	★★★★★	11/00
Seaman	Sega	★★★★	09/00
Sega Bass Fishing	Sega	★★★★	09/99
Sega GT	Sega	★★★★★	12/00
Sega Marine Fishing	Sega	★★★★	01/01
Sega Rally 2	Sega	★★★	01/00
Sega Sports NBA 2K	Sega	★★★★	11/00
Sega Sports NFL 2K	Sega	★★★★	10/99
Sega Sports NHL 2K	Sega	★★★	04/00
Seventh Cross Evolution	NEC	★★	03/00
Shenmue	Sega	★★★★★	12/00
Silent Scope	Infogrames	★★★	10/00
Slave Zero	Infogrames	★★★	01/00
Sno Cross Championship Racing	Crave	★★★	12/00
Sonic Adventure	Sega	★★★★	10/99
Soul Calibur	Namco	★★★★★	11/99
Soul Fighter	Red Orb	★	03/00
South Park Rally	Acclaim	★★	09/00
Space Channel 5	Sega	★★★★	08/00
Spawn: In the Demon's Hand	Capcom	★	12/00
Speed Devils	Ubi Soft	★★★★	01/00
Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike	Capcom	★★★	12/00
Super Magnetic Neo	Crave	★★★	09/00
Suzuki Alstare Extreme Racing	Ubi Soft	★	12/99
Sword of the Berserk: Guts Rage	Eidos	★★★	06/00
Sydney 2000	Eidos	★★	11/00
Tech Romancer	Capcom	★★★	06/00
Test Drive 6	Infogrames	★★	03/00
Test Drive Le Mans	Infogrames	★★★★★	01/01
Test Drive V-Rally	Infogrames	★★★★	11/00
Time Stalkers	Sega	★★★	06/00
THX Motorsports: Hardcore Heat	ASC Games	★★	12/99
Tokyo Xtreme Racing 2	Crave	★★★	01/01
Tokyo Xtreme Racing	Crave	★★★	09/99
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six	Majesco	★★★★	08/00
Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation	Eidos	★★★	06/00
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater	Crave	★★★★★	08/00
Toy Commander	Sega	★★★★	12/99
Toy Story 2	Activision	★	12/00
Trickstyle	Acclaim	★★	11/99
Ultimate Fighting Championship	Crave	★★★★★	10/00
Ultimate Il Second Offense	Activision	★★	03/00
Virtua Athlete	Agetec	★★	11/00
Virtua Fighter 3tb	Sega	★★★★	12/99
Virtua Striker 2000	Sega	★★	04/00
Virtua Tennis	Sega	★★★★★	09/00
Virtual On Oratorio Tangram	Sega	★★★	09/99
Wacky Races	Infogrames	★★★★	09/00
Walt Disney Quest Magical Racing Tour	Eidos	★★	10/00
Wild Metal	Rockstar Games	★★★	04/00
Wild Metal Country	Acclaim	★	02/00
WWF Royal Rumble	THQ	★★★	10/00
Zombie Revenge	Sega	★★	03/00

Nintendo 64

title	publisher	rating	#
1080° Snowboarding	Nintendo	★★★★★	42
A Bug's Life	Activision	★	09/99
All Star Baseball 2000	Acclaim	★★★★	55
All Star Tennis '99	Ubi Soft	★	10/99
Armorines: Project S.W.A.R.M.	Acclaim	★	02/00
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes	3DO	★★★	12/99
Banjo-Kazooie	Nintendo	★★★★	43
Battletanx	3DO	★★★	51
Battletanx: Global Assault	3DO	★★★	12/99
Beetle Adventure Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★	53
Body Harvest	Midway	★★★★	48
Buck Bumble	Ubi Soft	★★★	48
Castlevania	Konami	★★★	51
Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness	Capcom	★★	03/00
Cruisin' World	Midway	★★	48
Deadly Arts	Konami	★	49
Disney's Tarzan	Disney Interactive	★★★	05/00
Donkey Kong 64	Nintendo	★★★★	12/99
Duke Nukem: Zero Hour	GT Interactive	★	09/99
Earthworm Jim 3D	Rockstar Games	★★	01/01
ECW: Hardcore Revolution	Acclaim	★	03/00
Excitebike 64	Nintendo	★★★★	08/00
F-Zero X	Nintendo	★★★★★	46
Glover	Hasbro Interactive	★★★	48
Goemon's Great Adventure	Konami	★★★	53
Goldeneye 007	Nintendo	★★★★★	34
GT 64	Infogrames	★★	47
Hot Wheels Turbo Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★	11/99
Hey You, Pikachu	Nintendo	★★★	01/01
Hybrid Heaven	Konami	★★★	54
Hydro Thunder 64	Midway	★★★★	03/00
In the Zone 2000	Konami	★	02/00
International Superstar Soccer	Konami	★★★★★	32
International Superstar Soccer 98	Konami	★★★	44
Jet Force Gemini	Nintendo	★★★	11/99
Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest	Nintendo	★★★★	56
Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask	Nintendo	★★★★	12/00
Lego Racers	Lego Media	★★	01/00
Mario Party 2	Nintendo	★★★	04/00
Mission: Impossible	Ocean	★★★	44
Monaco GP Racing Simulation 2	Ubi Soft	★★★★	55
Monster Truck Madness 64	Rockstar	★	11/99
Ms. Pac-Man Maze Madness	Namco	★★★	01/01
Mystical Ninja	Konami	★★★	45
NBA Showtime: NBA on NBC	Midway	★★★	01/00
NHL Breakaway 99	Acclaim	★★	50
Nightmare Creatures	Activision	★★	50
Nuclear Strike 64	THQ	★★★★	05/00
Perfect Dark	Nintendo	★★★★★	06/00
Pokemon Puzzle League	Nintendo	★★★★	01/01
Quake II	Activision	★★★	10/99
Rainbow Six	Red Storm Ent.	★★★	01/00
Rayman 2	Ubi Soft	★★★★	01/00
Ready 2 Rumble Boxing	Midway	★★★	01/00
Resident Evil 2	Capcom	★★★★	12/99
Ridge Racer 64	Nintendo	★★★★	04/00
Roadsters	Titus	★★★	04/00
Rocket: The Robot on Wheels	Ubi Soft	★★★	12/99
Rush 2: Extreme Racing USA	Midway	★★★★	49
S.C.A.R.S.	Ubi Soft	★★★	50
San Francisco Rush	Midway Home	★★★★★	36
Shadowgate 64	Kemco	★★	10/99
Shadowman	Acclaim	★★	11/99
Smash Brothers	Nintendo	★★★★★	54
South Park Rally	Acclaim	★★	03/00
Space Station: Silicon Valley	Take 2	★★★★★	49
Star Wars Episode I Racer	Nintendo	★★★	55
Super Mario 64	Nintendo	★★★★★	21
Superman	Titus	★	10/99
Tonic Trouble	Ubi Soft	★★★	10/99
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater	Activision	★★★★★	05/00
Top Gear Rally 2	Kemco	★★★★	02/00
Turok: Rage Wars	Acclaim	★★	01/00
Turok 2: Seeds of Evil	Acclaim	★★★★	47
Turok 3: Shadows of Oblivion	Acclaim	★★★★	12/00
Vigilante 8	Interplay	★★★	53
Virtual Chess 64	Titus	★★★	47
Waverace 64	Nintendo	★★★★★	25
WCW/nWarm	Electronic Arts	★	12/99
WCW/nWO Revenge	THQ	★★★★	48
Wetrix+: Covert Operations	Kcet	★★★	01/00
Wipeout 64	Psygnosis/Midway	★★★★	48
World Driver Championship	Midway	★★★★	09/99
World Is Not Enough, The	Electronic Arts	★★★	12/00
Worms: Armageddon	Infogrames	★★★	04/00
Wrestlemania 2000	THQ	★★★	12/99
WWF Attitude	Acclaim	★★	11/99
WWF No Mercy	THQ	★★★★	01/01
Xena: Talisman of Fate	Titus	★★	05/00
Zelda: Ocarina of Time	Nintendo	★★★★★	48

PlayStation

title	publisher	rating	#
3Xtreme	989 Studios	★	55
Ace Combat 3	Namco	★★	04/00
Akuji the Heartless	Eidos	★★★	52
Alexi Lalas International Soccer	Take 2	★★★	56
Alien Resurrection	Fox Interactive	★★	11/00
Alundra	Working Designs	★★★★	38
Alundra 2	Activision	★★★★	05/00
Ape Escape	SCEA	★★★★★	56
Apocalypse	Activision	★★	50
Armored Core	SCEA	★★★★	37
Armored Core: Master of Arena	Agetec	★★★	04/00
Armored Core: Project Phantasma	Asci	★★★	48
Armorines: Project Swarm	Acclaim	★	09/00
Army Men: Air Attack	3DO	★★★	01/00
Army Men: Air Attack 2	3DO	★★★	01/01
Army Men: World War — Land, Sea, Air	3DO	★★★	01/01
Auto Destruct	Electronic Arts	★★★	39
Azure Dreams	Konami	★★★	44
Bail Breakers	Take 2	★★★	12/00
Ballistic	Infogrames	★★★	01/00
Batman and Robin	Acclaim	★★	47
Blast Radius	Psygnosis	★	53

Bisoto	SCEA	★★	42
Bloody Roar	SCEA	★★★★	41
Bloody Roar 2	SCEA	★★★★	56
Bomberman Fantasy Racing	Atlus	★★★	52
Boombots	Southpeak Interactive	★★★	01/00
Brave Fencer Musashi	Square EA	★★★	49
Breath of Fire II	Capcom	★★★★	41
Breath of Fire IV	Capcom	★★★★	01/01
Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling	THQ	★★★★	48
Bug Riders	GT Interactive	★★	37
Bushido Blade 2	Square EA	★★★★★	49
Bust-A-Groove	989 Studios	★★★★	50
Bust-A-Move	Enix	★★★★	41
Bust-A-Move 2	Enix	★★★	55
Cardinal SYN	Atlus	★★★	43
Castlevania: Symphony of the Night	Konami	★★★★	36
Castrol Honda Superbike Racing	Electronic Arts	★★	09/99
Centipede	Hasbro/Atari	★★★	09/99
Championship Motocross	THQ	★★★★	10/99
Chocobo's Dungeon 2	Square	★★★★	02/00
Chocobo Racing	Square EA	★★	10/99
Chrono Cross	Square EA	★★★★★	08/00
Circuit Breakers	Mindscape	★★★★	45
Civilization II	Activision	★★★★★	52
Clock Tower	Ascii	★★★★	37
Colony Wars	Psygnosis	★★★★★	38
Colony Wars Red Sun	Psygnosis	★★★★	04/00
Contender	SCEA	★	52
Cool Boarders 4	989 Studios	★★	01/00
Cool Boarders 2001	SCEA	★★	01/01
Covert Ops: Nuclear Dawn	Activision	★★	08/00
Crash 2: Cortex Strikes Back	SCEA	★★★★	37
Crash Bandicoot: Warped	SCEA	★★★	49
Crash Bash	SCEA	★★★★	01/01
Crash Team Racing	SCEA	★★★★★	01/00
Croc 2	Fox Interactive	★★★★	56
Dark Omen	Electronic Arts	★★★	43
Dead in the Water	AIC	★★	52
Dead or Alive	Tecmo	★★★★	37
Deathtrap Dungeon	Eidos	★	42
Deception 3: Dark Delusion	Tecmo	★★★	04/00
Demolition Racer	Infogrames	★	99
Destruction Derby Raw	Midway	★★	11/00
Devil Dice	THQ	★★★★	47
Diablo	Electronic Arts	★★★★	42
Die Hard Trilogy 2	Fox Interactive	★★	04/00
Dino Crisis	Capcom	★★★★★	10/99
Dino Crisis 2	Capcom	★★	11/00
Dragon Ball GT Final Bout	Bandai	★★★	39
Dragon Valor	Namco	★★★	11/00
Dragonseeds	Jaleco	★★	48
Driver	GT Interactive	★★★★	09/99
Duke Nukem: Time to Kill	GT Interactive	★★★★	48
Dukes of Hazzard: Racing for Home	Southpeak Interactive	★★★	47
Eagle One: Harrier Attack	Infogrames	★★★★	05/00
Einhander	SCEA	★★★★	40
Elimgrid	Square EA	★★★★	55
Fear Effect	Eidos	★★★★	04/00
Fighting Force	Eidos	★★★	37
Fighting Force 2	Eidos	★★★	02/00
Final Fantasy Tactics	SCEA	★★★★	40
Final Fantasy VII	Square EA	★★★★	34
Final Fantasy VIII	Square EA	★★★★	10/99
Final Fantasy IX	Square EA	★★★★★	12/00
Flintstones' Bedrock Bowling	SouthPeak Interactive	★★	11/00
Forsaken	Acclaim	★★★	43
Frogger	Hasbro Interactive	★	37
Frogger 2	Hasbro	★★★	11/00
Front Mission 3	Square EA	★★★★	06/00
G Darius	THQ	★★★	46
G Police: Weapons of Justice	Psygnosis	★	09/99
Galaga: Destination Earth	Hasbro	★★	12/00
Galerians	Crave	★★★★	04/00
Gekido	Interplay	★★★★	07/00
Gex 3: Deep Cover Gecko	Crystal Dynamics	★★	54
Gex: Enter the Gecko	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	42
Grandstream Saga	THQ	★★	44
Gran Turismo	SCEI	★★★★★	40
Grand Theft Auto: London 1969	Rockstar	★★★★	56
Grandia	SCEA	★★★★	12/99
Grinch, The	Konami	★★	01/01
Grind Session	SCEA	★★★	11/00
Guardian's Crusade	Activision	★★★★	52
Heart of Darkness	Interplay	★★★	47
Hogs of War	Infogrames	★★★★	11/00
Hot Shots Golf	SCEA	★★★★	41
In the Zone 99	Konami	★★	53
Incredible Crisis	Titus	★★★★	11/00
International Track and Field 2000	Konami	★★★	03/00
Invasion from Beyond	GT Interactive	★★	53
Jackie Chan's Stunt Master	Midway	★★	03/00
Jade Cocoon	Crave	★★★	09/99
Jersey Devil	MegaToon	★★★★	44
Jet Moto 3	989 Studios	★★★	11/99
Jojo's Bizarre Adventure	Capcom	★★	03/00
Judge Dredd	Acclaim	★★	42
Juggernaut	Jaleco	★★★	11/99
Kartia	Atlus	★★★★	45
Killer Loop	Crave	★★	01/00
Knockout Kings	EA Sports	★★	49
Knockout Kings 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	01/00
Knockout Kings 2001	EA Sports	★★★★	01/01
Konami Arcade Classics	Konami	★★★	09/99
Koudelka	Infogrames	★★★	09/00
Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver	Crystal Dynamics	★★★★	10/99
Legend of Dragoon, The	Sony	★★★★	08/00
Legend of Legaia	SCEA	★★★★	54
Legend of Mana	Square EA	★★	08/00
Lode Runner	Natsume	★★★	39
Lunar: Silver Star Story Complete	Working Designs	★★★★	55
Madden '99	Electronic Arts	★★	47
Madden 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	11/99
March Madness '98	Electronic Arts	★★	42
Medal of Honor	Electronic Arts	★★★★	01/00
Medal of Honor Underground	Electronic Arts	★★★★	12/00
MediEvil	SCEA	★★★★	48
MediEvil II	SCEA	★★★★	06/00
Megaman Legends	Capcom	★★★	47
Megaman Legends 2	Capcom	★★★★	01/01
Metal Gear Solid	Konami	★★★★★	48
Micro Machines V3	Midway	★★★★	39
Midway Collection 2, The	Midway	★★★★	38
Mike Tyson Boxing	Codemasters	★	01/01
Misadventures of Tron Bonne, The	Capcom	★★★★	03/00
Mr. Driller	Namco	★★★★	09/00
MLB '99	SCEA	★★★★	46
MLB 2000	989 Studios	★★★★	55
Monster Rancher	Tecmo	★★★★★	38
Monster Rancher Battle Card	Tecmo	★★	11/00
Mortal Kombat: Special Forces	Midway	★	10/00
Mortal Kombat 4	Midway	★★	46
Mortal Kombat Mythologies	Midway	★	38
Moto Racer	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	36
Moto Racer 2	Electronic Arts	★★★★	48
Mr. Pac-Man Maze Madness	Namco	★★★	12/00
MTV Sports: Snowboarding featuring Ricky Hatchcock	THQ	★★	01/01
Mujadel Superbikers	Midway	★★	12/00
N2O	Fox	★★★	45
Nagano Winter Olympics '98	Konami	★★★	39
NASCAR 99	EA Sports	★★★★	49
NASCAR 2000	EA Sports	★★	12/99
NASCAR Rumble	Electronic Arts	★★★★	04/00
NBA Live 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	02/00
NBA Live 2001	EA Sports	★★★★	01/01
NCAA Football 99	Electronic Arts	★★★	48
NCAA GameBreaker '98	SCEA	★★★★★	38
Need for Speed III	Electronic Arts	★★★★	43
Need for Speed: High Stakes	Electronic Arts	★★★★	54
Newman/Haas Racing	Psygnosis	★★	41
NFL Blitz	Midway	★★★★	47
NFL GameDay '99	989 Studios	★★★★★	47
NFL GameDay 2000	989 Studios	★★★★	11/99
NFL GameDay 2001	989 Sports	★★★★	10/00
NFL Xtreme	989 Sports	★★	46
NFL Xtreme 2	989 Studios	★	11/99
NGEN Racing	Infogrames	★★★	09/00
NHL 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	02/00
NHL 2K	EA Sports	★★★★★	12/99
NHL Face Off 2000	989 Studios	★★★★	12/99
Nightmare Creatures	Activision	★★★	38
No Fear: Downhill Mountain Bike Racing	Codemasters	★★	12/99
No One Can Stop Mr. Domino	Acclaim	★★★	51
O.D.T. - Escape Or Die Trying	Psygnosis	★	51
Omega Boost	SCEA	★★★	46
Onimusha	ASC Games	★★	39
Pakappa the Rapper	SCEA	★★★★★	35
Parasite Eve	Square EA	★★★★	45
Parasite Eve II	Square EA	★★★★	10/00
Pitfall 3D	Activision	★★	43
Pocket Fighter	Capcom	★★★★	45
Point Blank	Namco	★★★★	40
Pong	Hasbro	★★★★	02/00
PoolBreaker Racing	VR Sports	★★	42
Poy Poy	Psygnosis	★	49
Punky Skunk	Jaleco	★	42
R-Type Delta	Agetec	★★★	09/99
Rage Racer 2	989 Studios	★★★★	50
Rascal	Psygnosis	★★	43
Rat Attack	Working Designs	★★★	12/00
Rat Attack	Acclaim	★★★★	12/00
RC Stunt Copter	Titus	★★★★	11/99
Reboot	Interplay	★★★★	43
Red Asphalt	Interplay	★★	37
Resident Evil 2	Capcom	★★★★★	39
Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	Capcom	★★★★	12/99
Resident Evil Survivor	Capcom	★	12/00
Ridge Racer Type 4	Namco	★★★★	55
Rising Zan: Samurai Gunman	Agetec	★★	10/99
Risk	Hasbro	★★	45
Rival Schools: United by Fate	Capcom	★★★	48
Road Rash 3D	Electronic Arts	★★	46
Road Rash: Jailbreak	Electronic Arts	★★★	05/00
Rock the Rink	Electronic Arts	★★★★	05/00
Rollcage	GT Interactive	★★★	49
Rollcage	Psygnosis	★★★★	53
Rollcage Stage II	Psygnosis	★★★★	04/00
Rush Hour	Sunsoft	★★★	32
S.C.A.R.S.	Ubi Soft	★★	48
SaGa Frontier	SCEA	★	43
SaGa Frontier 2	Squaresoft	★★★★	03/00
Sentinel Returns	Psygnosis	★★	44
Shadow Madness	Crave	★★★	53
Shadow Master	Psygnosis	★	41
Shipwreckers!	Psygnosis	★★	38
Silent Bomber	Bandai	★★★★	03/00
Silent Hill	Konami	★★★★★	52
Silhouette Mirage	Working Designs	★★★	02/00
Sim Theme Park	Bullfrog	★★	05/00
Soulmonkey	Electronic Arts	★★	40
Sled Storm	Electronic Arts	★★★★	10/99
Spawn: The Eternal	SCEA	★★	38
Speed Punks	SCEA	★★	06/00
Speed Racer	Jaleco	★★	42
Spider-Man	Activision	★★★★	11/00
Spyro	SCEA	★★★★	47
Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage	SCEA	★★★★	12/99
Spyro 3: Year of the Dragon	Universal Interactive/SCEA	★★★★	01/01
Star Ocean	SCEA	★★★★	09/99
Star Trek: Invasion	Activision	★★★★	12/00
Star Wars: Episode I: Jedi Power Battles	LucasArts	★	11/99
Star Wars: Episode I: Racer	LucasArts	★★★	07/00
Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi	LucasArts	★★	38
Street Fighter Zero 3	Capcom	★★★★	52
Street Sk8ter	Electronic Arts	★★	54
Subkoden II	Konami	★★★★	12/99
Supercross Circuit	989 Studios	★★★	01/00
Ubi Soft	Ubi Soft	★★★	08/00
Supreme Snowboarding	989 Studios	★★★	52
Syphon Filter	SCEA	★★★★	05/00
Syphon Filter 2	Atlus	★★★★	11/99
Tail Concerto	Namco	★★★	48
Tales of Destiny	Disney Interactive	★★	10/99
Tarzan	Konami	★★★★	47
Team Losi RC Racer	Fox Interactive	★	47
Tekken 3	Namco	★★★★★	42
Tenchu	Activision	★★★★	48
Tenchu 2: Birth of the Stealth Assassins	Activision	★★★★	10/00
Tennis Arena	Ubi Soft	★★	43
Test Drive 4	Accolade	★★	37
Test Drive Off Road 3	Infogrames	★★	12/99
The Fifth Element	Activision	★★	50
Theme Hospital	Electronic Arts	★★★★	43
Thousand Arms	Atlus	★★★★	12/99
Thrasher: Skate and Destroy	Rockstar Games	★★	01/00
Threads of Fate	Square EA	★★★★	09/00
Thunderforce V	Working Designs/Spaz	★★	46
Time Crisis	Namco	★★★★	38
TNN Motorsports	THQ/Interactive	★★★★	50
TOCA 2: Touring Car Challenge	Codemasters	★★★★	12/99
Tomb Raider II	Eidos	★★★★	37
Tomb Raider III: The Last Revelation	Eidos	★★★★	02/00
Tombi	SCEA	★★★★	45
Tomba! 2	SCEA	★★★★	09/00
Tomorrow Never Dies	Electronic Arts	★★	02/00
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater	Activision	★★★★★	11/99
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2	Activision	★★★★★	12/00
Tomeko-The Last Hope	Enix	★	01/01
Trap Gunner	Atlus	★★★★	47
Triple Play 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	55
Turbo Prop Racing	SCEA	★★★★	45
Twisted Metal 3	989 Studios	★	50
Tyco R/C: Assault with a Battery	Mattel Interactive	★★★★	12/00
Um Jammer Lammy	SCEA	★★★★★	54
Uprising X	3DO	★★★★	50
V-Rally 2	Electronic Arts	★★★★	01/00
Vagrant Story	Square EA	★★★★	06/00
Vampire Hunter D	Jaleco	★	11/00
Vandal Hearts 2: Heavenly Gate	Konami	★★	01/00
Vanguard Bandits	Working Designs	★★★	07/00
Vigilante 8	Activision	★★★★	40
VR Baseball 99	Interplay	★★★	46
WarGames	MGM Interactive	★★★	46
Warpath: Jurassic Park	Electronic Arts	★★★	02/00
Warzone 2100	Eidos	★★	56
WCW Backstage Assault	Electronic Arts	★★	01/01
WCW Nitro	THQ	★★★★	38
WCW vs. The World	THQ	★★	30
WCW/NWO Thunder	THQ	★★★	52
Wild 9	Interplay	★★★	49
Wild Arms 2	SCEA	★★★	07/00
Wipeout 3	Psygnosis	★★★	11/99
World Cup '98	EA Sports	★★★	45
World Destruction League — Thunder Tanks	3DO	★★★	01/01
World Is Not Enough, The	Electronic Arts	★★★	01/01
Wu-Tang: Shaolin Style	Activision	★★★★	02/00
WWF Smackdown	THQ	★★★★	05/00
WWF Warzone	Acclaim	★★★	47
X-Games Pro Boarder	Electronic Arts	★★	49
The X-Files	Fox Interactive	★★	01/00
X-Men: Children of the Atom	Acclaim	★★	40
X-Men vs. Street Fighter	Capcom	★	45
Xena: Warrior Princess	Electronic Arts	★★★★	11/99
Xenogears	Square EA	★★★★★	49
You Don't Know Jack	Sierra	★★★★	12/99

title	publisher	rating	#

Online

Asheron's Call	Microsoft	★★★	02/00
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun	Westwood	★★	41
Everquest	989 Studios	★★★★★	54
Netstorm	Activision	★★★★	40
NetWAR	Headland	★★	41
Sanctum: Oppositions	Digital Addiction	★★★★	09/99
Tanarus	Sony	★★★★	40
Ultima Online: The Second Age	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	51

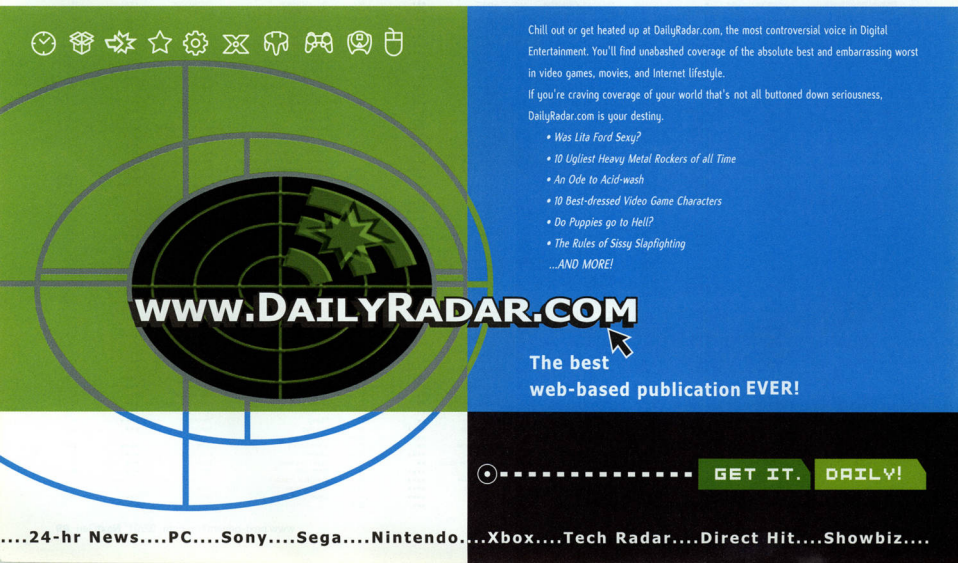
title	publisher	rating	#

PC

Abomination	Eidos	★★	02/00
Addiction Pinball	MicroProse	★★★★	45
Aliens vs. Predator	Fox Interactive	★★★★	54
Age of Wonders	GT Interactive	★★★★★	02/00
Army Men	3DO	★★★	44
Army Men II	3DO	★★★	53
Baldur's Gate	Interplay	★★★★★	52
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	★★★★★	12/00
Bang! Gunship Elite	Red Storm	★★★★	10/00
Battlezone II: Combat Commander	Activision	★★★★	03/00
Barrage	Activision	★★★	50
Beetle Buggin'	Infogrames	★★★	07/00
Blair Witch Volume I: Rustin Parr	Gathering of Developers	★★	12/00
Blaze and Blade	THQ	★★★	05/00
Blood 2: The Chosen	GT Interactive	★★	50
Boarder Zone	Infogrames	★★★	05/00
Braveheart	Eidos	★★★	12/99
Break Neck	SouthPeak Interactive	★★★★	05/00
Castrol Honda Superbike	Intense Simulation	★★	46
Civilization II: Test of Time	MicroProse	★★★★	11/99
Civilization: Call to Power	Activision	★★	55
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun	Westwood	★★★★	11/99
Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines	Eidos	★★★★	49
Comwars	Metrosis	★	10/99
Crimson Skies	Microsoft	★★★★★	11/00
Crusaders of Might and Magic	3DO	★★★★	42
Cyber Gnome	Front Interactive	★★★★	01/01
Daikatana	Eidos	★★	08/00
Dark Side of the Moon	SouthPeak Interactive	★★	51
Darkstone	Gathering of Developers	★★★★	11/99
Deathtrap	GT Interactive	★★★	49
Deer Avenger 2: Deer in the City	Simon & Schuster	★★	01/00
Delta Force	NovaLogic	★★★	51
Delta Force 2	NovaLogic	★★★	02/00
Descent 3	Interplay	★★★★	36
Descent Freespace	Interplay	★★★★	43
Deus Ex	Eidos	★★★★★	09/00
Devil Inside, The	Take 2	★★★	01/01
Diablo II	Blizzard	★★★★★	09/00
Die by the Sword	Interplay	★★★★★	42
Dominant Species	Red Storm	★★★	49
Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3	Eidos	★★	46
Drakan: Order of the Flame	Psygnosis	★★★★	11/99
Dukes of Hazzard: Racing For Home	SouthPeak Interactive	★★★	12/00
Dungeon Keeper 2	Electronic Arts	★★★	10/99
Elite Ops	Westwood	★★	48
Emergency: Fighters for Life	WizardWorks	★★	48
Enemy Engaged	Empire Interactive	★★★★	12/00
Evolva	Interplay	★★★★	08/00
Expendable	Rage Software	★★	56
Extreme Tactics	Piranha Interactive	★★★	46
F-16 Aggressor	Bethesda Softworks	★★★	11/99
Fallout 2	Interplay	★★★★	50
Flesh Feast	Segasoft	★★★	45
Freespace 2	Interplay	★★★★★	01/00
Gabriel Knight 3	Sierra	★★★★	01/00
Gangsters	Eidos Interactive	★★★★	51
Game, Net & Match	Blue Byte	★★★	45
Get Medieval	Monolith	★★★	48
Grand Prix Legends	Sierra Sports	★★★★★	49
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	★★★★★	50
Ground Control	Sierra	★★★★	09/00

Gamer's Guide

Gulf War: Operation Desert Hammer	3DO	★★	11/99
Half-Life	Sierra	★★★★★	98
Heavy Gear II	Activision	★★★★★	10/99
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2	Gathering of Developers	★★★	11/00
Homeworld	Sierra	★★★★	12/99
Homeworld: Cataclysm	Sierra	★★★★	01/01
Heretic II	Activision	★★★	51
Heroes of Might and Magic III	3DO	★★★★	54
Hexplore	Infogrames	★★★	49
Iranus: Sanctuary of the Gods	JC Research	★★★	48
Icewind Dale	Interplay	★★★★	10/00
Imperialism II	Strategic Simulations	★★★★	56
Incoming	Rage Software	★★★★	46
Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine	LucasArts	★★★	03/00
Industry Giant	Interactive Magic	★★★	45
Interstate '82	Activision	★★★	02/00
Invictus	Interplay	★★★	05/00
Jane's Fleet Command	Jane's Combat Simulations	★★★★	56
Jazz Jackrabbit 2	Gathering of Developers	★	45
Jeff Gordon XS Racing	ASC Games	★★	09/99
John Saul's Blackstone Chronicles	Mindscape	★★★	51
Kingpin: Life of Crime	Interplay	★★★	10/99
King's Quest: Mask of Eternity	Sierra	★★★	51
KISS Psycho Circus: The Nightmare Child	Gathering of Developers	★★	10/00
Knights and Merchants	Interactive Magic	★★★★	49
Lemmings Revolution	Take 2	★★★★	07/00
M.A.X. 2	Interplay	★★★★	47
Machines	Acclaim	★★★	55
Majesty	MicroProse	★★★	08/00
MDK2	Interplay	★★★★	09/00
MechCommander	MicroProse	★★★	46
MechWarrior 3	MicroProse	★★★★	09/99
Messiah	Interplay	★★★	06/00
Midtown Madness	Microsoft	★★★★	56
Midtown Madness 2	Microsoft	★★★★	01/01
MiG Alley	Interplay	★★★★	04/00
Might and Magic VI	3DO	★★★★	44
Might and Magic VII	3DO	★★★	08/99
Might and Magic VIII	3DO	★★	06/00
Monkeysumo's Return	Wizardworks	★★	50
Motocross Madness 2	Microsoft	★★★★	09/00
Monter: 2093-1944	Interplay	★★	03/00
Myth II: Soulblighter	Bungie	★★★★	53
Nam	GT Interactive	★	47
Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit	Electronic Arts	★★★★	48
Need for Speed: High Stakes	Electronic Arts	★★★★	09/99
Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed	Electronic Arts	★★★	06/00
NHL 99	EA Sports	★★★★★	50
Nocturne	Gathering of Developers	★★	01/00
Nox	Electronic Arts	★★★	05/00
Monolith	Eidos	★★★	02/00
Official Formula 1 Racing	Eidos	★★	10/99
Omikron: The Nomad Soul	Eidos	★★★	02/00
Outcast	Infogrames	★★★★	12/99
Panzer Commander	SSI	★★★★	46
Panzer General 3D Assault	SSI	★★★★	12/99
The People's General	SSI	★★★	50
Pharaoh	Sierra	★★★★	02/00
Plane Crazy	SegaSoft	★★	48
Planescape: Torment	Interplay	★★★★★	03/00
Prince of Persia 3D	Mindscape	★★★	12/99
Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey	Empire Interactive	★★★★	03/00
Quake III	Activision	★★★★★	02/00
Railroad Tycoon II	Gathering of Developers	★★★★	50
Rainbow Six	Red Storm	★★★★	47
Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear	Red Storm	★★★★	12/99
Rally Championship	Electronic Arts	★★★	04/00
Re-Volt	Acclaim	★★★★	10/99
Recoil	Electronic Arts	★★★	55
Red Alert 2	Westwood Studios	★★★★	01/01
Red Baron 3D	Sierra	★★★★	50
Redguard	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★	50
Redjack	THQ	★★★	45
Redline	Accolade	★★	54
Redline Racer	Ubi Soft	★★★	47
Redneck Rampage Rides Again	Interplay	★★★	45
Requiem: Avenging Angel	3DO	★★★	54
Return to Krondor	Sierra	★★★	52
Revenant	Eidos	★★★	02/00
Revenge of the Arcade	Microsoft	★	48
Rich Diamond	Core Concepts	★★	56
Red Orb	★	10/99	Unreal Tournament
Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter	WizardWorks	★★	44
Sabre Ace: Conflict Over Korea	Virgin Interactive	★★★	38
Sanitarium	ASC	★★★★	44
Sanity: Aiken's Artifact	Fox Interactive	★★★	11/00
Sega Rally 2 Championship	Mattel Interactive	★★★	01/01
Settlers III	Blue Byte	★★	53
Shadow Company: Left for Dead	Ubi Soft	★★★★	12/99
Shadow Watch	Red Storm	★	04/00
Shogo Mobile Armor	Monolith	★★★★	50
Shogun: Total War	Electronic Arts	★★★★	07/00
Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	52
Sid Meier's Gettysburg	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	37
SimCity 3000	Electronic Arts	★★★★	53
Sims, The	Electronic Arts	★★★★	04/00
Sin	Activision	★★★★	50
Sliver	Infogrames	★★★	01/00
Sim Theme Park	Electronic Arts	★★★★	02/00
Sinistar Unleashed	THQ	★★★	12/99
Soldier of Fortune	Activision	★★★★	06/00
Soulbringer	Interplay	★★	11/00
South Park	Acclaim	★★★	51
Space Bunnies Must Die	Ripcord	★★★	50
Spec Ops II	Ripcord	★	02/00
Star Trek: Armada	Activision	★★★★	06/00
Star Trek: Birth of the Federation	Hasbro Interactive	★★	09/99
Star Trek: Hidden Evil	Activision	★★★	03/00
Star Trek: New Worlds	Interplay	★★	12/00
Star Trek: Starfleet Command	Interplay	★★★★	11/99
Star Trek: Voyager — Elite Force	Activision	★★★★	12/00
Star Wars Episode I	LucasArts	★★★	09/99
Star Wars: Force Commander	LucasArts	★★	06/00
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron	LucasArts	★★★★	51
StarCraft	Constant	★★★★★	43
StarLancer	Microsoft	★★★★	07/00
Starsiege	Sierra	★★★★	54
Starsiege: Tribes	Sierra	★★★★★	51
System Shock 2	Electronic Arts	★★★★	11/99
Swarm	Reflex Entertainment	★★	44
Tachyon: The Fringe	Electronic Arts	★★★	08/00
Thief	Eidos	★★★★	52
Thief II: The Metal Age	Eidos	★★★★	06/00
Tiger Woods Golf '99	EA Sports	★★★	48
Tomb Raider II	Eidos Interactive	★★★★	49
Total Annihilation: Kingdoms	GT Interactive	★★★	10/99
Trespasser	Dreamworks Interactive	★★	50
Ultima IX: Ascension	Origin	★★★★	02/00
Ultimate 8 Ball	THQ	★★★★	56
Unreal	GT Interactive	★★★★★	44
Unreal Tournament	GT Interactive	★★★★	09/99
Urban Assault	Microsoft Games	★★★	49
Uprising 2: Lead and Destroy	3DO	★★★★	51
Vampire: The Masquerade — Redemption	Activision	★★★	08/00
VR Baseball 2000	VR Sports	★★★	49
Wall Street Trader 2000	Interplay	★★★★	04/00
WarGames	MGM Interactive	★★★	46
Wargasm	Infogrames	★★	52
Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate	SSI	★★★	51
Warhammer 40,000: Rites of War	SSI	★★★	11/99
Warlords III: Darklords Rising	Red Orb	★★★★	47
Warlords Battlecry	Mattel Interactive	★★★★	10/00
Warzone 2100	Eidos	★★★★	55
Wheel of Time	GT Interactive	★★★	02/00
Wild Wild West	Southpeak Interactive	★	03/00
Wizards and Warriors	Activision	★★	01/01
X-COM: Interceptor	MicroProse	★★★	46



Letters

Next Gen's mail strippers

I've been receiving **Next Gen** every month for about three and a half years now, and you just keep getting better. I understand that sweet, put-you-into-diabetic-shock praise of your magazine isn't exactly the kind of mail you're looking for, but I just couldn't stand it any longer. Every month your staff covers every new story, game, and gadget with concise, intelligent writing and an often biting sarcasm I thoroughly enjoy. If there's something I want to know about the game industry I turn to your magazine. I've played a ton of the games you review, and by god if you're not dead-on just about every time. Not only is it a great read, but a beautiful publication. I just wanted to express my thanks for money well invested. If it wasn't for **Next Gen**, no doubt I'd end up buying my fair share of stinkers. Anyway, keep up the stunning work.

Britnee Bayne
Via email

You're right. Normally, we don't print this kind of letter. However, such an eloquent example begs to be heard, so we'll let it slip just this once. Thank you.

I was reading through the December issue of **Next Gen** and came across the excerpt of Steven Kent's book, *The First Quarter*. At first I gave it a pass, but later went back and decided to read it. The excerpt was about the 1993 Senate hearings on videogames, and I was completely enthralled. I was truly sad when the story ended, so I went to Amazon.com and bought the whole book. The only time I'd ever really read books was when I was forced to in my English classes, but I read all 462 pages in two days. This just goes to prove that **Next Gen** should replace the Bible as the most influential publication in the history of mankind.

Jeff "U2 Rules"
Via email

Well, we don't know that we ought to replace the Bible (although anyone who has an idea how we could get copies of Next Gen tucked into motel room drawers for free, let us know), but we're certainly pleased you found us informative. We live for that sort of thing.

A while back Shiny Entertainment released *Messiah* for PC, and you guys covered it pretty extensively. It was said that the game was going to be released soon after for PlayStation as well, so any word about that? It seems like it's been a while. Has Shiny decided not to release it for PlayStation, or is it just taking a long time?

"TheSirPaul"
Via email

As far as we know, versions of *Messiah* for any system other than PC are on "indefinite hiatus," thanks mostly to incredibly lackluster sales. Shiny is working on a game based on *The Matrix*, although the license hasn't been officially signed. We have a feeling any *Messiah*-related projects (like a port) are pretty much dead in the water. Sorry.

I really like your magazine and I cannot wait until the next one arrives in my mailbox. Unfortunately, there was a glaring error that I, as a history buff, was shocked about. In the sidebar to your review of *Majora's Mask*, you referred to the first use of gas masks in war. The date you gave for the event was 1922, and the Great War ended in 1918! Better send whomever wrote that back to the second grade.

"The Historian"
Via email

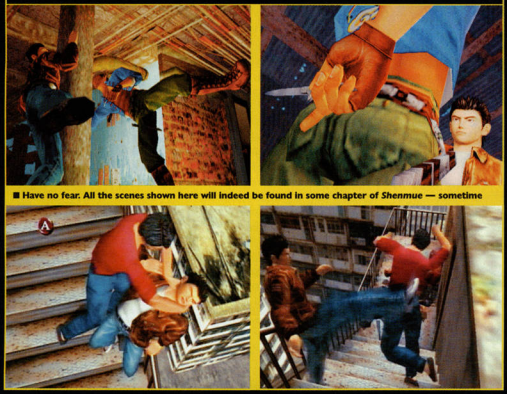
Correct. The Battle of Ypres began on April 22, 1915. The battle was significant (and mentioned in the review) because German forces prefaced their attack by breaking with the Hague Convention and releasing of 5700 cylinders of chlorine gas, along with a

SHEN WHEN?

After beating *Shenmue*, I still think it's the best game ever, but I also think there were a few scenes missing from the game. Back in **NG 04/99**, you guys had a preview of *Shenmue*, and you showed pictures of a fight scene. In the fight scene, there was a guy with a bandana, and he had a knife. Also you showed pictures of a fight on a staircase outside of an apartment building. The scenes look like they took place in Hong Kong. Also in the article you state that the gamer gets to play as young Ryo, but it never happened. I just wanted to know if these scenes were originally supposed to be in Chapter One, and later saved for Chapter Two? Also, do you know when Chapter Two is coming out?

"Shenmue111400"
Via email

To be honest, you've more or less guessed correctly. *Shenmue* Chapter One was supposed to be longer, but due to time constraints and market pressure it was trimmed slightly and ended at the point Ryo sets sail for Hong Kong (which is actually a pretty logical place to end it, once it became obvious they would have to). And yes, Chapter Two will pick up Ryo's adventure after he arrives there. As far as we know, it's also still slated to include a "young Ryo" flashback sequence. As for when it's due to be released, Sega is being pretty tight-lipped, although the best guess is sometime in fall 2001 for Japan, and hopefully not long after that in the U.S.



■ **Have no fear. All the scenes shown here will indeed be found in some chapter of *Shenmue* — sometime**

Letters

conventional artillery attack (against an Algerian division, by the way). This made it the first large-scale use of poison gas in WWI and necessitated the supplying of gas masks to Allied troops (hence, the "mask-related" point of the sidebar in question).

Obviously, the cited date mixed up the year and the day. The reviewer has therefore had his nasal spray "mixed up" with Drano to demonstrate the hazards of getting things switched.

I am amazed. Aaron Loeb's response to Nicolas Antoine's concerns about French-baiting (**NG 12/00**) was exquisitely reasoned, beautifully and sensitively written, and compassionate. It can serve as an encouragement to those of us who, despite the cultural backlash, have not backed away from the idea behind "political correctness" or, as it is better described, "increased awareness of the power of language." And it can serve as an example to those who bash "political correctness" as so much pandering, an example of how thoughtfulness and consideration of the feelings of others can and should guide our public utterances. This was a brief explanation of why no offense was meant, a sincere apology that offense was taken, and a rethinking of the entire tradition of mutual insults as a way of relating to other cultures. Mr. Loeb tacitly recognizes what is usually forgotten in such discussions: namely, that there is no such thing as "The French," but only French people, of which Mr. Antoine is one, and that in one's verbal actions one ought to respect the dignity of every human person. Bravo and thank you, Mr. Loeb!

Bart Odom
Via email

We thought so too. Then...

In response to the exchange on French insults between Messrs. Antoine and Loeb, I think it is important to add a few points for clarity on both sides. First of all, the term "cheese-eating surrender monkeys" (can you still print that?) most likely originated on an episode of *The Simpsons* and was spoken by Groundskeeper Willie, a Scottish character. We should all be offended that Mr. Loeb implicitly took credit for inventing this phrase, as no quotes were used or source cited (Episode 2F32, "Round Springfield").

Secondly, I am from Indiana: a Hoosier. If we're supposed to be the stupid ones why did you, Mr. Loeb, not capitalize the word "earth"? As it is written, we are "the dumbest people on dirt." I don't think this is what you intended, as we are in fact "the dumbest people on the planet."

To conclude, it is important to be able to laugh at yourself. Speech-impaired persons could take offense at our common usage of the word "dumb," but you never hear them complain. It is equally important to know when derogatory language is appropriate, especially if it is overt. If you don't see it in the example above, you might want to quit writing before you get in real trouble. If you did and found it truly offensive, then you should step out of the room, rub your temples, and repeat, "Calm blue ocean... Calm blue ocean..." (8F15, "Separate Vocations.")

Daniel J. Louks
Via email

Aaron Loeb responds:
"If my good friend, Daniel J. Louks from indiana [sic] had bothered to check the credits for 'Round Springfield,' he would have noted that I, in fact, wrote that episode. I also play the part of Groundskeeper Willie. Further, I am credited with the creation of *The Simpsons* series. And the word 'monkey.'

"Of course, I suppose it is too much to ask a Hoosier to read the credits — or anything for that matter — as they are all a bunch of raw onion-chewing illiterates."

EDITOR'S NOTE:
The opinions of Mr. Loeb are his own, and in no way reflect those of Next Generation, Imagine Media, or The Future Network. In fact, we at Next Generation, Imagine Media, and The Future Network explicitly disavow Mr. Loeb's statement above, and refuse to vouchsafe any factual accuracy.

We would also like to formally apologize to Matt Groening (creator of *The Simpsons*); Joshua Sternin and Jeffrey Ventimilia (teleplay writers of "Round Springfield"); Al Jean, and Mike Reiss (story writers of "Round Springfield"); and Dan Castellaneta (voice of Groundskeeper Willie). We do, however, reluctantly concede the term "monkey."

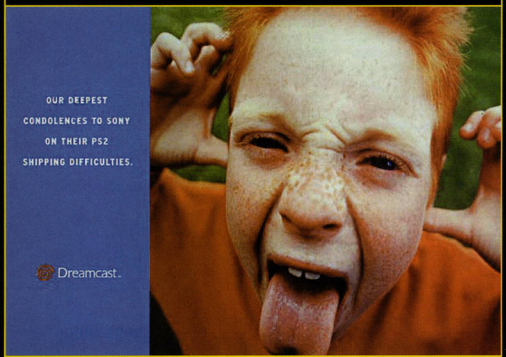
PSWHAT?

Somebody explain this to me. Sony creates a cutting-edge, (supposedly) "whup-ass" machine, gives it an aesthetically pleasing design, launches about 50 titles with it, and instead of showcasing the machine's power, green lights a series of completely moronic, 30-second TV ads that ramble on and on about PS9? Am I alone on this?

Alistair Christopher Haynes
Via email

No Alistair, you are not alone. We've been scratching our heads about the "PS9" campaign ever since it debuted. We're all for different or edgy commercials — god knows, they're too few and far between — but the whole PS9 thing is just symptomatic of the numerous missteps and misfires that have surrounded the PS2. Then again, with Sony practically guaranteed to sell every one of the million or so units (or as rumor has it, maybe not quite that many) it can ship this holiday season, we don't expect such awful ads really have a chance of hurting sales either. In that regard, Sony is pretty lucky.

Now Sega, on the other hand, managed to come up with an effective print ad to run. Check it out.



■ **OK, sure, it's childish. But hey, we laughed — which is more than we can say about "PS9"**

Next Generation Letters,
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Email us: ngonline@imaginemedia.com
Note: email is vastly, vastly preferred

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Check the Rating!

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rating system can help you decide whether a computer or video game is right for your family. The ESRB system provides both CONTENT DESCRIPTORS that indicate whether there are particular content elements which may be of interest or concern, and RATING Symbols that tell you what age the game is appropriate for.

CONTENT DESCRIPTORS
(found on the back of the game box):
The content descriptors tell you whether the game includes elements such as:

- Mild language
- Strong language
- Mild animated violence
- Mild realistic violence
- Comic mischief
- Animated violence
- Realistic violence
- Animated blood and gore
- Realistic blood and gore
- Animated blood
- Realistic blood
- Suggestive themes
- Mature sexual themes
- Strong sexual content
- Use of tobacco or alcohol
- Use of drugs
- Gaming
- Edutainment informational content
- Some assistance may be needed

RATING SYMBOLS
(found on the front of the game box):

EARLY CHILDHOOD — eC — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Content may be suitable for persons ages 3 and older.

EVERYONE — E — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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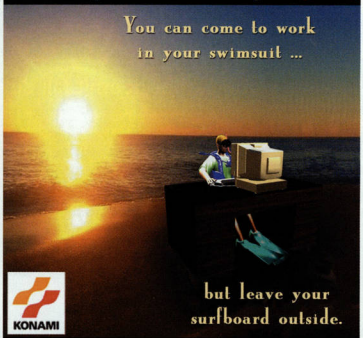

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Retroview

February 1988

Nintendo wobbles, but doesn't fall down

Christmas of 1987 had been a very profitable time for console players, but it was clear that the 8-bit generation would not be viable for much longer.

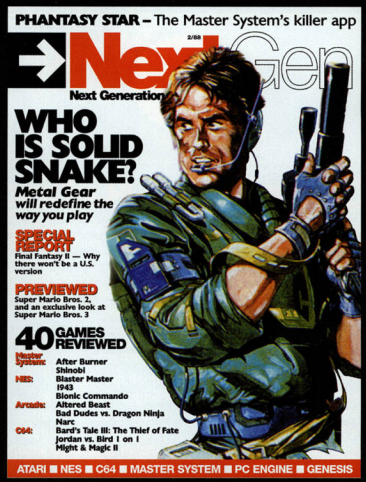
Market leader Nintendo had a number of concerns. A chip shortage in Japan was causing huge production delays, mangling the company's projected release schedule. The eagerly awaited *Super Mario Bros. 2* slipped from March to October, and it shipped only in limited quantities.

Another concern was how the aging NES would fend off upcoming 16-bit competitors. NEC's PC Engine would hit Japan in October, and if it did well, an American release was probable (in fact, the PC Engine sold extremely well and arrived in America in 1989 as the TurboGrafx-16). Furthermore, Sega had announced its 16-bit system, the Genesis, which would ship in Japan in the fall. For their own part, the folks at Nintendo were hard at work developing the Super Famicom (SNES), but the system would eventually be delayed until 1991.

Finally, Tengen, one of Nintendo's third-party developers, took the company to court in December over its stringent third-party licenses, which limited the number of games each developer could release per year and required that Nintendo itself manufacture and distribute each cartridge itself.

Despite these concerns, the NES would remain in command until late 1989, when the arrival of new consoles from Sega and NEC would threaten Nintendo's market dominance.

■ **With games like *Metal Gear* and *Contra*, the NES dominated 1988. *Contra* also introduced possibly the most legendary cheat code of all time**



What we were playing

Nintendo was king, but there were other games in town

■ **ALTERED BEAST**

■ System: Arcade
■ Publisher: Sega

■ **AFTERBURNER**

■ System: Sega Master System
■ Publisher: Sega

■ **PHANTASY STAR**

■ System: Sega Master System
■ Publisher: Sega

■ **LIFEFORCE**

■ System: NES
■ Publisher: Konami

■ **DOUBLE DRAGON**

■ System: NES
■ Publisher: Nintendo

Billboard's Number One Albums of 1988

George Michael	— Faith
Tiffany	— Tiffany
Van Halen	— OU812
Def Leppard	— Hysteria
Guns N' Roses	— Appetite for Destruction
Steve Winwood	— Roll With It
Tracy Chapman	— Tracy Chapman
Bon Jovi	— New Jersey
U2	— Rattle and Hum
Anita Baker	— Giving You The Best That I Got

...and in the real world

■ **"The Battle of the Carmens" takes place at the Winter Olympics in Calgary Canada, where West German Katerina Witt wins her second gold medal in women's figure skating, defeating American hopeful Debi Thomas. Both women skated to music from Bizet's "Carmen."**

■ **McDonald's opens in Moscow to huge success, proving once and for all that, capitalism and communism aside, big-shoed clowns still make the best french fries.**

■ **Notable passings:**
Roy Orbison – Musician
Enzo Ferrari – Car designer
Andy Gibb – Musician
John Holmes – "Actor"
Robert Heinlein – Author

■ **Vocal contortionist Bobby McFerrin offers soothing advice with his song "Don't Worry, Be Happy," which eventually collects Grammy Awards for Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best Pop Vocal Performance. The Grammy for Best Hard Rock/Heavy Metal Performance of 1988 somehow goes to Jethro Tull's *Crest of the Knave*, which inexplicably defeats Metallica's *...And Justice For All*.**

■ **Iran and Iraq reach a peace agreement, ending eight years of war, and the Soviets withdraw their military forces from Afghanistan after nine years of occupation. Conspiracy theorists and fast food junkies note that there are no McDonald's in Afghanistan. Coincidence?**

NextGen
Next Generation magazine

02/01

BackwardsCompatible

Believe it or not, she's not real. – Page 10. Here we see a green-haired beach punk being thrashed by a leopard in a bikini. Who says games are getting more realistic? – Page 38. **Their football game is nearly perfect. Can Sega swish the back end of a one-on-one with *NBA 2K1*? – Page 75.** How can you make a historical RTS more exciting? Why, add fireballs, lightning, and da Vinci-esque hang gliders, of course. – Page 34. **This may be the cutest game ever to begin with the death of a character. – Page 79.** A fighting game more popular in Japan than Capcom's or SNK's titles. Wow. – Page 48. **It's gorgeous, slightly strange, and the very worm-like god of Earth is named James. Is there any doubt as to who made this one? – Page 83.** One slight adjustment could make this the best game ever — license the *Thundarr* characters. – Page 42. **At last, a sequel to one our favorite Sega CD shooters ever. Now, if only it were... good. – Page 73.** Who would have guessed that our unattainable dream girl could become that out-of-touch lady we can't get rid of? – Page 80. **Proof positive that our beloved George Lucas has simply lost all control. – Page 50.** "Swinging" the pool cue. This may be a good time to remind everyone that we at **Next Gen** don't get out as much as we should, but we are still experts in our field. – Page 72. **We have run completely out of things to say about this game. Except that it still looks better than *Mort the Chicken*. – Page 45.** The game itself may be a 7-year-old, overrated dud, but isn't it kind of cool that it can be done in 3D now? – Page 84.

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So alas it is time to welcome Fred, the new features editor for whom we've waited so long and who brews a fine pot of fresh ground coffee just for us each morning. Great to finally get to know you Fred. And you too Jim. Hey Jim, ready for lunch? Jim? Oh yeah, and Blake? Never mind.

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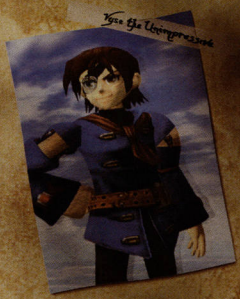

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