



Next Gen

Next Generation Magazine

THE BEST GAME OF 2002?

Maximo!

Capcom's classic
Ghouls 'n Ghosts inspires
the next PS2 masterpiece

XBOX LAUNCH SPECTACULAR

Thinking about buying an
Xbox? Read this first — page 80

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11>

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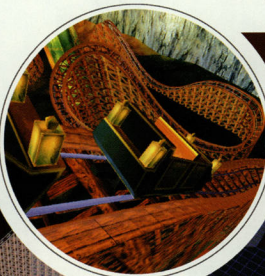
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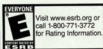


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Mild Language



PlayStation 2



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NextGen

Next Generation Magazine



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Special

Xbox Arrives!

Your comprehensive guide to the launch of Microsoft's new super-console. Is it all it can be? 80

11/01



EDITORIAL



As a magazine dedicated solely to the task of bringing you the best multiplatform game coverage on the planet, it is not in the **Next Generation** charter to comment on any news, however tragic, that does not concern the game industry. But the events that transpired on September 11 have affected us all.

The attack on America came just two days before we closed this issue, forcing many game companies to cancel press tours, product demos, analyst meetings, and more. Based on the many emails we have already received, we are well aware how heavily this has weighed upon you, our readers. You have raised questions as to how this will affect the game industry. Will the impending system launches be delayed? Will games that feature terrorists, such as *Metal Gear Solid 2*, be delayed? At this point, we are left to wonder just as you are, as we spend our spare moments looking to news from the rescue workers for answers to far more important questions. One thing is for certain: As with the rest of the country, the people working in the game industry are a resourceful, hard-working bunch resolved to do the right thing.

The **Next Gen** staff would like to share with you the tremendous sense of relief we've felt as we have discovered our many friends who live and work in Manhattan have escaped unhurt. We hope this issue finds you, and those close to you, safe from harm.

Tom

— Tom Russo

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→ News

Game industry news and analysis



■ READY, SET, HOLD...

XBOX LAUNCH DELAYED IN JAPAN

Japan-developed games are coming, but Japan's gamers will have to wait

E For once, the shoe is on the other foot — come this November, it's the Japanese gamers who will have to buy a foreign videogame console to get it first, as Microsoft has delayed its Japanese Xbox launch until February 22, 2002. The news of the delay was revealed at the Xbox Conference 2001 Summer, held in Tokyo on August 27, but was somewhat softened by Japanese developers Namco, From Software, and Atlus announcing new games

in development for the system.

The Japanese delay did not come as much of a surprise, as Microsoft is clearly focusing on Xbox's North American launch. Xbox chief Robbie Bach has already admitted it will be a challenge to crack the Japanese market that has been dominated by Sony and Nintendo for many years. Still, the company had a much better showing than it did at the last Tokyo Game Show, when it oddly showed *NFL Fever 2002* to a country that has no

football teams, or apparent interest.

This time around, Microsoft was smart in having developers from well-known Japanese companies showcase games to their countrymen. Namco is bringing *Ridge Racer*, *Soul Calibur 2*, *Dead to Rights* (an Xbox exclusive), and another unnamed title. From Software announced it will develop the robot shooter *Murakumo*, as well as a sim/RPG called *Gaia Blade*. Atlus, which has a much stronger market share in Japan than

■ MOVE OVER WAYNE, IT'S...

Spaceworld 2001

A new Mario, Zelda, and of course, a new U.S. launch date for GameCube. (Relax. It's only 13 days later.)



"Always leave 'em wanting more." No company better understands this old showbiz adage than Nintendo. At its pre-Spaceworld press announcement, the company once again proved its mastery of the tease, dangling quick video glimpses of two larger-than-life GameCube titles in front of a worldwide videogame press audience. Predictably, it was the next Mario and Zelda game, but that's the very reason attendees clung to the edges of their chairs when Nintendo uber-designer Shigeru Miyamoto took the stage.

Miyamoto introduced footage of Mario Sunshine first. Due next summer, the game featured Nintendo's mascot running through a sophisticated landscape that hinted at more platform action in the vein of *Mario 64*.

However, Mario wore an odd contraption on his back, and while the purpose of the device wasn't revealed, we predict that it's been devised to introduce some new form of physics-based gameplay. Miyamoto hinted at a new gameplay mechanic in our interview with him last year at Spaceworld; this year, he would only say that more would be revealed at E3 2002.

But if the announcements and, to an extent, the Mario footage were predictable, the Zelda footage was not. In a surprise move, Miyamoto had completely redesigned the game's visual style. The complex, high-polygon Link from last year's teaser demo had given way to a youthful cel-shaded hero whose appearance had more in common with skaters of *Jet Grind Radio* than Link characters of yore. The footage

showcased cel shading of unprecedented quality, including Warner Bros.-style exaggerated movements and facial expressions, all working in realtime. But not everyone in the audience was pleased with the game's new direction, and although Miyamoto specifically urged members of the press not to videotape the footage, it was available on the web almost immediately. Subsequently, the rest of the world has entered the debate as to whether or not the change in style was in the right one. (For more on this, see *GameCube Watch*, page 30.) In a post-announcement round-table session, Miyamoto explained that the game, which will be released for the holiday season in 2002, had been heading in a direction he wasn't pleased with, and that he felt alienated and uncomfortable with

the older-looking Link.

Going global!

Beyond those teaser clips, Nintendo paraded Japan's usual executives to the podium to share the new GameCube release date for Japan (September 14). However, at this "global" conference, they neglected to mention that the U.S. release date would slip from the originally planned November 5 to November 18. After the conference, Nintendo of America EVP of Marketing Peter Main explained to **Next Gen** that the delay was simply to have 700,000 systems available at launch, along with more software. Main hopes to push a total of 1.1 million units in the U.S. by December 31.

"I saw the disaster with PS2 at 480,000 [units]," Main said. "We've got to ensure not only that [GameCube] gets in and sells through, but that we've got the momentum we want going into the holiday and coming out of it. By dribbling and drabbing 450,000 units, then another 100, and another 100, you don't get that big impact. When you consider you've got to leverage marketing dollars strategically, it's a great, great move to insure the biggest bang for the buck."

(continued on page 17)



SPACEWORLD: THE FIRST DAY

■ Nagoshi



■ Naka



While Spaceworld traditionally opens on the weekend for the public, Nintendo built an "Industry Only" Friday to give Japan's videogame trade a good look at GameCube. The many attendees included Capcom producer Shoji Mikami, employees of Namco, and several heads of Sega's internal studios including Hitmaker's *Crazy Taxi* Hisao Oguchi, Amusement Vision's Toshiro Nagoshi, and Sonic Team's Yuji Naka.

the U.S., is working on the tentatively titled *Megami Tensei Online*, which is planned to be the first online Xbox title.

Also on hand was Capcom's Keiji Inafune who showed *Gemina Onimusha*, the Xbox version of the commercially successful *Onimusha* for PS2, which will now allow enemies to absorb souls and increase in power. Konami brought *Air Force Delta II* and *Silent Hill 2: The Final Verge*, while Sega showed the latest version of *Sega GT 2002* and *Gunvallyrie*. Tecmo presented *Dead or Alive 3*.

Despite the eagerly awaited introduction of Japanese development support, top-tier franchises such as *Resident Evil* and *Tekken* were nowhere to be found. Although Xbox Conference 2001 Summer was a step in the right direction, the world awaits Japanese developers to show wholehearted support by committing the crown jewels of their game franchises.



■ Sega GT 2002



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GIANTS

CITIZEN KABUTO

PREPARE TO GET BLOWN AWAY.

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PlayStation 2



Blood and Gore
Violence

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■ *Zelda was either loved or hated by attendees. Mario Sunshine (right) looked more like Mario 64, although we suspect his new backpack does something unique*

(continued from page 13)

Subsequently, on launch day, Nintendo plans to have black and indigo hardware units available, with Luigi's Mansion, Wave Race, and Pikmin on store shelves. The launch will be supported by third-party titles Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader, NHL Hitz, Madden NFL 2002, SSX: Tricky, and possibly another one or two titles, although Main wouldn't say which ones.

Down on the show floor

Spaceworld's floor was divided up about equally between GameCube and GBA displays, but on the Friday Nintendo reserved for media and industry only, the fascination with Nintendo's new console had most attendees queuing up for turns on GameCube. Overall, most of

the demos were very similar to the ones shown at E3, although everything seemed to sparkle a bit more with added effects, improved lighting, and faster framerates. The longest lines were for Luigi's Mansion, while the graphics in Star Fox Adventures were the most improved of all titles shown.

EA and Sega had the most third-party titles. Sega's Virtua Striker 3 offered a more arcade-friendly soccer experience and more visual polish than EA's FIFA. EA had SSX: Tricky running nicely, while Sega had Super Monkey Ball, a spitscreen version of Phantasy Star Online, and a very early version of Sonic Adventure 2. Surprises included from Software's Rune (See Alpha, page 53). One of the oddest new arrivals was a game

simply called Universal Studios by Kemco, offering a series of mini-games based on rides like Back to the Future or classic themes like a shooting gallery.

No new Nintendo system would be complete without a Bomberman. So Bomberman Generation was on the floor, although it was starting to look a bit dated, with an odd cross of styles this time. Bomberman himself is cel-

shaded, while his surroundings are made up of traditional, though minimal, polygons.

Aside from the playable titles, video monitors dotting the show floor looped new clips of several games. The highlights included a few seconds of the *i080°* Snowboarding sequel in development at Left Field productions, Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader, and a clip of *Metrod Prime*, which wasn't nearly as compelling as we hoped it would be.

Worth the trip?

Unlike the anticipation at last

year's GameCube unveiling, Spaceworld this year was anti-climactic. Considering how little was shown of *Zelda* and *Mario Sunshine*, and that most of the demos were nearly identical to those shown at E3, **Next Gen** has to wonder why we had to go all the way across the Pacific to get a new U.S. release date that wasn't even part of the general press presentation. Even our brief meeting with Nintendo's Director and General Manager of Corporate Planning, Satoru Iwata, yielded nothing. We bluntly asked why, two months before the launch of GameCube, the company still wasn't releasing screenshots of the launch games to the U.S. magazines. His weakly delivered promise to "try to do better in the future," certainly did not validate the cost of the ticket. — Tom Russo

Next month: We bring you our complete GameCube launch guide — including reviews of the first games.

GAMECUBE GOES GAME BOY ADVANCE



At Spaceworld, Nintendo finally revealed the connectivity features between GBA and GameCube. With a special cartridge and link cable (shown here) players will be able to play a special version of *GBA Kirby Tilt and Tumble*, a game that challenges players to roll Kirby through a maze of obstacles by alternating the angles and heights of the playfield. This is done with a motion-sensitive cartridge, and the game is alternately displayed on the GBA screen and the TV screen. With *Animal Forest*, the link cable will enable players to access a secret area where they can customize segments of the game (via minipaint programs and the like). Even when they are away from the GameCube, the link cable goes on sale in Japan in December for about the equivalent of \$13. No word yet as to how much it will sell for in the U.S., or when it will be available.

BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

→ In business circles, it's known as a Polson Pill. This past August, the now terminally broke publisher Interplay found itself the object of a rather hostile takeover by French publisher Titus. Titus already owned a large chunk of Interplay, but finally managed to leverage that magic 51% of stock to take over the board. However, before that could happen at the next regularly scheduled board meeting, Interplay signed a deal with Vivendi, giving that company (also French) exclusive distribution rights for all Interplay titles in the U.S. — a deal which Titus will now have to honor. Bitter, bitter bitterness all around.

Electronic Arts may have gutted Origin, but it's still squeezing everything it can out of the desiccated carcass. Any time now (by the time you read this), EA plans to launch *Ultimo Online* in Korea, trying to find a still uncollapsed vein to feed that country's inexplicable addiction to online titles, especially MMORPGs. Indeed, so fanatic is the Korean market over virtual worlds that guild wars and online rivalries have been spilling over into real life with frightening frequency, with players hiring actual thugs to assault or otherwise intimidate rival players.

In the "bleed 'em till they're dry" department, almost every major videogame retailer, including

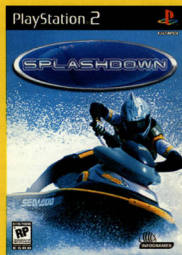
Electronics Boutique, Funco, and Toys "R" Us (through Amazon.com) was only accepting Xbox pre-orders in the form of "bundles." It simply wasn't possible to get by on the cheap by pre-ordering an Xbox (MSRP: \$299), then picking up a title or two, along with maybe a memory card at launch day. Oh no, you had to order an Xbox, a set of at least three titles (the exact mix of which varied from retailer to retailer), and a handful of accessories all at the same time. The cheapest such "bundle" went for \$499, but the typical example went for \$599 or more. This not only put pre-orders out of the financial reach of many, but also meant the

hardcore audience was forced to buy titles and other junk they didn't even want. Expect eBay to be flooded with Xbox "B" titles come late November.

And finally, trust Nintendo to give us our monthly dose of déjà vu. After unexpectedly pushing the U.S. launch date of GameCube back two weeks, the Big Red "N" then spectacularly failed to set a European launch date at all (other than "Spring 2002"), even at its own European trade show in late August. The same thing happened with N64 many years ago of course, so Nintendo snubbing the whole of Europe is, really, nothing new.

NextGen

ACTION



Wild Water Racing. Blast through the waters of Bali, tear it up over the Great Barrier Reef, maneuver through the Venice canals. Become one of eight rebellious riders as you throttle a Sea-Doo over water that looks so real you'll need a wetsuit. Jump wakes, fly over ramps and smash through the windows of a waterfront high-rise. Battle your way to the finish line through 18 incredibly detailed courses all around the globe. www.gosplashdown.com



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PlayStation 2

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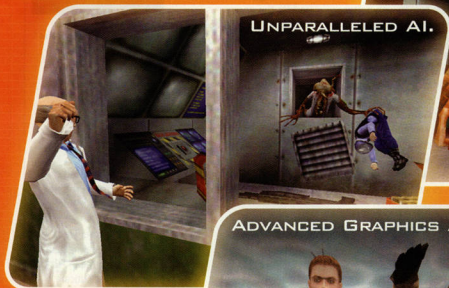
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— Electronic Gaming Monthly

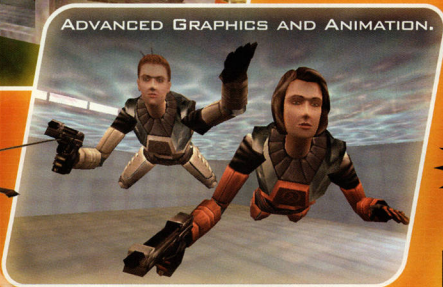
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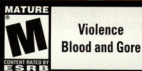
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The X-FILES

11/01

Time to put up or shut up

→ This will be the last X-files column — and that means it's time for some bomb-throwing. Here are my predictions for the next round of the console wars.

AND THE WINNER IS...

If measured by profits... GameCUBE. It's far cheaper to manufacture than PS2 or Xbox, and the GBA tie-in is a brilliant hook. Warmer third-party relations mean GC will have a richer library than N64. Plus, Nintendo knows how to do two things: Make money, and make money.

If measured by number of games...

PS2 wins. It already has the largest library in the history of videogames thanks to its backward compatibility.

But if measured by market share...

Xbox will win. A bold claim, I know. But I'm betting that Xbox's far superior hardware and ease of development, along with Microsoft's deep pockets and relentless marketing, will eke out a victory in units shipped by the fifth year of its life.

Why PS2 won't win...

In a recent chat with a sports game producer, he told me his company wasn't even going to port its baseball game to PS2 until its publisher forced it to: "PS2 is too difficult and expensive to develop for. We spend weeks just figuring it out. Xbox comes with better tools and infinitely better support. The nanosecond that PS2 is no longer the market leader, we're going to drop it like a hot rock."

Why GameCUBE won't win...

Nintendo seems perfectly content to be a toy company that makes videogames. Although it can no longer afford to snub its

third-party developers, it's still geared toward its traditional, younger, family-friendly market. It sure won't be home to any great online deathmatching in the future.

Xbox's biggest hurdle...

Besides the enormous head start that PS2 has, Microsoft's biggest problem is its arrogance. The company's haughty attitude has turned off many Japanese developers, one of whom leaked a video clip to Daily Radar back in March to embarrass his new partner. And J Allard's comments in September's **Next Gen** did little to



■ X-files columnist Jim Preston is the Previews/Disc Editor at PC Game

diminish the company's smug reputation.

RATING THE LAUNCH LINEUP

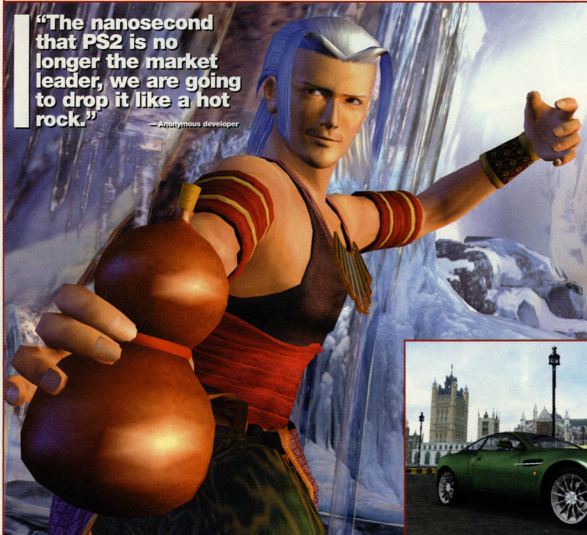
Who needs to review games when you can just take wild stabs based on preview code? Here's my prediction for the Xbox launch lineup:

Best-selling game: *Dead or Alive 3*; worst-selling game: *Fantasia*—er, I mean *Fuzion Frenzy*; biggest critical boom: *Dead or Alive 3*; biggest critical bust: *Azurik*; most underrated game: *Project Gotham Racing*; most overrated game: *Halo*; most pleasant surprise: *Cel Damage*; most unpleasant surprise: *Obi-Wan* (although those last two games will not make the launch).

That's my take. Hope you enjoyed the column. And if my predictions are wrong, feel free to track me down in five years and tell me so. — Jim Preston

"The nanosecond that PS2 is no longer the market leader, we are going to drop it like a hot rock."

—Anonymous developer



■ Newcomer Brad Wong (above) will mix it up with the deadly ladies of *Dead or Alive 3*. We can't wait to drive *Project Gotham's* brand-new Aston Martin (inset)

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

11/01

INFOGRAMES CAPTURES GODZILLA

Secret sources have revealed that the French videogame giant has secured the rights to publish games based on Japan's favorite giant lizard-thingy. In fact, the monster was last seen wrestling an 18-story Bruno Bonnell (Infogrames' CEO) off the coast of Tokyo. Considering the company's penchant for multi-platform development, we have to believe that games for several systems are already in the works. Note to Infogrames: There has never been a good Godzilla game — ever.



UNIVERSAL MALICE

Perhaps the biggest favor anyone ever did for Argonaut founder Jez San was when Xbox Advance Technology Group Director Seamus Blackley used Argonaut's *Malice* demo as one of the first games ever shown running on Xbox hardware. At the time of this monumental CES unveiling, the game was assigned to a publisher, and the fact that Next Gen picked the character to appear on the cover shortly thereafter only fueled the hype for a game that wasn't much more than a tech demo. Sources indicate that, sensing an opportunity to cash in on the notoriety, San made negotiations difficult for all interested publishers. However, we hear that a company within the Vivendi Universal family came up with the publishing rights to *Malice* after months of flinching. Subsequently, we can expect that the little girl with the big hammer will not remain exclusive to Xbox. As of press time, the deal had not been announced, but Vivendi-owned Sierra had just announced plans to publish new console games in its SWAT series, developed by (you guessed it) Argonaut.



TONY HAWK GLEAMS THE GAMECUBE

Forgive the bad inference to the 1989 skateboarding film starring Christian Slater, in which, ironically, Tony Hawk had the minor role of "Buddy" but Tony Hawk will reclaim his starring role on GameCube, and surprisingly, with a game that will ship within the system's launch month. At press time, we discovered Activision plans to call the game *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* (although, we were hoping for *Tony Hawk 3*). Neversoft is developing porting the GameCube version. In what might be seen as a related announcement, Nintendo has cancelled development of *Mario's Sunshine* Cel-Shaded Skatepark, which was due to release in 2006.



ECTS 2002 UNDERWHELMS

ECTS, Europe's lackluster version of E3, continues its downward spiral toward becoming a game industry footnote. But a beacon of light in the form of a Blizzard announcement broke through the clouds at this year's sparsely attended show. Blizzard revealed *World of Warcraft* for PC, an upcoming MMORPG with the release date of "when it's done."

The show, held September 2-4 in London, has been on a rocket ride to insignificance for a number of years. Need proof? The award for Overall Best Game of the Show, as voted by a panel of European journalists, went to *Denki Blocks* — a puzzle game for Game Boy Advance.

Blizzard's new MMORPG World of Warcraft



PlayStation 2 SMUGGLER'S RUN 2 HOSTILE TERRITORY



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■ 2001: A CASE ODYSSEY

Attack of the custom-built gaming PCs

Seven out of our top 11 games of E3 were PC games — so what are you going to play them on?

➔ Amid the roar and rumble of PS2, Xbox, and GameCube, a new kind of gaming PC has emerged, thanks to a new kind of PC vendor. They know gamers; they are gamers; and they custom-design monster gaming machines, the tricked-out muscle cars of the PC world. How cutting-edge are they? By the time you read this, they'll have brought to life new packages even more powerful than these. While we have the hubris to give them ratings, any one is guaranteed to rock your desktop.



Mach V

Manufacturer: Falcon Northwest
URL: www.falcon-nw.com

Processor: AMD Athlon Thunderbird 1.4GHz
Memory: 256MB PC2100 DDR RAM
Hard drive(s): 2x IBM 40GB, in RAID array
DVD/CD-ROM: Toshiba 16x DVD/48x CD-ROM
CD-RW: Plextor PlexWriter 24x, 18x, 40x
Video: VisiOnTek GeForce3
Audio: Hercules Game Theater XP sound card
Monitor: 22-inch Viewsonic P220F (20-inch viewable) .25 grille pitch flatscreen
Speakers: Klipsch ProMedia 4.1
Extras: 1.44" floppy drive
Price as configured: \$3995.00*

➔ Falcon eschews any sort of flashy case modding, preferring instead to let the awesome Cooler Master case stand on its own merit. (It's the same case Hyperion uses, without the window.) While we were dazzled by the enormous 20" viewable monitor, the system benchmarked poorly. Even the HP unit (at right) surpassed it in 3Dmark2001 and Quake III — probably due to its slower RAM and processor (though a 1.4GHz Athlon will often run many programs, like *Unreal Tournament*, as fast as a 1.8GHz Pentium). However, you can flavor your unit to taste, and Falcon definitely knows its stuff. Night owls beware: Like Voodoo (see opposite page, top), Falcon's tech support only works 9 to 6.

Rating: ★★★★★☆



Sonic Boom

Manufacturer: Hyperionic PC Systems
URL: www.hyperionic-pc.com

Processor: 1.8GHz Pentium 4
Memory: 256MB PC800 RDRAM
Hard drive(s): 2x 40GB IBM Deskstar 7200RPM, in RAID array (76.6GB yield)
DVD/CD-ROM: Toshiba 16x DVD-ROM/40x CD-ROM
CD-RW: Plextor PlexWriter CD-R/RW 24x, 10x, 40x
Video: VisiOnTek Nvidia GeForce3 64MB DDR (w/TV Output)
Audio: Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live! X-Gamer 5.1
Monitor: 19" flatscreen NEC-Multisync FE-950+ .25dp (18-inch viewable)
Speakers: Klipsch ProMedia 5.1
Extras: Neon-enhanced Cooler Master case
1.44MB floppy drive
One year — 24-7 technical support and onsite service
Hyperionic lifetime upgrade service
Price as configured: \$3870*

➔ We love the Hyperionic unit's awesome Cooler Master case, with its front-mounted USB ports and "Active Thermal Convective System" (i.e. lots of fans). Of course, transparent side panels and sound-sensitive, blue neon light doesn't hurt either: Hyperionic does it all right: The hardware is competitive with the Alienware and Voodoo rigs; it has 24-7 tech support; and should you decide that your rig needs some fresh gear (like a better sound card), Hyperionic's upgrade policy is bested only by Voodoo's.

Rating: ★★★★★

■ MAXIMUM GAME, MINIMUM GREEN

Pavillion 9800

Manufacturer: Hewlett Packard
URL: www.hpshopping.com

Processor: 1.7GHz Pentium 4
Memory: 256MB PC800 RDRAM
Hard drive(s): 75GB 7200 RPM
DVD/CD-ROM: 16x Pioneer DVD-ROM
CD-RW: 12x8x32 CD-RW
Video: Asus V8200 Nvidia GeForce3 64MB
Audio: Creative SoundBlaster Live! Value
Monitors: none
Speakers: Polk Audio AMR150
Extras: 1.44" floppy drive
Front-mounted USB, FireWire, and Serial port
Strange, crazy keyboard
Price as configured: \$2360.00*



➔ So, you don't have 4Gs to drop on a new dream machine! Don't rule out the mass-market boxes. While Dell unceremoniously snubbed our repeated invitation to submit a machine for review, Hewlett Packard's Pavillion 9800 (actually a multimedia machine) performed quite well as a gaming rig, even besting the Falcon in both 3Dmark2001 and Quake III demos. For maximum gaming on a tighter budget, this is a great alternative.

Rating: ★★★★★☆

Tsunami EGAD

Manufacturer: Voodoo
URL: www.voodoo-pc.com

Processor: 1.8GHz Pentium 4
Memory: 2GB PC800 RDRAM
Hard drive(s): 2x 40.9GB IBM Deskstar, in RAID array
DVD/CD-ROM: Pioneer trayless 16x DVD/40x CD-ROM
CD-RW: none
Video: Gainward Nvidia GeForce3 64MB
Audio: Hercules Game Theater XP
Monitor: 19" (18" viewable) Samsung SyncMaster 955
DF flatscreen monitor
Speakers: Klipsch ProMedia 4.1
Extras: 1.44MB floppy drive
Windowed case, to show off
crazy "Picasso" origami cable folding
White neon interior lighting
Three-year parts and labor warranty
Price as configured: \$400.00*

➔ Voodoo's machine is downright ugly — from the front. From the side, this speed demon is a true work of art. Lit by white neon lights, the case interior is painted in one of four colors — Porsche black, Bugatti blue, Ferrari red, or Lamborghini yellow — and yes, it's actually the same exact paint used on the cars. Then, Voodoo's trained origami experts (we're not kidding) fold all the cabling out of the way. The end result is simply breathtaking. It's also blisteringly fast, edging out the Alienware in *Quake III demo 1*, and destroying all comers in *3DMark2001*. Plus, when it's time to upgrade, Voodoo handles it better than anyone. But it should be noted that the company's tech support doesn't work nights.

Rating: ★★★★★



AREA 51

Manufacturer: Alienware
URL: www.alienware.com

Processor: 2.0GHz Pentium 4
Memory: 2GB PC800 RDRAM
Hard drive: IBM DeskStar 6L4GB
DVD/CD-ROM: Pioneer 16x DVD player
CD-RW: Piixtor 24x/10x/40x
Video: Nvidia GeForce3 Nfinite-FX 64MB DDR
Audio: Creative Labs SBLive! Platinum 5.1
Monitor: 19" flatscreen NEC Multisync FE-950+
25dp. (18-inch viewable)
Speakers: Klipsch ProMedia 5.1
Extras: Custom-painted case — and everything else.
One year 24-7 onsite warranty
1.44MB floppy drive
Sidewinder Precision 2 flight stick
Sidewinder gamepad
Price as configured: \$3553.00*

➔ In addition to painting every part of its PCs one of eight eye-popping colors, Alienware incorporates new tech faster than anyone: Our rig showed up sporting a 2.0GHz Pentium 4 and a pre-release, evaluation version of Windows XP. It benchmarked through the roof, and we suspect it would have gone even faster if it had been running a more established (or even finished) OS. In fact, it has only two minor weaknesses: a single hard drive (RAID arrays, used by all the other entries, are faster) and the second-best sound card (we prefer the Hercules). Alienware has great, 24-7 tech support, too.

Rating: ★★★★★



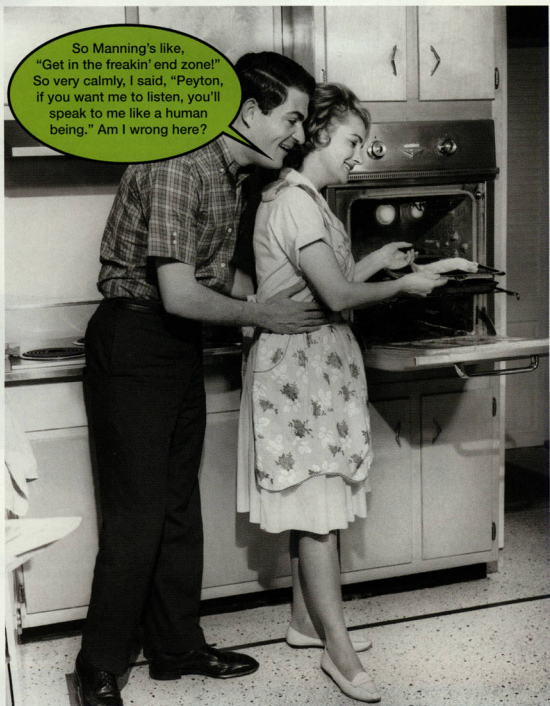
TO TEST THE BEST

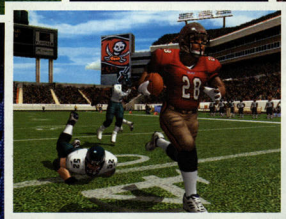
While much of our time with these machines involved logging time with hardware-intensive games like *Giants*, *Tribes 2*, and *Max Payne*, we also ran some more quantifiable tests. Some of the results are shown below. You'll notice they're all respectable scores — you can't go wrong with any of these rigs.

	Quake III demo 1	Quake III demo 2	3DMark 2001	SiSoft Sandra CPU test	DroneZmark minimum fps
Hypersonic	183.5 fps	180.9 fps	6304	2168	45.7
Alienware	172.4	191.0	6351	2394	46.7
Falcon	159.1	157.1	4898	1862	33.3
Voodoo	192.1	190.0	6666	2268	33.3
HP	167.9	165.1	5727	2033	29.3



* All prices are given as of August 13. The PC market changes almost daily as new products are introduced, so prices are surely going to be different if quoted today





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GameCube Watch

11/01

The Legend of Zelda turns Legend of "Cel-da"

→ Nintendo's next-generation GameCube console is now available in Japan. A November 18 release date in the U.S. draws closer and closer. But one specially cooked company ingredient is missing from both launches — a flagship title to sell hardware units. No Mario. No Zelda. Well, at least not yet.

Cel damage?

Rewind to August and pause on Nintendo's Spaceworld 2001 event in Tokyo, Japan (see News, page 12). Here master designer Shigeru Miyamoto unveiled his next-generation versions of the Mario and Zelda franchises, both promised for 2002 debuts. Almost two minutes of realtime footage was shown for the two games combined.

Mario danced around a huge city in his traditional plumbers garb, not looking very different from Mario's past. Link appeared too, but gone was the Link shown at Spaceworld a year before. Gone was the dark, gritty, realistic take on the Zelda franchise. In its place came a child: Powerpuff Link with cel-shaded "toon" graphics, a whole lot of Warner Bros.-inspired animation, and comic gags directly out of the Saturday morning cartoons.

When the new Zelda trailer was finished playing, something very unusual happened: The roaring applause and stand-up cheer common to major Nintendo unveilings like this was muted, the crowd

seeming more puzzled than satisfied. Indeed, even Japan's Nintendo executives present after the event were overheard asking, "Why didn't the Western press cheer like it usually does?" The answer? Change. Link's transformation from ultra-slick polygonal adventurer to childish, colorform cutout was completely unexpected. And, as the saying goes, people fear change.

Bad news, good news

Though the rants over-

flowing the message boards on the Internet would have you believe otherwise, the Zelda makeover wasn't all bad. Certainly the technology was outstanding, as boy Link ran through colorful, shadowed environments with a fluidity of animation unequaled on a console. The cel shading techniques employed in the demonstration were similarly impressive, effortlessly outclassing games with comparable styles such as Jet Grind Radio.

Meanwhile, the play mechanics seemed to closely resemble those first pioneered with N64's Ocarina of Time. Link

could target enemies, strafe around them, and use his sword to attack. But he could also flip over them during battle. Additionally, the tiny hero could sneak in the dark around his foes. One particular scene in the game showcased Link as he tiptoed past a guard, whose light illuminated the area only a few feet in front of him. It looked like fantastic fun and typically Miyamoto in its simplicity.

But regardless, it wasn't what gamers were expecting of Nintendo's next-generation Zelda. And the metamorphosis left many asking the question: Why didn't EAD instead inject



■ Our monthly GameCube Watch columnist, Matt Casamassina, is the editor-in-chief of IGNcube.com

this style and humor into the Mario franchise, for which it would have been perfectly suited?

Miyamoto explained that the change came because he didn't want the team working on the project to ever feel as if it couldn't exercise its creative freedom, and because he was personally becoming uncomfortable with the progress of the game. In the end, Zelda — or "Cel-da," if you prefer — will probably be an amazing update to a classic series. But will it be a step in the direction that gamers want, or what Nintendo wants?

NextGen



■ Not exactly the Zelda we'd expect, but the cel shading is exquisite. Why Link needs to look like a four-year-old, nobody knows



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Next Generation's sanity-shattering previews will keep you up at night with the lights on

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ETERNAL DARKNESS

■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Silicon Knights** ■ Release Date: **December** ■ Origin: **Canada**

Nintendo's take on survival horror might just make you scream



■ Alexandra Roivas (main image) is the lead character in *Eternal Darkness*, but you will also control 11 others, including Centurion Pious Augustus (above) and the Knight Joseph De Molay (below)



➔ Part *Resident Evil* survival horror, part Lovecraftian epic, and part hack-n-slash action, *Eternal Darkness* is the antithesis of the family-friendly image Nintendo has spent almost 20 years cultivating. Surprisingly, that's exactly what the company wants. With this project, Nintendo is finally making a serious bid for the more mature gamer. And instead of depending on excessive blood or gory fatalities, the master storytellers at Silicon Knights have created a dark tale of lurking horror and fading sanity sure to appeal to gamers looking for a little more (pardon the play on words) meat in their horror gaming experience.

As with most epic tales, it starts out with a seemingly smalltime turn of events. Players initially take on the

role of Alexandra (Alex) Roivas (above, staring at you), a headstrong young woman who is investigating the murder of her grandfather in the old family estate. Of course, Alex soon finds herself embroiled in a much larger conflict involving a powerful ancient race that ruled the Earth long ago, madmen that seek to restore them to power, and the heroes that have carried the burden of saving the planet before her.

It's these heroes that provide *Eternal Darkness* with its most distinctive gameplay angle. You'll not only play as Alex, but as 11 other characters from the past as well. In what has to be regarded as an extremely ambitious move, the 12 stories will actually intertwine to tell

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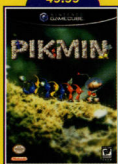
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**Nintendo
GameCube
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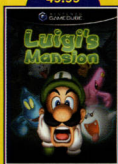
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■ The game engine can actually make 16 complete texture passes (for highlights, lighting, etc.) and still run at 60fps



■ Characters can only run for a short time before they get winded and actually start slowing down. In a combat situation, that's definitely not good



one single epic tale of evil and redemption. Aside from Alex, other playable characters include the Roman Centurion Pious Augustus from 26 BCE, Joseph De Molay, a knight Templar in the year 195, and Ellia, a dancing slave girl in 12th-century Cambodia. Choices made by the player in one time period can also affect what happens in another, so you'll (hopefully) want to go back and replay the game to see what could have been should you decide differently at a critical juncture.

All the characters have their own complete story lines to play through and their own weapons and combat methods as well. Joseph, for example, wields a nasty mace, while Alex is privy to more modern weapons, like a shotgun. And despite the fact that each character will have his/her own attacks, the combat interface has been streamlined quite a bit; hit the right analog button and you'll target the nearest enemy. Then, depending on how you push the stick, you'll target certain body parts.

TERROR TECH

With the help of some advance scripting and a dynamic animation system, characters in the game will react to their environments. For example, if there's a monster in the room, player characters will glare at it aggressively if they're healthy but show some apprehension if wounded. Environmental cues, like the sound of a torch popping, will put an accordingly surprised expression on a character's face. An especially elegant portrait on the wall will also demand your attention as you walk past. Players may not consciously notice these little touches, but the team feels they will add significantly to the game's immersive qualities.

Push up, for example, and you'll aim at the head, while left or right will take off an arm. A lot of the strategy in combat will be knowing which body parts are the best to lop off of which creatures. While removing arms from some may render them harmless, it will encourage other creatures to use more powerful magic attacks.

Other than the combat, the game goes out of its way quite a bit to improve on its survival horror brethren (although some of the enemies shown to **Next Gen** are dead ringers for **RE** zombies — go figure). First of all, characters are always controlled directionally — up

Making short work of the enemies will help you keep your sanity intact.

goes up, down goes down — instead of the relative (read: quirky) *Resident Evil* control scheme. To complement these controls, Silicon Knights has also put a lot of work into creating a new camera system that can not only help enhance the mood but can do so without the annoying drawbacks of Capcom's traditional static camera system. The developer has created a fairly intelligent camera that will remain static as you explore an area of a room, but will also gently pan around any walls



■ The intuitive combat control scheme enables you to target the specific parts of an enemy's body with each attack



■ Each character has a wildly different setting. Ellia is actually a slave dancer from 12th-century Cambodia, but that doesn't mean she can't kick ass when necessary

that get in your way, or lock at a distance to keep a monster in view. It even goes so far as to act differently if you enter the same room with or without enemies in it. The team has really gone out of its way to eliminate those pesky reversing camera angles and monsters that attack you from offscreen.

The most innovative feature in the game is also the one that will make or break it: the Sanity System. The characters in *Eternal Darkness* are being exposed to some seriously twisted stuff, which the designers feel is almost certain to have negative effects on their psyches. The idea is that the more you walk down this twisted psychological path without disposing of the enemies that confront you, the more your character's sanity will erode. It'll start

off subtly: small hallucinations that you might just catch out of the corner of your eye, pictures watching you, or blood slowly dripping down the wall. As you lose more of your sanity, the effects are more dramatic: Your head falls off as you enter a door and then, as you pick it up, starts reciting Shakespeare. However, making short work of the enemies will help you keep your marbles intact, as you've retained your sense of power and your ability to rationalize the horrific world you've entered.

Eternal Darkness definitely represents a new, more psychological take on a videogame genre that has long

Choices made in one time period can also affect what happens in another.

been dominated by nothing but visceral horror. As very little of the game has been shown, it's difficult to predict whether or not the team will accomplish its lofty storytelling goals and deliver something that could be considered a true system-seller. But given the quality of Silicon Knights' past projects, Nintendo could have its first winning, adult-oriented GameCube game that, we hope, could be the first of many to come. — Blake Fischer

■ Do you have a nice TV? If so, you should know that the final game will actually support progressive scan and 16:9 video modes



■ Characters will have their own combo attacks for maximum damage in combat



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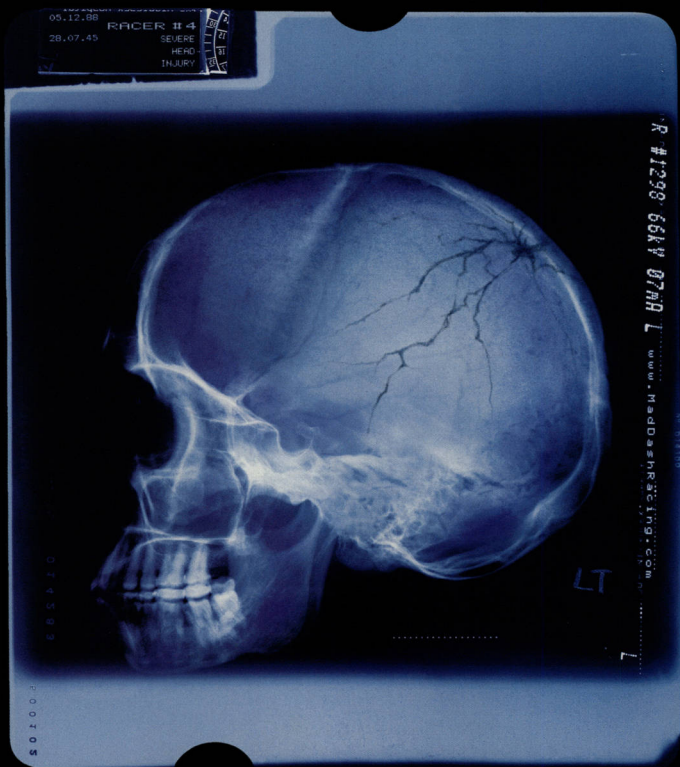
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■ The team has spent a lot of time ensuring that both the spaceflight and FPS modes work with console controllers

■ XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2

FALCONE: INTO THE MAELSTROM

■ Publisher: Virgin (UK) ■ Developer: Point Blank ■ Release Date: TBD ■ Origin: UK

COMIC ART

In order to give *Falcone* that comic-book appeal, Point Blank hired on artist Jim Murray (Batman, *The Demon*, *Judge Dredd*) as the full-time art director. In the same vein, the team is also being extremely careful to avoid the PC palette featured in many FPS titles. "The look for it is very 'console,' and that was key," offers Lead Designer Damian Hosen. "We wanted to get away from the traditional first-person palettes — the greys — and make it very colorful and vibrant."

Arrgh! Space pirates be raidin' your console

→ Think of pirates, and your mind is likely to conjure images of the cutlass-wielding nomads of the high seas. Point Blank's latest pirate game takes the same swashbuckling action and sets it in space, seamlessly blending together space flight and first-person action. That's right: You pilot your pirate freighter to each target, land, and then take out enemies on foot.

The concept plays like a comic book,

casting the player as a "loveable" rogue. Lead Designer Damian Hosen explains: "The player plays a space pirate called Gabriel Falcone, and you've got 20 levels, each of which has different objectives. But, as a subtext to every level, because you're a space pirate, you're a thief, and you have to break aboard and steal booty too."

Despite the game's FPS roots, the team presses the point that *Falcone*, is, was, and always will be a console game. "We've always been going for a console control method," confirms Hosen.

"Character styles, tempo, weapons — it's all for that sort of market. The key thing is keeping the continuity between the two sections on the pad. Because the two game modes are seamless, because there are no loading times — when you board a ship, you're in the ship — it's got to work consistently between the two."

Ultimately, success will depend on making the game look and feel like a console game instead of just another PC port. The team's got the right mindset to make it happen, but the final test is yet to come. — Nigel Edge



■ Since you're a pirate, the goal of many levels is to break in, steal the booty, and get out

~ Shenmue II ~

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~ Shenmue II ~

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■ PC

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II: DOUBLE HELIX

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Raven Software** ■ Release Date: **February 2002** ■ Origin: **US**

Raven's mercenary shooter is back and (uh-oh!) gorier than ever

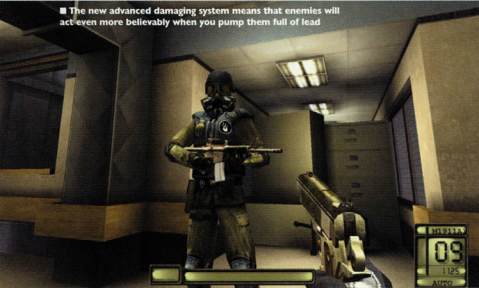
When Activision published *Soldier of Fortune* in mid-1999, it ruffled more than a few feathers both inside and outside the gaming industry with its unflinching portrayal of graphic violence. Not since *Kingpin* had we seen such gut-wrenching scenes of exploding heads, dismemberment, arterial spray, and convulsing body parts a-flyin' — and in fact developer Raven took things one step further with the addition of its custom-

built GHOUL technology, which modified the *Quake II* engine to deliver the most realistic carnage possible.

Once all the ill-informed critics had stopped huffing and puffing about the moral outrage, however, we got down to the business of enjoying a well-designed FPS driven by the non-stop visceral action and a cool techno-thriller-style story. And in these ultra-sensitive times, when even bleeding-edge shooters like *Return to*

Castle Wolfenstein and *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* are eschewing the bloodshed in pursuit of Teen ratings, you might think that the Raven boys would be dialing down the gore just a little. Think again. In fact it's going to be even gorier. "We're increasing the amount of damage zones on the characters," says Project Leader Jon Zuk. "We have more dismemberment areas and per-pixel hit accuracy on the skins. If you hit an enemy in the

■ The new advanced damaging system means that enemies will act even more believably when you pump them full of lead



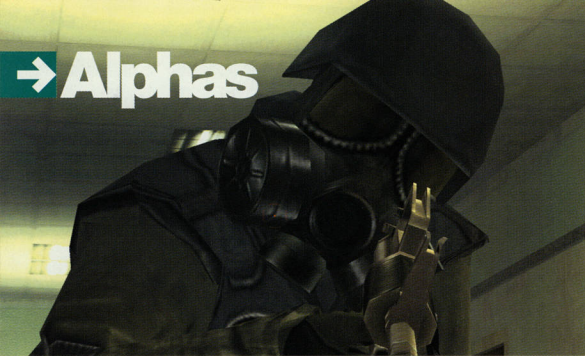
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE vs. SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

Bigger is better right? Here's an at-a-glance guide to how the sequel stacks up against the original, feature-wise.

	SOF	SOFII
LEVELS	30+	60
WEAPONS	12	20
ENGINE	Quake II	Quake III
TEXTURES	128x128 pixels	1024x1024 pixels
POLYS PER CHARACTER	500	3000

Other *SOFII* features: ICARUS2 scripting system (enhanced in-game cinematics); GHOUL2 damage system (skeletal animation, enhanced hit detection, more damage zones); LICH AI programming (allows NPCs to fight in squad formation); Random Mission Generator (creates infinite maps with variable goals against AI opponents).

→ Alphas



■ Stealth and cunning will be emphasized as opposed to just coming in blasting



■ The Quake III engine has enabled the team to create enemies that are eerily realistic

forearm, a bullet hole appears on the forearm. While we're aware of the climate that exists about game violence, we simply forge ahead. We make no bones about it that this is a Mature-rated title and thus should only be played by people over 17.

As in the original, *Soldier of Fortune II* casts you as real-life mercenary John Mullins (who is again on board as a technical advisor for the team) in a story line driven by sinister blowfare experiments. The single-player game spans over 60 levels, with 20 real-world weapons, and Zuk says that this time out the gameplay

will have a greater emphasis on stealth and cunning than what he describes as the "straight run-and-gun action" of the first game. That's one of many nods toward more realistic action, as the designers seek to incorporate realism while keeping the game entertaining. "We looked at a lot of the feedback from the users, and one of the things that kept coming up was, 'Make it more realistic,'" explains Zuk. "We have done some of that while staying true to the first game and the entertainment value of 'reality' We can be 'realistic,' but only to a degree. The designers always have to take liberties to create an exciting situation to put

the player in. So we create realistic interpretations of weapons, like the M4 and the Micro Uzi. We create more accurate hit locations and AI so that the enemies feel as if they're real people. I think that when people say they want reality, this is what they're asking for. They just don't know how to ask for it."

With such high-profile projects as *Jedi Knight II: Outcast* and *Quake IV* also currently in production at Raven's studio, it's clear that these guys have now joined Id and Epic on the genre's A-list. As *Soldier of Fortune II* moves into its Alpha stage, it further cements that position.

— Gary Whitta

"While we're aware of the climate that exists about game violence, we simply forge ahead."

— Jon Zuk, project leader, Raven



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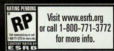
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■ Multiple enemies will attack at once, so you'll have to be careful not to get surrounded

■ GAMECUBE

RUNE

■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer: **From Software** ■ Release Date: **Winter** ■ Origin: **Japan**

GC's first RPG combines traditional gameplay with the luck of the draw

With the continued popularity of collectible card games like *Magic: The Gathering*, it's no surprise that game developers are taking cues from the school of collectible card game design. *Rune*, From Software's latest RPG, is a shining example. While it features many traditional RPG elements, the main focus of the game appears to be the card-based combat system itself.



■ Many of the spells you can use have spectacular effects, but beware — just because it looks good doesn't mean it's effective

On the surface, the game resembles most RPGs. You play as Katia Jerber, a young girl who is capable of great magic powers. Her mission isn't clear yet, but she explores the huge 3D world where she lives, she finds, predictably, that she must constantly fight the wandering monsters she encounters.

And it's when she runs into enemies that things get interesting. As players use cards in lieu of spells to fight in the realtime battles, your job is to assemble a "deck" of 30 of these cards (out of around 100) before you venture forth, using them to take out anything in your path. Much like in traditional collectible card games, success will depend on how the deck is put together since you'll only be able to select from four spells at a time — which are, of course, chosen at random for you. Although enemies don't actually use spell cards to fight back, you do have to be



■ Players choose from four spells at any given time

careful with them, as their arsenal includes typical monster attacks such as slashing, breathing fire, and stomping you at will.

Based on the little we saw at Spaceworld (see News, page 12), *Rune* looked like fun. Now we're hoping the team manages to tie a compelling plot into the mix. We're still not sure if it will see the light of day in the U.S., but with the popularity of CCGs and RPGs here, we're betting that it's in the cards.

— Blake Fischer/Christophe Kagotani

I'M GONNA DECK YOU SUCKA

Card battling isn't anything new in U.S. videogaming. Both *Final Fantasy VIII* and *IX* featured card-battling mini-games that were integrated into the story line, while *Pokémon Card Battle* on GBC featured such fights as the main source of combat — much like *Rune*, only turn-based. The closest game to *Rune* so far, however, was *Magic: The Gathering Battlemage* on PSX (though that game was so horrible that we've actually spent the last couple years trying to block out the memory of its existence).



■ Moto GP2's tracks are based around real-life ones, which means the scenery may not be as exciting as in, say, Ridge Racer



THE BATTLE OF THE REPLAYS

Ever since Gran Turismo, developers have spent an inordinate amount of time trying to make their replays look astounding (time, we'd argue, that could be better spent on the game itself). The current champion is Gran Turismo 3, but Moto GP2 has some nice replays too. Compare:



■ Gran Turismo 3



■ Moto GP2

■ PLAYSTATION 2

MOTO GP2

■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: Namco ■ Release Date: 2002 ■ Origin: Japan

Namco's fastest racer isn't what you think

➔ Moto GP was the runt of the PS2 launch litter. Hidden among the high-profile releases of Tekken Tag Battle and Ridge Racer V, the motorcycle racing game didn't stand much chance of being noticed among the already crowded PS2 U.S. launch lineup. And (surprise, surprise) it wasn't.

Since timing was the worst problem Namco faced, it's little surprise that the sequel isn't going to be all that different. The biggest improvement is in the graphics, which have benefited from a nice second-generation PS2 graphical boost. In particular, the bikes themselves are much more detailed than in the previous game. You can really see the dif-

ference in the replay modes, which look nearly photorealistic.

Of course, as any racing fan these days knows, the replay modes are worth squat if the game doesn't play well. Not much is changing in this department either: The game will still be a mesh of sim and arcade racing that emphasizes speed over strict realism. As with most sequels, there is also a lot more content in this game than in the original. Five new tracks have been added to the five in the

first game including the Hollanda GP and the Spain GP. The 20 riders in the game are also modeled after the real-life racers in the 2001 Championships.

The question remains as to whether timing was really the biggest hurdle the series faced in its quest for market acceptance. Motorcycle racing games have always been niche, and, no matter how nice this game looks, it may not be the kind of racing experience that the masses are waiting for.

— Blake Fischer/Christophe Kogotani



■ Motorcycle racing is actually much more challenging than auto racing because you can't really just powerslide around a sharp turn





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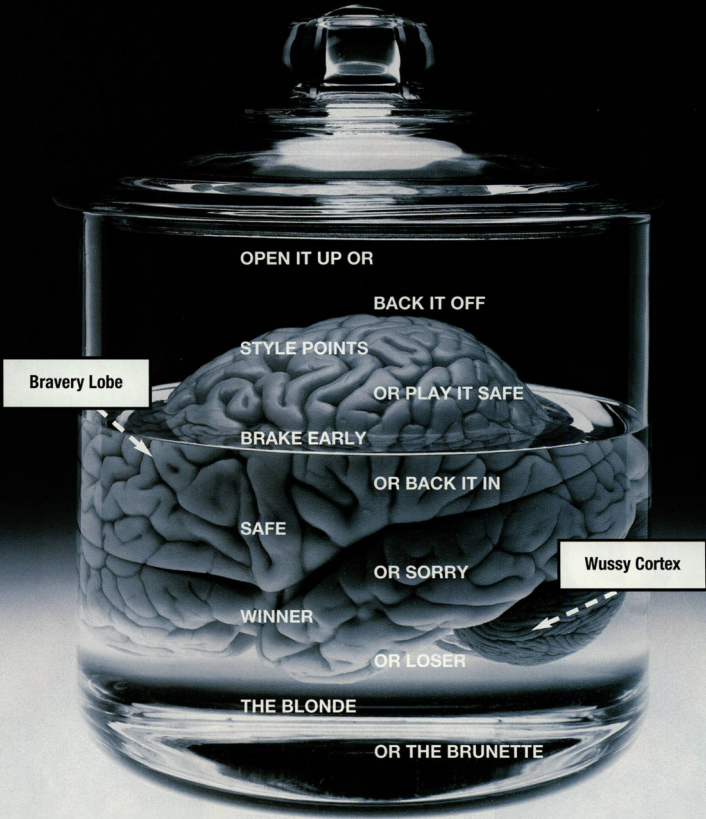


Violence

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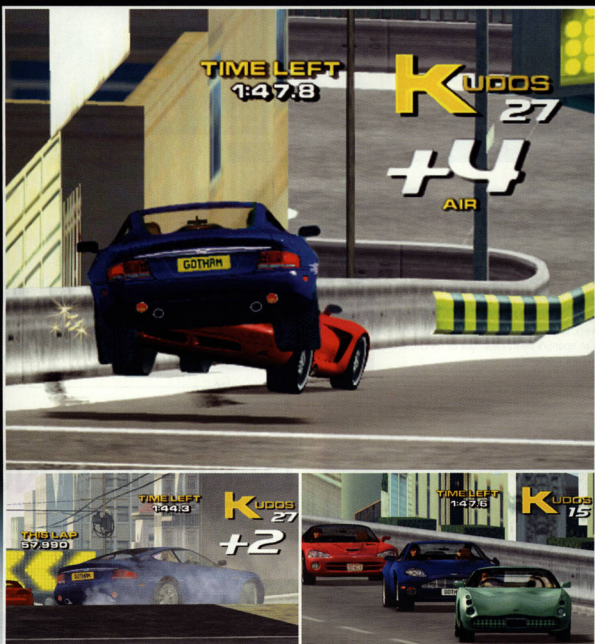
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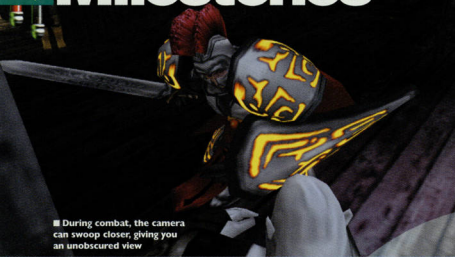
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→ Milestones



■ During combat, the camera can swoop closer, giving you an unobscured view

■ XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2

BLOOD OMEN 2

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**

■ Release Date: **November (PS2), TBA (Xbox)** ■ Origin: **US**

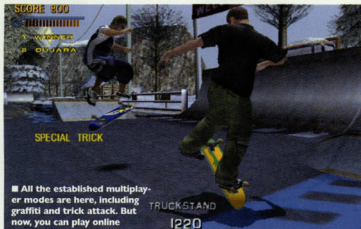
→ Hot on the heels of Crystal's long-delayed *Soul Reaver 2* comes this title, which we're actually much more excited about. First seen back in **NG 03/01**, Kain's array of arcane special powers, which range from mind control to stealthily punching an enemy's heart clean out of his chest, is the stuff our dreams are made of.



■ Even with Kain's power, multiple enemies can pose a serious challenge



■ Take a good look at this screen, and just try to tell us you don't want to play this game



■ All the established multiplayer modes are here, including graffiti and trick attack. But now, you can play online

■ GAMECUBE, XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2, PLAYSTATION, PC

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Neversoft** ■ Release Date: **November (GC, PS2, PSX), Q1 (Xbox, PC)** ■ Origin: **US**

→ We've seen the Hawk's latest guaranteed zillion-seller before, but now we've had a chance to try out online play, and it rocks. You'll need some sort of USB-capable Internet connection — we used a network-to-USB adapter — to play online, but it's well worth the investment



■ PLAYSTATION 2

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE

■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **Snowblind Studios**

■ Release Date: **November** ■ Origin: **US**

→ Interplay's "Diablo's Gate" 3D action RPG recently arrived in our offices in demo form, and it has us pretty hooked. Gameplay is just streamlined enough to pick up in seconds, while plenty of items, weapons, and the like will keep you busy. And the engine looks great.



■ Developer Snowblind is clearly in command of the PS2 hardware — the engine, especially the lighting, is top-notch

A handprint is formed by thick, dark brown or black paint strokes. The fingers are spread out. Overlaid on the palm and wrist area are several bright red, circular splatters of varying sizes, resembling blood. The background is a light, off-white color with some faint, ghostly text from another page visible.

wounds
will
heal.....

→ Milestones

■ XBOX, PC

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

■ Publisher: **Bethesda** ■ Developer: **Bethesda**
■ Release Date: **December** ■ Origin: **US**

➔ This ambitious "go anywhere, do anything" RPG has been a long time coming, but it should be worth the wait. The big draws are the open-ended gameplay, a huge "living" world, and the user-friendly scenario editor, which Bethesda hopes will facilitate a steady flow of Half-Life-style, player-created content.



■ The game was originally PC-only, but the Xbox version (shown here) looks every bit as lush

■ PLAYSTATION 2, GAMECUBE

LEGENDS OF WRESTLING

■ Publisher: **Acclaim** ■ Developer: **Acclaim**
■ Release Date: **November** ■ Origin: **US**

➔ The Rock, Triple H, and The Undertaker — none of them compare to the likes of Kamala the Giant, Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka, and Jake "The Snake" Roberts. Acclaim's wrestling history is dismal (ECW: Anarchy Rulz!, WWF Attitude), but this is an all-new team with something to prove.



■ The game features over 30 classic wrestlers and 12 types of match, including Ladder, Barbed-Wire, and Eight-Man Elimination



■ PLAYSTATION 2

DYNASTY WARRIORS 3

■ Publisher: **Koei** ■ Developer: **Koei**
■ Release Date: **November** ■ Origin: **Japan**

➔ Despite its repetitive nature, Koei's Dynasty Warriors 2 was one of our favorite PS2 launch titles, and this new entry looks even better. It's larger, with 40 playable characters (each with new moves) and 20 stages. More importantly, the game now has two-player splitscreen play in both co-op and versus varieties. Plus, you can now ride elephants.



■ One of the new characters is Zhang He, known for both his grace in battle and his merciless treatment of his enemies



■ Two players can now play splitscreen, either cooperating as friends or clashing as foes



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will be
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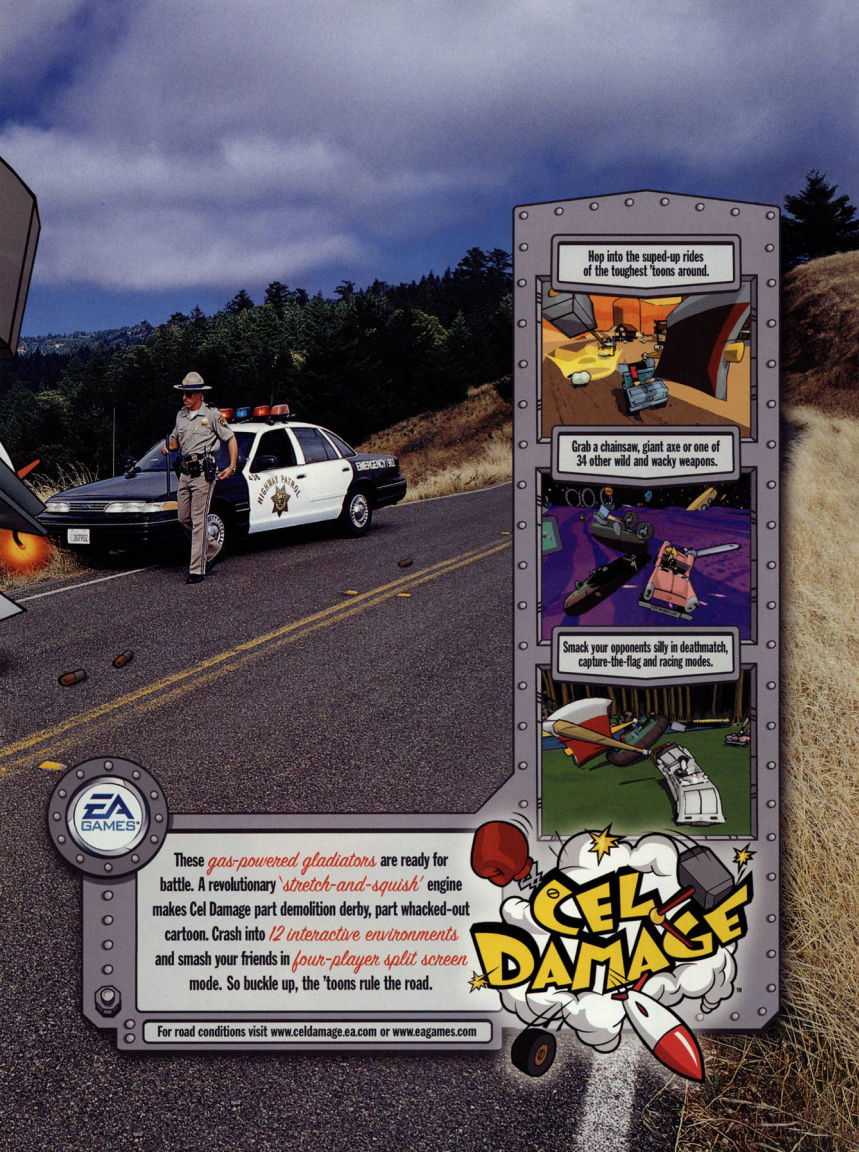
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Comic Mischief
Violence



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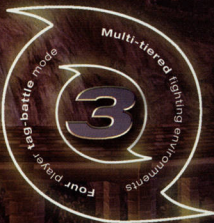
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Maximo

Capcom's U.S. development house proves you can bring classic 16-bit action to the 3D world of PlayStation 2

→ In today's increasingly complex world, racing games tout 200-plus cars with exchangeable parts, RPGs feature open-ended, "be anything" character classes, and adventure games boast epic, Hollywood-created plots and cinematic presentation. Developers get so busy "feature-chasing" competing products, they can forget the fundamentals of good game design. Luckily, Capcom Digital's Director of R&D David Siller remembers.

"My favorite coin-op game of all

time is *Ghosts 'n Goblins*," proclaims Siller, whose credits range from level design on *Rygar* to the role of producer on *Crash Bandicoot*. "Classic gameplay design doesn't go out of style.... We wanted to re-create the whole thing, but with little tributes to the original games." Surprisingly, Capcom of Japan agreed, thanks largely to legendary Director of R&D Yoshiki Okamoto, who not only helped allocate funding for the project, but also brought beloved artist Susumu Matsushita on board to

help visualize the game's Disney-meets-anime character designs.

In light of Siller's love of the old school, perhaps it will come as little surprise that *Maximo*'s most appealing trait is its ability to trigger an overwhelming sense of unabashed,

■ Maximo's basic attacks include a side slash, an overhead slash, and a leaping stab, which can hit multiple opponents

STORYBOOK ROMANCE

In case you missed last month's preview of *Maximo*, here's a quick story primer. Maximo is a king, who, while off at war, had his kingdom usurped by the evil Achilles. Aside from stealing the throne, Achilles has married Maximo's love and imprisoned his advisors (four sorceresses) in towers strewn throughout the kingdom. Achilles even murders Maximo upon his return from the war. Fortunately for our hero, Death itself is pissed at Achilles, whose power is derived from "spirit," which Achilles releases from the underworld using a giant drill — effectively stealing spirit from Death. Thus, the Grim Reaper sends Maximo back to the land of the living to avenge himself upon Achilles. The story also lends itself to a very natural continue system: The more spirit you return to Death, the more he'll reward you with additional lives.



→ Cover Story



■ The gameplay may be old-school, but this engine is purely next-gen. Check out the reflections on Maximo's golden armor, and his flaming sword's particle effects

Innocent excitement and enthusiasm. Much like the work of Shigeru Miyamoto or the classics to which it is a tribute, the game seems to know it's a game. Not a hyper-realistic simulation, not a plot-heavy, cinematic "experience" — just a game, expertly crafted from the very beginning to be two things: interactive and entertaining. Siller confirms this. "I wanted to make the ultimate 3D action game," he says. "A beautiful game, a game

with great technology, a game that we [the design team] wanted to play. This is the result of that."

What an awesome result it is. On paper, *Maximo* looks fairly textbook: medieval setting, 30 levels across five worlds — a cemetery known as "The Boneyard," a swamp dubbed "The Great Dank," a frozen "Graveyard of Ships," a fiery underworld called "The Realm of Spirits," and Maximo's own

siege-torn castle. Gameplay blends combat and platform jumping, with the player slaying enemies, fighting bosses, and collecting coins, spirit (see sidebar, page 67), and some 50 different power-ups. Typical, right?

Not exactly. For one, it's immediately obvious that every facet of *Maximo* is deliberately designed to be entertaining, even for the casual observer. Matsushita's character designs simply overflow with, for lack of a better term, character — with cartoon-like animations that only add to each of their personalities. The music recalls the campy, too-fun-to-be-spooky music often played in carnival haunted houses, and the camera favors a dramatic, slightly off-kilter angle, just like in a classic horror movie. And we do mean "just" like a movie; "Creepy Cam" was inspired by Sam Raimi's film *Army of Darkness*. Siller also gives tremendous credit to the classic amusement park "dark rides," a term used to describe pathed fun houses like the Disney amusement parks' Pirates of the Caribbean and Haunted Mansion. They inspired the ever-twisting level layouts, which subtly



■ What better way to complement finely tuned combat than with finely tuned platform jumping! (below)



YOU SPELLED IT WRONG

The original Japanese name for Ghosts 'n Goblins was Makal-Mura, which, literally translated, means "Demon World Village." Dai Makal-Mura — the name for Ghouls 'n Ghosts — means "Great Demon World Village."

channel the path of the free-roaming Maximo and simultaneously generate heightened suspense by yielding plenty of corners around which to hide spooky surprises. Ironically, despite these varied influences, Siller's team has not looked to any existing 3D videogames for inspiration. They just aren't as much fun to watch.

Finally, we get our hands on a controller. Two minutes later, we're completely hooked, leaping around a haunted graveyard, hoarding coins, grabbing firefly-like bits of spirit, and slashing away at every ghost, skeleton, and zombie we can find — all this despite the fact that our armor has taken some hits and we are now wreaking righteous vengeance upon evil while clad only in boxer shorts emblazoned with big, red hearts.

Whatever "it" is, *Maximo* has got it. It's as instantly addictive a game as we've played in ages, hearkening back to the days of Capcom's classic 16-bit side scrollers like *Ghouls 'n Ghosts*, when a game could be learned on a single quarter, but took weeks of allowance money to master. Yes, these are indeed textbook features — but culled from a much older, more fundamental book.

"The devil is in the details," proclaims Lead Designer Scott Rogers, which explains why *Maximo's* sword clangs noisily off of stone, but embeds itself in a tree trunk with a dull thunk. This is just one tiny example of how organic, how well planned-out *Maximo's* world is. Every interaction has been considered. Having trouble in the ice world? Try to find a flaming sword power-up. Do you need to get past the swamp zombie without him spitting piranhas at you? Use the ice sword so he freezes solid. In fact, two things become increasingly apparent as you play the game: No matter how tough, every enemy has a weakness,

■ As with Arthur (of *Ghosts 'n Goblins* fame) before him, *Maximo's* sensitive side shows through in his impeccable taste in underwear

"I wanted to make the ultimate 3D action game. A beautiful game, a game with great technology, a game that we [the design team] wanted to play. This is the result of that."

— David Siller, Director of R&D, Capcom Digital Studios

and certain weapons, power-ups, and attacks are much better suited to exploit that weakness than others. The sword skeletons are tough, but they're also show-offs. After attacking, they'll twirl their swords with a flourish, leaving them open for attack. Use your second-strike attack, and if their shield blocks your first strike, your second will connect, sending them clattering to the ground. And if your 16-bit alarm is going off, you're absolutely right. In fact, nowhere is the game's old-school idolatry more evident than in the boss battles.

"The big guy versus the little guy has always been kind of a tradition," Rogers explains. "It's fun." Thus, just as

in the classics, the bosses in *Maximo* are enormous, easily four times taller than the hero, and each possessing a wide range of devastating attacks. But, true to form, every boss has a weak point, which you can determine (continued on page 72)

A TIMELINE OF MAXIMO'S INFLUENCES...

While many elements of *Maximo* can be found in several games, here's a quick look at some of the most likely sources of inspiration, including the original *Ghosts 'n Goblins*.



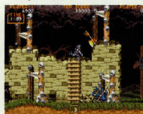
■ *Ghosts 'n Goblins* - 1985



■ *Trojan* - 1986



■ *Black Tiger* - 1987



■ *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* - 1988



■ *Magic Sword* - 1990



■ *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* - 1991

■ The unusual Realm of Spirits is filled with oddities like pig demons wielding giant hammers and enormous bear traps. (You can just barely see one off in the distance)



9999



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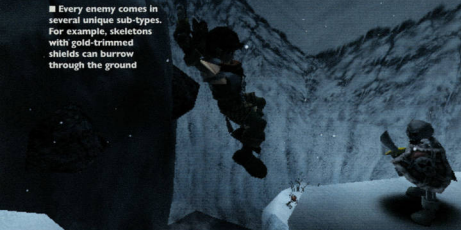
K
Kawasaki

J
JETPILOT



→ Cover Story

■ Every enemy comes in several unique sub-types. For example, skeletons with gold-trimmed shields can burrow through the ground



(continued from page 69)
by carefully examining the boss and his environment. Ghastly Gus is a gravedigger boss whose toes stick out of his boots, so the way to defeat him begins with a hit on each of his feet. Defeating Captain Cadaver, the pirate who attacks with a giant anchor (shown below), requires a completely different technique.

This dual emphasis on fundamental gameplay and attention to detail has made the game eminently playable. It also seems to have given the game a distinctly Japanese feel (helped along

by Matsushita's character designs). This comparison causes the humble Siller, who learned his trade working for Japanese developers such as Nichibutsu (creator of classics *Crazy Climber* and *Moon Cresta*) to first agree, then blush with pride.

"That's the ultimate compliment," he says. "The Japanese make the best videogames. They are the most thorough. They are very detail-oriented. They think of everything."

We'd argue that Siller has thought of everything, too. *Maximo* isn't due

until January (December in Japan), but we played all five worlds, including every boss but the final — one would assume that will be Achilles, but the form he'll take is anybody's guess — with fully populated levels, and near-final assets. This leaves the team months to spend balancing, tweaking, and buffing the levels to a perfect shine. When completed, *Maximo* will serve as a reminder to studios chasing *Metal Gear* and *Resident Evil* that an incredible gameplay experience doesn't necessarily mean hours of dialogue and beautifully motion-captured cut scenes. But you do need comprehensive design and a disciplined staff to execute it. In the end, the Japanese may make the best games, but now there's at least one more American studio running very close behind.

— Eric Bratcher



■ Powering up your moves is crucial. The regular downstrike can become this devastating attack, Ring of Pain (above)



FINAL FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS



Few could have predicted *Maximo*'s quality based upon the success of Capcom Digital's previous work: a Saturn port of the arcade title *Final Fight Revenge*, released only in Japan. While the game didn't garner much acclaim, Siller refuses to consider it a failure; Capcom Digital's performance in executing the project earned the studio the respect of Capcom Japan and the right to work on a project of its choosing. That project, of course, was *Maximo*.



■ Captain Cadaver is the ghostly commander of the frozen Graveyard of Ships. His arena is underwater, where fish and even killer whales can sometimes be seen swimming past



PlayStation 2

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MOSS

GAMES	REC	YDS
17	29	371
18	80	1413
19	11	1431

GAMES	REC	YDS
18	276	4163

CAN YOU?
DOMINATE

RANDY MOSS > MINNESOTA
RECEIVING

GAMES	REC	YDS	AVG
17	29	371	13.0
18	80	1413	17.7
19	11	1431	13.0

GAMES	REC	YDS	AVG
18	276	4163	15.4

PEDRO

WILL YOU?

INTIMIDATE

MARTINEZ

	GS	CG	SHO	IP	H	R	ER	HR
2000	0	0	0	8.0	6	7	7	0
2001	0	0	0	101.0	76	34	31	5
2002	1	1	1	144.2	115	58	55	11
2003	7	7	7	174.2	155	79	76	21
2004	1	1	1	216.2	187	100	87	19

WILLIAMS, SERENA

WILLIAMS, VENUS

WILLIAMS

WILLIAMS,

VENUS

WILLIAMS, SERENA U

WILLIAMS, VENUS U

SERENA

DO YOU?

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THE GAME**

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STATISTICS

GP	MPG	FGM-A	FG%	3PM-A	3P%
41	42.3	482-813	47%	76-170	

IVERSON

BPG	STP
1.1	1.1

PLAYOFFS

OFF STATISTICS

FGM-A	FG%	3PM	
117	251-661	387	48-

DARE YOU? TAKE CONTROL

#1 IN THE NBA IN POINTS PER GAME (31.1) 2000-2001

FGM-A	FT%	OFF	DEF	TOT	APG	SPG	BPG	TO	PF	
117	206	114	10	4.00	4.10	6.1	2.36	32	2.66	2.50



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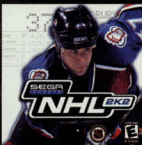
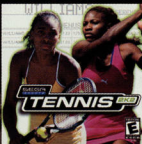
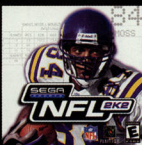
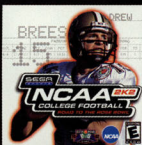
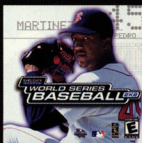
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Xbox Launch
→ **Special** X





XBOX ARRIVES

Two years after **Next Gen** broke the Xbox story wide-open (**NG 58**), it's finally ready for launch. Has the company better known for its office products successfully made the jump to the complex console market? Find out in our comprehensive launch guide to the system and its games . . .

XBOX RATING THE SYSTEM

You've heard the hype. Now read the uncensored truth as **Next Gen** analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of Microsoft's entry into the console war

HARDWARE POWER

If there's one area where Xbox clearly shines, it's in this category, by any measure you'd care to apply: It pushes more polygons, can handle larger and more textures, has better sound (supporting Dolby Digital 5.1), has more memory (which it can access faster), has a higher storage capacity, and can output a better-quality picture than any other console ever devised. Further, its architecture is relatively straightforward and based on design paradigms that are familiar to most (and probably all) developers. Better yet, Xbox can do all this right out of the box, with no extra hardware required (DVD playback aside). Indeed, if the worst criticism you can level at the hardware is that the controller is somewhat large and clunky, that seems a small (although not insignificant) misstep.

NextGen ★★★★★

CURRENT SOFTWARE LIBRARY

While we've been somewhat pessimistic about the launch lineup for the last few months, now that we've actually had a chance to play most of the games — however briefly — we are pleasantly surprised to find that most are, at the very least, solid and enjoyable. There are certainly a fair number of different titles available within the first month or so, and Microsoft has done a good job in covering all genres and basically delivering something for everyone. The main problem is that, besides DOA3 and possibly Halo, there's still a notable lack of any single killer app, and few franchise entries that would really make anyone look twice. Many Xbox games are available on other platforms — hardly a compelling reason to take a chance on this newcomer — and the exclusive titles are primarily original games that lack a proven track record to attract gamers.

NextGen ★★★★★

FUTURE SOFTWARE PROGNOSIS

Considering the sheer power under Xbox's hood, games should graphically improve by leaps and bounds over first-generation games. Plus, its Incubator Program aims to encourage indie development, so Xbox has the potential to garner the innovative ideas that fly outside corporate walls. The big question is whether Xbox can attract the top-tier properties that have yet to be secured.

NextGen ★★★★★

MARKETING MUSCLE

As of press time, Microsoft had yet to publicly reveal Xbox's marketing campaign. But the company recently shared that a national television campaign will soon debut, and will thankfully highlight the system's games (unlike the confusing "PlayStation 9" commercials from Sony). The company is also unveiling 10,000 demo kiosks to give gamers a hands-on experience.

NextGen ★★★★★

BOTTOM LINE

Xbox, at launch, is neither a flop nor a runaway success. Many games from its initial roster are fun, but despite the system's incredible technical capacity, very little of that power is on view yet. The question remains, how much support can Microsoft draw for the future, and will the games feature a compelling experience to back up fancy graphics? Though Microsoft has a massive uphill battle, no one else on the planet has its resources, and no company has come as far and as fast as it has up to now. However, even if Xbox winds up squarely in second place (or even, at worst, third), it has the backing to be in the race for the long run.

NextGen ★★★★★

XBOX BEST LAUNCH GAME

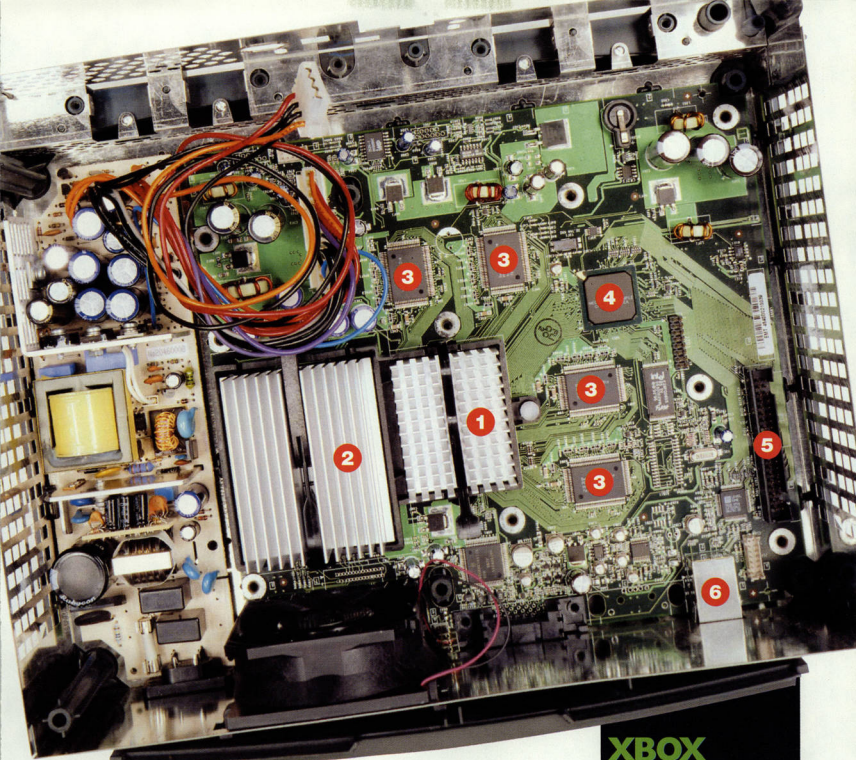
Dead or Alive 3

Publisher: Tecmo

Developer: Team Ninja

Without question, DOA3 is the launch title we are most eagerly anticipating. An elaborate, dynamic combat system melds with incredibly lifelike (though rather fantastically endowed) characters to create the most realistic and artistic fighting game home consoles have ever seen.





XBOX TECH SPECS

CPU: Intel PIII 733MHz

Graphics Processor: 250MHz NV2x Nvidia GPU

RAM: 64MB 200MHz unified DDR memory

Memory Bandwidth: 6.4GB/sec

Polygons/sec: 100 million textured/lit

Audio: Nvidia media processor capable of 256 simultaneous voices (stereo) or 64 voices (3D sound-enabled)

Storage: 5x DVD-ROM Drive — 4.7GB DVDs, 10GB hard disk, 8MB memory cards

Connectivity: Built in 100Mb Ethernet port for LAN/Internet hookup

Extras: DVD remote control adds DVD playback; high-definition TV pack enables resolutions as high as 1920x1080 via HDTV

What does it mean? Xbox really is an incredible polygon-pushing machine thanks to its Nvidia chipset and fast CPU. Currently this system has more brute force than anything else. The 64MB of unified RAM and awesome sound hardware really round out the package.

XBOX UNDER THE HOOD

- 1 250MHz Nvidia NV2x graphics processor
- 2 733MHz Pentium III
- 3 64MB of unified DDR memory
- 4 Nvidia media communications processor
- 5 IDE connector for hard drive and DVD-ROM
- 6 100Mb Ethernet port

(Xbox Launch Special continued on page 86)



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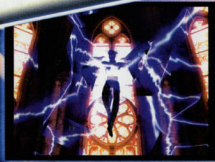
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BUT THERE'S A BULLET
WITH HIS NAME ON IT.

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A DEMON SWORDSMAN NAMED SPARDA WAGED A
ONE-MAN WAR TO SAVE THE HUMAN WORLD FROM
DAMNATION. 2000 YEARS LATER, A SHADLOWY FIGURE
NAMED DANTE FINDS CLUES THAT THE DEVIL WILL
RISE UP AGAIN. SOMEWHERE BETWEEN A MAN AND
A DEMON LIES OUR ONLY HOPE FOR SALVATION.



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PlayStation 2



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