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- Four new PlayStation2 previews
- Why is Pokémon being sued?
- 33 new games reviewed, including Donkey Kong 64 and Homeworld

Dreamcast ■ Nintendo 64 ■ PlayStation ■ PC ■ Arcade ■ Online

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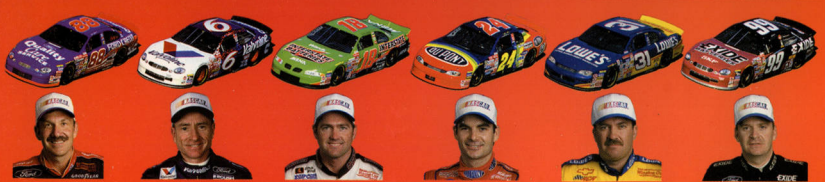

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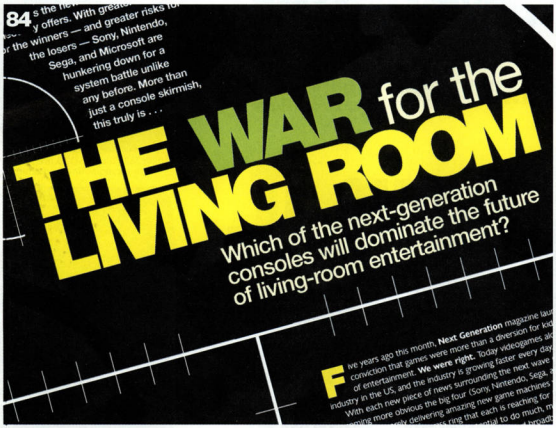

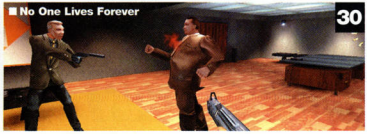

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If you want to stay informed, you better read this — or at least skim it really hard

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Special

The console war to end all console wars?

The next-generation consoles are breaking out of their stand-alone shells. Supporting a myriad of new features, the traditional console battle has become a war for the future of living room entertainment. The first shots are fired here ... 84

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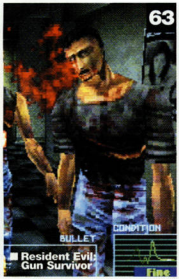
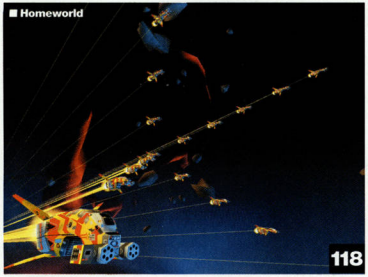
■ EDITORIAL

This is the fun part, or so they tell me

I always get nervous when game companies start talking about things other than games — I've found that any time a company veers away from trying to deliver hardcore games, quality suffers in all their products. But I have to admit, our story about how Nintendo, Sega, Sony, and Microsoft are slugging it out to determine who'll be able to dominate the next generation excites me, even though the companies are also talking a lot about the non-game world of broadband content distribution. Why? Because all four companies realize that the only way they can get the critical mass they need to make broadband profitable is by delivering killer games. With all the talk today about the mass market (and let's face it, when talking about game quality, "mass market" is basically a synonym for "crap real gamers won't play"), it feels good to know that we — the hardcore gamers — are in the driver's seat. Why? Because it's us, the influencers and early adopters, who will determine which machines succeed and fail in the next generation, not the casual gamers who wait for years before buying a new system. That's cool. So who's going to win? Check out our article on page 84, and let me know what you think at chris@next-generation.com.

Chris Charla





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News

Game industry news and analysis

■ CHOTTO OMOSHIROKUNAI

The Tokyo Game Show

Crowds aplenty, but the Japanese market is drifting away from ours

Fall TGS was packed, but other than what was showing in the booths of Sony (PS2), Sega (*Space Channel 5* and *Shenmue*), Namco (*Dragon Valor*, *Ridge Racer Next*), and Capcom (about twenty different *Biohazard* SKUs), TGS mainly demonstrated that the gulf is growing between what US gamers want and what the majority of mass-market-oriented Japanese companies put out: it seemed most of the other booths featured girlfriend simulators and Mah-Jongg. You've seen most of the best of TGS already in our pages, but to the right are looks at a few games we haven't given full previews to.

Dragon Valor

- Platform: PlayStation
- Publisher: Namco
- Developer: Namco

■ **Long-delayed, the first playable version of this action-adventure surprised attendees with its sharp graphics. The gameplay was also impressively tight, and the actual action was eerily familiar to those reared on the classics of the 16-bit age — this is an old-school game through and through.**

Gran Turismo 2000

- Platform: PlayStation
- Publisher: Sony
- Developer: Polyphony Digital

■ **We weren't sure what to make of the replay mode that accurately duplicated blinding lens flare and image-distorting heat waves, but when we could actually see what was on the screen, *GT2000* looked amazing, with over-the-top specular highlighting and persistant skids marks on the tracks. If Polyphony adds some dust to the cars, we'll be happy**

■ AND REALITY IS ONLY 800,000,000 POLYS PER SECOND

PlayStation 3 Revealed?

Kutaragi breaks Moore's law, claims 1000x chip performance for PlayStation3

When PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi talks about his future plans, listen. In July 1996, he was already saying that his next product would be capable of synthesizing emotions just as a music chip synthesized sounds. Now, with PlayStation2 already in production, Kutaragi has announced his next act.

First will be the commercialization of the PlayStation2 Tool development station. The Tool is a stand-alone graphic workstation that uses the same Emotion Engine and Graphics Synthesizer chips found in PlayStation2, coupled with a Linux OS. Kutaragi was quoted in an *EE Times* article as saying, "In the past, workstations and PCs had more power than home game consoles, so we could use them as development tools. But when the power [of PlayStation2] matches or exceeds their power, it becomes difficult to use them for development."

■ Commercial workstation versions of the Tool will probably follow Mr. Goto's bold design for the PS2 Tool hardware

The non-PlayStation development-specific version of the Tool, called the Creative WorkStation, will be marketed to high-end graphics professionals and movie makers as an alternative to current workstations. "The PC is losing its position as the technology driver; so are workstations," Kutaragi was also quoted as saying. Kutaragi also said he doesn't care if Sony actually loses money on the Creative Workstation, because he feels the entire system series is an R&D program. He also plans to open new markets with the WorkStation, including digital projection of movies.

The first generation CreativeWorkStations, which Sony plans to make available in 2000 or 2002, will offer roughly 10 times the performance of the Tool, using faster multiple versions of faster-clock-speed Emotion Engine and Graphic Sythesizer chips operating in parallel. For the second-generation version, due in 2002, Kutaragi promises 100 times the Tool performance, using second-generation versions of the EE and GS. By 2006, the third generation system will arrive, with EE3 and GS3, featuring 1000 times the performance of the Tool — just in time for the PlayStation3, which will also be delivered around that date, according to Sony sources mentioned in the *EE Times* article.

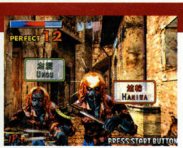
With PlayStation2 now in production, Kutaragi has announced his next act

WHAT IS IT?

■ David Lightman used this computer to (nearly) destroy the world in *War Games*.

Here's the PlayStation3 part

So what kind of statistics would a game system capable of 1000 times PlayStation2's performance generate? If you do the math, that's 66 *trillion* polygon calculations per second. On a super-high-definition 6400x4800 screen, that's more than enough polygons to update pixel-sized triangles more than 120 times per second. That's both better than movie resolution and a refresh rate faster than the human eye can detect (in



Typing of the Dead
- Platform: Dreamcast
- Publisher: Sega
- Developer: Sega

■ Imagine *House of the Dead*, only enemies have letters on them, which you need to type on a keyboard to kill them. No, we're not making this up. And now this utterly improbable arcade game is coming home to Dreamcast. This officially replaces the tennis RPG where you play against Satan as the weirdest game we've ever seen.

Dark Cloud
- Platform: PlayStation2
- Publisher: Sony
- Developer: Sony

■ Build a fantastic world using tile-based graphics, then seamlessly zoom in and explore it in third person. This title looks to combine no less than three genres: the god game, the action/adventure, and the traditional RPG. If this is indicative of the new types of gaming that PlayStation2 will deliver, count us in.

■ Security was... er, tight, by Namco's booth. We didn't mind

fact, those results can be done by a mere 3.6 trillion polys per second).

So how can Ken Kutaragi promise such results when Intel and AMD practically have to bathe their chips in liquid nitrogen just to eke out another 100Mhz of clock speed without them melting? Simple. Unlike Intel and AMD, who are hamstrung by the need to maintain backwards compatibility with the primitive, 20-year old 8080 architecture (which is only two generations removed from the first microprocessor, Intel's 8008), Kutaragi and team were able to start from scratch, designing chips for maximum efficiency without worrying about backwards compatibility (or, apparently, the marketing desire to pace changes so as to introduce new, more powerful chips the next year).

Kutaragi also has the benefit of a billion-dollar investment in two new chip-fabrication facilities, which enable him to predict the move to faster, more powerful .15 and .13 micron process chip-making facilities (the PlayStation2 and Dolphin will use .18 micron process chips). How will he pay for the facilities — and the development of EE3 and GS3?

IT IS...

■ The TRS-80 from Tandy/Radio Shack.

■ Enthralled by his creation, Ken Kutaragi has plans for PlayStation2's chips that go well beyond traditional game machines

Kutaragi has the benefit of a billion-dollar investment in two new chip fab facilities

Consumer sales of PlayStation2.

Don't expect the traditional PC and workstation market (and the companies that supplies the OSs for them, like Microsoft and Sun) to roll over and hand the keys to the future to Sony, but clearly, Kutaragi is very, very confident in the abilities of the chips his team has designed to lay down such a gauntlet. The response of the rest of the graphics and PC industry should be interesting, to say the least. "You never know what will happen," said Jack Lyon, director of Cnet's Computers.com, an expert on the computer industry, to whom we'll give the last word in this story: "This could be a wake-up call to the rest of the industry, the way Sputnik was to the aerospace industry in the 1950s." **Next**Gen

■ SELL, SELL, SELL!

Sega Rolls On

With little sign of slowdown, Dreamcast barrels into the holiday season

Within the first two weeks of the Dreamcast launch, Sega had pushed more than half a million units into the hands of consumers in North America. While some of these systems had been pre-ordered as much as six months in advance, the fact is, Dreamcast sales are still going strong.

■ Sega's VP of Marketing Peter Moore is confident the system will sell more than 1.5 million units in the US by the end of the holiday season

According to Peter Moore, Sega's vice president of marketing, the company had expected the sales to slow in late September, in the period after launch and before the holiday build-up. But, "the momentum is incredibly strong," Moore says. How strong? To the extent that Sega believes it will easily surpass the original business plan of 1.5 million units by March 31.

"We're very confident," Moore says, "based upon continued to demand, the marketing that's yet to come, and increased production coming out of Asia/Pacific, that we would be confident of usurping that number by the end of holidays."

Could Sega deliver a 1.5 million installed base by 2000? Quite possibly, as long as the company can continue to keep as many units on shelves to meet consumer demand, something the company has already had some problems with. According to several major retailers polled by **Next Generation**, Sega has had difficulty keeping retailers stocked with hardware. Aside from console shortages, VMUs and first-party controllers have been in short supply.

Sega has had difficulty keeping retailers stocked with Dreamcast hardware

So what's Dreamcast done to the competiton? According to a Fairfield Research study, Dreamcast games are cutting into the sales of N64 titles, but are having no effect on PlayStation game sales. This data seems to correspond to what **Next Generation** learned in regards to trade-in programs.

"For every PlayStation traded in towards a Dreamcast," says Electronics Boutique manager Alex Danielian, "we've had three Nintendo 64s traded in."

Danielian is the manager of the Henderson, Nevada, Electronics Boutique, the store which shattered EB's one-day sales record on the day of Dreamcast launch.

The Fairfield Research study had Sega's *NFL 2K* and *Sonic Adventure* and Namco's *Soul Calibur* running equal in sales during the week of Sept. 20-24. However, more than a month into the life the system, the retailers polled by **Next Generation** felt that *NFL 2K* was and far and away the game that was driving hardware sales, followed by *Soul Calibur*.

So what are the final Dreamcast sales figures seven weeks after launch? Sega wasn't ready to dislose that information. The next sales announcement the company intends to make will be when the Dreamcast surpasses a million units. Which, one particularly vague spokesperson said, would be "very soon." By the time you read this, it should already be announced.

NextGen

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-EGM

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■ No, this is not Sega's booth at E3, but damn if we don't know where Sega got the plan for its Dreamcast display at Disney World's Innoventions exhibition currently open at Epcot

HARDCORE

This is going back some ways. My parents bought me a copy of *Asteroids* for 2600 from Sears on a Sunday. Unfortunately, the family obligations that are enforced upon you at such a tender age took their toll on my game time that day, so I faked sick Monday morning — one of my greatest performances ever. As soon as my parents left for work, I immediately put *Asteroids* in. I sat kneeling for eight hours in worship at the Atari altar, destroying thousands of asteroids and turning the game over eight times in a row! When my mom came home, she asked me to stop and get up off the living-room floor. Did I mention that I was kneeling for eight hours? When I stood up, I realized I couldn't feel my legs at all. The first step I took sent me falling down the landing of our living room onto my head, knocking me out cold and giving me a slight concussion. Of course I missed the next day of school, too, but my Mom took *Asteroids* to work with her. Oh well, *Space Invaders* had to do that day.

— Robert Longo
robert.longo-next@attwls.com

■ SONIC, MEET MICKEY

Sega Unveils Dreamcast Exhibit at Epcot

Space Mountain takes a backseat to *Shenmue*

Remember when crowds flocked to Disney World for the rides and a chance to meet Mickey? The times they are a-changin'. On September 30, hundreds of Epcot Center visitors congregated to play videogames and swoon over reigning Miss America Heather French, one of several celebrities on hand for the grand opening of Innoventions at Epcot, part of Disney's interactive showcase featuring the future of technology and consumer entertainment products. Sega's exhibit provided 34 Dreamcast units running *Sonic Adventure, Sega Bass Fishing, Sega Rally 2 Championship, NFL 2K, NBA 2K, Flag to Flag CART Racing,* and Acclaim's *TrickStyle,* as well as a demo of the upcoming *Shenmue.*

Sega's Dreamcast exhibit replaces Sega's arcade display, and comes as a welcome change to some parents, who were often heard complaining that after shelling out as much as $45 per day for park admission, they still had to pump quarters into Sega's coin-op games.

So what's up next for Sega's "Videogames of Tomorrow" display? Visitors to the Sega exhibit will see more demo versions of Dreamcast games that have not yet shipped. With the help of strategic partner AT&T, Sega also plans to provide online, multiplayer gaming to the display. "Our upcoming online arena will enable families who visit Epcot to experience the 56K connectivity of today," says Charles Bellfield, director of marketing communications for Sega, "and the broadband capabilities of the tomorrow." We assume this will be an expansion of Sega's current display and not a separate exhibit entitled, "Videogames of the Day After Tomorrow." — *Kevin Toyama*

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

Citing irreconcilable differences with himself, much-admired 3Dfx CEO Gregory Ballard stepped down in early October. Ballard's resignation was due to a need for a "fresh perspective," in the former CEO's terms, as he has successfully marketed the company and the videocard maker now needs a more technical CEO. 3Dfx raised eyebrows three years ago when it brought Ballard, who'd never run a technology company, onboard as its chief. His reign ends with mixed results: 3Dfx is far and away the dominant video brand at retail but is flagging behind all others in the OEM market, contributing to a stock slide — when Ballard announced his resignation, the stock was well below its IPO price. **Verne Troyer is everywhere. Known to most of the world as Mini-Me,** the Amish-born actor was last seen at the Dreamcast launch fete in San Jose. Now Troyer has signed on to promote *Pac Man World 20th Anniversary* alongside Mr. T. This means that Troyer is now officially the games industry's "favorite little guy." Former favorite industry little guy Tommy Tallarico could not be reached to comment on his ouster. **Westwood continues its march toward world domination.** *Tiberian Sun,* while almost universally panned, conquered the September sales charts, occupying the first and second sales positions with its standard and platinum editions. The company is swiftly following it up with an expansion and the highly anticipated action game *Renegade.* Set in the *Command & Conquer* universe, *Renegade* goes to show that old franchises never die — they just get turned into 3D action games. **Taking revenge for Agincourt,** French publisher Titus has bought out English publisher Virgin Interactive. The deal gives Titus access to Virgin's distribution network in the UK, Germany, and Spain for its massive worldwide publishing network, which includes controlling stake in Interplay. **But the Hundred Years War doesn't end there!** The English gave the French their licks right back, with British developer/publisher Rage buying Digital Image Design from France's game juggernaut

■ FILE UNDER NESS: ELIOT VS. LOCH MONSTERS

Pikachu Charged with Racketeering

Litigants claim the *Pokémon* collectible-card game incites gambling

In the United States, you cannot say "one billion dollars" without attracting lawyers. Predictably, suits have been filed against Nintendo's billion-dollar revenue generator, *Pokémon*, a franchise responsible for selling 15 million cartridges, the number-one cartoon show in America, and the most popular trading cards on the market today.

In this case, several litigants have charged that Nintendo has violated RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) laws by promoting illegal gambling.

No, this does not mean that Nintendo is organizing *Pokémon* poker games for rings of 10-year-olds chomping on cigars in smoke-filled elementary-school bathrooms, and there are no third-grade toughies saying, "Read 'em and weep, Johnny — two Pikachus and three Meowths; a full house," as he rakes up a pile of milk-money quarters. The reason these guys have accused Nintendo of racketeering because you don't get the same *Pokémon* cards in every pack, and some cards are worth more than others.

This seemingly insipid case could set a serious precedent. If Nintendo is culpable for gambling by offering a rare card in one out of every eleven packages, how about those gum machines that have one capsule with a watch or a nice pocket knife and about 100 capsules with rubber spiders? Is that illegal gambling, too?

Next Generation is watching this case closely, because if these bozos can prove that randomly placing foil cards in packs of cards is an illegal form of gambling, you may be able to go after the kids who knock on your door Halloween night. Perhaps the term "trick or treat" is an illegal form of extortion. — ***Steven Kent***

■ **"I, Pikachu, do solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth . . . Yes, Senator? . . . On the advice of counsel I will exercise my Fifth Amendment rights."**

■ TWO STRATEGIES, TWO COMPANIES

Breaking up is easy to do — Sega forms two new divisions

Reinforcing the separate strategy Sega is taking in respect to the differences between the US and Japanese markets, Sega has introduced two new divisions to further the advancement of Dreamcast. Sega of America has changed its name to become Sega of America Dreamcast, specifically to reflect the company's commitment to the new system. The announcement comes at the same time Sega of Japan launches International Investment Corporation (IIC), a new network division to support Dreamcast's growth as an Internet appliance.

Sega of America becomes Sega of America Dreamcast, and in Japan, the company launches a new Dreamcast network company

"In regards to the name change here in the US," says Sega's VP of Marketing Peter Moore, "it is almost purely that. We've all become totally immersed in this company in the launching and nurturing of Dreamcast, to the extent where our legacy businesses of Saturn, Genesis, and to a lesser extent, our PC business, have become a very small part of what we do. So as a result, to keep us totally focused on Dreamcast as a whole, that's both network and in-home console usage, then we've simply added Dreamcast to Sega of America."

In Japan, IIC will handle Dreamcast network-related business, expanding into e-commerce, advertising, and online gameplaying.

"There's a very low penetration of PCs into Japanese households," Moore says, "and the Dreamcast hardware solution for [Internet connectivity] has really caught people's attention."

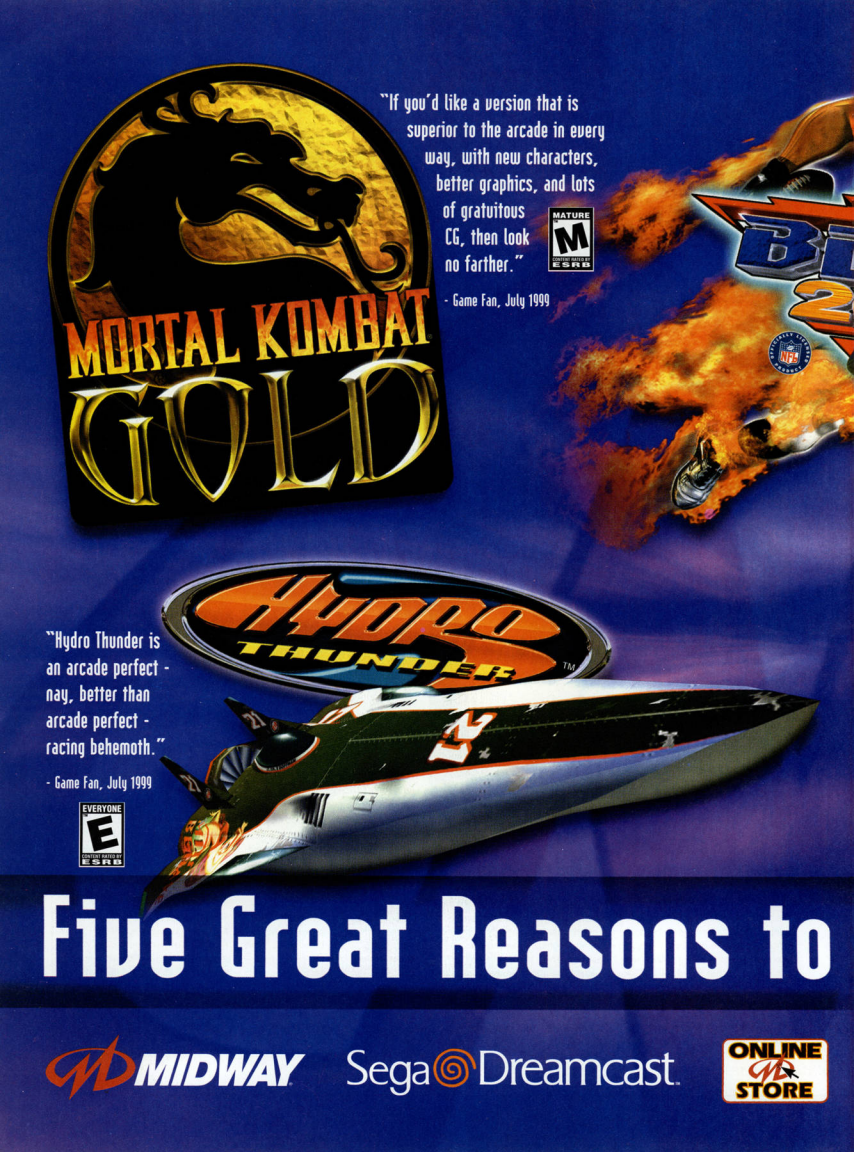
Moore says there are 330,000 people already registered as members of Japan's Dreamcast network, which he sees as the company's major cornerstone in Japan's business going forward.

"I think that is why CSK has made the decision to focus the time and resources on it," Moore says, "because they see the upside potential as almost limitless."

IIC is 70 percent owned by Sega's largest shareholder CSK, and 30 percent owned by Sega. There's already talk of taking IIC public, and Sega is considering partnering IIC with an undisclosed company. **NextGen**

Infogrames. The acquisition came fast on the heels of a mysterious 30-employee walkout at D.I.D's Warrington, England, offices. **And while the French acquire the English and the English acquire the French, in the grand old U.S. of A, we do things right:** we acquire ourselves. Barnes & Noble has recently announced plans to purchase Babbages Etc. — a company already owned by Barnes & Noble's CEO, Leonard Riggio. **This just in: the French get the final licks this month,** as Infogrames announces its new Japanese division, to be started by a certain tri-lingual former Japanese correspondent for several English mags (and one very respected American one). **A game show for gamers?** That's the idea behind GamesCon (http://www.gamescon.com), which is aiming to be America's first major consumer show for gamers (E3, of course, is for industry members only). After trial runs in Toronto, the first major GamesCon exhibition will be in February in San Francisco, and should feature celebrity guests, a massive LAN party, vendors selling discount software, and opportunities to hang out with other hardcore gamers. If they build it, we will come (assuming we get free press passes, anyway). **The truth is out there; what it is just depends on how you read numbers.** Is the Dreamcast dominating the game market? Take a look at the numbers and decide: 500,000 systems sold in a month — the fastest in the industry's history, but the highest ranking piece of software (*NFL 2K*) only at #6 on the charts for the month of September, well behind *FFVIII* and *Dino Crisis* for PlayStation. It should be a very interesting holiday season indeed . . . **According to Japan's weekly *Famitsu*, Sony will be lucky** if it manages to sell 500,000 units when it launches the PlayStation2 in Japan next year. In a recent poll by the magazine, only 17% of those surveyed responded that the PlayStation2's launch price of 39,800 yen is reasonable. It could be a *very* interesting spring.

— Compiled by Aaron John Loeb, Executive Producer, www.DailyRadar.com


"If you'd like a version that is superior to the arcade in every way, with new characters, better graphics, and lots of gratuitous CG, then look no farther."
- Game Fan, July 1999
MATURE
M
ESRB
MORTAL KOMBAT
GOLD
"Hydro Thunder is an arcade perfect - nay, better than arcade perfect - racing behemoth."
- Game Fan, July 1999
EVERYONE
E
ESRB
HYDRO THUNDER
Five Great Reasons to
MIDWAY
Sega Dreamcast
ONLINE
STORE

"Loud, fast and audacious, Blitz has dead-on gameplay and the unlimited replay value for the best sports titles."

–Game Fan, July 1999

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

"Ready 2 Rumble was arguably the game of the (E3) show across the board."

–Dreamcast.IGN.COM

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

READY 2 RUMBLE BOXING™

"If you still have reservations about buying a Dreamcast, hopefully a near arcade-perfect port of [NBA] Showtime will help put your mind at ease."

-Electronic Gaming Monthly, September 99

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www.midway.com

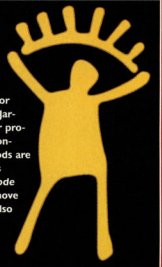
■ TOM RUSSO'S

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

TROUBLE ON ENDOR?

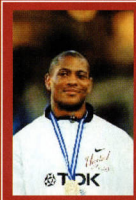
The Force is with PlayStation2, as we have it on good authority that there are already two PS2 games in development at Lucas, and at least one of the two games will feature characters from a galaxy far, far away. Still, not all the Ewoks at LucasArts are happy. Programmers Gary Brubaker of *The Dig*, *Shadows of the Empire*, and *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine*, and Dave Coathupe, programmer for the PC version of *Episode I: Racer*, have punched their Jar-Jar-branded time cards for the last time. Rumor has it other programmers are also looking to jettison the LucasArts consular ship. By the time you read this, their escape pods are probably well on the way to Tattooine. A LucasArts spokesperson said that many employees set *Episode One* as a benchmark, and have since opted to move on, as is the nature of the industry. LucasArts also cancelled plans for the PSX version of *Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine*, although Dreamcast and N64 versions are rumored.



PARADOX GOES PLAYSTATION 2

LA-based Paradox entertainment, developer of Wu-Tang Clan for Activision, and the next *Lion King* game for PC, PSX, and N64, has signed on with Mattel Interactive to develop PlayStation and PlayStation2 versions of the classic children's game *Rock'em-Sock'em Robots*.

■ In the '70s, before 3D fighting games existed on game consoles, this toy was as good as it got

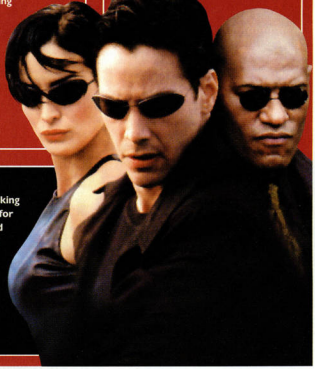


KONAMI RUNS TO PS2

Get ready to give your control pad a beating — Konami's *International Track and Field 2000* will be ready for PlayStation this holiday season. The game features 12 events including the 100-meter dash, weightlifting, cycling, hammer throw, and the long jump, and will be endorsed by the fastest man alive, Maurice Greene. Greene is the 1999 world champion for the 100-meter and 200-meter dash, and holds the world record for the 100 meters. But Konami isn't stopping with Greene or PlayStation. According to Craig Howe, Konami brand marketing manager, the *Track and Field* franchise will extend to the next-generation systems (read: PlayStation2). Through an agreement with Handling Speed Intelligently, the top track-and-field sports-management agency, Konami will be working closely with worldwide Olympic hopefuls, putting these athletes to good use in motion capture for track-and-field products with releases that correspond with the Sydney 2000 Summer Olympics.

ACCLAIM PUNCHES IN

While sources inside Acclaim recognize that the company's 16-bit foray into boxing with *Foreman: For Real* was overly underwhelming, it hasn't stopped the company from stepping back into the ring. The publisher has contracted Santa Cruz-based Osiris Studios to develop a next-generation boxing game. No word as to whom from the fighting world will be endorsing the game. Foreman again? Word is he's hungry.



WHAT IS THE MATRIX?

What is the Matrix? Still up in the air, if you're asking about the developer of the game. Frontrunners for the license right now include Shiny Entertainment and Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* team. "I can't say anything officially at all," David Perry of Shiny Entertainment says, "everyone is competing for it." Perry also intimated the writers were coming by his office for a visit that week. Insiders have it that the filmmakers have been insistent that the project go only to a developer with the right technology. No matter who gets *The Matrix*, it will likely be a PlayStation2 title.

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Sega Dreamcast. IT'S THINKING

//05.

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Match the US name of the *Street Fighter* boss to the name of the Japanese boss

US	JAPAN
1 Balrog	a Sagat
2 Vega	b Gouki
3 Sagat	c Balrog
4 M.Bison	d Vega
5 Akuma	e M. Bison

ANSWERS: 1e, 2d, 3a, 4d, 5b

GT2 Racing Wheel

Company: **Pelican Accessories**

Price: **$29.99**

Despite its name, the GT2 Racing Wheel actually has nothing to do with *Gran Turismo 2000*. But like the game its name so closely resembles, this wheel's responsive qualities put it ahead of the competition, and at $30, it is unquestionably the best buy of any PlayStation wheel available. How can it be offered at such a low price? Because it has an alternative to standard pedals. Instead of offering small pedals with an insufficiently weighted base that pops up or shifts during those "edge of your seat" racing moments, Pelican has instead opted to position well-designed analog gas and brake pedals behind the wheel. There is even a light-up display showing the degree to which the gas is depressed. As for steering, the unit offers tight turning resistance, which just makes the wheel feel right. It also has a nice dual-vibration feature, something rarely done well on most new wheels. Comfortable rubber grips round out the exterior package, and the steering sensitivity control and button-remapping feature make the adjustment options complete. Suction cup mounts enable you to stick it to your tabletop, and as the wheel is smaller and lighter than most, it won't work on your lap too well. Still, when used with furniture, this is the one to get.

■ CONTROLLERS, ACCESSORIES, ETC.

Peripheral Round-up

A discerning look at stuff you may or may not want

Stella At 20 — Volume 2

The Atari 2600, or VCS, was known to the original programmers as "Stella," based on the system's code-name during its development. 20 years after the birth of Atari 2600, Cyberpunks Entertainment documented Atari 2600's 20th-anniversary reunion, interviewing 11 of the system's original game designers.

This VHS tape is mostly footage of the designers as they describe the engineering tricks used to maximize the 2600. One noteworthy gem is David Crane's explanation of how he generated world of *Pitfall* using a polynomial counter, a reversible pseudo-random number generator that enabled players to move back and forth throughout the game's 256 screens.

But the conversation never really evolves beyond engineering tricks. This documentary features no host or narrator, leaving the transitional scenes feeling more than a little sparse. There are not enough anecdotal stories, and aside from some of the actual gameplay footage, the almost-90-minute tape fails to capture the excitement of the era. In the end, it becomes fairly obvious that *Stella at 20 Volume 2* was put together by nostalgic programmers, and that's exactly who it will appeal to — along with more tech-minded retrogamers. If you fall into either niche, you just might like it. The video can be ordered for $30 (plus $3 shipping) at www.cyberpunks.uni.cc.

— Tom Russo

Airplay

Wireless controllers don't get any better — which doesn't make this one good

Wireless controllers are better in theory than in practice. They eat batteries, and since most are based on infrared signals, they require a direct line of sight to the receiver. The Airplay controller from Eleven Engineering attempts to rectify these problems by using radio waves instead of infrared signals, and featuring a "reLOAD" battery system so you can quickly swap Duracells.

But it still ain't perfect. Although technologically impressive — it works up to 20 feet away, and the signal is steady and tough to block — the controller itself doesn't feel very good in your hand. It's boxy, with strangely placed shoulder buttons, and there's no analog or shock support. At press time, the company still hadn't decided on an MSRP, but you only get one controller in the package.

In short, we're still waiting for a better wireless experience.

■ **You can't block its signal, but you can't hold it comfortably either**

Interact's Sharkwire

Swim with the sharks and you will get bitten

Sharkwire from Interact is a modern cartridge and accompanying keyboard that plugs into your Nintendo 64. For $79.99 at retail and a $9.95 subscription fee, it lets you log on to an Interact gateway site — the only site you can access — and download Game Shark codes and Dex Drive saves, as well as send email and access some news and strategies (plus lots and lots of ads).

If you have absolutely no other Internet access and own a lot of Interact gadgets, you might find some utility in Sharkwire (and even that's a little doubtful). Otherwise, the steep price and monthly fee won't get you anything you couldn't get on the Web. If you own a PC — steer clear.

■ **PC owners will find Sharkwire to be the most useless gaming product of 1999**

MP3PSX

Why make a device that plugs into the back of your PlayStation and lets it play MP3s burned onto a PC CD? Perhaps for the same reason that men climb mountains — because it can be done. While the device is basically useless unless you have a PC and CD-R drive (meaning you can already play MP3s), this is one of the coolest hardware hacks we've seen in a while, and it's fully GameShark compatible as well. For more info, check out http://www.mp3psx.com.

■ MARCUS WEBB'S

Arcadia

Bombings, departures, Disney, and the Senate

VIDEOGAME EXPLODES NEAR KREMLIN

An arcade videogame exploded on August 31 at Moscow's underground Manezh shopping center, located near the Kremlin. At least 25 people were injured; at least three victims were hospitalized. Moscow has been plagued by a series of terrorist bombings over the summer — but you've got to sink pretty low to hide a bomb in an arcade where kids are playing.

ARCADE GAME FACTORIES RUN FOR COVER

US arcade-videogame manufacturers recently adopted a landmark advertising policy, which calls on all new game ads to include a color-coded Parental Advisory Disclosure Message in the bottom portion. The Advisory system is a voluntary self-rating system to signal strong or mild violence, language, or sexual content.

The issue of violence in videogames faded from America's front pages over the summer because school was out. But now the kids are back in class and the state legislators are back in session. (To name just one example, New York set Oct. 6 for hearings on a proposed ban of arcade gun games, and the legislation's sponsor says he's spoiling for a Constitutional fight to establish that lawmakers have the right to control the media intake of younger citizens.) Also, the Clinton Administration has announced a new commission to study the "causes" of youth violence; and the US Senate is planning hearings on "the Decline of American Culture," so gamers and game makers alike are bracing for a new round of efforts to ban, blame, and censor videogames in American homes and arcades alike. Advertising for new games is a particularly sensitive issue. If US government investigators decide certain ads for super-violent games are targeting underage kids, the responsible game factories could be fined huge amounts of money.

MIDWAY LOSES *MK* TEAM

John Tobias, co-creator of the highly successful *Mortal Kombat* videogame series, announced his resignation from Midway Games this past summer. Also departing were David Michicich and Joshua Tsui, veteran Midway game designers. The three have been responsible for the art direction and design of many *Mortal Kombat* games, the franchise that began in the arcade and spread to a console software series, TV show, movies, and more. Tobias said Midway approached the group to complete *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces*, the current *MK* game in development, but could not come to an agreement. The trio said they intend to "pursue several creative ventures" in the entertainment industries.

Meanwhile, Midway Games has a new "Sports Station" upright videogame arcade cabinet. It's in arcades now with player-selectable *NFL Blitz 2000* or *NBA Showtime*. It's the first time in our memory that an arcade game has featured two major league sports licenses. But wait a minute . . . isn't *Blitz 2000* also currently available for PSX, Nintendo, and Dreamcast systems? Well, not exactly. Midway says the arcade version in the "Sports Station" is the *Blitz 2000 Gold Edition* with updated player rosters, more stadiums, and more plays to choose from. For the year 2000, Midway says it plans to release nearly a dozen arcade titles.

DISNEY QUESTIONS "QUEST"

The Walt Disney Co., now deep into the $150 million investment territory with its DisneyQuest superarcades in Orlando and Chicago, may back off from building more of these mega-fun centers. Although the Chicago store has lines around the block, smart gamers have figured out that the best deal is to buy $30 universal passes so they can stay and play all day for a relatively low dollars-per-hour ratio. The Orlando store may be seeing a bit higher per-player spending, although it sees smaller crowds. But word is Disney's still hot on expanding its ESPN Zone concept, a sports-bar chain with arcade sports games playing a key part of the mix.

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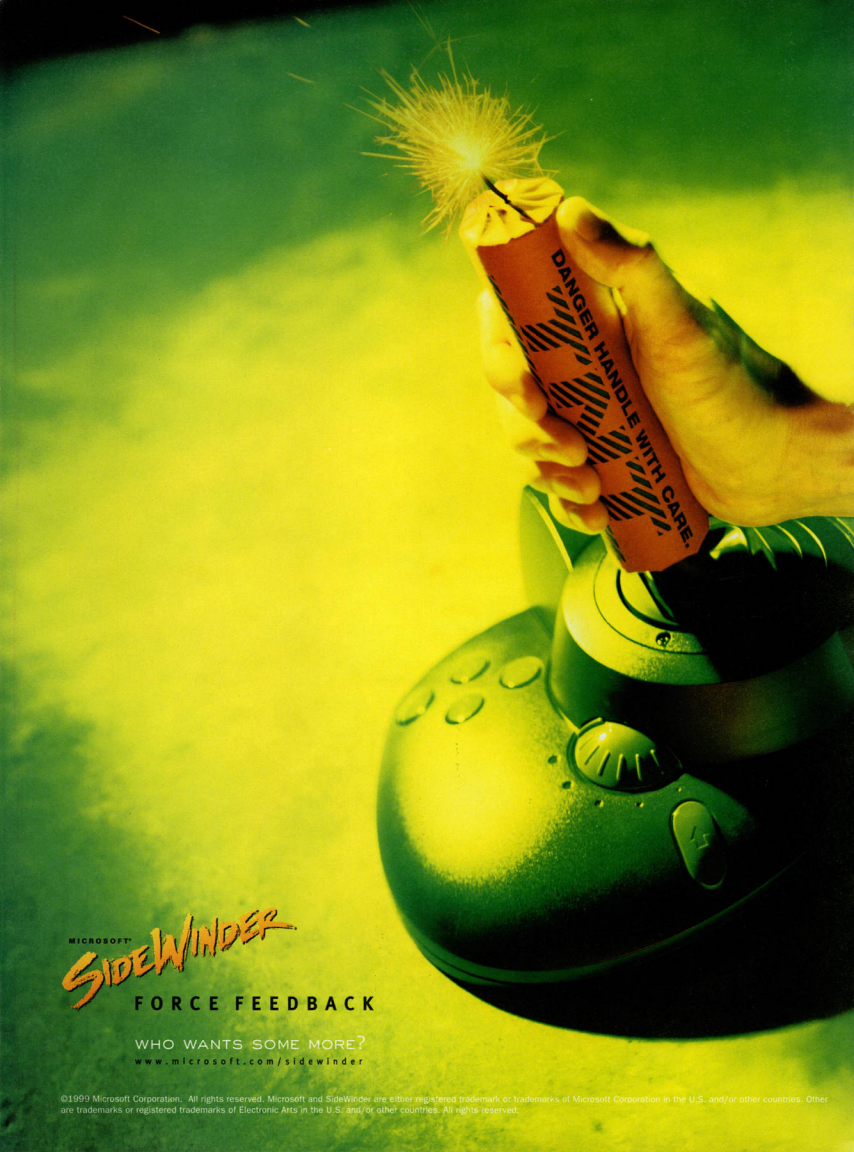

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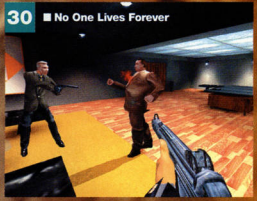
Alphas

The first in-depth looks at the true next generation of gaming



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■ PC, MAC, PLAYSTATION2

HALO

■ Publisher: **Bungie** ■ Developer: **Bungie** ■ Release Date: **2000** ■ Origin: **US**

Is this God's gift to gaming?

How is it that the human race always ends up getting targeted for extermination by alien hordes? In *Halo*, you play the ever-brave (but as-always underpowered) Terrans as you fight for survival against an alien alliance (called the Covenant) on the strange ring-shaped world of Halo.

Predictably, you play a member of an elite cyborg attack force. But putting the storyline aside, the game world's dazzling graphics suck you in as soon as you start to play. Holographic computer displays and reflective floors are just a few of the pieces of eye candy you'll see in your base as soon as you start running around.

Once outside, however, the scope of the game really hits you. Never mind the flowing hills or glistening ocean in the background — it's time to kick some alien butt. How you do this is up to you, but it's almost impossible not

If we didn't know better, we wouldn't have believed this was anything but a CG movie

■ After you shoot a rocket, the contrails will actually be affected by the wind that is blowing through the canyon. You have to be careful because wind currents may also affect how you aim

Alphas

to balk for a second as you consider the sheer amount of options. Should you attack head-on, hop in a vehicle and attack from the sky, land, or water, or should you stay back and head up the defense?

At the core of all these options is a hyper-realistic physics engine. At one point, the Jeep we were driving in was chased by two alien fighters and shot over a hill at high speeds, *Streets of San Francisco*-style. Thats's right — major air — and there's nothing more satisfying than flying through the air only to land (with realistically modeled suspension), skidding out in the dirt (throwing up clods into the air and almost rolling over in the process), and taking on the pursuers with the rear-mounted machine gun. If we didn't actually see a person playing the game, we wouldn't have believed that this was anything other than a CG animated movie. Now, imagine this kind of detailed simulation with all manner of tanks, Jeeps, hovercraft, aircraft, and foot soldiers, and you'll see what we mean about gameplay opportunities.

■ There is a large assortment of vehicles to commandeer and use for enemy destruction. If you're on foot, you can also jump up on the side to catch a ride on many of them

The sheer amount of detail is almost overwhelming. When your character fires his pistol, he actually recoils a bit and you can see the hammer of the gun go off. This kind of meticulous detail extends to all facets of the game — skid to a stop and all of the players in the Jeep will rock forward,

■ Nobody does skylines like Bungie. Or water, for that matter. In fact, no game we've seen yet comes anywhere near this level of environmental beauty

as will the antennae. You'll even be able to see the shell casings left on the ground from previous battles.

While the game will follow a generally mission-based structure, there will always be plenty of missions for you to take on at any one time. One example we were given is that at some point in the game you might have to choose between rescuing soldiers or destroying an enemy base. If you rescue the soldiers, the enemy base will still be there later in the game, but it may be even harder to take out.

A real thrill for gamers, however, is going to be the multiplayer game. It's here where teams of aliens can square off against the humans and wage war upon another. "The goal is to provide an environment that rewards teamplay, but doesn't force it," stresses Josef Staten, product manager on the game. The Jeep, for example, has three separate slots for players to climb into — the driver, shotgun, and the rear machine gun. With three players working in tandem, this is a very potent offensive tactic. Even the tanks have handholds on the side so players can run and grab on for a quick ride to the heart of the battle. If you're clever enough to survive behind enemy lines, you can steal some of their vehicles and weapons for even more chaos.

By far the most exciting prospect is of multiplayer battles between console and PC players. While Bungie kept tight-lipped about the prospect of a PlayStation2 version, Sony insiders have managed to confirm that the title will indeed be one of the earlier releases on its supersystem after it debuts in the fall of 2000. The future is looking great. — *Blake Fischer*

■ You can take the position of the gunner while your buddy drives the Jeep and the camera will track your perspective to help you keep your sights focused

"The goal is to provide an environment that rewards teamplay, but doesn't force it" — **Josef Staten,** product manager

■ The alien vehicles are mostly based around anti-gravity and -energy weapons, while the human forces use more conventional vehicles with projectile weapons

WHEN ALIENS ATTACK!

Get advance warning of alien invasion with a UFO detector! Supposedly, this device (as described on parascope.com) will sense changes in the magnetic environment, signifying a nearby UFO. This will give you a few seconds to run for cover while your neighbors get herded up like cattle.

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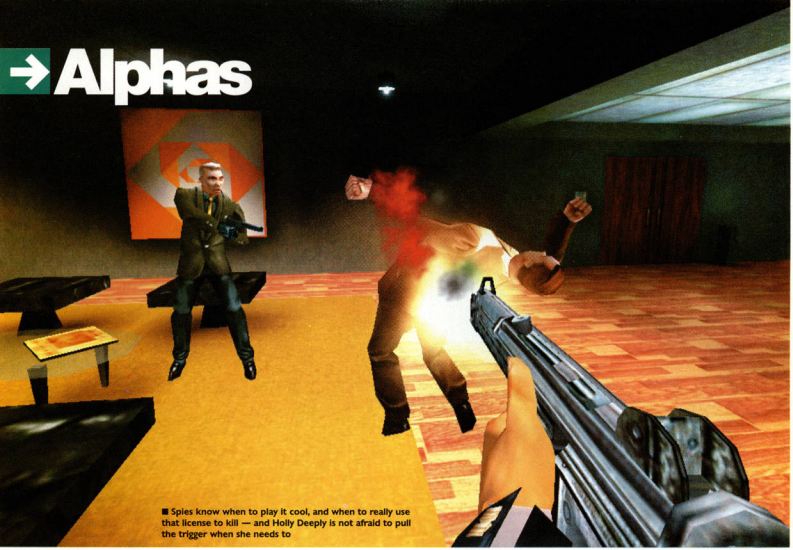


■ Spies know when to play it cool, and when to really use that license to kill — and Holly Deeply is not afraid to pull the trigger when she needs to

■ PC, PLAYSTATION2

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

■ Publisher: **Monolith** ■ Developer: **Monolith** ■ Release Date: **July 2000** ■ Origin: **US**

Can a '60s sexy super-spy make it in the new millennium?

Tired of games based in grim, dystopian futures? So is Monolith's Craig Hubbard. "They're so bleak and humorless and unimaginative," he groans. "You can only take so many *Blade Runner* rip-offs." The cure for this may very well be the upcoming first-person action/adventure *No One Lives Forever*. Like Tetsuya Mizuguchi's *Space Channel 5* (see page 71), *No One Lives Forever* rides high on a wave of mod-'60s retro and steadfastly refuses to take itself seriously — think *Half-Life* crossed with *Austin Powers*.

Set in 1967, *NOLF* follows the adventures of super-spy Holly Deeply (a working name that will almost certainly change), ex-British Intelligence and recent recruit of UNITY, an secret international antiterrorist group. Unfortunately, being the only woman on the team, she draws

■ The game's character designs give a good idea of the kind of '60s retro feel the developers are shooting for

■ Unlike many games, you get access to several different types of machine guns, as well as different kinds of ammunition, from full metal jacket to hollow points and tracer rounds

all the crummy jobs. "I'm hoping that will push you as a player to be like, 'Well, I'm gonna show *you*!'" Hubbard jokes.

Then, on a routine mission of escorting a defecting biophysicist out of East Germany, the scientist is kidnapped in mid-flight over Europe. At the same time, UNITY agents all across the globe are being assassinated — can the two events be connected? What do *you* think?

The game uses Monolith's Lithtech engine, a multipurpose, extremely flexible 3D renderer and game toolkit that Monolith hopes will be the ubiquitous (and completely cross-platform, more on that later) game engine for the next generation. Lithtech is equally adept at both indoor and outdoor environments, with complete support for character animation, numerous lighting and other special effects, and event and AI scripting.

Evidence of the last is found in the behavior of the game's many NPCs. Guards generally go about their business (talking to each other and punching soda machines, among other things) but have a sense range and react to things like footsteps, weapons fire, dead bodies, and even flashlight beams. In combat, they turn over tables to create cover, sound the alarm, and back each other up.

But *NOLF* isn't a first-person shooter, and going in with guns blazing isn't the way of a clever spy. "We want to focus on things like gadgets, character interaction, and stealth," Hubbard explains. "There's still plenty of action — we're trying to balance it so it's not just sneak around all the time — but different levels have been designed for different kinds of gameplay."

So, a given stage may simply involve meeting a contact in a dance club and questioning him. Another might mean breaking into someone's office with ten minutes to find and photograph documents, or sneaking into a warehouse, then fighting your way out.

■ **Monolith's Lithtech engine is good at both indoor and outdoor areas, so Holly not only sneaks around in buildings, she commandeers different vehicles for cruising jungles and deserts as well**

Holly's arsenal of doodads includes fanciful items like a mechanical poodle for distracting guard dogs

"We've constructed the game out of scenes rather than traditional levels," Hubbard continues. "So instead of a five-mile-long level that somehow has the appropriate amount of gameplay, you go from interesting situation to interesting situation. If a scene's not working, we can pull it without affecting the overall game and plug in something else that's cooler."

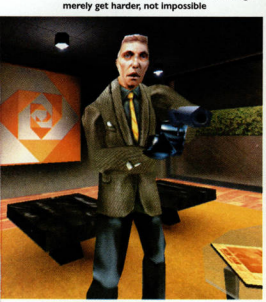
And the cool factor *is* very high. *No One Lives Forever* is consciously patterned on every staple of '60s pop culture, especially the gadget-happy spy spoofs of the period, from *The Avengers* to *In Like Flint*. Holly's arsenal of doodads includes practical devices like code-breakers, but also more fanciful items like a mechanical poodle for distracting guard dogs, and her fashion sense tends towards vinyl skirts and go-go boots.

Although scheduled for release on PC in summer 2000, sources at Sony and Fox confirm a version of the Lithtech engine is in development for PS2. Could Holly Deeply land on Sony's new machine? What do *you* think? — *Jeff Lundrigan*

MOD CULTURE

The year 1967 was quite possibly the peak year for the fads and fashions of '60s "mod" culture. Movies: *Blow Up*, *Casino Royale*, *In Like Flint*. TV: *Mission: Impossible*, *The Avengers*. Music: The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*; Cream, *Disraeli Gears*; Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Are You Experienced?*

■ **Character interaction is important, but there really aren't "right" or "wrong" ways to handle a conversation — blow it, and things merely get harder, not impossible**



This is no time to second guess yourself.

Killer soundtrack
including music performed by
Blink 182, Ministry, Fear Factory, H2O, Voodoo Glow Skulls, Joi, Lagwagon, Ten Foot Pole, Pulley, Face to Face

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PlayStation®

■ The *Unreal* engine might not support curved surfaces, but it's still capable of creating detailed (and, vitally, real-world) environments

■ PC

DEUS EX

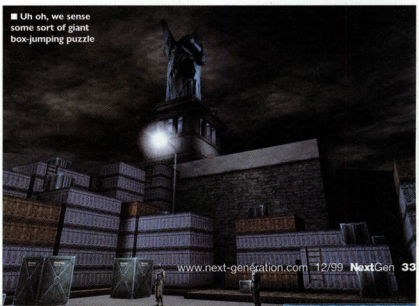
■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Ion Storm** ■ Release Date: **Spring 2000** ■ Origin: **US**

Does this paranoia-tinged thriller have what it takes to dethrone *Half-Life*?

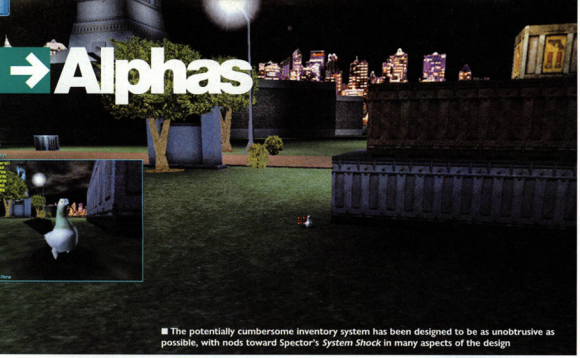
■ As with every conspiracy, there are people that will stop at nothing to keep you from the truth

Warren Spector wants to change the world. After describing himself as an "over-educated asshole," it's quite evident that this guy eats, drinks, and sleeps games. But not just "games," more the art of interactive experiences. The creator of such bona fide classics as *System Shock* and *Ultima Underworld* (which shipped before *Wolfenstein*, he's proud to note, with the merest hint of disdain for perhaps not having the credit that it deserves) has been toying with the concept for his latest future hall of famer, *Deus Ex*, for some eight years. Now, five months away from shipping, the code is virtually complete and these remaining months will be spent balancing, fixing, and tweaking, ensuring the requisite fun quotient for a game that is ambitious in scope and intriguing in concept.

So how do you feel when an email arrives in your PDA calling you by your real name? Paranoid? You betcha.



■ Uh oh, we sense some sort of giant box-jumping puzzle



■ The potentially cumbersome inventory system has been designed to be as unobtrusive as possible, with nods toward Spector's *System Shock* in many aspects of the design

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Deus Ex will tap into conspiracy theories you've heard of (JFK, cures for cancer, etc.) and a whole bunch that have been dreamed up just to make you paranoid. The Web is a wonderful source of crackpot information. Head to http://www.conspire.com or http://www.rumorsrumors.com to get started with some of the paranoia-mongering.

So many games these days blur the edges of the genre pigeonholes that have become the standard, and *Deus Ex* epitomizes this problem; it's a role-playing action/adventure or, as Spector tries to describe, "an immersive sim." It's also a glimmering beacon in the future of troubled Ion Storm. Set in the near future, with real-world locations (from New York to Hong Kong, through Washington and Area 51), *Deus Ex* spans 15 core "missions" steeped in conspiracy theories and dripping with paranoia. "We're hoping to tap in to some of that millennial weirdness that's going on," explains Spector, though he's loathe to divulge much of the core storyline so as not to spoil the many surprises planned for this journey. What we do know is that you play a nano-technology-augmented agent working for UNATCO, a government anti-terrorist agency (and, at least in theory, the good guys). Player choices are important to Spector, and they begin with character creation. Entering your real name at the beginning of the game appears unimportant since you're known by the code name JC Denton. So how do you feel when an email arrives in your PDA calling you by your real name? Paranoid? You betcha.

You also choose how to assign your skill points to the range of options including lockpicking, weapon skills, and computer savviness. There are four skill levels — untrained, trained, advanced, and master – which can be improved by earning points awarded for completing objectives. For more character customization there are the augmentations — superpowers, if you will. Limited slots and numerous augmentation options (strength, night sight, jumping, etc.) allow for highly individual characters. It also makes for diverse methods of achieving certain goals, and it's this huge variety of playing options and puzzle resolutions that will take months of intense playtesting to balance.

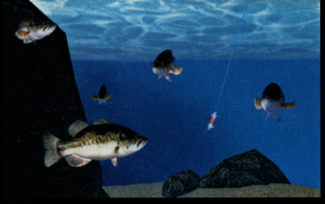
Built using the licensed *Unreal* engine, each mission comprises some four to eight maps that offer total interactivity. Every item, from a box to a wine bottle, can be picked up and used (though the drunken vision effects are still under development). It's this total immersion in the game world that gets Spector excited. "There are three to five NPCs I want you to really hate," he confides.

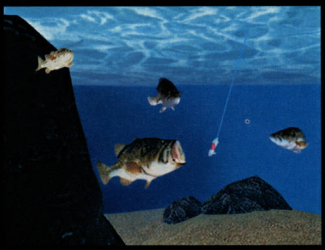
New realtime lip-syncing technology seems merely the technological pinnacle of a game steeped in thick plot, character development, and so many plain great game-design ideas that no one should bet against Spector attaining his lofty world-changing goal. — *Rob Smith*

■ In order to maintain the suspense, many of the locations and the conspiracies that you're uncovering are being kept secret

■ Getting past guard dogs will take more than a full ammo clip. Thoughtful use of objects and the environments is more important than who has the biggest gun

■ That's where technology is heading — a realistic, fully functioning bathroom, because that's what gamers demand these days





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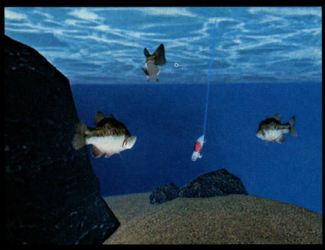
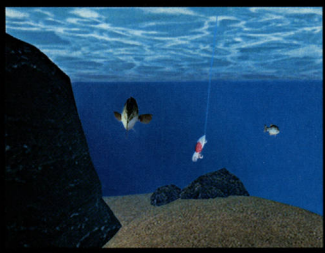
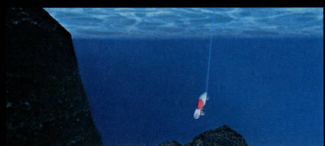
ALL THE DUMB FISH ARE IN OTHER GAMES.







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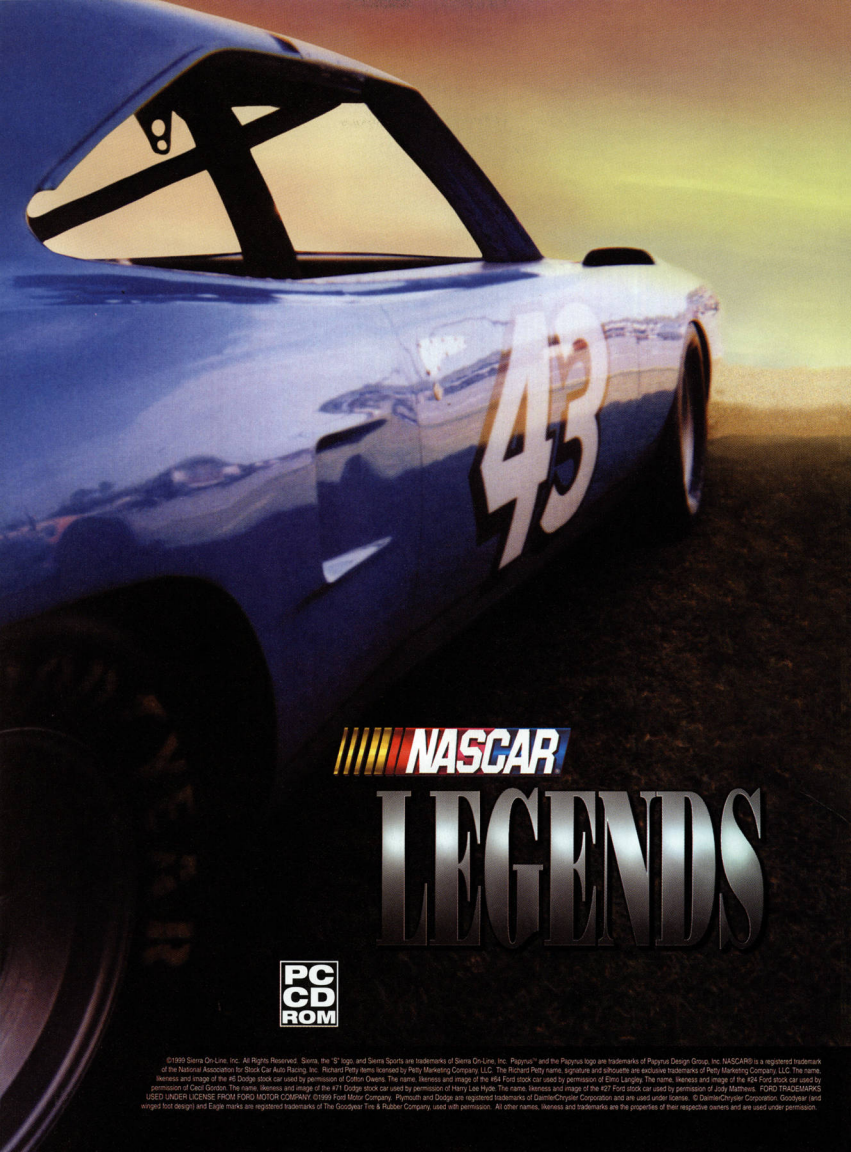

NASCAR

LEGENDS

PC CD ROM

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ANDREW REYNOLDS

GEOFF ROWLEY

JAMIE THOMAS

■ Almost every spell from the *AD&D* third edition rules will be included in the game, including Wish — although that one will need to have a GM present to keep it fair

■ PC

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

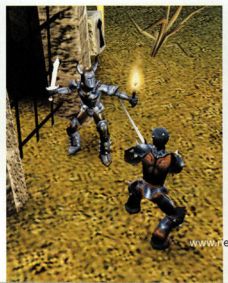
■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **BioWare** ■ Release Date: **Holidays 2000** ■ Origin: **Canada**

Baldur's Gate 3D? Better.

■ Combat has been beefed up beyond what most roleplaying fare offers. Now players will have plenty of moves available so they'll actually look like they're fighting

Neverwinter Nights (a name stolen from an old AOL online RPG) is the first in a new breed of RPGs where traditional ideas are being re-thought to take advantage of the way games are played today. Namely, multiplayer games. While BioWare's last effort, *Baldur's Gate*, did a fine job of enabling players to play online as a party, there were problems that arose from the fact that the same group of players would have to play through the entire story together to get the full effect (which is a commitment of more than 100 hours).

This problem was solved by taking the genre all of the way back to its roots — pen-and-paper *D&D*. This time around, the story is just as epic and compelling as



■ The 3D engine allows you to pull back for large action scenes or zoom in for some intense one-on-one combat

Alphas

■ Use the director ability to make it so that the camera changes in certain situations for a more dramatic effect

■ Dungeon exploring is a major part of the gameplay, and, depending on whether or not your race can see in the dark, you might have to carry torches or candles with you

■ Gather your friends together and you can go out adventuring as a party. The relatively short length of each module makes it easy to plan an outing that won't run all night

Players can actually hold intelligent conversations with NPCs for more advanced quests and subplots

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

While 28 modules that last around four hours each may sound like a lot of story, Oster confides that the entire plotline of *Neverwinter Nights* is also part one of a five-part story arc! Do the math, and the designers at BioWare have mapped out several hundred hours of RPG gaming. Now, that's impressive — if a little sick.

in *Baldur's Gate*, but it has been broken down into 28 smaller "modules" that can be played in single 3-4 hour sessions. Much like in the pen-and-paper modules, the story continues from one module to the next so groups can play through the adventure at a more regulated pace.

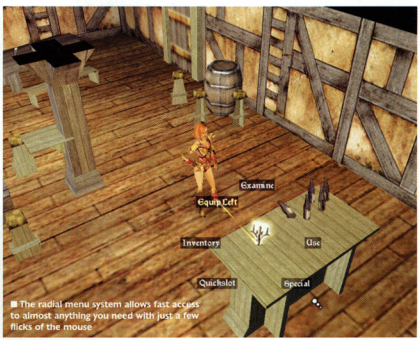
To enhance this experience, the wizards at BioWare have implemented a "DM" (Dungeon Master) function to allow one or more players to become masters of the world. Much like in Nihilistic's *Vampire: The Masquerade*, the DM can hop around the server and control anyone he wants. This allows for players to actually hold intelligent conversations with NPCs and for more advanced quests and subplots to develop. The DM has the option of following the *Neverwinter* storylines and scripting or adding their own subplots as the game goes along.

This is where the real vision behind the game comes in. Included with every retail copy of *Neverwinter Nights* will be a very advanced editing kit called Solstice. Players can modify the current modules or create their own from scratch and then they can put them up on their server for play or download. Power has even been given to create and insert cinematic sequences wherever you want in the game to enhance certain dramatic moments. "We haven't even thought of everything you can do," admits producer Trent Oster. "Personally, though, we're looking forwards to somebody converting *Tomb Of Horrors*."

There is even the option to create your own persistent worlds like *Ultima Online* or *EverQuest*. Servers can then be linked up via portals so that dozens of persistent wolds can coexist together. Other options suggested by Oster include Party vs. Party modules where two groups race towards a single goal or even a DM vs. DM scenario.

One thing that Oster notes is that the team is going to fix the "I bonk you, you bonk me" mentality of current RPG fights. Now characters will block, parry, and dodge out of the way as a monster comes in for an attack. In addition, the new *Third Edition D&D* rules are being implemented for *NN* so you can expect a few more classes and playable races than in *Baldur's Gate*. Tie it all together with the cleanest and fastest RPG menu system we've seen yet, and it's enough to have RPG gamers champing at the bit until the holiday 2000 release. — *Blake Fischer*

■ With hundreds of character combinations already available in this early state, it won't be a problem to tailor your characters to look the way you want them to



■ The radial menu system allows fast access to almost anything you need with just a few flicks of the mouse

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■ You can use portals like this to jump to other parts of the level if you are in a bad spot. Luckily, you can see what kind of danger is on the other side before making the leap

■ PC, DREAMCAST

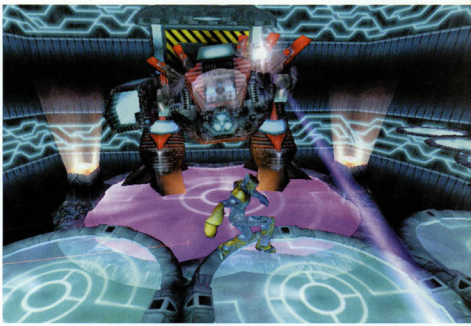
DRONEZ

■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer: **Zetha Games** ■ Release Date: **Spring 2000** ■ Origin: **France**

In the future, it'll still be fun to throw stuff at people's heads

"All along we've mentioned *Discs of Tron* as a major influence — but we are *not* developing *Discs of Tron 2000*"

— Giovanni Caturano, project leader

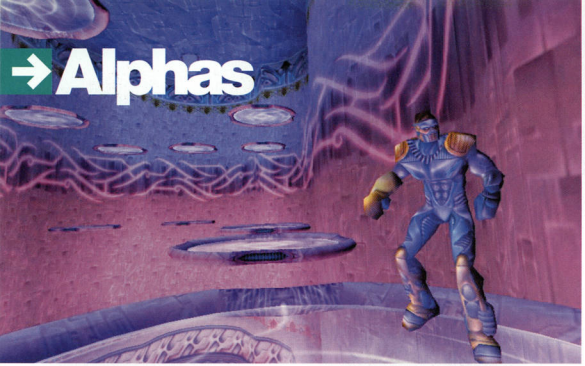


■ The often physically impossible architecture and enemies at all heights and angles should make for many exciting moments

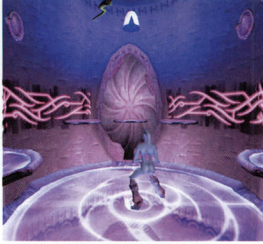
It's always hard to know what to expect from a newcomer among game developers, but Zetha Games' invitation to visit its Paris-based studio turned out to be a welcome surprise. Over 18 months in development, the company's first PC and Dreamcast title, *Dronez*, shows a lot of promise in its combination of classic arcade-style elements, innovative gameplay ideas, and competitive technology.

Yet again, the future of our dear planet looks ugly, to a point where humans are doomed to live in isolated

Alphas



■ The character models and environments impress with their lack of "low-poly" angles and their very organic quality. Wait until you see this in action!



■ In the early version shown to **NG**, the game already featured a rich variety of textures, architectural designs, and all sorts of weird stuff

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Back in 1983, Midway released the instant arcade hit *Discs of Tron*. The innovative "Total Environment Cabinet" with quadrophonic sound added unprecedented immersion to arcade games. Surprisingly, the game never received a sequel on a next-generation system despite its huge fanbase and critical acclaim.

private units, breathe artificial air, and eat lots of canned food. All they have is technology to stay alive and entertained (certain **NG** editors know what that's like!). To forget their misery, people gather in virtual worlds where they fight other "dronez" (read: avatars) with projectiles of all sorts, moving from one platform to another.

Veteran gamers among our readers will already have sensed certain similarities to Midway's arcade classic *Discs of Tron*. Development Leader Giovanni Caturano doesn't deny his game's roots: "All along we've mentioned *Discs of Tron* as a major influence — but we are *not* developing *Discs of Tron 2000*." It looks like the yet-to-be-determined publisher won't be Midway...

Caturano adds, however, "If we didn't have circular-shaped platforms, nobody would even compare the two." While Zetha considers implementing differently shaped platforms to avoid future comparisons, a closer look at *Dronez* reveals true differences.

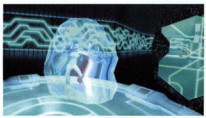
The game is played from a third-person perspective and set in a fully 3D environment. Gamers can control both their character's movement, as well as certain platforms they stand on, all using the same directional buttons. "We want to keep the gameplay as simple as possible," Caturano explains. This choice is obvious because the player will also have to aim each shot manually — and things can get very hectic with six degrees of movement freedom.

Some platforms hang in the air diagonally or even at 90 degrees. Zetha is developing a clever camera system that smoothly interpolates when moving between differently angled surfaces. This should avoid awkward perspectives to ensure easy aiming at all times, whether the gamer is hanging upside down, surrounded by dozens of enemies, or gliding through *Descent*-like mazes on transparent platforms.

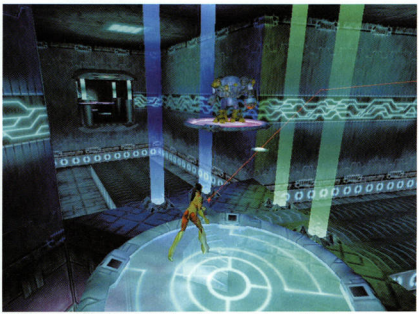
Caturano promises both an involving single-player "story" mode and various multiplayer concepts like Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and an innovative option where up to four can play single-player missions together to discover spots hidden to solo gamers.

Although *Dronez*' deathmatch should please even *Quake III* fans with its fast and intuitive gameplay, Caturano doesn't want "multiplayer to be pure carnage. I want people to develop strategies and be smart." This (much like Dreamcast's "It's thinking" ad campaign) seems to show that Dreamcast is quickly becoming the thinking man's console of choice — which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

According to the development leader, *Dronez* for the Dreamcast and PC will be graphically identical, with the console version making full use of the modem, VMU, and jump pack. When the game is released next spring, it wouldn't be surprising if Zetha Games makes a big name for itself. — *Jorg Tittel*



■ The effects in *Dronez* tend to be just as otherworldly as the environments



■ While a lot of instinctive aiming/shooting will be involved, players will have to choose platforms intelligently, plan attacks, and, basically, think a bit

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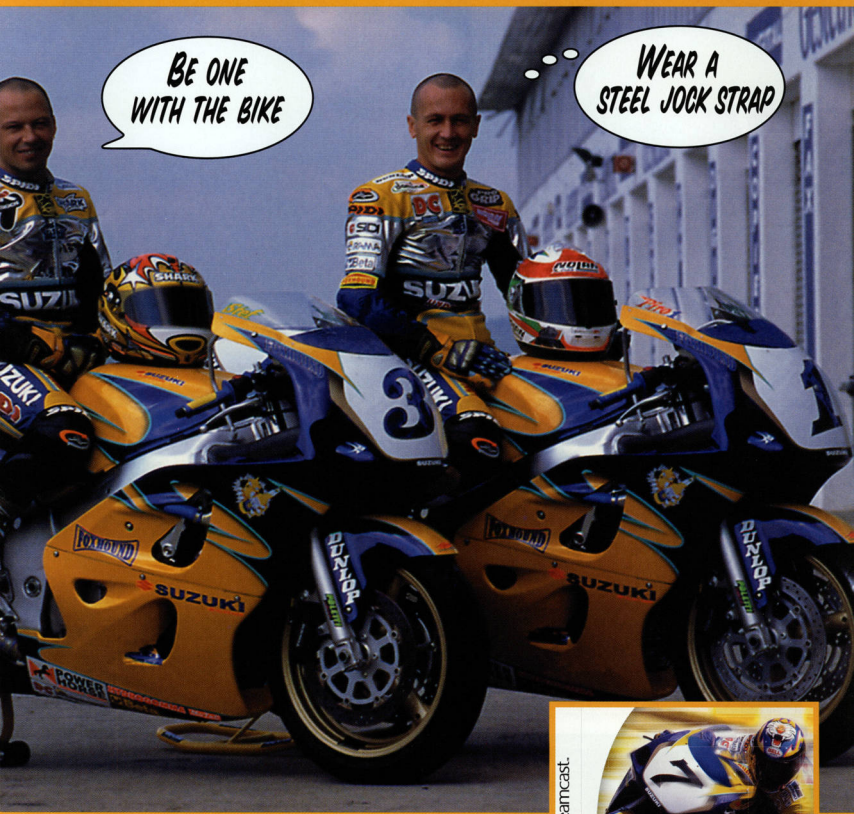
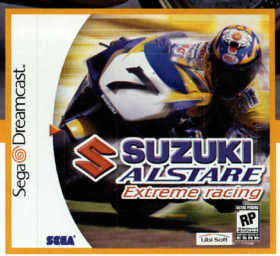
RACING SUPERBIKES IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS?





Sega Dreamcast.

criterion studios

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■ Look out of any window, at any time, and the world will be going about its business, following detailed scripted paths that don't affect gameplay, but add greatly to the sense of immersion in the setting

BACK TO THE ROOTS

Tom Hall has never made a secret of the fact that Japanese console RPGs are one of the main inspirations for *Anachronox*. The engine has even been tuned so that mini-games such as this arcade shooter can be inserted into the action. Who'd have thought that the *Quake II* engine could do this?

■ PC

ANACHRONOX

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Ion Storm** ■ Release Date: **March 2000** ■ Origin: **US**

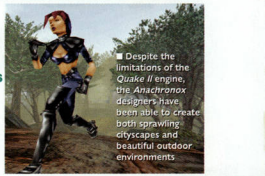
Bringing cinema to the PC RPG

One hundred years from now, when the line between interactive games and cinema has been blurred by technology, a historian might do worse than consider Tom Hall's *Anachronox* as a germination point for the true blending of these arts. It's hard to believe that under this complex science-fiction roleplaying facade beats the heart of the quintessential shooter, *Quake II*. But the members of Hall's crew are creating cinema: they're telling a story, conveying emotion, asserting truths and destroying them, and letting you take the leading role.

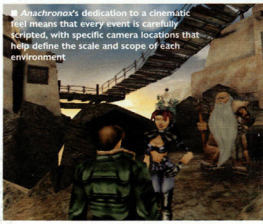
The world of *Anachronox* has been created by artists who create the environments for dramatic effect, not for the requirement of weapon placement and balancing. In it you play Sly Boots, an investigator delving into a story so deep that Hall has had to split it into two (thus confirming an *Anachronox 2*). In typical RPG fashion, the storyline starts off with you looking for work, but soon expands to the point where you're an instrumental piece in an epic plot of universe salvation. Incredible camera scripting is at the core of the cinematic feel. Important story points are presented with careful use of close-ups, swift movement, and scale-setting positioning that draws observers into the action, rather than distancing them from it, as these breaks in gameplay often manage.

With its own programming language (APE), a vast number of sub-games are built in as you sneak or chase through the world, taking pictures, speaking to numerous NPCs (and your attitude-laden virtual secretary, Fatima), and working out which character fits with which puzzle, story arc element, conflict, or resolution. Branching options offer tremendous replayability, and with Ion releasing all the game building tools, complete with full tutorials, this world is one that will be extended beyond Hall's own fertile imagination.

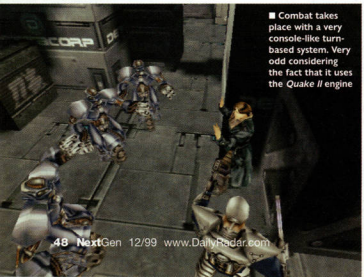
— Rob Smith



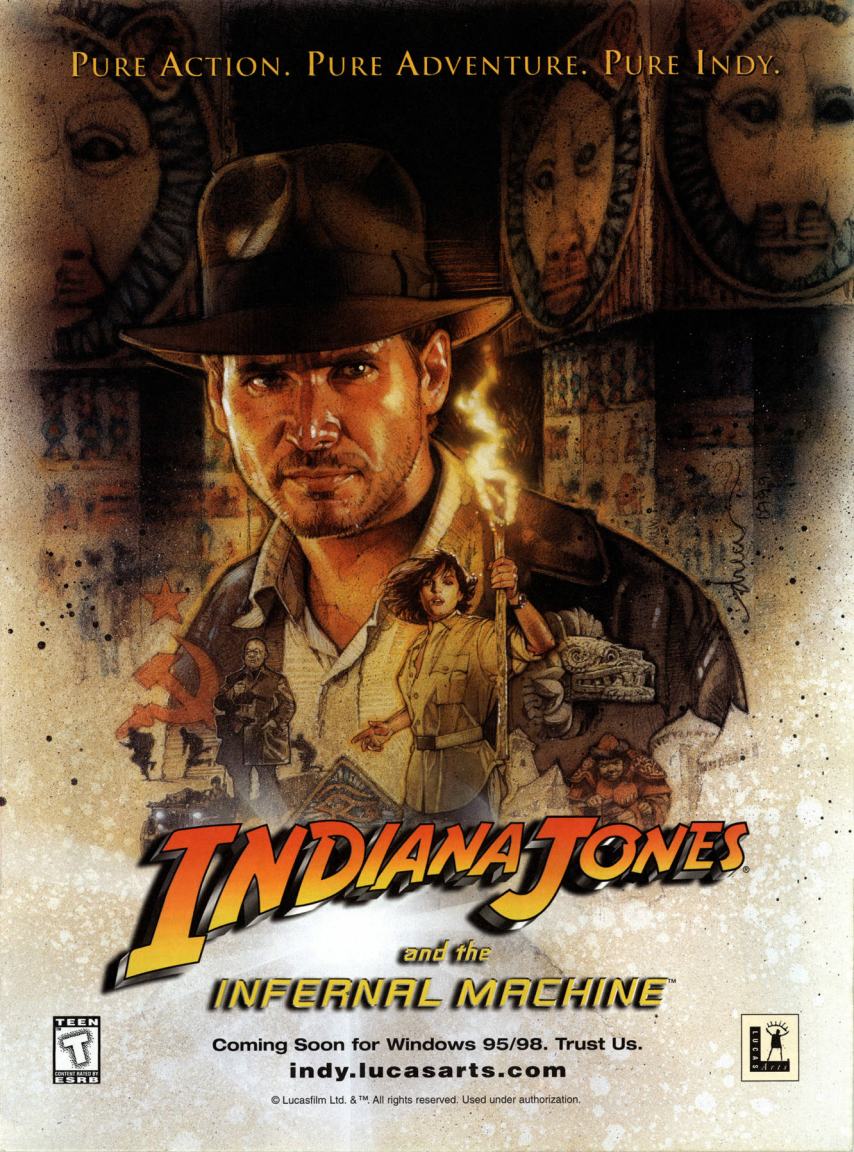
■ Despite the limitations of the *Quake II* engine, the *Anachronox* designers have been able to create both sprawling cityscapes and beautiful outdoor environments



■ ***Anachronox*'s dedication to a cinematic feel means that every event is carefully scripted, with specific camera locations that help define the scale and scope of each environment**



■ **Combat takes place with a very console-like turn-based system. Very odd considering the fact that it uses the *Quake II* engine**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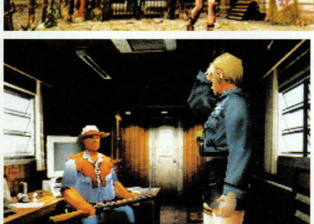
■ Aya must take on more mutated monsters than ever in this installment of her battles with the wannabe mitochondrian upstarts



■ Aya will have many allies this time around who will even be able to assist her in fights if necessary

■ PLAYSTATION

PARASITE EVE 2

■ Publisher: **Squaresoft** ■ Developer: **Squaresoft** ■ Release Date: **2000** ■ Origin: **Japan**

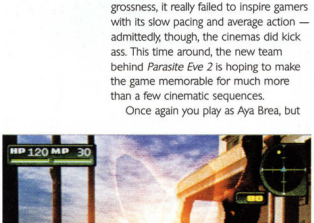
Microscopic invaders: "Today, New York. Tomorrow, the world!"

While the original *Parasite Eve* was an interesting mix of sci-fi, roleplaying, and just plain grossness, it really failed to inspire gamers with its slow pacing and average action — admittedly, though, the cinemas did kick ass. This time around, the new team behind *Parasite Eve 2* is hoping to make the game memorable for much more than a few cinematic sequences.

Once again you play as Aya Brea, but now you are a member of a special FBI task force assigned to keep an eye on mitochondria activity three years after the original incident. The game starts with MIST (Mitochondria Investigation and Suppression Team) getting called in to check out reports of monsters in a New York skyrise. Aya shows up and the mitochondria-inspired mutation mayhem begins again — along with a whole new adventure.

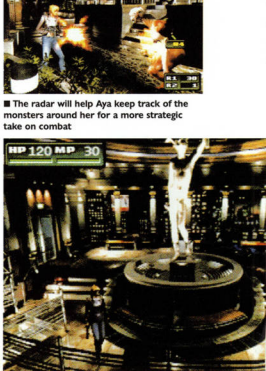
Gameplay will still be divided between *Resident Evil*-style exploration with pre-rendered backdrops and action/RPG-based combat, although this time an effort is being made to meld the two types of gameplay together more naturally. Effort has also been made to avoid all of the random battles with the addition of a new radar that shows you where the enemies are located. AI NPCs are also going to be helping out a bit more this time around, and players can expect some extra firepower from Aya's friends when she goes into a heated firefight. Of course, great ideas from the first title have been kept intact, such as Aya's strange psychic-like abilities and the ability to create new weapons by attaching parts.

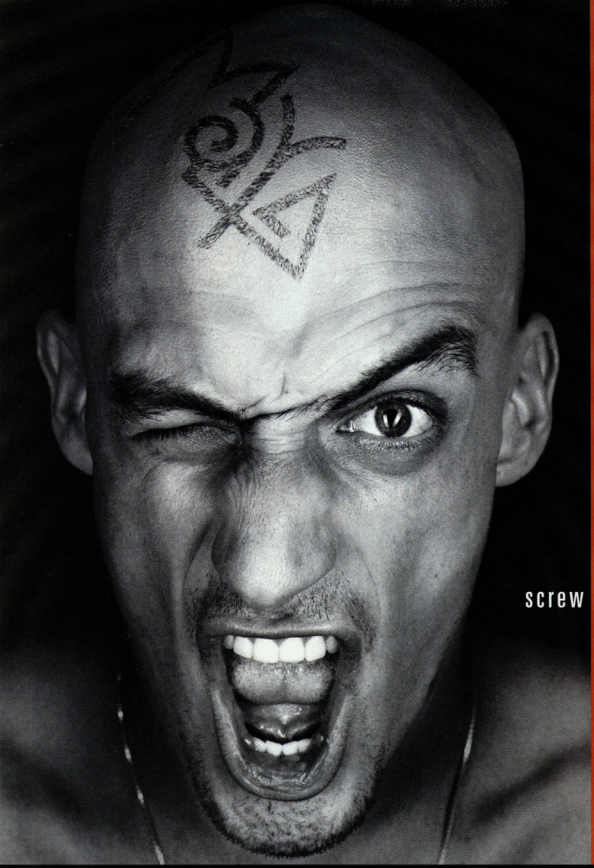
With a team dedicated to overcoming the problems of the first game and some interesting new features thrown into the mix, *PE2* could the game that redefines the "cinematic RPG" in a good way. — *Blake Fischer*



■ The mitochondria in Aya have granted her psychic-like powers, which she can use offensively or to heal herself

■ The radar will help Aya keep track of the monsters around her for a more strategic take on combat





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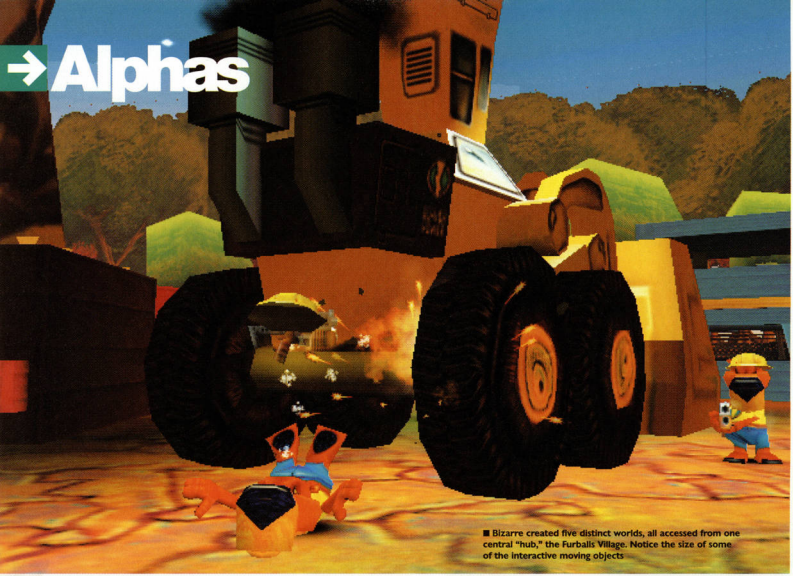


■ Bizarre created five distinct worlds, all accessed from one central "hub," the Furballs Village. Notice the size of some of the interactive moving objects

■ DREAMCAST, PC, PLAYSTATION2

FURBALLS

■ Publisher: **Acclaim** ■ Developer: **Bizarre Creations**
■ Release Date: **April 2000** ■ Origin: **England**

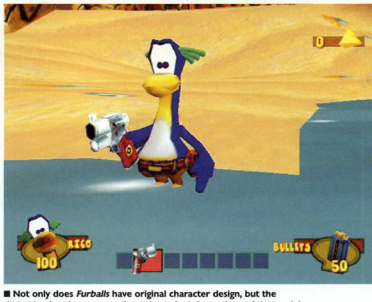
Cute and cuddly, but oddly dangerous

When **Next Generation** previewed Bizarre Creations' Dreamcast exclusive *Metropolis Street Racer* (**NG 55**), the developer was kind enough to give a quick glimpse of its second project, *Furballs*. The title has come a long way since then.

After two years of development, the "third-person-cartoon-action-puzzle-shooter-adventure-explore-'em-up," as company boss Martyn Chudley calls it, is shaping up to be a potential hit, mingling different genres with humor, wacky characters, and a bit of disturbing violence on top. At this year's ECTS, Acclaim announced that it will publish the title worldwide, bringing it to PC and Dreamcast first and to "other next-generation platforms" in late 2000. Although the "other" versions are kept a tight secret, the platform (*cough, PlayStation2, cough*) shouldn't be too hard to guess...

"*Furballs Dreamcast* is the current main development version and is aimed to push the hardware, with the PC version being taken from this," Wiswell says. Not surprisingly, both versions look very much alike, but future versions may differ significantly. "You can be sure that we'll be making the most of any increased capabilities," the producer comments.

■ The game is designed to push the hardware, so expect intricate levels with lots of effects



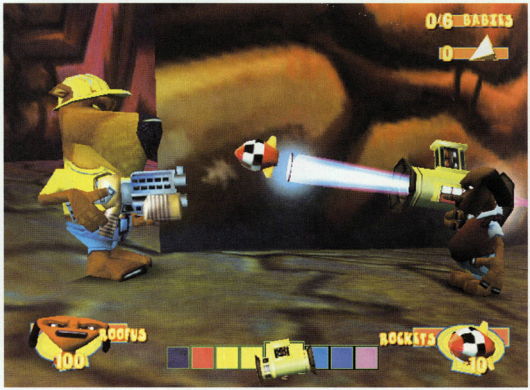
■ Not only does *Furballs* have original character design, but the skeletal animation system allows dynamic deformations of the models and very smooth movements

You are in charge of the six Furballs, an "elite squad of special-forces cuddly animals"

THE GAME THAT NEVER WAS...

It's been known for quite a long time that Bizarre Creations has been developing a second title in addition to *Metropolis Street Racer*, but *Furballs* was initially known as *Drive-By*. The working title wasn't meant to mislead gamers — Bizarre indeed started conceiving another racing game. Bizarre's self-funded project started out as a game starring two lesbians, one at the wheel of a car and one handling the guns. In a world exclusive, Next Generation received the title screen of a game that will probably never see the light of day — we don't know if that's good or bad...

■ **If there's one game that would have stolen *Driver*'s thunder, this is it: *Drive-By* avengers!**



■ **Despite their cartoony appearance, the Furballs don't shy away from somewhat disturbing violence**

The game will put the player in control of the six Furballs, an "elite squad of highly trained special-forces cuddly animals." In what seems like a standard-fare videogame plot, the player will have to defeat General Viggo, who made his army of bears kidnap the Furballs' families (he's also — surprise, surprise — planning to take over the world). The six heroes go out to rescue their babies as well as save their spouses and parents, who have been mutated into evil end-of-level bosses (sounds a lot like a paranoid high-school-age fantasy).

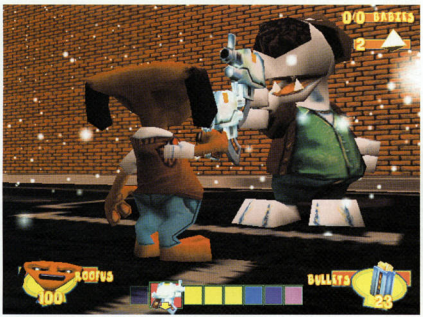
What makes this game rather special is that all six characters need to be used in order to finish the game. Each character has a unique skill which enables it to reach areas to which others don't have access. The kangaroo, Bungalow, can leap extra high, while Roofus, the dog, can burrow through soft ground. Imagine *Sonic Adventure* with the difference being that all characters must be used to see the final credits. The innovative multi-character gameplay should also make for good replay value, with many different ways to complete the game.

■ **We shudder to think of how many sickeningly cute voices this game will have**

Wiswell insists that puzzle elements will be as important as frantic shooting, "and many of the puzzles are spread across large sections of the levels. We have tried to integrate the puzzles into the environments — we didn't want any floating platforms or bits of scenery that just didn't fit." In actual gameplay, gamers will put huge cranes in motion or even step into the New York subway — all adding to the game's immersive and movie-like quality.

The very fluid animation doesn't fail to impress, either. The characters move in a very distinct and often hilarious cartoon style and the game is full of surprises, like flying bear heads for instance (but hey, they're just stuffed animals!).

With Bizarre's dedication to the project and an attention to detail that may make *Furballs* the first truly interactive cartoon (gulp!), it looks as if Acclaim may have a very successful franchise on its hands. — *Jorg Tittel*



■ **Although the player will face many bears throughout the game — among other creatures — the enemy characters are kept fresh through different costumes, weapons, and more**

■ **A John Woo-style standoff with an oddly cute twist**

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■ Although Sega claims the game isn't set in San Francisco, we'd like to point out that tracks with lines down the middle are only found under San Francisco's cable cars

■ DREAMCAST

CRAZY TAXI

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Sega R&D 3** ■ Release Date: **Q1 2000** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Can I get a receipt, please?

Crazy Taxi — the wild racing romp where players have to deliver passengers and collect fares across a San Francisco-like city — was one of the best arcade games of 1999. It's also rumored to have been completed for Dreamcast for months, held back because Sega wants to ensure software available to follow up the US launch. The suspiciously complete version shown at Tokyo Game Show shows the conversion to be nearly arcade perfect.

■ Losing a fare is a hassle, but hey, in a city packed with tourists, there're plenty more

Players start *Crazy Taxi* by selecting one of four different characters available, each of whom offers different driving styles. The objective is to pick up customers and bring them as safely as possible to their destination (shown in green on the screen). You don't need to stick to roads — you can drive freely on the map. As with real taxi drivers, aggressive driving is strongly recommended if you want to make your goals — while there are no specified routes, there are time limits. Scoring "driving combos" can help you reach your destination: by using a combination of steering and the speed lever, you can pull combos such as spins. Players will also be able to use other cars as jumping ramps, like in *Top-Skater* — not really surprising as *Crazy Taxi* shares that title's Director and Producer. Wondering how Sega of America will keep up the momentum of its succesful launch? Titles like this should answer that question.

— Nicolas Di Costanzo

■ OK, maybe it isn't San Francisco: Ocean Beach hasn't been warm enough for bikinis since the heat wave of 1987

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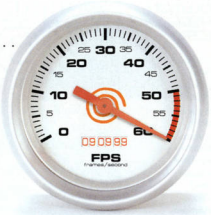

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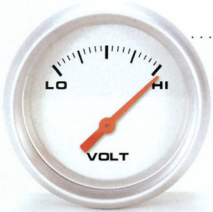
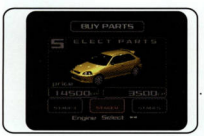


Throw down against road rivals in point battle mode, customize your import racer in quest mode, or choose versus mode to go head-to-head at a blistering 60 frames per second.

HIGHOCTANE



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THE EVOLUTION OF *RIDGE RACER*:

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- *Ridge Racer* (PlayStation)
- *Ridge Racer 2* (Arcade)
- *Ridge Racer Revolution* (PlayStation)
- *Rave Racer* (Arcade)
- *Rage Racer* (PlayStation)
- *Ridge Racer Type 4* (PlayStation)
- *Ridge Racer 64* (Nintendo 64)
- *New Ridge Racer* (PlayStation2)

■ **The *Ridge Racer* feel has been kept intact for this version — in no time at all, players will be skidding around corners like pros**

■ NINTENDO

RIDGE RACER 64

■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Nintendo** ■ Release Date: **2000** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Nintendo pulls into the fast lane

Admit it. Great racing games have been few and far between on Nintendo 64. Sure, there are a few standouts such as *Beetle Adventure Racing*, but for the most part they lack the depth and replayability of the popular PlayStation racing titles.

Hoping to improve the quality of life for racing fans on N64, Nintendo licensed the most famous game in racing games, and has turned to one of its own internal teams to handle the port. Though there is nothing really groundbreaking here in terms of gameplay — or originality, for that matter — the game plays extremely well and the framerates are surprisingly fast, especially in the high-res mode.

More importantly, the spirit of *Ridge Racer* has been kept intact. Powersliding is in full force, as is managing drift around turns. *Ridge Racer 64* also features four speed classes, each with varying degrees of drift and grip, a nice addition beyond the original game.

The main focus of the development team has been features and options, and *Ridge Racer 64* delivers these in top form. *Ridge Racer 64* incorporates every track from *Ridge Racer* and *Ridge Racer Revolution* and also features three Nintendo-exclusive tracks. The final version of the game will have over twenty different vehicles and four-player simultaneous racing on the same screen, another first. Coupled with nice graphical effects such as skid marks, smoking tires, and working headlights, *Ridge Racer 64* just may take the checkered flag when it's released next year. Note to Namco: Dreamcast, now, please! — *Tom Ham*

■ **One of the best features is the four-player split screen, which is exclusive to the Nintendo 64 version**

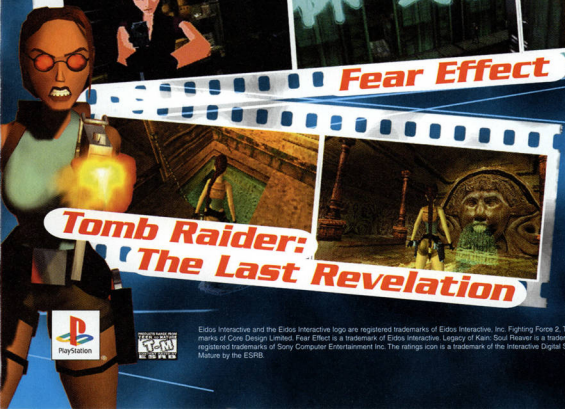
■ **Besides all of the tracks from the first two *Ridge Racer* games, *RR64* will also have three brand-new courses**

Meet the New Cast of Characters

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver

Fighting Force 2

Fear Effect



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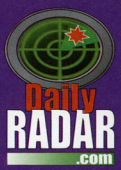

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DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE

Nevrhood

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TEEN T ESRB

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SOUTHPEAK™ INTERACTIVE

■ Zombie hunting becomes much more intense when you actually have to do the aiming (there's no auto-correct here). And unlike the zombies in *House of the Dead*, these splatter red blood all over the place

■ PLAYSTATION

RESIDENT EVIL GUN SURVIVOR

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Capcom** ■ Release Date: **TBA** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Survival horror gets up-close and personal

■ Besides herbs that can be used to heal you, there are also a wide variety of items that must be retrieved in order to solve puzzles and progress in the game

When Capcom said that it was going to make a light-gun game based on *Resident Evil*, we groaned inwardly, thinking it would be a *House of the Dead 2* clone on PlayStation. It turns out, however, that our assumptions were incorrect, because instead of going down the tried-and-true gun-game path as Sega's zombie blast-a-thon did, Capcom is aiming to redefine the way a gun game is played.

The biggest revolution in game design is the idea that gun games need not be on rails. Unlike every other gun game on the market, Capcom is giving players the

■ You'll see plenty of familiar enemies in *Gun Survivor*. These hellhounds don't come jumping through the window like in the first *Resident Evil*, but they'll put up quite a chase

Alphas

LIGHT GUN HORROR

So how do light guns work, anyhow? Although specifics differ, the general idea is this: when you fire the gun, the screen flashes for a second. During that flash, the light sensor in the gun reads the portion of the screen it "sees." If the raster (the point of light that draws the image) is detected where a target is, the gun tells the system that the target is hit.

ability to go where they want to in the fully 3D world. Players are given the option to shoot the screen in specific places at specific times to walk, run, or spin around, and the A and B buttons are used to turn from left to right as well. Strangely enough, the Dreamcast controller has a D-pad on it, which would be useful for this sort of maneuvering, but instead Capcom went with PlayStation. Go figure.

Along with the ability to move around in the environment comes the necessity of puzzles to solve and items to find. Along the way you won't merely discover the usual assortment of guns (ripped straight from the *Resident Evil* universe), but also locked doors that need keys, herbs that can heal you, and a whole bunch or puzzles that will be instantly familiar to the people who have played through the *Resident Evil* games. There is even a storyline to play through that is parallel to the other *Resident Evil* games, but totally unrelated.

■ **Mysteries and puzzles abound as you explore places like this cineplex. Perhaps the figure on the floor symbolically represents the status of the *Resident Evil* movie**

Of course, high-intensity action is the primary focus, and what would a gun game be without plenty of enemies to shoot? *Gun Survivor* isn't lacking here at all. Every enemy we've known and feared over the years is back — and more dangerous than ever. Expect to see zombies, dogs, spiders, birds, and even hunters as you race around trying to solve puzzles. Strangely enough, the gameplay seems much more intense when the baddies are all coming straight at you instead of attacking an onscreen character. They also blow up really good (definitely a plus).

While Capcom USA still isn't sure when the game will come to the States, we're betting that it's a pretty sure thing for mid-2000. With the success of *Resident Evil* and the sheer distinction of the gameplay, this could be another huge hit for the franchise. Either way, we're sure developers are also watching this one closely and the next generations of gun games will all feature several of the ideas introduced in this game. — *Blake Fischer*

■ **The hunters didn't look anywhere near this creepy when we viewed them from above. Unfortunately, there's no time to look since they're just as deadly as they've ever been**

■ **Ravens and spiders and zombies, oh my! As in any good gun game, enemies will come at you from the ground, the sky, or even the roof above you, so you always have to pay attention to your surroundings unless you want to end up dead**

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Sega Dreamcast.

TEEN

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

■ Like a dancing pied piper, Ulala must use her infectious choreography to gather fellow Earthlings to dance and do battle with the aliens. The more people you gather, the more powerful she'll grow

■ DREAMCAST

SPACE CHANNEL 5

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Sega** ■ Release Date: **Winter (Japan), TBA (US)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

In the future, space aliens will invade — the question is, can you dance well enough to get rid of them?

You can't count the number of games based on thwarting a massive alien opposition. But have you ever had to dance to do it? That's the premise behind *Space Channel 5*, a rhythm-action title that may be even more offbeat than *PaRappa*.

> **"I do not want to make a stylish game that only has a good atmosphere. The game needs to be fun"** Tesuya Mizuguchi, producer

Set in the 25th century, *Space Channel 5* looks like *The Jetsons*, except the dancing and '70s Euro-groovy music smack the game with an overwhelming *Austin Powers* flavor. As a cute TV reporter named Ulala, your mission is to rid the Earth of a mysterious alien presence. Your mission is accomplished by keeping time to the music's rhythm while issuing simple commands, such as directing a shot at the aliens. Keeping time with the tunes enables Ulala to more effectively blast the aliens and build an army of people to join her. The better Ulala does, the more people fall into step with her. The scene is not unlike a typical Broadway musical, in which progressively more cast members pile onto the stage, all performing the same routine in unison.

Sound absurd? It is. But if anyone can make this work, it's the title's producer, Tesuya Mizuguchi. Mizuguchi is responsible for some of Sega AM Annex's best-playing arcade games, including *Sega Rally* and the motorcycle racing game *Manx TT*. And while the game comes from the minds of Director Takashi Yuma and Art Director Yumiko Miyabe, Mizuguchi has been responsible for making it play perfectly.

"We've changed the game system during development," Mizuguchi says. "I do not want to make a stylish game that only has a good atmosphere. The game needs

■ Mizuguchi explains that it was a conscious decision to make Ulala sexy, but more through her dancing than her physical character model. We think he's done both

■ There is still quite a bit of camera work being tweaked, including this segment in which Ulala shoots the aliens

Alphas

BEFORE ULALA, THERE WAS BARBARELLA

Back in 1968, Jane Fonda starred as the sexy, scantily-clad Barbarella, a space vixen who knew how to have fun while saving the galaxy. The film, like the game *Space Channel 5*, doesn't take itself very seriously.

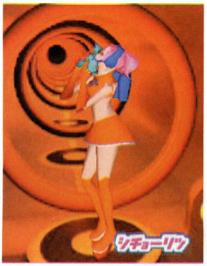
■ **Ulala — shades of Barbarella? We think so**

to be fun. As a producer, it is my job to check it until the last minute."

Although Mizuguchi estimates the game is only 20% complete, *Space Channel 5* is already bubbling over with stylized music and graphics that blur the lines between sci-fi and a cartoon world. And while the characters don't boast large polygon counts, the game can feature scores onstage at once, bringing an oddly theatrical aspect to this musical saga that, well, just hasn't been done before. Any professional stage performer knows when they've "won" the audience over, and *Space Channel 5* imparts that dynamic by enabling players to bring in the crowd and get them dancing along.

Still, the game is scheduled to be available in Japan this winter, and that final 80% will be a lot of work for the development team of 25. Although some kind of modem play is being considered, the game will probably remain a single-machine experience, as Mizuguchi views *Space Channel 5* as a kind of party game, admitting it has been designed with the masses in mind. He feels that it should be enjoyable to watch someone else play as it is to play.

■ **In the 25th century, the world is filled with bizarre rings. We predict that Sonic will love it**



■ **Players will not receive a traditional point scoring; rather they must obtain a high "excitement" percentage**

"Recently, games are not so interesting," complains Mizuguchi when a reporter asks about the genesis of the game. Perhaps aware that *Space Channel 5* taps into something different, albeit completely wacky, he continues his thought: "Games with just better graphics and music are not enough, I think. If the gameplay does not really change from what is proposed now, the market may shrink."

With Dreamcast here now, and more high-end systems on the way, it's unlikely that the creative forces in this industry will let the next round of hardware go unchallenged on the design side. Like Mizuguchi himself, we know they've been thinking two or three hardware generations ahead for years. — *Tom Russo*

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SUB CULTURES

Criterion's previous game *Sub Culture* got us thinking about some of the weirder subcultures we've encountered online — people way beyond Civil War recreationists and hardcore Beanie Baby collectors. The weirdest we've found? Furries, people who like to dress up as cute plush animals and, well, interact with other people dressed like cute animals.

■ PC, DREAMCAST

DEEP FIGHTER

■ Publisher: **Ubi Soft** ■ Developer: **Criterion Studios** ■ Release Date: **February 2000** ■ Origin: **France**

Sick of 3D combat in space? Take a dive with Ubi Soft

The story is a little trite — as a private in the Deep Fighters subforce, you've got to help "the General" defend your deep-sea civilization against enemies, as well as perform rescues — but Ubi's latest submarine action game should have several things to recommend it. First, of course, is the pedigree: Criterion, creator of *Sub Culture*, has already cut its teeth on one sub game, and the company is also known for its graphic prowess (seen most recently in *TrickStyle*).

Second, and more importantly, should be the gameplay. Although the game will feature extensive 3D dogfights (which are nice, since the water makes the physics different from most space combat sims), the real hook may be the more strategic elements, like puzzle solving, herding giant schools of fish, and repairing and maintaining the underwater cities.

More than just window dressing, the non-combat missions are challenging and compelling, and they provide context for the combat, which makes it more meaningful, as does knowing you are progressing to an ultimate goal: construction of a massive mothership, the Leviathan, which can transport your entire civilization away from the dangerous waters you currently patrol.

As you'd expect, as you move through the game you'll be able to use better and better subs, and access a wide variety of weapons and tools, including what may be the first underwater geiger counter we've seen. The game will also ship (of course) with robust multiplayer support. Given its depth (no pun intended), the game could find serious success when it comes out next spring. — *Michael Wiley*

■ The graphics require 3D acceleration: Glide and D3D will be supported out of the box

In real life, SHODAN would make the y2k bug seem like a harmless pest.

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■ PLAYSTATION2

STREET FIGHTER EX 3

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Akira** ■ Release Date: **Spring 2000** (Japan), **Holidays 2000** (US) ■ Origin: **Japan**

Can a 3D shot in the arm re-vitalize the classic series on PlayStation2?

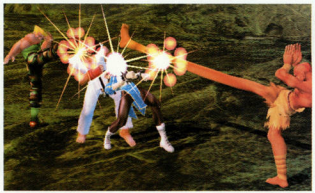
As a spin-off, the *Street Fighter EX* series hasn't ever been the primary focus of the 2D-oriented Capcom game-generation factory. In fact, Capcom doesn't even do the game itself, instead entrusting the creation of *Street Fighter's* 3D cousin to Akira, a company composed of ex-Capcom, -Square, and -Taito employees.

So far, the *EX* games have gotten mixed reviews: the gameplay is fun and more-or-less accurate to the *Street Fighter* style, but the games are hampered by their blocky graphics. With *EX 3*, however, the series looks ready to come into its own with 3D hardware that is finally powerful enough to bring the vision of Capcom's anime characters into 3D on PlayStation2.

Characters now look as good as prerendered models and even the tiniest of details are visible

■ The new camera system puts a unique spin on many of the older characters' classic moves, like this head stomp

■ Sharon is one of the characters that will be exclusive to *SF EX 3*. Obviously, Akira felt that the series needed the requisite "angry seductress character"



■ Akira is known for putting some of the most outrageous combos in the *EX* games, and *EX 3* doesn't look to be an exception

Alphas

First shown at the PlayStation2 announcement conference in Japan, *Street Fighter EX 3* was one of the surprise titles confirmed for the system's launch. It makes sense, though, because a quick look at the quality of the models in *EX 3* shows how much the team has been suffering having to work on the outdated PS1 hardware. Characters now have the look of pre-rendered models; even the tiniest details, like facial expressions, are clearly visible. A new *Tekken*-like floating camera delivers better views of the action when things get out of hand, too, so the details are very appreciated. One place where the game still seems to be lacking is animation, possibly due to Akira's reliance on hand animation rather than motion capture. Still, the game is early, although we have high hopes that some of the rough edges will be fixed come the PS2 launch in Japan this coming March.

In the initial build played by **Next Generation,** only four characters were selectable (Blanka, Dhalsim, Chun-Li, and Skull-o-mania), but there are expected to be more than 20 in the final version of the game. In addition to old favorites like Ryu and Ken, there will also be several *EX*-exclusive characters as well as some brand new faces. Gameplay so far is pretty standard, with lots of combos and chargeable super moves that light up the screen with all sorts of PS2 pyrotechnics. The newest mode to be introduced is the Team Battle, which enables each player to pick two fighters that they can then switch between at will during fights — some super moves can even involve both characters at once, like those in *Marvel vs. Capcom*. Unlike other fighters that possess the Tag Team feature, the characters in *SF EX 3* actually leave the fights by running toward and away from the camera, which is a first (and we must say, it's pretty cool to watch).

While it may not the most revolutionary game of the PlayStation2 launch library, *EX* should be a good testament to the system's power — that games look this good right out of the starting gate bodes well for the system's future. Hopefully, Akira will continue to tune the game up until the end so that it can live up to its own pretensions as a 3D version of *Street Fighter* that has the same look and feel as its 2D counterparts.

— *Blake Fischer*

■ **The power of PlayStation2 allows the developers to model even the tiniest of details like the individual spikes of Blanka's hair**

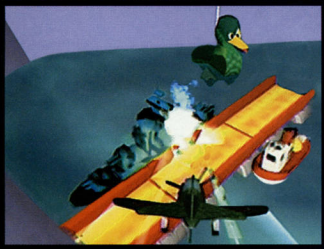
WHO'S THE BOSS?

Akuma, the boss of *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, has since become a staple of *Street Fighter* games. His name is shared by the boss-boss of what classic proto-fighter for Apple II?

■ **Jordan Mechner's *Karateka*, released by Broderbund**

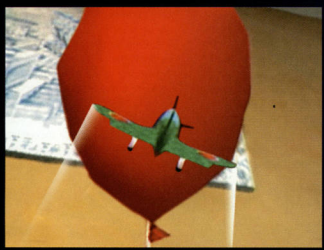
■ **You can use both of your teammates at once for a super move that does an absurd amount of damage**

■ **Expect even the most common of moves to throw the screen into special-effects overload. Sometimes there are so many effects onscreen that you can't tell who hit what**



YOU CAN ATTACK, BUT YOU CAN'T ESCAPE

WHEN GOOD TOYS GO BAD.



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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The title of the game refers to a giant tear in space that is discovered early in the game. This wormhole is what links the galaxies of the alien races to the star of Proxima Centauri. James Thrush, the producer on the project, also points out that "the Rift" refers to the division between all the races in the game, for a clever double meaning.

■ PC

THE RIFT

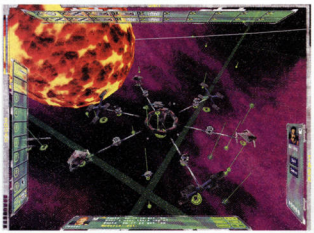
■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer: **Thrushwave Studios** ■ Release Date: **Spring 2000** ■ Origin: **US**

Can't we just all get along? No.

Part character-based space-opera storyline and part 3D space strategy, *The Rift* takes a different approach to the now-blooming sub-genre pioneered by *Homeworld*. The biggest change from what we've seen so far is that you no longer duke it out in empty space. Each area has moons that orbit planets that in turn orbit around their stars. Your ships can orbit around any of these, which adds an incredible layer of depth to ship placement as you can use planets as defensive barriers or you can wait until a planet's orbit is in a place where you can launch a concerted attack from different sides.

Each object in the game possesses its own weight, rotation, and inertia — planets, space stations, and even each ship — so you'll have to take these factors into account with every move. AI pilots will be able to use the unique qualities of each vehicle to their own advantage in battle, so you can expect some spectacular clashes.

Ships range from space stations to giant carriers to armored marines who can be launched to swarm an enemy unit. Even better, the graphics engine supports the ability to zoom in and out dynamically so you can see all the details in a marine's facemask — or zoom out to see the entire battle theater. If you're in the mood, you can even put the game in a special letterbox mode and get the most cinematic view of your entire operation. — *Blake Fischer*



■ This orbiting space station makes a great re-supply station and defensible battle platform

■ You can zoom in on your marine raiders as they launch across the void of space to storm an enemy ship

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Milestones

Next Generation's monthly update on tomorrow's games

■ *Crisis Zone* features the most frenetic gameplay we've seen in a gun game

■ ARCADE

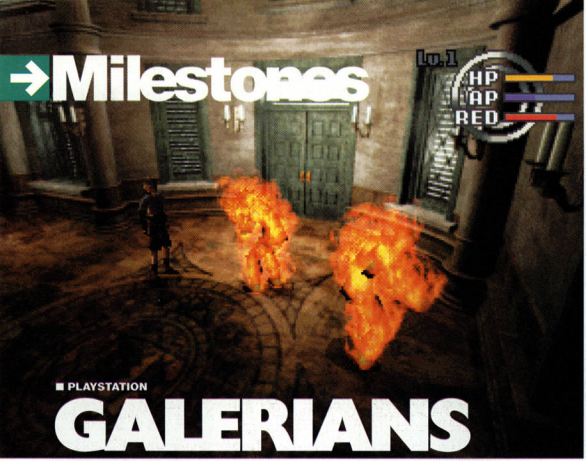
CRISIS ZONE

■ This port of the latest version of *Virtua On Oratorio Tagram* promises to take advantage of Dreamcast's online capabilities for head-to-head play without having to resort to split screen

■ DREAMCAST

VIRTUA ON ORATORIO TAGRAM

Milestones



■ PLAYSTATION

GALERIANS

■ This suspense thriller features dark psychic powers and some truly disturbing imagery

■ PLAYSTATION, DREAMCSTAST, PC

PLANET OF THE APES

■ Fox promises that a compelling plot and deep puzzles will complement the action in this spin-off from the classic sci-fi story

■ Otaku of the world will weep with joy when they get their hands on this game

■ DREAMCAST, ARCADE

SNK vs. CAPCOM

■ PLAYSTATION, DREAMCAST

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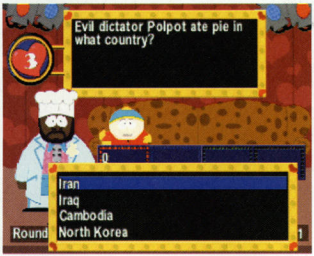


■ Acclaim's irreverent tribute to *You Don't Know Jack* features the *South Park* characters squaring off in a bizarre game-show format

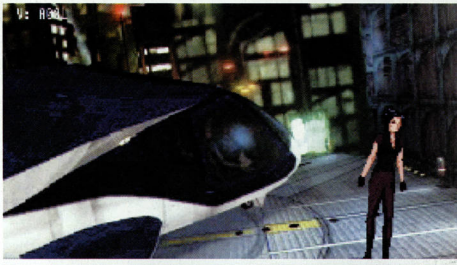
■ DREAMCAST

TIME STALKERS

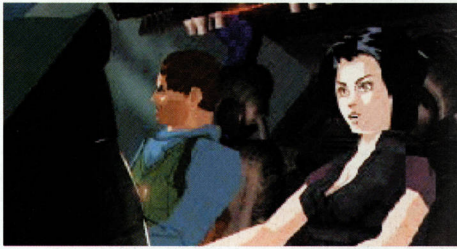
■ This successor to the Genesis cult classic *Landstalker* features gorgeous graphics and multiple timelines to explore. This title is also notable for the 10 different VMU mini-games that come with it

■ PLAYSTATION

FEAR EFFECT



■ Formerly known as *Fear Factor*, this title looks to up the ante in the action/adventure genre with some inspired visuals, a dark futuristic plot, and plenty of action



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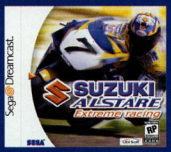

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The next generation of videogame consoles will offer so much more than the last. Fueled by new processing and storage technologies, supported by high-profile partners like AT&T, Intel, Matsushita, and IBM, they promise not just amazingly interactive games, but all the riches the new world of online connectivity offers. With greater rewards for the winners — and greater risks for the losers — Sony, Nintendo, Sega, and Microsoft are hunkering down for a system battle unlike any before. More than just a console skirmish, this truly is . . .

THE WAR for the LIVING ROOM

Which of the next-generation consoles will dominate the future of living-room entertainment?

Five years ago this month, **Next Generation** magazine launched, based on the fi conviction that games were more than a diversion for kids — they were the futu of entertainment. **We were right.** Today videogames alone are a $7.1 billion industry in the US, and the industry is growing faster every day.

With each new piece of news surrounding the next wave of console hardware, it is becoming more obvious the big four (Sony, Nintendo, Sega, and Microsoft) have no intention of merely delivering amazing new game machines with online gaming capabilities. Instead, the brass ring that each is reaching for is a box that delivers the hardware power and connectivity potential to do much, much more.

Consoles, TVs, and networks (both narrow and broadband) are being designed to work in concert not just to deliver web-browsing and e-commerce, but also to deliver downloadable entertainment such as music, TV programs, and movies — and, as Sony has stated, new kinds of interactive content that have yet to be defined.

Hasn't this been tried before?

Wait a minute — didn't 3DO and Philips fail (quite spectactularly) at marketing "do everything" multimedia machines that could play games *and* be set-top boxes? Yes. And haven't the experimental interactive TV efforts of Time-Warner — a company that should know a thing or two about what TV consumers want — all been dismal failures too? Yep. So what do Sony and the rest of the console combatants have that Time Warner and 3DO lacked? Two things: games, and technology.

Games are the only application other than linear media (TV shows and movies) that have been successful in the living room. (Why? If you have to ask, you shouldn't be reading this magazine — anyway, the discussion of why games are good will have to wait for another feature). One of the major reasons previous set-top box efforts have failed is due to a lack a critical mass: the chicken-and-egg problem in which creating compelling interactive content can't be profitable until a certain number of boxes are installed, which won't happen until the content is there, etc. . . . But game consoles can provide that critical mass that can then be used for more general-interest interactive applications.

And technology? Up till now, set-top box candidates have been woefully underpowered. That's not true anymore: if you question the ability of next-generation consoles to deliver all that is mentioned above, you haven't been doing your homework.

According to IDC Research, the number of game consoles that will have shipped worldwide with Internet support will be 15 million by the year 2002. Dreamcast may make up a fairly significant number of those 15 million, and it's already a secure vehicle for e-commerce. According to Ken Soohoo, VP of product development at PlanetWeb, the developer of Dreamcast's web browser, Dreamcast's 200 MHz Hitachi processor is quite capable of handling the cryptography required for secure Internet e-commerce. "From an online security standpoint, someone accessing the Net from a Dreamcast looks exactly like someone accessing the Net from a PC," says Soohoo.

And Sony's already planning for PlayStation2 technology to be incorporated into high-end post-PC graphics workstations (see related story, page 07) being designed for high-end image-processing, for games as well as film and broadcasting.

These are just a couple of examples, and while the power of these systems is not to be downplayed, the public at large (at first, anyway) will not accept these consoles as anything other than game machines. So to avoid the marketing pitfalls that 3DO and Cd-i fell into, don't expect to see this next round of consoles marketed as "multimedia devices." While the consoles definitely will expand into the multimedia device realm, this is not how they are being positioned.

Nintendo's stance is typical. While Dolphin will certainly house technology capable of providing more than gaming, saying otherwise would directly contradict the company's mantra. When asked, Nintendo engineer Jim Merrick toes the company line: "Browsers and things are relatively simple to implement on these next-generation machines," Merrick says. "They are all capable of it. But for Nintendo, we really want to focus on what augments and enhances our core expertise, which is gaming."

Great, but if all your competitors are offering great games and more benefits online or with DVD movie compatibility, shouldn't you consider expanding on your system's potential for online access?

"The simple answer is no." says Merrick, "Nintendo probably views it slightly different than a Sony or Sega would, in that we're a very traditional, pretty focused gaming company. The main thrust of our machine is going to be as a dedicated gaming console."

Perhaps. But Microsoft isn't taking any chances with Nintendo's, Sony's, and Sega's potential to offer services traditionally bound to PC, especially if consoles plan to make them comfortably usable in the living room. This is why Microsoft has every intention of delivering a console of its own. If there's going to be a machine providing ancillary PC features and PC entertainment in the living room, Bill Gates wants it to be X-Box.

War Is Declared

As Sun Tsu wrote, all war is based on deception. While the generals at Sega, Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft are busy in their war-rooms planning for the long term, their company spokespersons are happy to reveal that their short term plans are all based on "games, games, games." (Except for Microsoft, who has yet to confirm its system even exists.) Do not be deceived.

It is without question that each of these major players is strategically planning for the same trillion-dollar prize — mass-market dominance in the next millennium and ultimate control of the living room. This means eventually building out e-commerce portals, and providing promotional opportunities that target the console demographics. The new systems will certainly open up ways for the hardware manufacturers to bring in non-traditional forms of revenue. And interestingly, as you'll see below, each company has a markedly different strategy for success.

So who's going to win? Ultimately, you will decide.

The system that delivers the best variety of the best games at the best price will build the foundation of consumers upon which successful networks and broadband support can be built. This means that now more than ever each console manufacturer needs to deliver an amazing line-up and a killer game network to convince people like the readers of this magazine — the early adopters and influencers — that its system is the one you can't live without.

In the coming pages, we'll examine the strategies of the four players: what they've got to offer, what they say about their strategy today, and what we think — based on hundreds of hours of conversations with analysts and insiders at third parties and the companies themselves — their long-term strategies for total dominance will be. Then, starting on page 90, we've got previews and reviews of the hardware itself.

SEGA: DOING IT NOW

What's Sega's got:

As the first out of the gate, Sega makes no apologies for being a low-cost system designed to appeal directly to traditional console players. An online gaming network is scheduled to become fully operational in the year 2000. By Q3, the network should support 12 titles including the online persistent world of *Frontier*, and Dreamcast versions of *Baldur's Gate* and *Half-Life*.

What Sega says:

Sega is forthright about its plans for the Internet — its short-term plans, anyway. "Going forward, we're building the Dreamcast gaming community," says Sega Vice President of Marketing Peter Moore, "and obviously online gaming and multiplayer situations are critical to that."

Another arena in which the company intends to compete is price: "Today, and certainly for the future within the next two years," says Director of Corporate Communications Charles Bellfield. "DVD technology is prohibitively expensive for a game console product. That is, if you want to focus just as a low-cost piece of hardware that delivers the highest performance of games. If you want to be just an entertainment black box, and you feel that you can charge more for it, that's a different story." In other words, while Sega will compete on price (count on a price drop before PlayStation2 launches next year) because it's focusing on games, the other guys — Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft — will also have to charge more because they're trying to offer more than just games.

Secret, long-term plan:

Despite what Sega says, it is clearly poised to position Dreamcast as more than a simple game machine. The company's deal with AT&T is telling: sure, AT&T is a major ISP, but the company is also investing heavily in cable — and the broadband capabilities that come with it. And Sega Enterprises' President Shoichiro Irimajiri has repeatedly mentioned the possibility of a Dreamcast broadband or DSL network in Japan and US as early as 2000.

Still, Moore demurs from discussing the strategy: "Broadband is still somewhat of a distant dream — it's going to be 18 months to two years before, from our perspective, it is something you can build your core online consumers around." That said, Moore loves the fact that Sega's 56K modem is a snap-in, snap-out device. "Once we figure out that broadband has reached a critical mass of American households," he continues, "we will then be able to offer a broadband device that will allow to have this thing on 24 hours a day."

Bottom Line:

Right now, for Sega, it's all about games. But once Dreamcast has a better installed base, the company is clearly poised to jump on the broadband wagon, with all the video and music on demand applications that implies. Given the low cost of goods on Sega's system, some analysts have even suggested that within a year or two AT&T may be distributing Dreamcasts for free to its broadband subscribers as interface devices. That would be a win for both companies — AT&T would get a cheap broadband controller (and a great subscriber premium), and Sega would see a dramatic rise in its installed base.

SONY: IF WE BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

What Sony's got:

As our profiles last month and on page 90 show, with PlayStation2, Sony may have the most powerful piece of consumer electronics ever conceived. With DVD movie playback, USB, IEEE-1394, and PCMCIA connectors, the system is set to outpace top-of-the-line PCs. Unfortunately, it lacks a modem — Sony says adding one is easy, but consumers are slow to adapt to console peripherals. (How many PlayStations still lack analog controllers? Millions.)

What Sony says:

Sony clearly assumes that dominance in games consoles will be as easy to gain this time as it was in 1995, and judging from the stats — more than 100 publishers and developers already signed up, retail demand for one million units in the first two days — it certainly looks like PlayStation2 can't fail as a game machine.

Unlike Sega and Nintendo, however, Sony is open about its efforts to become more than just a game system — chairman Ken Kutaragi has made it clear that his vision for PlayStation2 goes beyond mere games into the new (and undefined) realm of "computer entertainment." One thing is clear: to get there, the company doesn't plan on taking baby steps. While it won't introduce its online strategy until 2001, SCEA VP Phil Harrison is adamant that it won't include narrow-band technologies like HTML and email over a 56K modem.

Instead, the company is focusing on broadband, particularly cable, as the online technology that will enable forms of interactive entertainment as dramatically different from today's games as today's games are from the platformers of the 16-bit days.

Secret, long-term plan:

Sony's long-term plan isn't secret at all: According to Phil Harrison, the company's "long-term strategy is broadband, what we call the 'network digital entertainment market,' which is a

very ambitious goal, something that is going to take all our focus as a company to achieve. We will create a whole new market and then claim it. We're basically leapfrogging what you would describe as the Internet today. What everybody knows today as the Internet, which is basically HTML, is of no interest to us in the long term. Now, in the short term, because we've included USB and PCMCIA ports on the machine, it's very easy to plug in a modem and create some software, either embedded in the game or as a separate, stand-alone application, that delivers today's Internet experience. And we would be very happy if a third party comes along to address those commercial opportunities. But that's not our strategy in the short term. I'm sure there are commercial opportunities [there] that we're ignoring and missing out on. So be it, because the end game is megabytes of data per second through broadband connectivity."

In fact, Sony doesn't consider broadband a way to drive PlayStation2 as much as PlayStation2 is a way to drive broadband. "Our business is a killer application for the cable market to gain a whole ton of consumers who are interested in this two-way high-bandwidth connectivity." What about those who think cable pales next to DSL? "Cable is going to be a very significant part of our strategy, but it's not the exclusive aspect of that strategy." Harrison even offers a tantalizing glimpse at something Sony is still keeping close to its chest: "There might be other ways that aren't even physical connections. Wireless is something we haven't mentioned yet, but it might be possible."

Bottom Line:

Sony is so confident that it will have the core game business sewn up by the time it rolls out its broadband service in 2001 that it feels comfortable talking publicly about its post-game machine plans. Given the power of PlayStation2, it's hard to disagree: the real question is whether or not "computer entertainment" will be the killer app that Sony expects.

ALL'S QUIET ON NINTENDO'S FRONT

What Nintendo's got:

So where's Nintendo in all this? So far the company has been quiet, announcing little more than partners (ArtX, Matsushita, IBM, and others), and price ("aggressive"). The current plan is for Nintendo to create an inexpensive, games-only machine, and for Matsushita to create a DVD player that incorporates Dolphin technology. Nintendo has mentioned a release date — fall 2000 — but given the company's hardware history, it's hard imagining the company making that target.

What Nintendo says:

Perrin Kaplan, Nintendo's director of corporate communications, is plainspoken about the company's goals beyond creating a strictly-games machine. "While we do entertain these other ideas," Kaplan says about broadband and DVD movies, "and may be incorporating those into Dolphin, we haven't announced it yet. We always have our eye on the highest amount of penetration possible. [We are] going for your average American consumer, not your early adopter, and not your smaller percentage of real gameheads."

Although Nintendo has said its version of the machine wouldn't play movies, Matsushita's player will, although there have been conflicting reports about whether or not Matsushita will bring its player to the States. "There seems to be some confusion surrounding that," Nintendo's Jim Merrick says. "We don't know what the plans are for bringing over an integrated DVD-player appliance under the Panasonic or Matsushita brand names for the States."

Secret long-term plans:

The fact is, Nintendo had a content network on Famicom in Japan in the 1980s, and chairman Hiroshi Yamauchi has repeatedly stressed his interest in connecting. However, the company has shown more willingness to innovate along these lines in Japan — the NES network, for instance, never came to the US, and it is unclear whether or not Game Boy Advanced, which is designed to work with cellular phones, will ever see the light of day in the States.

Still, with AOL's Steve Case recently suggesting that AOL is looking to partner with next-generation console makers, it's easy to create AOL/Nintendo scenarios. Analyst Kevin Hause of IDC research feels that Nintendo will likely launch with some kind of network option. "Basically, any next-generation platform," says Hause, "including Dolphin, is probably going to ship with a modem because as more and more developers find cool things to do with that connectivity to enhance and improve the gaming experience, it is going to become a requirement."

Nintendo was the first console maker to partner (with Sony for SNES-CD, and later with SGI for Nintendo 64), and the company clearly feels its forte lies in content, not

creating consumer electronics. In fact, by selling the games-only version of Dolphin and allowing Matsushita to sell the DVD-movie-playing version, the company appears to be willing to take what appears to be a junior role in the marketing of its next-generation hardware. Why stay in the hardware race at all then? "We like selling razors, not just razorblades," says Kaplan.

Bottom Line:

While it will certainly offer networking abilities with Dolphin, don't expect the company to try to take the game industry to the next level with hardware or networking innovations, as Sony is attempting. Instead, any paradigm shifts in interactive entertainment that Nintendo offers will be driven by Shigeru Miyamoto, who offered this take on networking in NG II/99: "They can talk about networks, but we all know about that, so what's new about it. It's not interesting."

Rest assured, when Miyamoto comes up with something he does think is interesting, Nintendo will make sure he has the hardware he needs to realized his vision.

X-BOX: MICROSOFT'S ENIGMA WRAPPED IN A MYSTERY

Where & what is X-Box?

By the time you read this, there's a good chance there will have been an X-Box announcement. Insiders have intimated that the system will be announced at the annual Las Vegas Comdex, which runs from November 15 to 19. It is likely the system will be positioned as Console/PC hybrid designed to go in the living room.

This has been attempted before — from Coleco's Adam to (arguably) Commodore 64. But those attempts came long ago, before computers penetrated 50% of US households, before Microsoft delivered standard tools for the home and office such as Excel and Word, and long before the killer app of the home PC, the Internet, emerged.

Currently believed to be partnered in the X-Box project are Intel and nVidia. And while it's well known there was a very private showing of X-Box to analysts at ECTS, the most recent person to go on record with knowledge of the device is Yoshihiro Maruyama, the vice chairman of Square EA. While Maruyama mentioned 3Dfx as a possible graphics chip provider for X-Box, we believe it will be nVidia's GeForce 256. It may have been the loss of the X-Box project to nVidia that forced 3Dfx President Greg Ballard to resign in early October, since, if X-Box goes to nVidia, 3Dfx will have failed twice to deliver its technology into a mass-market console project.

What makes X-Box so mysterious and intriguing at once is the link the Microsoft has to Dreamcast as an operating system provider. While Sega's own Charles Bellfield has gone on record to admit knowledge of the system, he adamantly denies that it is something that would compete with Dreamcast.

"If you're talking about a Windows 2000-based system," Bellfield cautions, "you're saying it has to have an inherent cost of a PC-type architecture, and that will not hit a sub-$200 price point. If you're talking about a Windows-based system, then you are not talking about a closed environment where developers can get close to the metal, and develop content to the thinnest APIs possible."

Bottom Line:

Regardless of who makes the machine, if it plugs into your TV, supports high-end graphics, and plays a current library of games on control pads, it is competition for everyone. It is worth noting, though, that several third parties have mentioned that X-Box may actually spur Dreamcast development, since developing for a PC-based X-Box standard would mean a Dreamcast port would be trivial.

IN CONCLUSION

Game machines are, after TVs and VCRs, the most successful living-room appliances ever. It's no surprise then that as the window of viability on broadband opens that game consoles are looked at — both inside and outside the game industry — as the best chance to deliver both critical mass and killer apps. What's comforting is that unlike cable boxes and providers, which are chosen in monopolistic deals with local governments, it is gamers like us who will decide who will win the next-generation console war, and perhaps, the larger war for the living room.

Are we forecasting geniuses or complete BS artists? Write us at systemwar@next-generation.com. (Feedback will be compiled and published in a follow-up story.)

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PlayStation2

- Launch: **March 4, 2000**
- Launch Price: **¥39,800 ($390)**
- US release: **Fall 2000**
- Origin: **Japan**
- US sales: **N/A**
- Worldwide sales: **N/A**
- US titles: **TBA**
- Worldwide titles: **85 titles announced in development**
- US retail price: **TBA (estimated at $299)**
- Tech partner: **Toshiba**

TECH SPECS AT A GLANCE:

- CPU: **128-bit "Emotion Engine" @ 294.912 MHz**
- GPU: **"Graphics Synthesizer" @ 147.456 MHz**
- RAM: **4MB VRAM embedded on chip**
- DRAM: **32 MB direct**
- Drives: **DVD-ROM (4x), CD-ROM (24x) DVD-movie compatibility**
- Sound: **Sound chip, 48 hardware channels, 2MB audio RAM**
- Interface: **2 controller ports, 2 memory card slots, 2 USB ports, i.Link (IEE1394) PCMCIA slot (type III)**

■ Although the DualShock2 controller looks the same as the original, the controller features pressure-sensitive analog buttons, measuring 256 levels of velocity data with each press. Gaming just got a whole a lot more tactile

The story so far:

PlayStation had barely launched before rumors of PlayStation2 began to emerge from Sony's HQ. Little did we know then that it would be six years before PlayStation2 would be unveiled. Now, like the title cowboy from the movie *Shane*, PlayStation readies itself for the dusty ride off into the sunset of discount bins, little brothers' rooms, and closets. PlayStation's end is near, but like Shane, it leaves with the satisfaction of a job well done.

Enter a new machine with the spirit of the ol' gunfighter. Hey, it even plays PlayStation titles, but this is a mere footnote in Sony's overall scheme, which includes the most powerful gameplaying machine of all time. The company has wisely included DVD-movie support, just as the format appears to be on the verge of exploding. Current DVD players alone sell for around $300 dollars, and while those prices will have dropped a year from now, PlayStation2 adds that much more value to its launch appeal.

Beyond 2000, Sony has embraced broadband technology. Although Sony believes that a third-party partner may deliver a modem and HTML browser, the company plans to forego a narrow-band HTML browser and packed-in modem, and instead plans to introduce an external hard drive and broadband modem package in 2001 that will include the technology required to download videos, music, and games.

Why broadband? Sony is dedicating its resources to bring forth a network capable of driving new interactive experiences that go far beyond traditional games as we know them. Ken Kutaragi describes this new medium as "computer entertainment." Sony is pushing videogaming further into the realm it has touched upon with PlayStation. Games are now powerful enough to bring personality to a game's characters, and a real narrative to the gameplay. This is the Emotion Engine's destiny, says Kutaragi: to bring emotive qualities to videogames. No less an industry luminary than Trip Hawkins recently told **Next Generation** that "technology is becoming passé; story and emotion will be the most important determiner of success in the next generation."

He may be right. Sony says this is what's going to drive gameplay into the next decade: marrying a quality gameplay experience — be it *Tekken* or *Tomb Raider* — to the epic, cinematic storytelling experiences seen in *Saving Private Ryan* or even read in *Moby Dick*. More than likely, the best of it will be something we couldn't possibly conceive today.

Sony is dedicating its resources to bring forth a broadband network capable of driving new interactive experiences

Ratings:

Demonstrable hardware power: When the first 1 million units are released on March 4 in Japan, PlayStation2 will unquestionably raise the bar in console technology. The system can process 16 million polygons per second with all the effects turned on and curved-surface rendering to boot, which dwarfs Dreamcast's 3 million per second. Still, PlayStation2 will not be as easy to program for as PlayStation was. The learning curve will be steep, and some developers will require the use of middleware (externally licensed programs that support the game's coding, — for example, a game could use a middleware physics engine, radiosity lighting model, etc.) which may limit developers from tapping the system's true potential. Subsequently, the first generation of PlayStation2 software may be comparable to Dreamcast's, but PlayStation2 will inevitably outpace Dreamcast. The real question is, how long will it take?

Current software library: While even the first-to-be-finished PlayStation2 titles are still a few months away, some impressive titles were on display at Tokyo Game Show. Sony has more than 85 titles going out the door in Japan next year — of course, some may slip into 2001. The real question is how many will make the March 4 Japan launch, and how many of those will make it to the US next fall. (*Go by Train!*, anyone?) However, in that catalog of 85 titles, there are certainly some gems. *Tekken Tag Tournament*, *New Ridge Racer*, *Gran Turismo 2000*, *Street Fighter EX 3*, and Square's impressive free-roaming brawler, *The Bouncer*, are just a few of the titles that have left us pining for a dev kit and playable alpha versions of the aforementioned software.

Future software prognosis: Considering the strong support the system has already garnered in Japan, it is not surprising to see that US and European publishers and developers are also clamoring to get onboard. One telltale sign is Electronic Arts' immediate endorsement of PS2. The world's largest third-party publisher will likely have several titles ready for PlayStation2's launch in US. Industry insiders have told **Next Generation** that the company is going full steam ahead in preparing its current franchises for the leap to PlayStation2. Perhaps wary of the "catch-up game" the company played with the original PlayStation, Electronic Arts is skipping Dreamcast in its entirety to focus its resources on one killer system. Even Electronic Arts Senior VP and Chief Creative Officer Bing Gordon has alluded to this in conversation — that with a company as large as EA, you can't just change strategies mid-swing.

Marketing muscle: It's hard to tell, with a product as successful as PlayStation, what the impact of the marketing has been. Certainly Sony's corporate branding has been amazing — PlayStation remains *the* cool system to have, even five years after its release — but individual game campaigns have been mixed. Still, the upmarket approach that Sony's advertising company, Chiat Day, has taken over the years has been far more appealing to us than Nintendo's predictable, McDonald's-like campaigns or Sega's, which, even with some Dreamcast spots, were irritatingly abstract. With PlayStation2, we expect an uncanny amount of exposure, and like the system itself, a visionary and meticulously-designed campaign.

Overall future prognosis: Sony certainly has challenges ahead of it, namely managing the transition from PlayStation to PlayStation2 without confusing consumers and muddying the launch. Until Nintendo reveals Dolphin, and Microsoft officially announces X-Box, it will be difficult to say how hot the competition will be. Still, Sony has yet to promise consumers something it couldn't deliver, and that definitely separates the company from the rest.

Final score: Too soon to call

Bottom line: It's too early to review PlayStation2. Regardless of the fact that Nintendo has yet to show its cards, Sony just continues to build on the PlayStation momentum. Barring any unforeseen problems, or an astronomical US launch price (which we feel is unlikely), all signs point toward PlayStation2 in the winner's circle in 2000.

10 PlayStation2 games to watch for

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NEW RIDGE RACER

GRAN TURISMO 2000

KONAMI SOCCER

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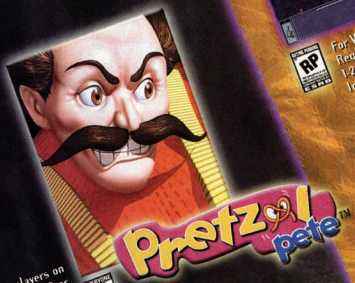

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Project Dolphin

- Launch: **TBA**
- US release: **Fall 2000**
- Origin: **Japan**
- US sales: **N/A**
- Worldwide sales: **N/A**
- US titles: **TBA**
- Worldwide titles: **TBA**
- US retail price: **TBA (Estimated at $99 to $199)**
- Tech. partners: **Matsushita, IBM, ArtX, S3, MoSys**

ARTIST CONCEPTION

TECH SPECS AT A GLANCE:

- CPU: **400 MHz .18 micron copper process "Gekko Processor," an IBM-designed and -manufactured superset of the PowerPC**
- GPU: **200 MHz custom chip from ArtX, featuring S3's texture compression technology and embedded DRAM**
- Drive: **DVD by Matsushita, which will incorporate "enhanced anti-counterfeit technology"**

Ratings:

Demonstrable hardware power:
There hasn't been so much as a tech demo to back up Nintendo's E3 Dolphin announcement at which Howard Lincoln boldly stated that Nintendo's technology would be "as fast as anything our friends at Sony have." Nintendo has been extremely quiet since E3, and September saw the cancellation of a presentation about the Dolphin GPU being developed by ArtX. However, Nintendo has announced a partnership with S3 that will have S3's excellent texture compression used on the GPU. The GPU will also feature embedded RAM, probably much more than the 4MB the PlayStation2 Graphics Synthesizer uses. The texture compression means that Dolphin games will be able to feature huge, detailed textures, and the embedded RAM means that the system should have blindingly fast fill rates and polygon drawing times. More partner announcements are also in the works, says a Nintendo spokesperson. Presumably they'll be about the areas the company still refuses to discuss: an online/gaming network. Unfortunately, the latest word is Dolphin will not be shown until Nintendo's Spaceworld show next August. If this is true, a 2000 launch for the system in the US may be impossible to orchestrate. No surprise to avid Nintendo watchers — the company hasn't shipped a system on time since NES in 1985.

Future software prognosis:
Nintendo's greatest strength is its software, and Shigeru Miyamoto's teams are already at work on virtual environments that Miyamoto says could be used in future *Zelda* or *Mario* titles.

Miyamoto is already working on virtual environments that could be used in future *Zelda* or *Mario* titles

Rare, Retro Studios, and other companies close to Nintendo are also already at work on Dolphin titles as well. The big question is the larger third-party community, which has avoided Nintendo 64 due to development difficulties, and the financial risk of pricey ROM cartridges.

Nintendo's US technology go-to guy, Jim Merrick, thinks that situation will change: "This system is not going to have the barriers to entry that N64 did. There were various criticisms of the technology, some valid and some not, that the N64 was difficult to write for. We are addressing those on Dolphin."

Merrick says the development support staff at Nintendo of America has doubled in a year, and he believes the company is in a better position to proactively support the teams still learning Dolphin. "We've hired more people specifically for Dolphin, and we've brought in a couple of people with masters degrees in computer science to handle some of the things we expect to be seeing in terms of physics and other things."

Unlike N64, Merrick also believes it will launch with more than three titles.

Marketing muscle:
That the word "Nintendo" is synonymous with "videogame" to so many people is a testament to the company's marketing skill. This year, Nintendo's marketing team will spend $150 million dollars to create the illusion that there are years of life left in N64. They'll probably succeed. Expect the same level of expertise for Dolphin.

Overall future prognosis:
Nintendo consistently produces innovative hardware (the first analog game pad, the first four-port system) and software (*Mario*, *Zelda*). While the company often acts like it would rather the market remain at 1987 levels (with games firmly ensconced as children's toys), it has, over its 110-year history, been capable of dramatic paradigm shifts. Nintendo is the only company to remain profitable after a generational shift, and were it really as conservative as competitors claim, it would still be making playing cards, not videogames. Do not underestimate Nintendo.

Final score: Too early for review

Bottom line: Right now, there's barely more to Dolphin than a few .18 micron chips on an assembly line in Vermont. But as we've already said, it's the software that counts. And while we'll probably be well into the next millennium before we get to see it, chances are it will be worth the wait. If so, Nintendo will be a far more formidable competitor in this round.

Dreamcast

- Launch: **Nov. 20, 1998**
- US release: **Sept. 9, 1999**
- Origin: **Japan**
- US sales: **500,000+**
- Worldwide sales: **2,100,000**
- US titles: **40+ by Jan. 2000**
- Worldwide titles: **200**
- US retail price: **$199**
- Tech partners: **NEC, Yamaha, Hitachi, Microsoft, AT&T**

TECH SPECS AT A GLANCE:

- CPU: Hitachi SH4 200Mhz
- GPU: NEC VideoLogic CLX1 graphics chip
- RAM: 16MB main operating RAM
  8MB video RAM
  2MB audio RAM
- Sound: Yamaha AICA sound chip
- OS: Dual Windows proprietary OS
- Storage: Proprietary GD-ROM,1 GB capacity
- Online: 56K modular modem

The story so far:

Climbing out of the hole Sega dug with Saturn hasn't been easy. But several months after the launch of Dreamcast, it seems the company has done so with resilience — but not without some birthing pains. Many of the top US executives responsible for the successful launch of Dreamcast, notably former US President Bernie Stolar, former VP of Third-Party Gretchen Eichenger, and former VP of Product Development Eric Hammond, are no longer with the company. With 19 titles in place, the system launched to a whopping $134 million dollars in sales in its first four days. A month later, the system moved into the holiday season with more than a half-million units sold, and talk of hardware shortages possible in December. The company's plans to have 1.5 million units installed in the US by March of 2000 now seem almost conservative. Still, Sega continues to shake things up on the corporate side. Sega of America will become Sega of America Dreamcast, and a new company in Japan, International Investment Corporation (IIC), will handle Dreamcast-network related business. (See news story, page 13.)

At Tokyo Game Show this fall, Sega announced digital imaging plans and showed a Zip drive attachment that could bring considerably more memory to the machine for online use. Also in late September, Sega President Shoichiro Iramijiri, possibly in response to Sony's PlayStation2 broadband announcement, expressed his belief that Dreamcast could be connected to a Sega network via DSL or cable modem as early Summer 2000 in Japan and shortly thereafter in the US.

The company's plans to have 1.5 million units installed in the US by March of 2000 now seem almost conservative

Ratings:

Demonstrable hardware power:
★★★★☆

For the immediate future, Sega's hardware remains the undisputed champion. Despite the controller, which we're not very fond of, the system's got it under the hood. The Power VR-based graphics chip, 16 MB of onboard RAM, and the Hitachi-powered CPU have together provided a vehicle for amazing journeys into *NFL 2K* and *Soul Calibur*. With a Zip drive expansion and online play looming in the future, Dreamcast still has a long way to go before being surpassed by Sony's, Nintendo's, and possibly Microsoft's impending technologies.

Current software library:
★★★☆☆

We've praised the Dreamcast launch library, but the system still has some glaring software holes. We're still waiting for a killer racer (where's *Metropolis*?), and where the hell are the good adventure games? As for the sports titles, *NFL 2K* is great, *NBA 2K* should be equally impressive (and done before the holidays), but the NHL hockey and MLB baseball titles won't be seen until spring. Still, as far as 1999 goes, no one is going to have a more impressive title than Dreamcast's *Soul Calibur*.

Future software prognosis:
★★★☆☆

With *Shenmue*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Dead or Alive 2*, *World Series Baseball*, and *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* in the works, there are some fairly significant titles on the horizon, and probably a few more that haven't been announced. But considering all the support that has already been announced for PlayStation2, quality Dreamcast products may be harder to come by in the future — especially from Japan, where development has slowed to a trickle. Still, Nintendo 64 succeeded with scant Japanese support, so there is a model there for Dreamcast to follow.

Marketing muscle:
★★★★☆

Coming off a highly successful launch, the word is out on Dreamcast. Although Sony and Nintendo will be pouring it on with huge holiday campaigns, it will be hard for both companies to shout down the impressive look of and excitement that surrounds this new system. In a marketplace where hot new graphics sell systems, Sega's timing with the holiday season couldn't have been better planned. The challenge will be getting others interested after the holiday season.

Overall future prognosis:
★★★☆☆

Sony will ship a superior hardware product next year (Nintendo says it will, too), but Sega has a year's head start. The company needs to maximize every day of the next year, ensuring the third-party support stays in place with more A-list titles. Sega also needs to get the online network up and running before the Sony and Nintendo pre-release hype puts Dreamcast in the fight of its life. Dreamcast can make it, but only if Sega of Japan and Sega of America can quit the internal bickering long enough to make the right decisions, quickly.

Final score: ★★★★☆

Bottom line: If you want the most powerful system available now, showcasing the best graphics at a reasonable price, this system is for you. Otherwise, you'll be waiting a year for PlayStation2 and maybe longer for Dolphin.

5 best available Dreamcast games

5 most anticipated Dreamcast games

- **SHENMUE**
- **RESIDENT EVIL:** CODE VERONICA
- **CRAZY TAXI**
- **DEAD OR ALIVE 2**
- **WORLD SERIES BASEBALL**

PC

- Launch: **1981 (4.77 MHz 8088 microprocessor)**
- Origin: **US**
- US sales: **46 million home PCs (32.1 million used with games)**
- US retail price: **$1,800-$2,000 for a game-ready system**

TECH SPECS: (FOR A GOOD GAME-PLAYING PC):

- CPU: **Pentium III or AMD Athlon 500 MHz**
- GPU: **Riva TNT 2 or GeForce 256**
- RAM: **128 MB**
- Drives: **13 GB hard drive (Ultra DMA, 7500 RPM or better)**
  DVD-ROM Drive
- Online: **56K modem or DSL connection**
- Sound: **Soundblaster Live! and speakers**
- Extras: **17-inch monitor**
  Microsoft Sidewinder pad
  Microsoft Sidewinder
  force feedback joystick

Ratings:

Demonstrable hardware power:
★★★★☆

The system specifications listed above reflect the state of the art in today's consumer-level PC components. Players with this system can expect optimal performance for software released in the next year, and it will remain viable for perhaps another year beyond that. This PC will perform comparably to Dreamcast, although probably not as well as PlayStation2. (However, it's worth noting that while the system is capable of outputting Dreamcast-level results, most PC games are designed to work on a broad range on hardware, and thus most games will look sub-Dreamcast quality.) Since PC technology advances incrementally, with better graphics technology appearing at a quarterly rate, upgrading may become more frequent in the future.

Current software library:
★★★★☆

With 3D accelerators and Internet access ubiquitous in the marketplace in the last two years, PC game developers have really picked up the ball with some engaging designs and crisp visuals that far surpassed PlayStation and Nintendo 64, leaving these consoles seemingly stalled out by comparison. *Half-Life*, *EverQuest*, *Homeworld*, *Baldur's Gate*, *Grim Fandango*, *StarCraft*, the *Quake* series, *Unreal*, and *Grand Prix Legends* offer sophisticated and elegantly crafted titles that, even if ported to console, just don't play any better than on PC.

Future software prognosis:
★★★★★

As the PC and console architectures become closer, expect to see more Dreamcast, PlayStation2, and Dolphin games going to PC, and vice versa, especially if Microsoft's X-Box comes to fruition. Titles in the works for 2000, such as *Halo* (see preview, p. 25), *Deus Ex* (see preview, p. 33), *Command and Conquer: Renegade*, and Digital Anvil's *Freelancer* make the PC's future library extremely bright, as does the platform's infinite expandability.

Marketing muscle:
★☆☆☆☆

The open architecture nature of the PC is its greatest advantage, but also its biggest weakness. As an open system, developers can create games without the expensive overhead of enrolling in Nintendo's, Sony's, or Sega's development programs. And without the licensing fees and third-party approval process, a PC developer has the freedom to conceptualize new kinds of gameplay. On the other hand, the open system creates compatibility problems, and there remains no one system champion building consumer awareness, or keeping buggy software from entering the channel. The level of entry into cutting-edge PC gaming is still very high, and the near-$2,000 pricepoint is just the starting point.

Overall future prognosis:
★★★★☆

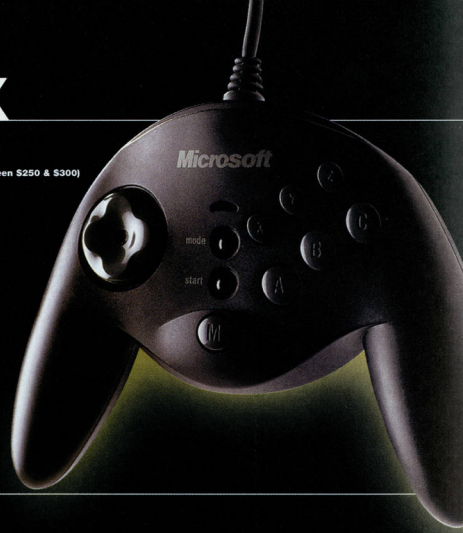
With amazing software in the works, continually impressive new hardware, online gaming booming, and coders such as Id's John Carmack working to make it more accessible to the masses, there's no question PC will continue to drive innovation in game development. However, PlayStation2 and Dolphin will make strong arguments for playing in the living room. It's hard to imagine a post-PC world, but PS2 offers the first glimpse at what may be a PC-free future in gaming.

Final score: ★★★★☆

Bottom line: The PC continues to be an amazing platform for game development, and it remains the only place you can play multiplayer online games (for now, anyway). The price of entry is high, but well worth it considering what is available, and what's coming next.

X-Box

- Launch : **TBA (Estimated fall 2000)**
- Origin: **US**
- US sales: **N/A**
- US retail price: **TBA (estimated to retail between $250 & $300)**
- Worldwide sales: **N/A**
- US titles: **N/A**
- Worldwide titles: **N/A**
- Tech partners: **Intel, nVidia (unconfirmed)**



RUMORED TECH SPECS:

- CPU: **500 MHz Intel processor**
- GPU: **nVidia GeForce graphics processor (unconfirmed)**
- RAM: **Internal hard drive (memory TBA — estimated at 6 or 8 Gigabytes)**
- OS: **Modified Windows 2000 operating system**
- Online: **56K built-in modem**
- Drives: **DVD-ROM with special proprietary coding to protect against piracy**

Ratings:

Demonstrable hardware power:
Microsoft has not even admitted the system exists, coyly saying only that "we have made no announcement about that," never mind shown as much as a tech demo. But we have seen the power of X-Box's rumored graphics chip, the nVidia GeForce 256. At 15 million polygons per second, the chipset also takes on transform and lighting responsibilities, freeing the CPU to handle AI and advanced physics models.

Future software prognosis:
There is no current library of specific X-Box titles announced, but soon after the system is announced the first X-Box enabled PC games, which should run on both X-Box and PC, will be released. By the 2000 holiday season, some experts expect most PC games to be X-Box compliant.

Marketing muscle:
Considering how much it will cost to bring this project to fruition, even for Microsoft, you can bet a comprehensive plan will be in place to convince consumers that X-Box is a smart buy. Whether that marketing push will come from Microsoft itself, or X-Box hardware partners like Dell or Gateway is unclear, however.

Overall future prognosis:
If Microsoft and its partners can deliver something that appeals to traditional console buyers, and can put games in place that are competitive with PlayStation2 and Dolphin, this machine certainly has a fighting chance. However, there are problems that will need to be solved first. With an open architecture system, multiple manufacturers, and the glaring fact that PC games consistently ship with bugs, the "Windows people" have more to sort out than a launch date.

Final score: Too early for review

Bottom line: Bill Gates didn't become king of the computer world by chance, and while the company's game division has taken its lumps, the fact is this: when Microsoft enters a market, it doesn't aim for second place.

Best available PC games

HARDWARE ROUND-UP

Nintendo 64

- Launch: **June 23, 1996**
- US release: **Sept. 29, 1996**
- Origin: **Japan**
- US sales: **12 million**
- Worldwide sales: **24.1 million (as of March 31, 1999)**
- US titles: **200+**
- Worldwide titles: **N/A**
- US retail price: **$99**

TECH SPECS AT A GLANCE:

- CPU: **64-bit MIPS R4300 RISC @ 93.75 MHz**
- GPU: **64-bit RISC graphics co-processor @ 62.5 MHz**
- RAM: **4 MB RAM, internal data bus is 128 bits wide**
  Rambus DRAM subsystem enabling transfers up to 562.5MB/sec.
  8-bit Rambus bus @ 500MHz maximum

Ratings:

Demonstrable hardware power:
★★★☆☆

Despite the recent growth in cartridge memory sizes (games now average around 32 megs of ROM) and new cartridge memory-compression techniques, the games on N64 just haven't gotten any better-looking in the last couple of years. Only with the 4MB expansion pak have there been any real improvements. This machine has peaked.

Current software library:
★★★☆☆

While there's no doubting the quality of Miyamoto's and Rare's games, the truly exceptional titles on N64 have been few and far between. There haven't been enough solid four-star titles such as *World Driver Championship* or *Rogue Squadron* in between the big hits.

Future software prognosis:
★☆☆☆☆

When does a console appear to be at the end of its lifecycle? When it starts to get the ports from other consoles. (Remember *Bonk's Adventures* for Super NES? How about *WipeOut* for Saturn?) Original, innovative titles are becoming harder to find, and now some of the best looking titles are PlayStation ports and franchises — *Resident Evil 2*, *Destruction Derby 64*, *Ridge Racer 64*, and dare we say *Road Rash*? Sure, there's *Zelda Gaiden*, and maybe another Rare hit or two (*Perfect Dark* and *Banjo Twooie*, probably), but with even Rare working on Dolphin projects, dwindling third-party support is causing N64 to look older faster than the more elderly PlayStation.

Marketing muscle:
★★★★☆

Nintendo will push this system hard for the holiday season: with $150 million in their second-half marketing strategy, don't expect the company to roll over to Dreamcast and PlayStation. The company is spending $12 million on the launch of *Donkey Kong 64* alone, including trailers in movie theaters and billboards. This exposure, the franchise's strong reputation and recognition among gamers of all ages, and (perhaps) a lack of choices for players, has led Nintendo to predict sales of 2.7 million units between its launch on November 22 and the new year.

Overall future prognosis:
★☆☆☆☆

With Dolphin in the works, the N64 hardware seemingly maxed out, and the cartridge format looking less and less desirable to publishers everyday — we're expecting the N64 software market to dry up by the end of 2000.

Final score: ★★☆☆☆

Bottom line: You're not going to get *GoldenEye*, *Zelda*, or *Mario* anywhere else. But if you've lived this long without them, do you need them now? On the upside, though, the system is only $99 and most of the best games are already in the Players' Choice discount promotion.

5 best available Nintendo 64 games

- **LEGEND OF ZELDA:** OCARINA OF TIME
- **GOLDENEYE 007**
- **MARIO 64**
- **SAN FRANCISCO RUSH 64**
- **WAVERACE**

5 most anticipated Nintendo 64 games

- **ZELDA GAIDEN**
- **PERFECT DARK**
- **BANJO TWOOIE**
- **RESIDENT EVIL 2**
- **UNANNOUNCED STAR WARS:** EPISODE ONE SHOOTER

PlayStation

- Launch: **Dec. 3, 1994**
- US release: **Sept. 9, 1995**
- Origin: **Japan**
- US sales: **21.2 million (as of 10/1/99)**
- Worldwide sales: **62.9 million shipped as of 8/1/99**
- US titles: **661 (as of 6/1/99)**
- Worldwide titles: **662, Europe (PAL); 2,156, Japan**
- US retail price: **$99**

TECH SPECS AT A GLANCE:

- CPU: **32-bit RISC processor @ 33.8688 MHz**
- RAM: **2MB main RAM**
  1MB video RAM
  CD-ROM Drive

Ratings:

Demonstrable hardware power:
★★☆☆☆

The genius behind Ken Kutaragi's system design is evident in PlayStation's longevity. In the five-year life of PlayStation, developers have continually proved that there's still more processing power to exploit, and today's games look dramatically better than those of 1995. With the advent of PlayStation2, however, the larger dev teams from companies such as Namco, Capcom, Konami, and Square have moved on, and at this stage, the big development effort required to break new ground for PlayStation are no longer financially practical; companies like LucasArts are canceling titles because they aren't technologically viable.

Current Software Library:
★★★★☆

If we gave Sony a nickel every time we thought we'd seen "the last great PlayStation game," we'd owe them a quarter, maybe two. With plenty of variety and more than 500 titles available, PlayStation has the best game library around, hands down (even if the best two individual games are for Nintendo). With limited exceptions (most recently *Gran Turismo* and *Crash Team Racing*), there's been a lack of great first-party games, but Sony's third-party publishers have more than risen to the challenge. One only need look at *Resident Evil 3*, *Dino Crisis*, and *Medal of Honor* to find the best new action/adventures this holiday season, something Dreamcast is definitely lacking.

Future software prognosis:
★☆☆☆☆

Unfortunately for PlayStation, the arrival of PlayStation2 next year means this holiday season should finally mark the last of the AAA titles for the ol' PSX. Of course, you can bet Sony will continue to support the system with games designed for your little brother. To *Lomax the Lemming III*, we say no.

Marketing muscle:
★★★★☆

According to Sony, since the price drop to $99, PlayStations are flying off shelves. This holiday season, the system is backed by the 1999 $150 million marketing budget and *Gran Turismo 2*, and we believe that massive third-party support, including the return of venerable series such as *Tomb Raider*, *Resident Evil*, *NHL 2000*, and 989 Studios' *GameDay* makes PlayStation's last big holiday season a great one.

Overall future prognosis:
★★☆☆☆

Considering the huge installed base, the lower price, and massive software library, PlayStation will ride out 2000 like a great baseball player on the verge of retirement — enjoying one more easy year in the sun, knowing full well it is the last. As PlayStation2 is backwards compatible, Sony would have you believe that PlayStation hardware will still be of merit. But considering the kind of support PlayStation will begin to get next year (dare we utter the foul term "edutainment"?), that is not going to be the case. Expect PlayStation to take the place NES did when Genesis arrived: the perfect system for little brothers and sisters everywhere.

Final score: ★★☆☆☆

Bottom line: Sony's first entry into the videogame console market has been an astounding success, with a longevity we never expected, and a legacy that will clearly see it enter the pantheon of classic systems.

5 best available PlayStation games

- **TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATEBOARDER**
- **TEKKEN** (SERIES)
- **RESIDENT EVIL** (SERIES)
- **GRAN TURISMO**
- **CRASH TEAM RACING**

5 most anticipated PlayStation games

- **GRAN TURISMO 2** (AVAILABLE 12/8/99)
- **TENCHU 2**
- **FINAL FANTASY IX**
- **SPIDERMAN**
- **CHRONO CROSS**

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Finals

Holiday releases are in full swing, and we'd like to take a moment to point out that we review more titles than any other magazine — just thought you'd like to know

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Nintendo 64

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■ Without a doubt the deepest 3D fighting game ever (and arguably the deepest fighting game of *any* kind), *VF3tb*'s only problem is that its graphics are three years old

■ Still, it's not like the game looks *bad* at all — in fact, certain stages are nearly as impressive now as they were then

■ Dreamcast

Virtua Fighter 3tb

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Sega AM2**

The reigning king shows a few wrinkles

When Yu Suzuki and Sega's AM2 division first unveiled the Model 3 arcade system and *Virtua Fighter 3*, it was one of the defining moments in the history of gaming. No game before it had ever boasted so many polygons, looked so sharp, included so much visual detail, or simply moved as well and controlled so fluidly.

That, however, was three years ago. Model 3-level graphics have long since been upstaged by numerous advances in hardware — including, ironically, Dreamcast — and although it remains a remarkably beautiful-looking game, it's hard to ignore the fact that there *are* more graphically impressive titles out there. Further, its classic martial-arts approach doesn't offer much in the way of innovation or originality, and the series' history on consoles brings its own baggage: a disappointingly blocky version of *VF2* for Saturn, then a rushed version of *VF3tb* for the Japanese Dreamcast launch that was not only missing a simple Versus mode, but also sported a few bugs.

NOTHING COMPARES 2 YU

Virtua Fighter creator and all-around gaming guru Yu Suzuki (who's currently — and still — at work on *Shenmue*, which began life as *Virtua Fighter RPG*), had this to say once: "My ideal is that if you take the number of family members and subtract one, that is the number of TVs needed in the house." Um, OK...

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The Rating System

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

★★★★★ **Revolutionary**
★★★★☆ **Excellent**
★★★☆☆ **Good**
★★☆☆☆ **Fair**
★☆☆☆☆ **Bad**

Denotes a review of a Japanese product

■ The game's animation and dead-on responsive control should be appreciated by anyone with even a passing interest in fighting games

Virtua Fighter is a game for the committed perfectionist, not button mashers

On that score at least, the re-tooled US version is much improved, as it does include a Versus mode, and seems to have had a few other kinks worked out as well. The full US release also includes the Team Battle mode, the normal Arcade mode, and a Training mode, plus a few movies to sit and watch, a couple of alternate costumes for various characters, and you can now play as Dural by using a code. Once again, however, this is little better than standard for a modern fighting game.

However, as the series has progressed through the years, its true strength has increasingly been in its depth, not in its breadth, and in this respect *VF3tb* remains unsurpassed. The simple fact is that mastering *Virtua Fighter* almost approaches a true martial art in and of itself, and any one character of its familiar roster can boast a longer list of moves, counter moves, and techniques than the entire lineup found in some other brawlers. You have to practice not only button and keypad combinations, but also the correct timing of those combinations, as well as being mindful of your character's stance, the angle at which you face your opponent, and even the terrain.

Virtua Fighter is a game for the committed perfectionist, not button mashers. Although this does give it a steep learning curve, any of the faithful can probably tell you — with some measure of pride and in great detail — about the first time they successfully pulled off a reversal, or a senbon punch (and don't even get us started about obsessive Akira devotees).

And frankly, that's the crux of it: although *VF3tb* is clearly showing its age, it's still the most comprehensive and deep 3D fighting game in existence, no question. Either that flies with you, or all in all you'd rather be playing something that really shows off your new console, like *Soul Calibur* or *Power Stone*. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A peek beneath the exterior shows it's still got all the right moves — the question is, will you look?

■ The addition of a Versus mode (and clearing up a few graphics bugs) constitutes the difference between the Japanese and US versions

Pen Pen TrIceLon

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **General Ent. Co. / Team LandHo!**

■ ***Pen Pen* isn't a bad multiplayer game, but the single-player mode doesn't have much depth**

One part *Mario Kart* and one part *Sonic R*, *Pen Pen TrIceLon* is one of those rare games that manages to mix elements of previous titles without being a blatant clone, but without being especially notable either.

At its core, *Pen Pen* is a racing game with the ultimate goal of simply finishing in first place. There are plenty of characters to chose from and a number of tracks, some of which are initially hidden. What sets *Pen Pen* apart is the style of play. Instead of racing around in vehicles, you are racing through a winter triathlon — hence the name "triCElon."

Because there are no vehicles, your characters must move under their own power. You do this by rhythmically pressing the A button. Simply smashing the button quickly will not achieve results — there's a definite rhythm to it. On the easiest levels, the game will provide an on-screen guide.

Characters also have a "bump" move that is useful when you need to push an opponent out of the way. This must be used wisely, however, because a missed bump will slow your character down.

As a single-player game, *Pen Pen*'s lack of challenge and general graphic functionality definitely leave something to be desired. *Pen Pen*'s one value is as a multiplayer title, and it supports up to four players at a time, making *Pen Pen* is an decent party game, if not an especially memorable one. — *Adam Pavlacka*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: If you regularly play games with a group, pick it up — otherwise make it a rental

Suzuki Alstare Extreme Racing

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Ubi Soft** ■ Developer: **Criterion Studios**

■ **As motorcycle racing games go, it doesn't look bad, but there's nothing else going for it**

Proof positive that exciting new systems don't always mean exciting new games, *Suzuki Alstare Extreme Racing* has the Suzuki team license (obviously) and some fairly decent graphics, but that's about it. In fact, on the whole, it's about as generic as they come.

The game follows the standard race structure: start with one bike and three tracks, and if you can accumulate enough points (ten for first place, six for second, etc.) to place first in the overall standings, you unlock the next set of tracks and new bikes. It enables you to adjust a bike's attributes — all three of them: power, steering, and brakes — on a sliding scale so that pumping up one lowers the others (although you can safely forget about needing brakes, since you'll never use them). Then, as you move up in the competition bracket, the bikes get faster and the other riders get better. Oh, it also offers some multiplayer racing.

And that's about it. The races begin by being ridiculously easy, and there's very little challenge until about halfway through when the other riders start deliberately bumping you. Even so, once you get the hang of a given track — and you wind up racing on many of the same tracks over and over again — it's not hard to stay out front, despite the nearly primitive physics model. There's a vague sense of speed, and the control isn't bad, but mostly it's just pretty boring. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: "Extreme"? Who are you trying to kid?

TNN Motorsports Hardcore Heat

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **ASC Games** ■ Developer: **CSK Research Institute**

■ ***Hardcore Heat* is a terribly exciting game — if you have the reflexes of a two-toed sloth**

Hardcore Heat looks good and handles decently, but one minor problem prevents it from being a top-notch title: there is no feeling of speed. None. Although the speedometer may read 90mph, you would swear that your car had trouble hitting 30mph. Grandma could drive to church faster than one of these race cars.

On the up side, the game does have a solid physics model, some interesting tracks, and plenty of options. One nice touch is the AI. The computer opponents don't simply drive faster on the harder difficulty settings, they actually drive smarter. Unfortunately, all of this is just not enough to make the game compelling. By failing to convey the proper sense of speed, *Hardcore Heat* loses any appeal it may have had, simply becoming another has-been racing title. — *Adam Pavlacka*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: If you absolutely must play an off-road racing game, go ahead and rent this one. If you want to buy, bide your time and wait for *Sega Rally 2*, a much better game all around.

■ **Dreamcast**

Toy Commander

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **No Cliché**

You want different? You want strange?

■ **Enter the world of dangerous toys, and prepare for one heck of a ride — not to mention some evil teddy bears**

Ah, now here's a breath of fresh air. Nearly everything about *Toy Commander* is original and appealing. Developer No Cliché has lived up to its name, creating a primary-colored game world in which your toys are angry with you, and you have to fight them to regain control of the house. Common household objects like cereal boxes and kitchen appliances become fortresses, and nothing is so dangerous as a bottle rocket, or even a bent soda can lid.

Each room is dominated by a boss toy, who subjects you to various challenges which range from simply destroying something, to races, to finding different objects hidden around the room. Complete these in a given amount of time and you fight the boss, who then joins you in the struggle against the evil teddy bear that rules them all.

But if *Toy Commander* is simple in theory, the actual practice is something else, since all you have at your disposal are more toys. So, you pilot a model plane around a flooded kitchen, sinking toy subs to save a toy boat. Or, you take control of a tiny tank and helicopter to stop an inflatable dinosaur from stomping a makeshift, miniature city to dust. If that sounds like a hoot, well, yes it is, and the game carries off its premise to the hilt and with a completely straight face (well, almost).

If there's trouble in paradise, it's that success in a given mission is often a matter of trial and error (instructions are often vague), and playing certain stages over and over can grow tiresome. Also, the difficulty level varies widely, with seemingly impossible tasks followed by something so simple that you crack it the first try. Still, you owe it to yourself to try this one. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Why are you still reading this? There are toys to liberate — go!

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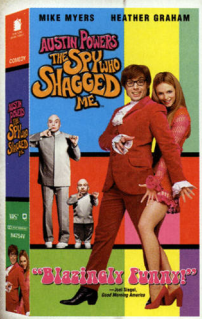

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■ Players will need to use each of the five characters at different times to reach new areas

■ The incredible textures and lighting effects make *DK64* one of the prettiest games on N64

■ Nintendo 64

Donkey Kong 64

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

The cynical may sneer, but here's one big ape who's still got it

The most anticipated N64 game of the season may look like *Banjo-Kazooie* at first glance — and second glance, and even third glance. It even feels like *Banjo-Kazooie* when you first start to play it. But rest assured, despite the similarities, *Donkey Kong 64* stands on its own with stunning graphics and massive levels.

The game comes with a 4MB Expansion Pak, but unlike most games, the extra memory isn't used for a high-resolution mode. Instead, Rare utilized the memory to create a vast array of colorful textures for a different feel in each world. The lighting effects, transparencies, and plethora of graphical touches make the game look fantastic, and the extra memory brings it all together in some of the biggest levels ever seen in a Nintendo title.

The game starts when K. Rool, Donkey Kong's longtime enemy, comes to DK Island and steals Donkey's golden banana hoard. He also imprisons Donkey's friends, Diddy, Tiny, Lanky, and Chunky. Donkey must free his pals, who then become available to play, as well as collect his missing golden bananas. And so you jump, swing, shoot, and pound your way through eight different levels, and each character has special abilities and items that lets them unlock new areas. Many of these areas can be seen early in the game but can't be reached until later, after gathering the appropriate characters and items. Some may find this frustrating, although it seems to be an increasingly common feature in Rare's titles.

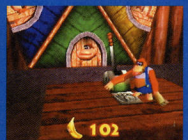
Each character has to find five bananas in each level, a total of 200 tasks to complete. In other words, this game is huge. Maybe too huge: at some points we felt the sheer number of bananas and coins to find made it less a game and more an interactive egg hunt. Luckily, you don't have to accomplish every goal to finish.

Still, the tight control, smooth framerates, and fun mini-games (several are hidden throughout, including the original *Donkey Kong*), as well as the rich multi-player options (deathmatches or playing some of the mini-games in multiplayer) assure *DK64*'s status as one of the best N64 games this season. — *Norman Chido*

■ Tree climbing, swinging, and a variety of attacks make up the 109 moves among all five characters in the game

ARCADE FUN

Hidden away in the game lies an unassuming arcade game. However, activating this game triggers one of the coolest additions to *DK64* — an arcade-perfect version of the original *Donkey Kong*. If you finish enough levels without dying, you'll even earn a golden banana.



■ Yep, Donkey Kong has never gotten over his obsessions with barrels, bananas, and not wearing pants

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: If you think it's just a prettier, bigger *Banjo-Kazooie*, you'd only be part right. The game is a lot more.

■ Nintendo 64

Army Men: Sarge's Heroes

■ Publisher: 3DO ■ Developer: 3DO

Bloodless combat can't heat up plastic passion

3DO's little green army marches on with *Sarge's Heroes*, the first N64 game based in 3DO's world of plastic warfare. Your goal is to use a clever variety of weapons to mow down the opposing Tan Army forces while rescuing POWs and exploring the colossal environments of our dimension as seen from the viewpoint of a two-inch-high soldier.

It's clear that 3DO is aiming for the simplicity with the control: like *Zelda*, a context-sensitive action button is used for a variety of activities. However, the analog stick is not as precise as it should be, and small moves are often frustratingly difficult, making you feel clumsy and slow. Coupled with some minor camera problems, this makes the platform elements of the game tough, as it's all too easy to misjudge timing and perspective, landing on the ground instead of on that ledge you were aiming for.

The camera takes getting used to — it's sluggish (you move faster than it, so you somtimes have to wait for it to catch up), and probably the least intuitive of any 3D game we've seen. The end result is that you're constantly being shot by enemies you can't even see yet.

Still, the levels are well designed (and huge), and fighting through each mission takes planning, stealth, and (because of the camera) a little luck. Half the battles take place in the plastic world, and half in our world. Fighting on a gigantic bathroom sink or across a titanic backyard is a novel concept, but you may find that the more "normal" combat levels of the game fall flat in comparison.

The mammoth rubber ducks and house-sized Christmas presents look nice, even without help from the Expansion Pak, but the levels set in the universe of the Army Men are pretty standard WWII fare. Still, there's plenty to see and do here, if you can deal with the camera and control frustrations.

— Chris Kramer

■ A sandbox becomes a sprawling, deadly battlefield when you're two inches tall and made of plastic

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: The camera and control will probably make you throw down the controller in disgust every now and then, but if you can get past that, *Army Men* delivers some fun.

BattleTanx: Global Assault

■ Platform: Nintendo 64 ■ Publisher: 3DO ■ Developer: 3DO

The word "tank" conjures up images of slow-moving, rugged behemoths that can punch holes through walls, crash over cement barricades, and generally go wherever they want. 3DO doesn't seem to like this basic definition, but *whatever.*

Like the original *Battletanx*, gameplay in *Global Assault* consists of performing certain tasks such as escorting convoys, annihilating everything in sight, destroying enemy fortresses, and rescuing prisoners, all the while racing around the battlefield at a frenzied pace (the tanks in *Global Assault* resemble their real-life counterparts in appearance only — the M1A1 Abrams handles like a dirt bike!). Unlike the original, the battlefield here is stretched across the entire Earth, not just North America. This gives you the chance to reduce large amounts of English, French, and German real estate to rubble while gawking at historical landmarks. Once again, the mechanics and control are solid, while the game as a whole doesn't last very long.

You also get multiplayer modes like Deathmatch to Capture the Flag, which are fun but nothing special. *— Doug Trueman*

■ **Inferno: The fastest flamethrower the world has ever seen**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Players looking for mass destruction will enjoy this title, but gamers looking for more realistically paced action and strategy should wait until *Tokyo Wars* hits Dreamcast.

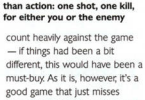
Rainbow Six

■ Platform: Nintendo 64 ■ Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment ■ Developer: Saffire

Usually an N64 port of a PC game is a bad idea, but in this case, Saffire managed to take most of the great stuff from Red Storm's *Rainbow Six* and make an almost-great N64 game. You command Rainbow Six, an international organization fighting terrorist activity throughout the world. Before entering one of the 12 missions, you lay out an attack plan, choose which operatives to take into action, equip them with appropriate gear, and split them up into teams.

Then the real strategy kicks in, as you lay out actions using blueprints and early enemy intelligence on the placement of hostages and guards. The meat of the game is in playing through the mission yourself, however. You assume command of one of the four teams, kill terrorists, disarm bombs, and rescue hostages in a first-person view with beautiful graphics.

The game suffers from some disappointing problems, though. As many as four players can go through a mission cooperatively, but there's no Adversarial mode — a huge disappointment. Also, the game doesn't come with any pre-made mission plans, which means you're forced to either create your own, or go in commando-style. These flaws count heavily against the game — if things had been a bit different, this would have been a must-buy. As it is, however, it's a good game that just misses greatness. *— Mike Wolf*



■ ***Rainbow Six* is more sim than action: one shot, one kill, for either you or the enemy**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: A fantastic game with some significant flaws, *Rainbow Six* is worth playing, but it's not a must-have.

Rocket: The Robot on Wheels

■ Platform: Nintendo 64 ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Developer: Sucker Punch

Perhaps the quintessential "super happy fun game" to ever hit a Nintendo console, *Rocket: The Robot On Wheels* is the most sickeningly sweet, innocent title we've ever seen. Its childish theme and cartoonish characters suggest that it's intended for a preschool audience, but the difficulty of some of the puzzles argues otherwise.

After two Attention Deficit Disorder robots run amok the night before the debut of a new high-tech theme park, Rocket has to repair the damage that has been done and return the grounds to working order. Much like in *Mario 64*, Rocket wheels around an impressively large 3D world playing scores of minigames when he's not serving as an automated mechanic. Tokens and ride tickets must be found to unlock further areas of the park, but the tickets are carefully hidden or protected by ingenious puzzles. Some are simple, like finding missing pieces of machinery, but some are downright devilish, like activating a robotic dolphin and jumping it through floating rings.

Rocket is obviously intended to be the antithesis to the gore and violence of other games, and its relaxing, gentle style would be more successful if Sucker Punch had slightly tightened the control and camera work As it is, it's OK, but no better. *— Doug Trueman*

■ **Look at all the colors, children**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: *Rocket* is an attractive, almost anti-violent 3D puzzler with graphics intended for kids, but with some puzzles whose level of challenge is more appropriate for adults.

WCW Mayhem

■ Platform: **Nintendo 64**
■ Publisher: **EA** ■ Developer: **Kodiak Interactive**

■ **Yes indeed, that's one gimpy-looking Diamond Dallas Page**

It's sad when a game with this much hype ends up as just another clone in the genre's history. *WCW Mayhem* does sport one new gimmick that has the illusion of innovation, but there's nothing here that wrestling fans haven't already seen and long since grown bored with.

All of the wrestlers you would expect are included as well as the ability to edit a wrestler, but although you get to choose the physical attributes of your creation, you then merely slap an existing move set on top of them — two years ago that might have been pretty exciting, but now?

Presentation is half-hearted at best with insanely repetitive play-by-play, tinny theme songs, and lackluster ring intros that add very little. The touted motion-captured animation does make the wrestlers look good while they are actually performing moves, but the rest of the time they walk like robots with something jammed up their — er — nether regions.

Awful collision detection and a cheap, primitive grappling engine make the actual wrestling pointless, and the much-vaunted out-of-the-ring areas (locker rooms, parking lots, etc.) are nothing more than boxes with bad textures on them that add nothing to gameplay. — *Daniel Erickson*

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: If this game existed in a total vacuum, it would barely pass — in the face of *Wrestlemania 2000* and even *Attitude*, it's simply inexcusable

Wrestlemania 2000

■ Platform: **Nintendo 64**
■ Publisher: **THQ** ■ Developer: **AKI**

■ **Hopefully, this will be the title that stuns other companies into rethinking wrestling games**

Based on the *WCW/NWO Revenge* engine, but with upgrades in all the right places, *Wrestlemania 2000* is far and away the best wrestling title available this year. Spearheaded by gameplay that actually re-creates the feel of the WWF (rather than merely showcasing its cosmetic appeal) this year's entry from THQ features the best cage matches seen on a console and the deepest create-a-wrestler mode ever.

The AI has been improved remarkably since *Revenge* and now perfectly reflects the "rules" wrestling is supposed to follow. There's no way to win a tag-team match without either pinning someone right in your corner or taking out your opponent's partner, and, if your opponent gets off a huge series of moves, the best strategy really is to roll out of the ring and take a breather.

This realism blankets every aspect of the game. Wrestlers sell their moves, managers step in to help out in the very likely event of outside interference, and your opponent will wrest weapons out of your hands and turn them against you. Really, the only letdown in the cart is the sound, which continues to be far sub-standard. — *Daniel Erickson*

NextGen ★★★★☆

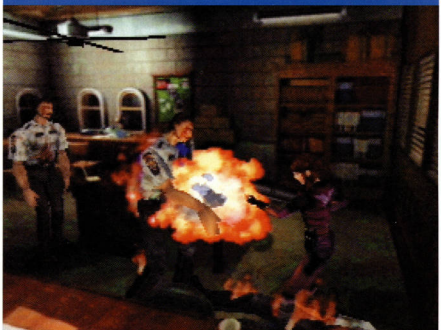
Bottom Line: Wonderful gameplay even overshadows the lack of quality audio

■ **Nintendo 64**

Resident Evil 2

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Angel Studios**

Old evil is still good evil



■ **If there's one thing we're absolutely sure of, it's that few things are more satisfying than taking a shotgun to some zombies. Well, maybe blasting Nazis — ooo hey, how about *Nazi zombies*!**

It's taken almost two years, but finally Capcom's million-plus-selling horror adventure game has made it to Nintendo 64. The story is still the same: you play Leon or Claire and must escape from Raccoon City, which has been infested by zombies. Along the way, you'll need to solve the mystery of what exactly happened to the city, as well as deal with several otherworldly horrors that would like nothing more than to rip the very flesh from your bones — with their teeth.

N64 owners who have been craving this type of game will be happy to know that almost everything has survived the port — including the FMV — and some things have actually been improved. Notably, the in-game graphics are much sharper than the original PlayStation fare. Everything from the zombies to the lickers to the main characters look noticeably higher resolution and cleaner. On the down side, while the voices are all in the game, the compression scheme that was used sometimes makes it sound like people are underwater.

Overall, though, this is the same great game we played at the beginning of 1998. For gamers who haven't given the series a try, it still packs an intriguing storyline, plenty of shocks and scares, and loads of puzzles to solve. — *Blake Fischer*

■ **It's remarkable just how close the graphics are to the original PlayStation version — who'd have thought you could cram so much data onto a cart?**

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Of course, with *RE3* coming out on PlayStation at the same time as this one, the window of opportunity on this game has narrowed a lot. Still, if you only have a N64 and you want a title that's a little more mature, check this one out.

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■ PlayStation

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis

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

Been there. Shot that.

■ The world of *RE3* is littered with plenty of new enemies. We have no idea what these are supposed to be — grasshoppers gone bad?

■ Carlos seems like a nice enough guy, but when you put him behind a fully loaded machine gun in a room full of zombies, he's all business

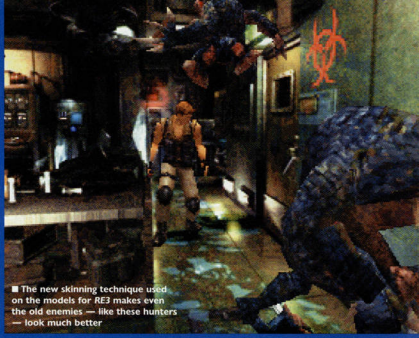
Resident Evil 3 has a lot going for it. First of all, it's the best *Resident Evil* yet. Almost everything (from the voice acting to the graphics) shows an improvement upon the prior installment in the series, and for experienced players the difficulty has even been ramped up a bit. The problem is that even with all of the improvements, sometimes you feel like you're just going through the motions.

Part of the problem is the storyline. This time around, you play Jill Valentine (from *RE1*), and you start the game in the middle of Raccoon City just before the events of *RE2* occur. Needless to say, near the beginning you see many of the same areas as in *RE2*, but as the game progresses, you end up being in lots of original locations. The idea of the game is simple: Jill must escape from Raccoon City. As she tries to make her way out past zombies, hell hounds, and a really ugly giant

■ Nemesis will show up from time to time to fight you. Many of these times, you'll be given the option of running away, which will prompt a chase

SURVIVAL CAMP

Beat the game and you'll be treated to a brand-new mini-game titled "The Mercenaries." In this game, you get play as one of the Umbrella soldiers and must make your way across town with limited time and ammo. Catch is, the more monsters you kill, the more time you get, so you must learn to balance your need to run with your homicidal impulses.



■ The new skinning technique used on the models for *RE3* makes even the old enemies — like these hunters — look much better

worm-thing, she must also contend with the mysterious adversary known as Nemesis, who shows up periodically and wants nothing more than to kill her.

It's a good start, and it's pretty involving, but the theme of escape isn't really all that compelling for more than a few hours. There are a few mysteries out there to be solved, but none are very pressing (except, perhaps: Who is Nemesis?) and, basically, you know many of the answers if you've played the first two games. This familiarity with others in the series also hurts this game because you definitely get a sense of "been there and done that." You enter the same rooms with the same music and the same damn zombies. It's a little tiresome, and the levels are also now so huge that running back and forth can get old (although, thankfully, there is an automap).

■ While many of the puzzles are much more grounded in the real world, there are still some that lack believability, like this one where you must replace bronze items on the wall

You enter the same rooms with the same music and the same damn zombies — it's all little tiresome

■ What would a *RE* game be without some sort of harmless creature horribly mutated into a thing of terror?

Where the game has seen a lot of improvement is in the design of the puzzles. As in *Dino Crisis*, the puzzles are more adventure-game-like and require some brainpower to solve. Unfortunately, most of them are solved by items you find in the same room as the puzzle (we wonder if the designers were afraid that real puzzles would turn off gamers?). Still, you get a much better feel for being in a real-world situation than the puzzles in the last two games (no more locks with hearts on them).

At the end of the day, though, while the *Resident Evil* series is still fun, the real problem is that we're just not scared anymore. Sure, things burst through windows and startle you, but there's so much available ammo that you're never really defenseless. In a sense, survival is not really an issue anymore (except when fighting the bosses), and with the loss of this tension the game loses a little of its immersiveness. It sure is nice to whup some zombie ass, though. — *Blake Fischer*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: While a little light on story and not as scary as before, *RE3* still manages to be one of the better adventure games on PlayStation. Go figure.

■ The backgrounds in *RE3* are far more animated than in the previous games. Expect to see flames, water, or electricity animated in the background wherever you go

Grandia

■ Platform: **PlayStation**
■ Publisher: **SCEA** ■ Developer: **Game Arts**

■ **Highly detailed environments and an engaging storyline make this a title worth grabbing for**

When *Grandia* was released for Saturn two years ago, it instantly became one of the main reasons to own the system — even after it died. Unfortunately, the game never saw release on our side of the Pacific, but now PlayStation owners are getting lucky. Thanks to SCEA, *Grandia*, with its huge 3D environments and quirky but endearing 2D characters, is finally available in the US.

As Justin, a boy with a knack for mischief and a mind for adventure, you begin with a casual quest to follow in his missing father's footsteps. Along with his painfully cute childhood friend, Sue, they set out into the land and stumble onto a bigger adventure than either of them ever dreamed. Sounds simple, right? Well, it is, but this simplicity is *Grandia*'s charm. The engaging and humorous dialogue is very well translated (a marked departure from the barely functional job in SCEA's *Legend of Legaia*) and Justin's world is massive, challenging gamers for a good 50+ hours of exploration.

There is a hitch in the game's battle engine: similar to *FFVIII*'s Guardian Forces, you must use individual spells for them to increase levels, meaning you're going to be fighting *a lot* just to make your magic worth using. Add to this some questionable voice acting and a less-than-slick framerate, and *Grandia* just misses the five-star rating. But with its strong characters and engaging storyline, you won't mind a bit. — *Francesca Reyes*

NextGen ★★★★☆

The Bottom Line: Light-hearted, but incredibly involving, *Grandia* proves to be worth the wait.

NASCAR 2000

■ Platform: **PlayStation**
■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **Stormfront Studios**

■ **Someone needs to tell EA Sports that the grunge look is out**

NASCAR 2000 has all the gameplay elements should that make it a classic: solid control, a wide variety of cars and tracks, a great sense of speed, and lots of customizable options. Official tracks can be raced from 3% to 100% of their actual length, so you can run as many as 200 laps if you want to. There are 16 cars on the course, creating a very strong sense of immersion as you're constantly in a pack of vehicles, dodging, turning, slipstreaming behind other racers, and avoiding collisions at breakneck speeds. But with all of this the game still fails. Why? Someone forgot to tell EA that decent graphics and sound are required in this day and age.

Although we'd choose solid gameplay over flashy graphics any day of the week, EA's latest title is so lacking in visual and auditory interest that we're wondering if they're covertly pouring all of their graphics R&D resources into a secret PS2 game. *NASCAR 2000* looks so horribly grungy, blocky and and pixelated that it practically resembles a first-generation 3DO title, and commentators Benny Parsons and Bob Jenkins are wasted as they repeat the same inane phrases over and over during the course of the same race. — *Doug Trueman*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: This would have been a terrific title several years ago, but now it looks and sounds incredibly dated.

■ **PlayStation**

Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage

■ Publisher: **SCEA** ■ Developer: **Insomniac**

Sony's baby dragon gets a little older but doesn't have to grow up

■ **He may be small, but he packs a serious flamethrower**

Insomniac Games proved last year that Naughty Dog isn't the only Universal developer that can crank out great-looking PlayStation games, and *Spyro 2* continues that tradition. This isn't a massive reworking, but it is a nice update to a youthful adventure.

While the cartoonish, colorful graphics and true 3D nature of the first *Spyro* were impressive, the gameplay was not that inspiring to anyone over the age of eight. It's still not the most challenging game, but the changes made here are for the better, including new, if not highly original, moves for the cute little dragon — He swims! He stomps the ground! — and a two-tiered quest designed to get casual gamers going in the game while providing a bit more of a challenge for more dedicated game players.

Mini-games have been added as well, with creative pauses such as racing and ice hockey breaking up the flow and cutting down on the repetitive burnout factor. These diversions can be a bit tricky, as the *Spyro* engine doesn't seem to have been created with things like two-on-two hockey in mind, but they're usually simple enough that players can get the hang of them quickly.

The central gameplay mechanics from the original hold true. You run amok, breathing fire on the bad guys, flying from perch to perch while trying to keep from falling to your death. Yes, now you're able to travel underwater and ride carts, but the game is essentially about collecting your MacGuffins and opening up portals to new areas. Of course, *Spyro*'s real strength lies in its amazing graphics, which are impressive even at this point in PlayStation's lifecycle. The bright, vivid colors and rounded funky angles bring to mind classic Warner animation. — *Chris Kramer*

■ **Swimming isn't that much different from flying, but the drops are a lot safer**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: *Spyro 2* feels like a kids' title, but it has more meat to it than the first, and the cute graphics may make your girlfriend finally stop cooing over those damn Pokémon.

■ PlayStation

Thousand Arms

■ Publisher: **Atlus** ■ Developer: **Red**

Who says gamers can't get a date?

This latest in a growing list of hybrid RPGs is, perhaps, the strangest yet. Get this: *Thousand Arms* is a combination RPG and that oddest of Japanese concepts: the dating simulator. You take the role of Meis, a "spiritual blacksmith." Weapon upgrades and spells are acquired by forging swords, but tapping into the spirits requires the help of a woman, and the more emotionally attached she is to you, the more powerful the weapons and spells you can forge.

For the most part, *Thousand Arms* is an above-average RPG. The story is practically generic — evil guy plots to take over the world, intrepid band of young adventurers stops him — but the graphics are exceptional, the voice acting isn't bad, and there are enough surprises in the dungeon designs to keep you thinking. Battles are as repetitive as usual, but at least most of them are short, and it offers a respectable 20 or 30 hours of gameplay.

And yes, a large part of that time is taken up by managing (there's no other word for it) relationships with a number of female characters by buying them gifts, playing games, and taking them on dates to raise your "intimacy level" and the power of the weapons you can forge. It's kinda weird telling practically every woman in the game that she alone is your one true love (and if you don't feel like a bit of a heel, shame on you), and it doesn't help that it's all on a barely adolescent level. Still, figuring out each girl's personality quirks and what she likes and doesn't like is oddly compulsive. If you've never tried this sort of game before, the novelty alone probably makes it worth your time.

— Jeff Lundrigan

■ Forge weapons, date women, save the world from evil — all in a day's work for a Spiritual Blacksmith

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Well made if breezily inconsequential, *Thousand Arms* straddles the line between being an enjoyable time-waster and a thoroughly engrossing game — either way, you can't miss.

No Fear Downhill Mountain Bike Racing

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

With the exception of dogsleds, we can safely assert that every racing sport known to man has been simulated on PlayStation. In this latest abstraction, you select from six riders (three male, three female) each with a "unique" skillset that includes power, stamina, recovery, and balance. A Career mode enables you to advance from amateur to pro, upgrading bike parts and unlocking new course segments as they progress. There's also Single Race, Time Trial, and two-player split-screen racing as well.

In the Career mode, you have to win three successive races (tournament style) to advance to the next track. There's no saving between heats, so if you screw up the final run it's back to the first heat again. You also only race one other rider at a time, which isn't too bad because the main challenge is really in the courses themselves.

While the game delivers a solid sense of speed, the controls lack polish. It's easy to get stuck on a corner in the course, and it's frustratingly difficult to simply turn your front wheel back on track. The variety of courses feature lush environments, but the average framerate, lighting, and models make for middle-of-the-pack graphics.

— Tom Russo

■ Not as exciting as most racing games, but at least it's more fun than *Running Wild*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: This downhill mountain-bike racer is quirky fun, but the limitations are enough to keep it at two stars

Suikoden II

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **Konami** ■ Developer: **KCET**

It's hard to pinpoint exactly why this game is so incredibly likeable. Maybe it's the refined 2D graphics that really show the expressiveness of each character. Maybe it's the multitude of options that you have in and out of battle. Or it could be the real connection you grow to have with the two main characters. But no matter how you slice it, *Suikoden II* improves tenfold over the original, making its mark on the RPG genre with expert storytelling, memorable characters and a good variety in gameplay. It's got plenty of secrets, multiple endings, and even cooking recipes!

And for fans who managed to collect all 108 Stars in the first game, you're able to load up old saves and reap your reward — we won't ruin it for you, but it's worth it. At its heart, *Suikoden II* portrays a deeply involving struggle between two best friends (finally, an RPG that isn't about simply killing a bad guy and saving the girl!) embroiled in all sorts of political and emotional conflicts. Quietly epic in scope but with moments of casual pace, this won't dazzle gamers with massive spells and a multitude of love triangles, but remains impressive and earns its place as a must-have RPG.

— Francesca Reyes

■ The 108 Stars of Destiny return to save the land from ruin and the occasional bad meal

NextGen ★★★★☆

The Bottom Line: One of the best RPGs to hit PlayStation this year. Buy it now.

TOCA 2: Touring Car Challenge

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

Driving-sim fans that snap the *TOCA 2* disc into their PlayStation are in for a treat. While the game is no *Gran Turismo*, the driving physics, depth of play, bountiful options, and precise gameplay make for the best racing title to come out since then.

The gameplay style here is truly that of a sim, and all of the cars that Codemasters licensed for the game can have their suspension and gearing tuned to the player's specifications. Combined with the well-modeled driving physics, *TOCA 2* creates a very intense driving experience, although one that takes practice to master. Weather plays its part, changing the way a car will handle on a given track and requiring you to plan for rain.

TOCA 2's high-resolution graphics run at 512x256 and really deliver a sharp image, showing off the tracks and car models beautifully. Car damage and realtime lighting add to the visual quality, and the game maintains a consistently high framerate, even in two-player split-screen mode.

— Rick Sanchez

■ A love of all things fast and challenging is a necessity for liking *TOCA 2*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom line: Hands down, *TOCA 2* one of the best touring-car sims available, and one of the best new driving games for PlayStation.

Finals

NHL FaceOff 2000

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **989 Studios** ■ Developer: **989 Studios**

■ **Very, very good turns out to be second best, but it is, after all, still very, very good**

Like last year, *FaceOff 2000* has all the options and details that gamers expect in a modern hockey game: all the play modes (exhibition, season, playoff), advanced controls (drop passes into one-timers), teams (including the Thrashers and international clubs), commentary and stats of any quality title.

More importantly, *989* has dramatically improved *FaceOff 2000* with far better animation and control, and the result is serious competition for EA's *NHL* series for the first time in years. Although the players are slightly blocky, the framerate never slips, keeping the action smooth and the control responsive (you never have to worry about skating those irritating circles around standing pucks). Passing is accurate for the most part, though you may find yourself passing to no one in particular when using the analog stick. Icon passing works well and should be used exclusively.

The game's basic hockey sense is right on target, too, with few bizarre goals, and a thankful lack of AI weirdness (no mindless backpasses on breakaways, etc.). As usual, the best way to score is off a rebound from a one-timer, but this is as hockey should be. Only the slightly muddy graphics and the fact that *NHL*'s control is tighter keep this title in second place. — *Jim Preston*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom line: An impressive effort. If you don't like the style of *NHL 2000*, this may be the one for you.

You Don't Know Jack

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **Sierra** ■ Developer: **Starsphere**

■ **The ultimate trivia game is now available for PlayStation — it's a party waiting to happen!**

Let's face it: everyone loves trivia. (Well, actually, 79.3% of the population loves trivia, according to a recent poll.) Ok, that's a lie, but it illustrates the point.) This game, which has been around on PC and Mac for years, is one of the best electronic trivia games ever: it's got a smart-ass host, excellent double-entendre questions, and enough variety to keep things interesting.

The game takes the format of a multiple-choice radio quiz show, and comes complete with hours and hours of narration (note to the hearing impaired: you need to be able to hear to play this game, or at least to enjoy the nasty comments made when you choose a wrong answer). Although most of the questions are multiple-choice, there are enough other types of questions to keep things interesting, like DisorDat (where you might have to decide which members of a group are funk stars, and which are former vice presidents).

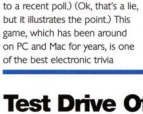
With support for three players (the multi-tap is supported, but three can play with two controllers) and two discs of questions, this game should rival *PaRappa* as one of the best PlayStation party games around. — *Chris Charla*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom line: With question topics like "Something fishy in Wanda," how can you *not* want this?

Test Drive Off-Road 3

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



■ **It's no *Cosmic Race*, but it ain't great, either**

The latest in this moderately successful *Test Drive* spin-off, *Test Drive Off-Road 3* is another PlayStation bump-'em jump-'em racer that doesn't quite make the grade, possibly because it uses a year-old engine.

Small touches, like water splashing around the wheels of a car, are missing, and the cars bounce off each other like they're made of foam. The graphics are repetitive and bland, but at least there's a good sense of speed, and the tracks seem wider than last year's "tube racer."

The physics engine is top-notch — it's possible to slide backward down a hill if you don't lightly tap the gas to retain traction — but (especially if you choose the wrong truck for the track) this can become very annoying — watching your vehicle coast in the wrong direction while the opposition dashes past isn't exactly thrilling.

The lead CPU vehicle often sprints to an insurmountable lead within moments of the starting gun, and catching up is nearly impossible on any difficulty setting. Not exactly a sim, and not exactly an arcade game, this is competent, but not tons of fun. — *Doug Trueman*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: *Test Drive Off-Road 3* is fairly well done, but there are just not enough new features here to raise the game's rating above "fair."

■ **PlayStation**

NHL 2000

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

EA delivers a bone-crushing hockey blast

EA's forgotten more about making fantastic hockey games than most companies will ever know, and it shows in this stellar effort. All the usual EA bells and whistles are present, of course, but EA has wisely ditched last year's attempt at hyper-realistic player models and ice textures, which led to a great PC product, but slow framerates and unsatisfying play on PlayStation. Rather than making the PlayStation version into a junior PC version this year, the game has been optimized for the aging system, with great results.

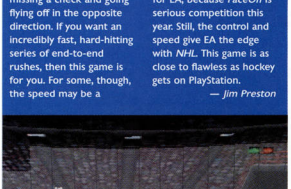
Still, the graphics are clean (although the players are a bit boxy), and the speed of play has picked up dramatically. It takes a steady thumb on the analog pad to keep from missing a check and going flying off in the opposite direction. If you want an incredibly fast, hard-hitting series of end-to-end rushes, then this game is for you. For some, though, the speed may be a problem, and if you're looking for a more deliberate game, *FaceOff* (see review, left) or the upcoming games from Fox and Konami may be better suited to your play style.

Still, although some may be intimidated by the speed, the tight control more than keeps up with the fast pace.

Scoring is tough, making a mastery of indirect plays (such as rebounds off slappers, one-timers, and the give and go into a one-timer) a required skill. Still, that's true to the game, and it helps the realism here — don't plan on scoring with a backhander from the blue line.

The addition of a dedicated deke button and other control tweaks make this one of the best hockey games ever, which is good for EA, because *FaceOff* is serious competition this year. Still, the control and speed give EA the edge with *NHL*. This game is as close to flawless as hockey gets on PlayStation.

— *Jim Preston*



■ **Other may come close, but there's only one *NHL 2000*, and discriminating gamers should accept no substitutes**

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom line: EA Sports once again proves it does hockey better than anyone else on the planet.

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You can't see your opponent. Sometimes that's a good thing.

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Finals

Braveheart

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Red Lemon Studios**

■ **The battle scenes in *Braveheart* would have been nice, had the camera been easier to control**

Mixing elements of classic strategy games with the realtime strategy genre is a laudable goal, but sadly, *Braveheart* just isn't the game to do it. The main flaw is that it tries to be too many different things, and in doing so, fails to excel at anything. As a result, the game design is muddled, and it plays as if there is no real goal in sight.

The two main parts of the game are the Planning mode and the Realtime 3D mode. Planning mode is where you manage your towns, order your armies around, and conduct diplomatic relations, and in many ways it's similar to the *Civilization* games. When you enter a battle, or wish to analyze a town, you can switch to Realtime 3D mode. This is a nice feature, but the clumsy camera control and poor combat interface make using it a chore.

Another problem is the tutorial. For the most part, it's great, at least until you start learning about caravans and trading. On the copy we reviewed (a production disc, shrink-wrapped and everything), the tutorial continually locked up at this point and became unusable. Although the main game did not give us problems, this one bug may be indicative of more.

On paper, *Braveheart* sounds great. In reality, however, it's a convoluted attempt at a game that's more work than play. — *Adam Pavlacka*

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: There are plenty of other strategy games out there. You can do better.

Outcast

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Appeal**

■ ***Outcast*'s voxel technology results in a world that looks stunning — even at 320x240**

Sometimes the best games come from small, unknown developers. *Outcast* is one such title, the brainchild of a group of French developers. It's also one fine game.

You're placed in the role of Cutter Slade, a Special Forces operative leading a group of scientists through an interdimensional portal in order to save the world. Needless to say, things go wrong and Cutter ends up alone on a very large alien world.

Combining both the role-playing and adventure genres, *Outcast* presents the player with a number of options. Every situation has more than one solution, so you're free to approach each problem however you see fit. The story is engaging, drawing the player in with a combination of cinematic cut scenes and excellent voice acting.

About the only thing wrong with *Outcast* is the game's poor performance at higher resolutions. On an Athlon 600 system with 128 MB of RAM and an Ultra TNT2, *Outcast* was quite choppy at 512x384. Granted, it looks quite good in standard resolution, but missing out on the high-resolution display was disappointing. — *Adam Pavlacka*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: If you're tired of FPS madness — and you've got some serious horsepower — give *Outcast* a try. Soon you'll be drawn into a world of beauty and intrigue, and won't want to leave.

Panzer General 3D Assault

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Strategic Simulations, Inc.** ■ Developer: **Strategic Simulations, Inc.**

■ **This is strategy wargaming at its finest — and now you can blow up Nazis in 3D!**

Panzer General II was one of the best WWII turn-based strategy games ever. It featured historically accurate units and missions and offered outstanding multiplayer conflict. Since then, grid-based games like *Panzer General* have languished somewhat, failing to offer anything new to strategy gamers, but SSI's new *Panzer General 3D Assault* may change that.

Gameplay is very much the same as in previous *Panzer General* titles. The player has a number of units on a grid and takes turns moving and attacking. There are some new twists: units can have multiple action points for movement and attack, and they receive more with experienced leaders. A new headquarters screen makes outfitting and selecting units for a campaign much more intuitive.

The most noticeable change is in the game's presentation, running in stunning 16-bit color, with everything from units to landscapes rendered in 3D. Players can rotate and zoom in and out on the map for better strategic views of the battlefield. — *Rick Sanchez*

NextGen ★★★★☆

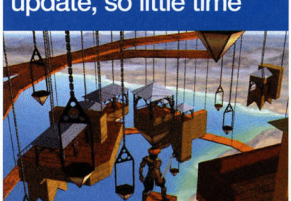
Bottom Line: With over 60 multiplayer and single-player missions, more than 200 units, the ability to play as the American, British, German, or French forces, and the streamlined playing system, *Panzer General 3D Assault* is the most refined *Panzer General* yet.

■ **PC**

Prince of Persia 3D

■ Publisher: **Mindscape** ■ Developer: **Red Orb**

So many classics to update, so little time



■ **The Prince is back, he's once again racing to rescue the Princess, and this time he's in 3D — any questions?**

Prince of Persia 3D is an old friend, dressed up in a snazzy new turban and baggy pants. But you wouldn't have any trouble picking him out of a police lineup. He still spends his time breaking out of prison dungeons and rescuing princesses.

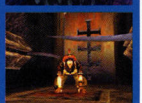
The two earlier *Prince of Persia* games were both side-scrollers, giving us colorful, rotoscoped action in which the prince climbed walls, clung to ledges, dodged traps, fought copious sword-wielding guards, and worked his way toward the ultimate rescue of some fair maiden.

The plot hasn't changed. He continues to climb, cling, dodge, and fight. Only now he does it in 3D.

And it works. The new game is evenly-paced, with enough enemies to keep action fans happy and enough puzzles to please adventure fans. It looks great, too. You get to run, jump, and crawl through palaces, dungeons, temples, and exotic architecture right out of *1,001 Nights*. There's even a lengthy session with an ancient dirigible.

Sure, it has weak points. Controls can be sluggish. And the camera stays firmly over-the-shoulder during movement, changing to a side view only during battles. If you want to check out a side passage, you have to come to a stop. That can be dangerous if you're fleeing from superior forces.

But hey, rescuing kidnapped damsels isn't supposed to be easy. If it were, Scheherazade would undoubtedly have run out of tales on about the third night. — *John Lee*



■ **Many of the moves and situations are very reminiscent of the original**

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: It's not without its quirks and minor annoyances, but damn if it ain't fun.

■ PC

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear

■ Publisher: **Red Storm** ■ Developer: **Red Storm**

Who says innovation is important?

■ **Plot your moves carefully and turn the team loose**

Rainbow Six reshaped the first-person action game with its clever blend of planning, action, and strategy. *Rogue Spear*, the new stand-alone sequel, offers more of the same.

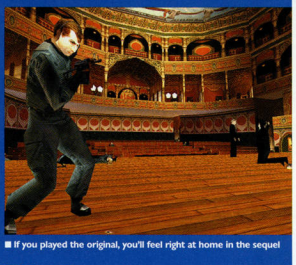
Same basic premise. You're part of an antiterrorist team, charged with rescuing hostages and blowing away bad guys. There are 16 cool new locations, including the Natural History Museum in New York, battle-scarred Kosovo, Russian snowstorms, and a parked 747 jumbo jet full of terrorists.

Same planning sessions. You pick your team, arm them, and outfit them. Then you peer at maps. Terrorists in that room? Approach with cover. Hostages over there? Bring an extraction team, and use your sniper as backup. When you've covered the bases (or at least think you have), start the action and watch your carefully laid plans go awry.

Same vulnerability. You die easily on these missions (one shot can do it), so you learn to crouch and peer around corners, and use grenades and flashbangs to flush terrorists into the open so your sniper can take them out.

Same graphics engine, which is both good and bad. It means nicely detailed scenery, but slightly stuttery motion.

If you're looking for innovation, go elsewhere. There are no radical changes in *Rogue Spear*. Red Storm has a good thing going and knows it. But the story is deep and filled with the kind of planning and action that gets *Rainbow Six* fans frothing at the mouth. — *John Lee*



■ **If you played the original, you'll feel right at home in the sequel**

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: More of the same, but then it's hard to ask for anything more.

Shadow Company: Left for Dead

■ Platform: **PC**

■ Publisher: **Ubi Soft** ■ Developer: **Sinister Software**

■ **It's a lot like playing with toy soldiers, except you've got a budget to worry about**

Although it's had a long, tortuous route getting to store shelves (originally, this was supposed to be released through Interactive Magic, until that company abruptly stopped all consumer publishing), *Shadow Company* has turned out to be well worth the wait. It's got a few quirks, but realtime tactical squad-level combat doesn't get much better.

The premise is simple: hire a group of up to eight mercenaries, outfit them with the best equipment you can afford, and command them through a multi-objective mission. The terrain is all in 3D, as are all the characters, and if you've got the horsepower, the high-resolution textures make everything look very nice indeed. The interface seems a lot more complex than it actually is, although the game's single biggest hurdle is in learning to handle the camera system. Character AI could use a little work — you can't actually trust your mercenaries to take care of themselves in many situations, which is a bit annoying — and enemy AI is just plain mean at higher difficulty levels.

Mission goals are relatively varied, from search-and-destroy to rescues, but most of them involve shooting folks and blowing things up, which is always fun. There are a few minor bugs, but nothing damning, and the multiplayer options (cooperative missions), work well. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A fun idea done well, and addictive to boot. *Shadow Company* will steal hours of your time if you're not careful.

Sinistar Unleashed

■ Platform: **PC**

■ Publisher: **THQ** ■ Developer: **GameFX**

■ **Blasting enemies is your main occupation in *Sinistar Unleashed*, but at least they blow up nice**

Sinistar Unleashed is a lot like one of those *Baywatch* babes — luscious to look at, but not much between the ears.

Basically, it's another retro/nostalgia trip, harking back to an arcade classic of the 1980s, a game notable because it introduced digitized speech — the evil Sinistar rumbling, "Beware, I live." You'll hear echoes in this new game when you encroach on Sinistar's territory.

It seems aliens are building a space portal to our world so Sinistar can attack us, and you've been assigned to destroy that portal. But, oops, as you blow it to smithereens, your ship is sucked through and you're suddenly alone in the dark, sinister world of Sinistar himself.

What you get are darting enemy ships, colorful explosions, relentless action, looming space portals, and huge boss bugs. You've also got to blow up asteroids and mine the rubble for crystals to keep your ship running.

You'll fight your way through a total of 24 mission-based levels, each tougher than the last, with new ships to fly, hotter weapons, and so on. Eventually you'll reach the center of Sinistar's universe, where another portal may be waiting to send you home — if, of course, you can get past Sinistar. — *John Lee*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Nothing special here. Like that *Baywatch* babe, it might be exciting enough for a brief fling, but you wouldn't want to enter any long-term relationships with it.

■ Defend your mothership at all costs because it holds all that is left of your people as you search for your mythical home planet

■ PC

Homeworld

■ Publisher: **Sierra** ■ Developer: **Relic**

In space, no one can hear you micromanage

There are some games that must be seen in action to be fully grasped. *Homeworld*, with its convincing space combat and epic feel, is one of those games. In fact, taken as the newest evolution of realtime strategy, it has breathed some life back into a genre that other companies have beat into the ground and exhausted. Yes, it's that different.

Strangely enough for an RTS, *Homeworld*'s core strength is in its single-player game, which is one of the most masterfully sculpted interactive stories ever produced. It hooks you from the start and, both through in-game and some great realtime and hand-drawn cinemas, draws you in like a good space opera should (we're not going to spoil it for you). Complementing the excellent storytelling is a robust graphics engine and some incredible sound work that really makes you feel like you are watching a lost episode of *Battlestar Galactica* (and we mean that in a good way).

Unfortunately, these advances come with a price. *Homeworld*'s ambitions of a fully 3D space-strategy game have been realized, but there are still some birthing pains. The core problem comes from the fact that combat in 3D space gets overwhelmingly cluttered when you send fleets against each other. While you can always tell your ships to just attack everybody (which is pretty non-involving), many campaigns are easier to beat if you micromanage every encounter in combat — a *very* daunting task when you've built a healthy-sized fleet. And unfortunately, ships aren't smart enough to attack other enemies when they complete an assignment. Their target destroyed, they just stop dead, which leaves you having to constantly track the activity of every tiny fighter — micromanagement hell.

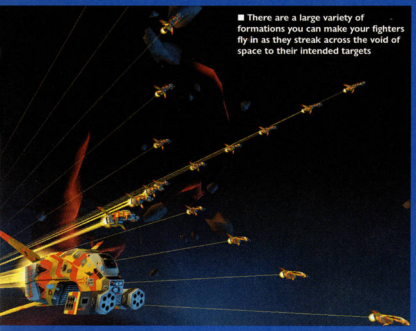
This one fatal flaw can overwhelm even the most dedicated players, and it drags the game down from perfection to occasional frustration. Still, it's a testament to the game's appeal that you'll feel compelled to finish this game come hell or high water because you care about what happens to the characters — and how many games can boast that?

— *Blake Fischer*

■ The innovative camera system allows for easy ways to focus on specific parts of the action

OH NO! YES!

Homeworld's soundtrack boasts a song from the band Yes. For those of you who don't know Yes, they are a progressive rock band from the '70s whose last mainstream hit was "Owner Of a Lonely Heart" in 1983. Other '70s bands we'd like to see matched up with '90s games: The Eagles with *Quake 4*, Pink Floyd with *Tempest X4*, and the Bay City Rollers with *Shogun*.



■ There are a large variety of formations you can make your fighters fly in as they streak across the void of space to their intended targets

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Beautiful and deep, *Homeworld* is a brave step forward for realtime strategy. Unfortunately, it's slightly marred by its own paradigm-breaking complexities.

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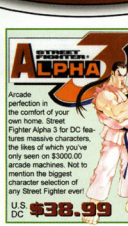

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NBA Showtime	$42.99
NFL 2000	$44.99
NFL QBC 2000	$44.99
Ogre Battle 64	$54.99
Psyhic Force 2012	$44.99
Rainbow Six	$44.99
Rayman 2	$44.99
Ready 2 Rumble Boxing	$44.99
Ripper Riders	$44.99
Sega Rally 2	$44.99
Slave Zero	$42.99
Soul Calibur	$39.99
Soul Fighter	$43.99
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Street Fighter Alpha 3	$38.99
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Pelican Memory Card 256	$37.99
Pelican Super 64 Analog	$12.99

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InterAct Mega Memory Card	$24.99
Nyko Pocket Vision	$6.99
Nyko Power Grip	Call
Nyko Power Pak	$14.99
Nyko PowerLink	$5.99
Nyko Shock 'n Rock	$19.99
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Gamer's Guide

Because you never know when you'll need a few hundred game reviews

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 time, and cull out older stuff. Which older stuff? Well, mostly bad PC games, but a few first-generation console titles, too. We leave in just about every title that ever got ★★★★★ though, since they're almost always a good bet, no matter 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.)

Dreamcast

title	publisher	rating	#
Blue Stinger	Activision	★★★	11/99
Dynamite Deka 2	Sega (Japan)	★★★	09/99
Expendable	Rage (Japan)	★	09/99
Flag to Flag CART Racing	Sega	★★★	10/99
Frame Gride	From Software (Japan)	★★★	10/99
House of the Dead 2	Sega	★★	09/99
Hydro Thunder	Midway	★★★★	10/99
King of Fighters	SNK (Japan)	★★	11/99
Monaco GP	Ubi Soft	★★	11/99
Mortal Kombat Gold	Midway	★★	10/99
NFL Blitz 2000	Acclaim	★★★	11/99
Power Stone	Capcom	★★★★★	09/99
Ready 2 Rumble	Midway	★★★★	11/99
Sega Bass Fishing	Sega	★★★★	09/99
Sega Sports NFL 2K	Sega	★★★★	10/99
Sonic Adventure	Sega	★★★★	09/99
Soul Calibur	Namco	★★★★★	11/99
Tokyo Xtreme Racing	Crave	★★★	09/99
TrickStyle	Acclaim	★★	11/99

Nintendo 64

title	publisher	rating	#
1080° Snowboarding	Nintendo	★★★★★	42
A Bug's Life	Activision	★★	09/99
Aero Fighters Assault	Video Systems Inc.	★★★	36
Aero Gauge	Ascii	★★★	39
All Star Baseball '99	Acclaim	★★★★	43
All Star Baseball 2000	Acclaim	★★★★	55
All Star Tennis '99	Ubi Soft	★	10/99
Automobili Lamborghini 64	Titus	★★	37
Banjo-Kazooie	Nintendo	★★★★	43
Battletanx	3DO	★★★	31
Blast Corps	Nintendo	★★★★	31
Body Harvest	Midway	★★★★	48
Buck Bumble	Ubi Soft	★★★	48
Castlevania	Konami	★★★	51
Clay Fighter 63 1/3	Interplay	★★	36
Cruisin' USA	Nintendo	★	26
Cruisin' World	Midway	★★	48
Dark Rift	Vic Tokai	★★★	31
Deadly Arts	Konami	★	49
Diddy Kong Racing	Nintendo	★★★★	37
Doom 64	Williams	★★★	29
Duke Nukem 64	GT Interactive	★★	37
Duke Nukem: Zero Hour	GT Interactive	★	09/99
Extreme-G	Acclaim	★★★	37
F-Zero X	Nintendo	★★★★★	46
F1 Pole Position 64	Ubi Soft	★★★	36
FIFA Road to the World Cup 64	Electronic Arts	★★★★	38
FIFA Soccer 64	Electronic Arts	★★	30
Fighter's Destiny	Ocean	★★★	41
Forsaken	Acclaim	★★★	43
Glover	Hasbro Interactive	★★★	48
Goemon's Great Adventure	Konami	★★★	53
Goldeneye 007	Nintendo	★★★★★	34
GT 64	Infogrames	★	47
Hexen	GT Interactive	★★	32
Hot Wheels Turbo Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★	11/99
International Superstar Soccer	Konami	★★★★★	32
International Superstar Soccer '98	Konami	★★★★	44
Jet Force Gemini	Nintendo	★★★	11/99
Ken Griffey Jr.'s Slugfest	Nintendo	★★★★	56
Killer Instinct Gold	Nintendo	★★★	26
Mace: The Dark Age	Midway	★★	37
Madden 64	Electronic Arts	★★	37
Mario Kart 64	Nintendo	★★★	30
Mike Piazza's Strike Zone	GT Interactive	★	44
Mission: Impossible	Ocean	★★★	44
Monaco GP Racing Simulation 2	Ubi Soft	★★★★	55
Monster Truck Madness 64	Rockstar	★	11/99
Mortal Kombat 4	Midway	★★★	44
Multi Racing Championship	Ocean	★★★★	33
Mystical Ninja	Konami	★★★	45
NBA Hangtime	Williams	★★	29
NBA In the Zone 64	Konami	★	41
NHL Breakaway 99	Acclaim	★★	50
Nightmare Creatures	Activision	★★★	50
Olympic Hockey '98	Midway	★	41
PilotWings 64	Nintendo	★★★★	21
QBC 64	Acclaim	★★★	37
Quake II	Activision	★★★★	10/99
Quake 64	Midway	★★★	41
Quest 64	THQ	★★★	43
Rampage World Tour	Midway	★★	41
Robotron 64	Crave Entertainment	★★★	39
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
Shadows of the Empire	Nintendo	★★	26
Snowboard Kids	Atlus Software	★★★	40
Space Station: Silicon Valley	Take 2	★★★★★	49
Starfox 64	Nintendo of America	★★★★	32
Star Wars Episode I Racer	Nintendo	★★★	55
Super Mario 64	Nintendo	★★★★★	21
Superman	Titus	★	10/99
Tetrisphere	Nintendo	★★★	35
Tonic Trouble	Ubi Soft	★★★	10/99
Top Gear Rally	Midway	★★★★	37
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter	Acclaim	★★★	28
Turok 2: Seeds of Evil	Acclaim	★★★★★	47
Vigilante 8	Interplay	★★★★	53
Virtual Chess 64	Titus	★★★	47
War Gods	Midway	★	31
Wave Race 64	Nintendo	★★★★★	25
Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey	Midway	★★★	29
Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey '98	Midway	★★★	39
WCW/NWO Revenge	THQ	★★★★	48
Wetrix	Ocean	★★★	44
Wipeout 64	Psygnosis/Midway	★★★★	48
World Driver Championship	Midway	★★★★	09/99
WWF Attitude	Acclaim	★★	11/99
Yoshi's Story	Nintendo	★★	41
Yuke Yuke Troublemakers	Enix	★★★	34
Zelda: Ocarina of Time	Nintendo	★★★★★	48

PlayStation

title	publisher	rating	#
3Xtreme	989 Studios	★	35
Abe's Oddysee	GT Interactive	★★★★	35
Ace Combat 2	Namco	★★★★	35
Akuji the Heartless	Eidos	★★★	52
Alexi Lalas International Soccer	Take 2	★★★	56
Alundra	Working Designs	★★★★	38
Ape Escape	SCEA	★★★★★	56
Apocalypse	Activision	★★	50
Area 51	Midway	★★	37
Armored Core	SCEA	★★★★	37
Armored Core: Project Phantasma	Asci	★★★	48
Atari Collection One, The	Midway	★★★★	27
Auto Destruct	Electronic Arts	★★★	39
Azure Dreams	Konami	★★★	44
BallBlazer Champions	LucasArts	★★★	31
Batman and Robin	Acclaim	★★	47
Battlestations	Electronic Arts	★★	31
Beetle Adventure Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★★	53
Black Dawn	Virgin	★★★★	23
Blast Radius	Psygnosis	★	53
Blasto	SCEA	★★	42
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain	Activision	★★★★	24
Bloody Roar	SCEA	★★★★	41
Bloody Roar 2	SCEA	★★★	56
Bogey Dead 6	SCEA	★★★	22
Bomberman Fantasy Racing	Atlus	★★★	52
BRAHMA Force	Jaleco	★★★	30
Brave Fencer Musashi	Square Electronic Arts	★★★	49
Bravo Air Race	THQ	★★★	34
Breath of Fire III	Capcom	★★★★	41
Broken Helix	Konami	★★★	32
Brunswick Circuit Pro Bowling	THQ	★★★★	48
Bubsy 3D	Accolade	★★	26
Bug Riders	GT Interactive	★★	37
Burning Road	Playmates	★★★	27
Bushido Blade	Sony	★★★★★	31
Bushido Blade 2	Square EA	★★★★	49
Bust-A-Groove	989 Studios	★★★	50
Bust-a-Move	Enix	★★★★	41
Bust-a-Move 2	Enix	★★★★	55
Buster Bros Collection	Capcom	★★★	30
Cardinal SYN	SCEA	★★	43
Carnage Heart	SCEA	★★★★	28
Castlevania: Symphony of the Night	Konami	★★★★	36
Castrol Honda Superbike Racing	Electronic Arts	★★	46
Centipede	Hasbro/Atari	★★	09/99
Championship Motocross	THQ	★★★★	10/99
Chocobo Racing	Square EA	★★★	10/99
Circuit Breakers	Mindscape	★★★★	45
Civilization II	Activision	★★★★★	52
Clock Tower	Ascii	★★★★	37
Codename Tenka	Psygnosis	★★★	28
Colony Wars	Psygnosis	★★★★★	38
Contender	SCEA	★	52
Contra: Legacy of War	Konami	★★★	25
Cool Boarders	SCEA	★★★	27
Cool Boarders 2	SCEA	★★★	37
Courier Crisis	GT Interactive	★★	37
Crash 2: Cortex Strikes Back	SCEA	★★★★	37
Crash Bandicoot	SCEA	★★★	23
Crash Bandicoot: Warped	SCEA	★★★	49
Croc: the Legend of the Gobbos	Fox Interactive	★★★	35
Croc 2	Fox Interactive	★★★★	56
Crow: City of Angels, The	Acclaim	★	30
Crusader: No Remorse	Origin	★★★★	29
Dark Forces	LucasArts	★★★	26
Dark Omen	Electronic Arts	★★★	43
Darklight Conflict	Electronic Arts	★★	34
Dead in the Water	ASC	★★	52
Dead or Alive	Tecmo	★★★★	37
Deathtrap Dungeon	Eidos	★	42
Deception	Tecmo	★★★	24
Demolition Racer	Infogrames	★	11/99
Descent Maximum	Interplay	★★★	29
Devil Dice	THQ	★★★★	47
Diablo	Electronic Arts	★★★★	42
Die Hard Trilogy	Fox Interactive	★★★★	23
Dino Crisis	Capcom	★★★★★	10/99
Disney's Hercules	Virgin Interactive	★★	34
Dragon Ball GT Final Bout	Bandai	★	39
Dragonseeds	Jaleco	★★	48
Driver	GT Interactive	★★★★	09/99
Dynasty Warriors	KOEI	★★★★	32
Duke Nukem: Time to Kill	GT Interactive	★★★★	48
Einhander	SCEA	★★★★	40
Elregia	Square EA	★★★	55
Fantastic 4	Acclaim	★	35
Felony 11-79	Ascii	★★★	34
FIFA '97	Electronic Arts	★	26
Fighting Force	Eidos	★★★	37
Final Doom	Williams	★★★	24
Final Fantasy Tactics	SCEA	★★★★	40
Final Fantasy VII	SCEA	★★★★★	26
Final Fantasy VIII	Square EA	★★★★	10/99
Formula 1	Psygnosis	★★★★	24
Forsaken	Acclaim	★★★	43
Frank Thomas Baseball	Acclaim	★★	32
Frogger	Hasbro Interactive	★	37
G Darius	THQ	★★★	46
G Police: Weapons of Justice	Psygnosis	★	09/99
GameDay '97	Sony	★★★★★	27
Gex: Enter the Gecko	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	42
Ghost in the Shell	THQ	★★★★	35
Goal Storm '97	Konami	★★★★	30
Grand Slam	THQ	★★	44
Gran Turismo	SCEI	★★★★★	40
Grand Slam	Virgin	★★	31
Grand Theft Auto: London 1969	Rockstar	★★★	56
Grand Tour Racing '98	Activision	★★★	36
Guardian's Crusade	Activision	★★★★	52
Heart of Darkness	Interplay	★★	47
Herc's Adventures	LucasArts	★★★	35
Hot Shots Golf	SCE	★★★★	41
In the Zone 2	Konami	★★★★	26
In the Zone 99	Konami	★★	53
Independence Day	Fox	★★	29
Invasion from Beyond	GT Interactive	★	53
Jade Cocoon	Crave	★★	09/99
Jersey Devil	MegaToon	★★★	44
Jet Moto	SCEA	★★★	27
Jet Moto 2	SCEA	★★★	37
Jet Moto 3	989 Studios	★★★★	11/99
Judge Dredd	Activision	★	42
Juggernaut	Jaleco	★★★	11/99
Jumping Flash!	SCEA	★★★★★	08
Jumping Flash! 2	SCEA	★★★★	20
K-1 The Arena Fighters	THQ	★★	30
Kartia	Atlus	★★★★	45
Knockout Kings	EA Sports	★★	49
Konami Arcade Classics	Konami	★★★	09/99
League of Pain	Psygnosis	★★★	30
Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver	Crystal Dynamics	★★★★	09/99
Lode Runner	Natsume	★★★	39
Lost Worlds: Jurassic Park, The	Electronic Arts	★★	34
Lunar: Silver Star Story Complete	Working Designs	★★★	55
Machine Hunter	MGM Interactive	★	34
Madden '97	EA Sports	★★★★	24
Madden '98	Electronic Arts	★★★	35
Madden '99	Electronic Arts	★★	47
Madden 2000	EA Sports	★★★★	11/99
March Madness '98	Electronic Arts	★★	42
MechWarrior 2	Activision	★★★★	31
Medievil	SCEA	★★★	48
Mega Man X 4	Capcom	★★★	36
MegaMan 8	Capcom	★★	29
MegaMan Legends	Capcom	★★★	47
Metal Gear Solid	Konami	★★★★★	48
Micro Machines V3	Midway	★★★★	39
Midway Collection 2, The	Midway	★★★★	38
MLB '99	SCEA	★★★★	46
MLB 2000	989 Studios	★★★★	55
Monster Rancher	Tecmo	★★★★★	38
Mortal Kombat 4	Midway	★★	46
Mortal Kombat Mythologies	Midway	★	38
Moto Racer	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	36
Moto Racer 2	Electronic Arts	★★★★	48
Motor Toon Grand Prix	Sony	★★★★	26
N2O	Fox	★★★	45
Nagano Winter Olympics '98	Konami	★★★	39
Namco Museum Volume 1	Namco	★★★★	21
Namco Museum Volume 2	Namco	★★	24
Namco Museum Volume 3	Namco	★★★	27
Nanotek Warrior	Virgin	★★★★	27
NASCAR 99	EA Sports	★★★★	49
NBA Jam Extreme	Acclaim	★★	28
NBA Live '97	Electronic Arts	★★	25
NBA Shoot Out '97	SCEA	★★★★	30
NCAA Football 99	Electronic Arts	★★★	48
NCAA Gamebreaker '98	SCEA	★★★★★	38
Need For Speed II	Electronic Arts	★★	32
Need For Speed III	Electronic Arts	★★★★	43

Newman/Haas Racing	Pygnosis	★★	41
NFL Blitz	Midway	★★★★	47
NFL GameDay '98	SCEA	★★★★★	35
NFL GameDay '99	989 Studios	★★★★	47
NFL GameDay 2000	989 Studios	★★★★	11/99
NFL Xtreme	989 Sports	★★	46
NFL Xtreme 2	989 Studios	★★	11/99
NHL 99	EA Sports	★★	49
NHL Breakaway '98	Acclaim	★★★	37
NHL Face Off '98	SCEA	★★★	36
Nightmare Creatures	Activision	★★★	38
No One Can Stop Mr. Domino	Acclaim	★★★	51
Nuclear Strike	Electronic Arts	★★★	36
O.D.T. - Escape Or Die Trying	Psygnosis	★★	51
Omega Boost	SCEA	★★	10/99
One	ASC Games	★★	39
OverBlood	Electronic Arts	★★	31
PaRappa the Rapper	SCEA	★★★★★	35
Parasite Eve	Square Electronic Arts	★★★	45
PGA '98	Electronic Arts	★★★	36
PitBall 3D	Activision	★★	42
Pocket Fighter	Capcom	★★★	45
Point Blank	Namco	★★★	40
Porsche Challenge	SCEA	★★★	35
Power Move Wrestling	Activision	★★★	26
Powerboat Racing	VR Sports	★★★	42
Poy Poy	Konami	★★★★	33
Project Overkill	Konami	★★★	23
Psybadek	Psygnosis	★★	49
Punky Skunk	Jaleco	★	42
R-Type Delta	Agetec	★★★★	11/99
Rage Racer	Namco	★★★	32
Rally Cross	Sony	★★★	30
Rally Cross 2	989 Studios	★★★	50
Rascal	Psygnosis	★★	43
RC Stunt Copter	Titus	★★★★	11/99
ReBoot	EA	★★★	43
Red Asphalt	Interplay	★★★	37
Resident Evil	Capcom	★★★★★	17
Resident Evil 3	Capcom	★★★★★	39
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
Robo Trip	GT Interactive	★★★	48
Roller Jam	Psygnosis	★★★★	53
Rush Hour	Psygnosis	★★	32
S.C.A.R.S.	Ubi Soft	★★	48
Saga Frontier	SCEA	★★	43
Sentient	Psygnosis	★★★	30
Sentinel Returns	Psygnosis	★★	44
Shadow Madness	Crave	★★★	53
Shadow Master	Psygnosis	★	41
Shipwreckers!	Psygnosis	★★★	41
Silent Hill	Konami	★★★★★	52
Skullmonkeys	EA	★★★	40
Sled Storm	Electronic Arts	★★★	10/99
Spawn: The Eternal	SCEA	★★	38
Speed Racer	Jaleco	★★	42
Spyro	SCEA	★★★★	47
Star Ocean	SCEA	★★★	09/99
Star Wars: Episode I	LucasArts	★★★	11/99
Star Wars: Masters of Teras Kasi	LucasArts	★★	38
Steel Reign	SCEA	★★	37
Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha	Capcom	★★★★	35
Street Fighter Zero 3	Capcom	★★★★	52
Syphon Filter	989 Studios	★★★★	52
Syndicate Wars	Electronic Arts	★★★	34
Tail Concerto	Atlus	★★★	11/99
Tail of the Sun	SCEA	★★★	31
Tales of Destiny	Namco	★★	48
Tarzan	Disney Interactive	★★	10/99
Team Losi R/C Racer	Fox Interactive	★	47
Tekken 2	Namco	★★★★★	46
Tekken 3	Namco	★★★★★	42
Tenchu	Activision	★★★★	48
Ten Pin Alley	ASC Games	★★★★	27
Tennis Arena	Ubi Soft	★★	43
Test Drive 4	Accolade	★★	37
The Fifth Element	Activision	★	50
Theme Hospital	EA	★★★	43
Thunder Truck Rally	Psygnosis	★★	33
Thunderforce V	Working Designs/Spaz	★★★	46
TigerShark	GT Interactive	★★★	29
Time Crisis	Namco	★★★★	38
Tiny Tank	MGM Interactive	★★★	50
Tomb Raider II	Eidos	★★★★	37
Tombi	SCEA	★★★	45
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater	Activision	★★★★★	11/99
Trap Gunner	Atlus	★★★	47
Triple Play '98	EA Canada	★★★	31
Triple Play 2000	EA Sports	★★★	55
Turbo Prop Racing	SCEA	★★★	45
Twisted Metal 2	SCEA	★★★★	30
Twisted Metal 3	989 Studios	★★★★	50
Uprising X	3DO	★★★	50
Vigilante 8	Activision	★★★★	45
Virtual Pool	Interplay	★★	27
VMX Racing	Playmates Interactive Ent.	★★	36
VR Baseball '99	Interplay	★★★	46
WarGames	MGM Interactive	★★★	46
Warzone 2100	Eidos	★★	56
WCW Nitro	THQ	★★	38
WCW Vs. The World	THQ	★	30
WCW/NWO Thunder	THQ	★★	52
Wild Arms	SCEA	★★★	32
Wild 9	Interplay	★★	49
Wing Commander IV	Electronic Arts	★★	31
Wipeout	Psygnosis	★★★★★	11
Wipeout 3	Psygnosis	★★★★	11/99
World Cup '98	EA Sports	★★★★	45
WWF Warzone	Acclaim	★★★	47
X-Games Pro Boarder	Electronic Arts	★★★	49
X-Men: Children of the Atom	Acclaim	★★	40
X-Men vs. Street Fighter	Capcom	★★★★	45
Xena: Warrior Princess	Electronic Arts	★★★★	11/99
Xenogears	Square Electronic Arts	★★★★★	49
Xevious 3D/G+	Namco	★★★	31

title	publisher	rating	#
Online			
Akens Online	Kesmai	★★★	43
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun Internet	Westwood	★	45
Meridian 59: Revelation	3DO	★★★★	37
Netstorm	Activision	★★★★	40
NetWAR	Headland	★★★	41
Spectrum Opposotions	Digital Addiction	★★★★	09/99
Tanarus	Sony	★★★★	40
Ultima Online: The Second Age	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	51

title	publisher	rating	#
PC			
688(I) Hunter/Killer	Jane's Combat Simulations	★★★★	34
Addiction Pinball	MicroProse	★★★★	45
Age of Empires	Microsoft	★★★★	37
Air Warrior II	Interactive Magic	★★★★	31
Air Warrior III	Interactive Magic	★★★★	40
Alien Earth	Playmates	★★★	42
Andretti Racing	Electronic Arts	★★★★	39
Armor Command	Ripcord Games	★★★★	43
Army Men	3DO	★★★★	44
Army Men II	3DO	★★★★	53
Atlantis: The Lost Tales	Interplay	★★★★	35
Baldur's Gate	Interplay	★★★★★	52
Battleships	Bethesda	★★★	45
Battlezone	Activision	★★★★	42
Barrage	Activision	★★★★	50
Betrayal in Antara	Sierra	★★★	34
Black Dahlia	Take 2 Interactive	★★	44
Blade Runner	Virgin	★★★★	39
Blood	GT Interactive	★★★★	33
Blood 2: The Chosen	GT Interactive	★★★★	50
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain	Activision	★★	36
Broken Sword: The Smoking Mirror	Virgin Interactive	★★★	36
Burnout Championship Drag Racing	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★	45
Carmageddon	SCI	★★★★	33
CART Precision Racing	Microsoft	★★★★	38
Castrol Honda Superbike	Intense Simulation	★	46
City of Lost Children, The	Psygnosis	★★	32
Civilization II Test of Time	MicroProse	★★★	11/99
Civilization: Call to Power	Activision	★★★	55
Comanche 3	NovaLogic	★★★	33
Command & Conquer	Virgin	★★★★★	12
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	Virgin	★★★★	25
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun	Westwood	★★★	11/99
Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines	Eidos Interactive	★★★★	49
Corsairs	Microids	★★★	10/99
Creatures	Mindscape	★★★★★	35
Curse of Monkey Island, The	LucasArts	★★★	39
Dark Earth	MicroProse	★★★	37
Dark Reign	Activision	★★★★	38
Dark Side of the Moon	SouthPeak Interactive	★★	51
Darkstone	Gathering of Developers	★★★★	11/99
Deadlock II	Cyberlore Studios	★★★	43
Deathkarz	GT Interactive	★★★	49
Delta Force	NovaLogic	★★★	11/99
Descent 3	Interplay	★★★★★	36
Descent Freespace	Interplay	★★★	45
Descent to Undermountain	Interplay	★★★	48
Diablo	Blizzard	★★★★	28
Die By the Sword	Interplay	★★★★	42
Discworld II: Mortality Bytes!	Psygnosis	★★★	32
Dominant Species	Red Storm	★★	49
Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3	Ion	★★	46
Dragon Dice	Interplay	★	35
Drakan: Order of the Flame	Psygnosis	★★★★	11/99
Dungeon Keeper	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	33
Dungeon Keeper 2	Electronic Arts	★★	10/99
Dune 2000	Westwood	★★★	48
Ecstatica 2	Psygnosis	★★★	30
EF2000 v2.0	Ocean of America, Inc.	★★★★	36
Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall, The	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★★	24
Emergency Fighters for Life	WizardWorks	★★★	48
Emperor of the Fading Suns	SegaSoft	★★★	32
Excalibur 2555 A.D.	Sir Tech	★★	37
Expendable	Rage Software	★★	56
Extreme Assault	Blue Byte	★★	35
Extreme Tactics	Piranha Interactive	★★★	46
F-15	EA	★★★★	43
F-16 Aggressor	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★	11/99
F1 Racing Simulation	Ubi Soft	★★★	39
Fable	Sir-tech	★★★	31
Fairy Tale Adventure II	Encore Software	★★★	40
Fallen Haven	Interactive Magic	★★	32
Fallout	Interplay	★★★★	38
Fighter Duel	Interplay	★★★★	50
Flesh Feast	SegaSoft	★★★	45
Forsaken	Acclaim	★★★	44
Gangsters	Eidos Interactive	★★★★	51
Game, Net & Match	Blue Byte	★★★	45
Get Medieval	Monolith	★★★	48
GPolice	Psygnosis	★★★★	38
Grand Prix Legends	Sierra Sports	★★★★★	49
Grand Theft Auto	Take 2	★★★★	42
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	★★★★★	29
Gulf War: Operation Desert Hammer	3DO	★★	11/99
Half-Life	Sierra	★★★★★	10
Heavy Gear	Activision	★★★	39
Heavy Gear II	Activision	★★★★★	10/99
Heretic II	Activision	★★★	51
Hexplore	Infogrames	★★★	49
Hoyle Casino	VR Sports	★★★	48
Hoyle Classic Games	Sierra Sports	★★★	35
I-Fighter	Interactive Magic	★★★	35
Imperialism II	Strategic Simulations	★★★	56
Imperium Galactica	GT Interactive	★★★	33
Incoming	Rage Software	★★★	46
Industry Giant	Interactive Magic	★★★	45
Interstate '76	Activision	★★★	31
Into the Void	Playmates	★★★	33
Isle of Four Winds: Rune War, The	Arcanum Productions	★★★	39
Jane's Fleet Command	Jane's Combat Simulations	★★★	56
Jazz Jackrabbit 2	G.O.D.	★★★	45
Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II	LucasArts	★★★★★	36
Jedi Knight: Mysteries of the Sith	LucasArts	★★★	41
Jeff Gordon XS Racing	EAC Games	★★★	09/99
John Saul's Blackstone Chronicles	Mindscape	★★★	51
Journeyman Project 3	Red Orb	★★★	41
Kingpin: Life of Crime	Interplay	★★★	10/99
King's Quest: Mask of Eternity	Sierra	★★★	51
Knights and Merchants	Interactive Magic	★★★	49
Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny	Westwood Studio	★★★	37
Last Bronx	Sega	★★★	43
Last Express, The	Broderbund	★★★	31
Lords of the Realm II	Sierra	★★★	28
MAX	Interplay	★★★	30
MAX 2	Interplay	★★★	47
MIA2 Abrams	Interactive Magic	★★★	32
M1 Tank Platoon II	MicroProse	★★★★	43
Machines	Acclaim	★★★	55
Magestayer	GT Interactive	★★★	37
Magic: The Gathering	Spectrum Holobyte	★★★	31
MDK	Playmates	★★★	31
Meat Puppet	Playmates Interactive	★★★	34
MechCommander	MicroProse	★★★	46
MechWarrior 3	MicroProse	★★★★	09/99
Midtown Madness	Microsoft	★★★★	56
Might and Magic VI	3DO Company	★★★★	44
Might & Magic VIII	3DO	★★★★	09/99
Monster Truck Madness 2	Microsoft	★★★★	44
Montezuma's Return	Wizardworks	★★	50
Motocross Madness	Microsoft	★★★★	21
Myth	Bungie	★★★★	38
Myth II: Soulblighter	Bungie	★★★★	53
Nam	GT Interactive	★	47
NASCAR Racing 2	Sierra On-Line	★★★★	40
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit	Electronic Arts	★★★★	48
Need for Speed: High Stakes	Electronic Arts	★★★★	09/99
Nox, The	EA Sports	★★★★★	50
Of Light and Darkness	Interplay	★★	43
Official Formula 1 Racing	Eidos	★★	10/99
Outlaws	LucasArts	★★★★	32
Outwars	Microsoft	★	43
Panzer Commander	SSI	★★★★	46
Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain	THQ	★★★	37
The People's General	SSI	★★★	50
Plane Crazy	SegaSoft	★★	48
Pod	Ubi Soft	★★	31
Postal	Ripcord	★★★	37
Powerslave	Playmates	★★	30
Privateer 2: The Darkening	Origin/EA	★★★	29
Quake	Id Software	★★★★★	22
Quake 2	Activision	★★★	39
Railroad Tycoon II	Gathering of Developers	★★★	50
Rainbow 6	Red Storm	★★★	47
Re-Volt	Acclaim	★★★	10/99
Realms of Arkania II: Shadows Over Riva	Sir-Tech	★★★	33
Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	★★★	30
Rebellion	LucasArts	★★★	43
Recoil	Electronic Arts	★★	55
Red Baron II	Sierra	★★	40
Red Baron 3D	Sierra	★★★★	50
Redguard	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★	50
Redjack	THQ	★★★	45
Redline Racer	Ubi Soft	★★★	47
Redneck Rampage	Interplay	★★★	32
Redneck Rampage Rides Again	Interplay	★★★	45
Return to Krondor	Sierra	★★★	52
Revenge of the Arcade	Microsoft	★★★	48
Rich Diamond	Core Concepts	★★	56
Ring	Interplay	★★	10/99
Riot	Red Orb	★★★	38
Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter	WizardWorks	★★★	46
Sabre Ace: Conflict Over Korea	Virgin Interactive	★★★	38
Sanitarium	ASC	★★★★	44
Scarab	Electronic Arts	★★★	30
Sega Rally	Sega	★★★	30
Sega Touring Car Championship	Sega	★★	42
Sentient	Psygnosis	★★	33
Settlers II	Blue Byte	★★	53
Shivers 2: Harvest of Souls	Sierra On-Line	★★	32
Shogo: Mobile Armor	Monolith	★★★★	50
Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri	Electronic Arts	★★★★★	52
Sid Meier's Gettysburg	Electronic Arts	★★★★	37
SimCity 3000	Electronic Arts	★★★★	53
Sin	Activision	★★★	50
South Park	Acclaim	★★★	51
Space Bar, The	Boffo Games	★★★	33
Space Bunnies Must Die	Ripcord	★★★	50
Spec Ops	Ripcord	★★★	43
Star Command Revolution	GT Interactive	★★	31
Star Trek: Birth of the Federation	Hasbro Interactive	★★★	09/99
Star Trek: Starfleet Command	Interplay	★★★	11/99
Star Trek: Pinball	Interplay	★	43
Star Wars: Episode I Racer	LucasArts	★★★★	09/99
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron	LucasArts Interactive	★★★★	51
StarCraft	Cendant	★★★★★	43
Starfleet Academy	Interplay	★★★	36
Starsiege: Tribes	Sierra	★★★★★	31
Starship Titanic	Simon & Schuster	★★★	43
Streets of Sim City	Maxis	★	40
Submarine Titans	Eidos Interactive	★★★	43
Sub Culture	Ubi Soft	★★★	37
Swarm	Reflex Entertainment	★★	44
Terraglyph	SouthPeak Interactive	★★★	38
Terminator: SkyNET	Bethesda Softworks	★★★★★	26
Test Drive Off Road	Accolade	★★★	31
Tex Murphy: Overseer	Access	★★	42
Theme Hospital	Bullfrog/Origin	★★★★	31
Thief	Eidos interactive	★★★★	53
Tiger Woods Golf '99	EA Sports	★★★	48
Tomb Raider Gold	Eidos Interactive	★★★	43
Tomb Raider III	Eidos Interactive	★★★★	49
Total Annihilation	GT Interactive	★★★	36
Total Annihilation: Kingdoms	GT Interactive	★★★	10/99
Trespasser	Dreamworks Interactive	★★★	50
Tunnels Odyssey	Activision	★★★	34
Ultimate 8 Ball	THQ	★★★★	56
Ultimate Race Pro	MicroProse	★★★★	40
Unreal	GT Interactive	★★★★★	44
Unreal Tournament	GT Interactive	★★★★	09/99
Uprising	Cyclone Studios	★★★★★	37
Urban Assault	Microsoft Games	★★★	49
Uprising 2: Lead and Destroy	SSI	★★★	51
Vangers	Buka Entertainment	★★★	46
Virtual Pool 2	Interplay	★★★★★	38
Virus	Sitech	★★★	40
VR Baseball 2000	VR Sports	★★★	49
Wages of War	3DO	★★★	40
WarCraft 2: Tides of Darkness	Blizzard Entertainment	★★★★★	18
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 III: Reign of Heroes	Red Orb	★★★	35
Warzone 2100	Eidos	★★★	55
Wing Commander Prophecy	Electronic Arts	★★★	40
Wipeout XL	Psygnosis	★★★	33
X-COM: Apocalypse	MicroProse	★★★	35
X-COM: Interceptor	MicroProse	★★★	46
X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	★★★★	32
XCar: Experimental Racing	Bethesda Softworks	★★★	35
Zork: Grand Inquisitor	Activision	★★★★	39

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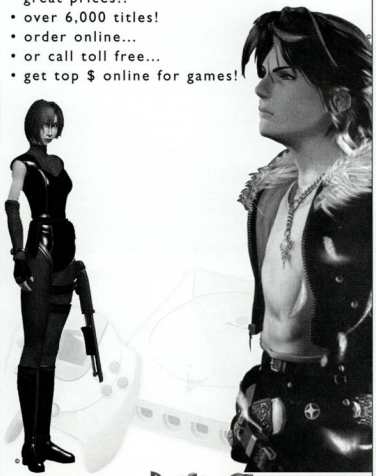

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Letters

Revealed: the inalienable writes of the Next Generation readers

Just minutes ago, while bowing to the god of all fighting games known as *Soul Calibur* and chanting "I'm not worthy" in a sick no-social-life kinda way, I just had to take a moment and wonder what the makers of this game could do with a great racing title. Suddenly it hit me! (Actually I hit my head against the coffee table while kneeling . . . d'oh!) These guys *have* made great racing titles — the *Ridge Racer* series! And yet I have not seen a single word in regards to an upcoming *Ridge Racer* game on the Dreamcast. Have you heard anything about a *Ridge Racer* game?

Tyrone Diggs
tydiggs@prodigy.net

Sorry Tyrone, Namco has been totally silent about future Dreamcast plans, although it has already shown footage of the forthcoming PlayStation2 Ridge Racer (which looks sweet, by the way). Although several Namco Dreamcast games are rumored, none are confirmed (and none of the rumored ones are Ridge Racer).

I was wondering about some things in regard to the PS2. I have noticed that there seem to be only two controller ports. I understand that they can use the USB port to make more controllers fairly easy to add, but why didn't they include the seemingly now-standard four ports? Is it because a the backwards compatibility issue, or just because they ran out of space? The other question I had was you said that they managed to keep the launch price the same launch price as PlayStation. I don't remember PlayStation being $390.

jbibby@purdue.edu

According to Sony, the number of controller ports was kept at two to ensure backwards compatability, although why a PlayStation1 game couldn't simply use the first two is beyond us: frankly we think lack of additional ports was simple cost cutting, and as you note, USB controllers should make the issue moot. As for price, PlayStation debuted in Japan for $390 (roughly) and at $299 in the US. Since PlayStation2 is debuting for $390, a $299 launch in the US next year seems likely.

I have every **Next Generation** issue starting with **NG!** proudly displayed on my bookshelf and have loved watching your magazine evolve into the prestigious publication that it is today. However, for avid fans such as myself who not only enjoy but also collect **Next Generation**, there is a problem. Almost every month I am forced to buy a second **Next Gen** off of the newsstand because the one which was delivered to my home is marred, torn, or otherwise defaced in the delivery process. This could be easily avoided if the magazines were simply shipped inside plastic bags (as they used to be). This prevents 90% of most damage that occurs in delivery and also avoids putting the mailing label directly onto the cover of the magazine (which for a collector like myself, means a trip to the news stand and cash out of pocket).

P. Wes Schiel
wschiel@manhattanassociates.com

There are two reasons we no longer use plastic wrap. First, it's expensive and we'd rather pass the savings on in the form of cheaper subscription rates. Second, it seems wasteful and we get petitioned a lot by environmentalists not to do it.

In regards to the two stars that were given to *TrickStyle*: I can only hope that Jeffrey Adam Young was having a real bad day when he did it, 'cause brother you have dissed one of the most ELECTRIFYING gaming experiences of ALL time. Granted there are a few tracks (Japan 5, anyone?) that defy the logic inherent throughout most of the game, but if you say that the AI is relentless and the tracks are too complicated, then maybe you should take those two little stars, shine 'em up, and watch them sparkle as I turn them sideways and shove 'em straight up your candy ass!

Jason Levin
ajlevin@worldnet.att.net

First: games that have levels that defy the logic present in the rest of the game are poorly designed. Second: the AI players don't act like humans, they act like

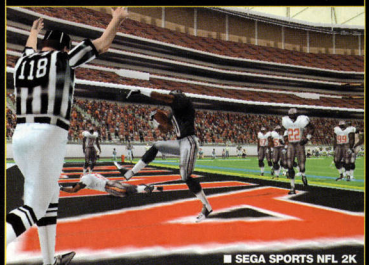
Hail Mary . . .

Come now. Do you really mean to say that *NFL 2K* isn't REVOLUTIONARY? In every sense, it certainly is. Graphics, animation, control, gameplay, sound — it's all there and then some. You know it is. You even went so far to admit that it was more attractive to play than the (ahem) FIVE-STAR *GameDay*. The animation is amazing, and yet still yields the tightest control.

Your reason for withholding that fifth star was the running game. Now, I haven't played *NFL 2K* that much, and I'm OK at it, but not that great. But you know what? I have been able to break long runs frequently in pro level — a feat which you say almost never happens, and is the reason you withheld the fifth star. Just this evening, I broke a 22-yard run with the Rams' Marshall Faulk against the Niners D in pro level! Stiff-arming is the key. Try it, you'll like it! Five stars, please!

Keith Sullada
keithsullada@netscape.net

You're right, Keith. With more play, we've also come to realize that stiff-arming is the key. Unfortunately, with judicious stiff-arming, we can now break out for 9-yard minimum runs every play when using a certain play, which unfortunately makes the game less fun than when we couldn't run (and even less like the NFL — where stiff-arming is extremely rare these days). And when we let the game play itself in several 60-minute matches? Negative running yards on both sides. The point is, while the game is revolutionary in many areas, it isn't flawless. If there was ever a game that called for a four-and-a-half-star rating, it's NFL 2K, but we couldn't give it five stars in good conscience. (And as for GameDay, we couldn't give it five stars either, this year.)



■ SEGA SPORTS NFL 2K

■ NFL2K is an awesome football game, and the only one we play around the office, but a flawed running game still keeps it out of the ★★★★★ range.

PSX debuted in Japan for roughly $390, and at $299 in the US. With a PlayStation2 at $390 in Japan, a $299 US launch seems likely

computer-controlled drones that know the tracks perfectly, creating a less-than-satisfying experience. Third: our stars are abstract concepts, not physical objects that can be shined or shoved anywhere. Fourth: We aren't sure, but we think J.A.Y. packs heat, so we wouldn't mess with him if we were you.

I just received your latest issue — and in a month that saw the release of one of the most commercially successful franchises of all time (*Final Fantasy VIII*) and what is certain to be one of the biggest sellers of 1999 (*Dino Crisis*), you guys ran a cover story on . . . *Shenmue*! A game that won't be released for months, for a system whose fate is still in doubt? All I can say is . . . well done! No, I don't own a Dreamcast. And frankly, I think PlayStation2 will bury all opposing systems. But your dedication to covering what is truly new in the videogames business (as opposed to merely running features on "what's popular on the sales charts at Wal-Mart" like all those other, shall we say, "Poké-mags") is what keeps me a happy subscriber. It's refreshing to see a magazine that lives up to its masthead. Keep it up.

VMisail@harpell.com

Thanks. Unlike other mags that go for the mass market, Next Generation prides itself on looking forward and providing in-depth coverage for the leaders and opinion-makers of the game industry: hardcore gamers. And for the record, we broke the story of Dino Crisis in June, and did a major feature on FFVIII back in February. (Someday maybe the other mags will thank us for getting such great renders made, since they all tend to use images originally created for us . . .)

What is the sailing screenshot on page 14 of your **11/99** issue? Is that from a game, and for what platform?

Jeff Thoreson

matejthor@webtv.net

That's actually a shot from a graphics demo, not a game — we haven't seen a game with a dedicated sailing engine since the Apple II days. Anyone know of one?

Thanks for previewing the Dreamcast version of *Centipede*. However, you got one thing wrong. The developer is not RealSports from the UK, but us, Leaping Lizard Software of the US. We did the PC version as well. Realsports (who aren't from the UK either!) did the PSX port.

Chris Green, President Leaping Lizard Software

http://www.lplizard.com

We apologize for this error. To help Chris atone for his mistake, we covered him in fleas and centipedes, then staked him in the path of a man-eating — if not leaping — lizard (a komodo dragon). Fitting, eh?

Come on, guys! Although I'm a die-hard Atari fan, even I wouldn't credit *Space Invaders* (Retroview 11/99) to Atari. The arcade game *Space Invaders* was developed by Taito in Japan and released in America by Bally/Midway. Atari did get in the picture when it licensed the game (a first) for its Atari VCS (2600). Cool cover, though!

Leonard Herman

author, *Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Videogames*

www.rolentapress.com

We've sent the offending editor to Japan to apologize to Taito. Still, considering the cement shoes, the chum bucket around his neck, and the fact that it's a long, wet, shark-infested walk from San Francisco's Ocean Beach, it may take him a while . . .

I usually take your reviews as gospel. But your review of *Jet Force Gemini* **really** bugs me. The subtile "Too much to do, too little to see" is a VERY bad start. A rephrasing would be: "Duuuuh. Dis game has too much gameplay and not enuf grafix."

What kind of message is that to come from a respected magazine like **Next Generation**? How can you dare consider criticising a game for too much content? I shudder to think of the butchering you'll do to *Ultima Ascension* with that attitude...

Mathew Babcock

mad_tinkerer2@hotmail.com

We have no problem with long games that hold your interest (a la the Ultimas, Final Fantasy, etc), but when a game is long just for the sake of being long, and features repetitive tasks that are fun once but boring the tenth time, then that game has problems.

If Rare had cut out half of Jet Force Gemini, the result would have been a shorter game that kept your attention the entire time, instead of a longer game that became boring halfway through. And it still would have been plenty long.

DC or PS2? Both

My understanding from what I have seen from the Internet is that PS2 will be much more powerful than Dreamcast. Although I don't doubt that Sony can do it, I still think I want a Dreamcast. The graphics are great, and it is here NOW! Maybe I will get a DC now and get a PS2 when it comes out, but that brings up another issue, price. Will PS2 actually be priced for the average public? I want a new system, but I want one now. Is DC worth getting until PS2 comes out? Please help me in my decision.

trainer17@mymailstation.com

If you want a new system (and who doesn't want to play the latest games?), Dreamcast is definitely worth your $199. As for PlayStation2, the best guess is that it will sell for $299 when it debuts in the US next fall.

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Next Generation Statement of Ownership

Post Office Notice: Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation for Periodicals class privileges as required by 39 USC3685: 1. Title of Publication: Next Generation 2. Publication No. 1078-9693 3. Date of Filing: 10/1/99 4. Frequency of Issue: Monthly 5. Number of issues published annually: 12 6. Annual subscription price: $20.00 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005 8/9. Complete address of the headquarters of general business offices of the publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: Doug Faust – same address, Editor: Chris Charla – same address, Managing Editor: Sarah Ellerman – same address 10. Owner: Imagine Media, Inc., 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005; Shareholder: The Future Network plc, Beauford Court, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA12BW U.K. 11/12. N/A 13. Publication title: Next Generation 14. Issue date for Circulation Data below: November 1999 15. Extent and nature of circulation given in this order, number of average copies each issue during preceding 12 months followed by actual number of copies published nearest filing date: a. Total number of copies 267,709, 226,824 b. Paid and or Requested Circulation (1) Mail subscriptions Outside-County 152,088, 122,780. (2) Paid In-County Subscriptions 0,0. (3) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution: 31,279, 31,457. (4) Other Classes Mailed Through USPS 0,0. c. Total Paid and or Requested Circulation 183,367, 154,237. d. Free Distribution by Mail (1) Outside County 2,087, 1,418. (2) In-County 0,0. (3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS 0,0. e. Free Distribution Outside the Mail 546, 0. f. Total Free Distribution 2,632, 1,418. g. Total Distribution 185,999, 155,655. h. Copies not distributed 81,710, 71,169. i. Total 267,709, 226,824. j. Percent Paid and/or Requested 99%, 99%. 16. Publication of Statement of Ownership is required and is printed in this issue of this publication December 1999. 17. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete: Kate Bailey, Subscription Director.

Retroview

December 1987

Gumpei Yokoi's masterpiece cements Nintendo's dominance

As the Apple II market slowed down in late 1987, LucasArts began an adventure game legacy with *Maniac Mansion*, the first title to use the SCUMM engine (which Lucas used until the release of *Grim Fandango* last year). On console, the Nintendo Entertainment System had quickly gone from being the system no retailer would stock to the one no kid could live without, and would outsell competitors both new (Sega's Master System) and old (Atari's XE Game System) by at least a ten-to-one ratio in 1987.

Why? Great games. 1987 alone would not only introduce the US to vampire hunter Simon Belmont, but also to videogaming's original femme fatale, Samus Aran, who journeyed through the caverns of Nintendo's *Metroid* in what was, at the time, the best game ever released. The game culminated in a ferocious battle against the Mother Brain, followed by a real surprise — the hero was a woman, a radical idea for the time.

■ You needed to locate weapons and learn moves to finally defeat *Metroid*

Meanwhile, in Japan, Square would release the first game in the *Final Fantasy* series (although it wouldn't hit US shores until 1990).

What we were playing

The golden age of 8-bit? Judge for yourself . . .

■ **AFTERBURNER**

■ System: Arcade
■ Publisher: Sega

■ **CASTLEVANIA**

■ System: NES
■ Publisher: Konami

■ **MANIAC MANSION**

■ System: Multi
■ Publisher: LucasArts

■ **PHANTASY STAR**

■ System: Master System
■ Publisher: Sega

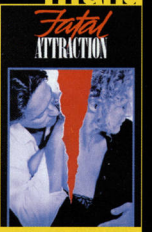
■ **RAD RACER**

■ System: NES
■ Publisher: Nintendo

Top 10 movies of '87

1 Three Men and a Baby
2 Fatal Attraction
3 Berverly Hills Cop 2
4 Good Morning, Vietnam
5 Moonstruck
6 The Untouchables
7 The Secret of My Success
8 Stakeout
9 Lethal Weapon
10 Dirty Dancing

■ The horror, the horror



■ Boiled rabbit? Mmm

...and in the real world

■ **The 3.5-inch floppy and VGA become PC standards when IBM includes them in its new line of PS/2 computers.**

■ **A financial disaster mitigated only by its cool name, "Black Monday," marks the day the stock market melts down, losing 508 points (22% of its then-value), as billions of dollars of value simply vanish.**

■ **Apple introduces HyperCard, a multimedia authoring and viewing tool. It is the first popular commercial product to feature hyperlinking.**

■ **Oliver North takes the fall for Iran-Contra, paradoxically becoming a folk hero to millions of law-and-order types as he testifies to numerous extra-Constitutional crimes.**

■ **The USSR's policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (reform) reach a new high point during Mikhail Gorbachev's November 2 speech which condemns the crimes of Stalin — many mark this date as the beginning of the end of the Cold War (and the Soviet empire).**

NextGen
Next Generation magazine
12/99

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BPA Congrats to Jon, Heidi, and Jackson! Please don't rebel by being into Star Trek. This issue now has less than 20 minutes to go before it gets dumped off the server. Hurry up, you lazy bums! Oh, it's finished. In the meantime, we can bring you late-breaking news, if only something interesting was happening this morning other than Tom being late, Jeff being grumpy, and Blake trying to vainly find anything to trade Chris for his copy of *Metal Gear: VR Missions*. Blake, Chris still needs a sink-come machine, you know...

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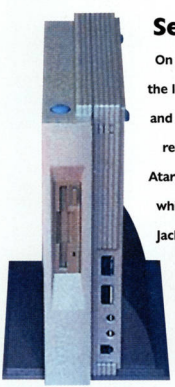
Imagine Media is aimed at people who have a passion. A passion for games. For endlessly rearranging our home entertainment centers. For still writing games in BASIC. For trying to see just how much junk food you can eat before dying. For surplussing down at HBO in Santa Clara. You get the idea. These are passions we share, along with Thursday evenings for the NG writing circle/fragfest. Our goal is to feed your passion with the greatest magazines, and web sites, in the Northern Hemisphere.

We love to innovate, we love to have fun, and we have a cast-iron rule always to deliver spectacular editorial value. That means doing whatever it takes to give you the information you need. With any luck, we'll even make you smile sometimes.

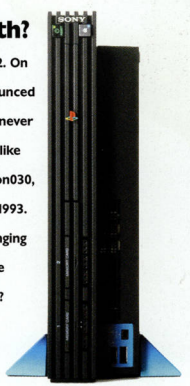
Thanks for joining us. Next Generation's passion for games extends beyond everything — even editorial deadlines. Today's favorites: *Tony Hawk, Q3 Test, UT, CTR, Army Man.*

BackwardsCompatible



Separated at birth?

On the right, Sony's PlayStation2. On the left, a picture of Atari's announced and publicly demonstrated (but never released) Microbox, a console-like Atari PC based on the Atari Falcon030, which was supposed to ship in 1993. Jack Tramiel described it as bringing "workstation power into the living room." Sound familiar?



NextMonth Veronica

■ **Capcom's Dreamcast horror title is revealed. Can Veronica scare us?**

NextGen 01/00 on sale December 21, 1999
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Next Generation (ISSN# 1078-9693) is published monthly by Imagine Media, Inc., 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005, USA. Periodicals Class postage paid at Brisbane, CA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER send changes of address to Next Generation, PO Box 53680, Boulder, CO, 80328-3680. Newsstand distribution is handled by Curtis Circulation Company. Subscriptions: one year (12 issues) U.S.: $20. Canada: $34. Foreign: $44. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST# R 128 220688) CPC Int'l Pub Mail #0781126.

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