

■ Descent II Review ■ Inside NBA Live '96 ■ Panzer Dragoon Zwei Preview

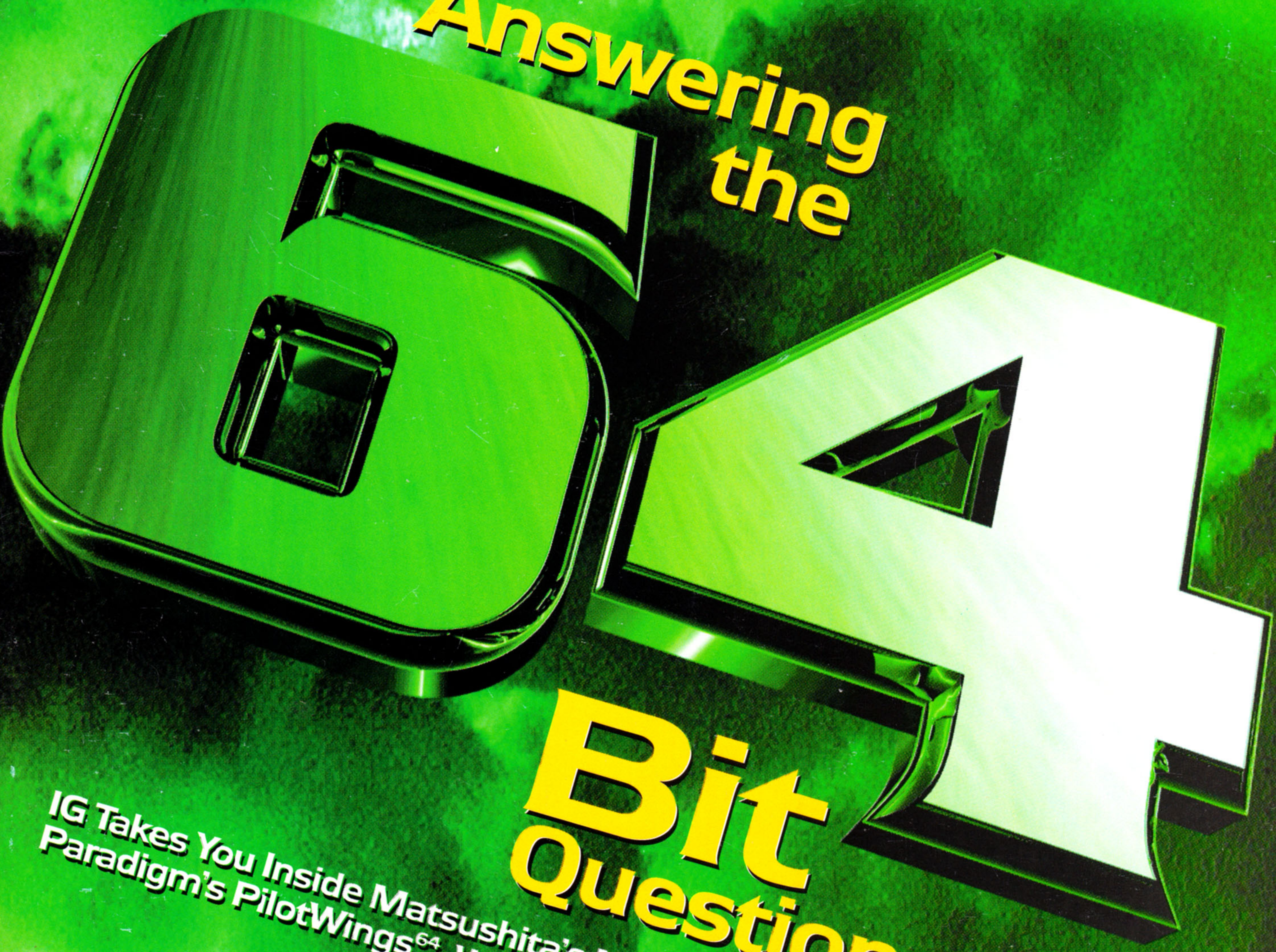
INTELLIGENT GAMER'S



PUSSY

Nintendo⁶⁴ • Saturn • PlayStation • Jaguar • 3DO • PC • Internet

Answering
the



Bit Question

IG Takes You Inside Matsushita's M2 and Behind the Scenes of
Paradigm's PilotWings⁶⁴ With Revealing Interviews and Exclusive Photos

Do They Deliver
on the 64-Bit Promise?

April, 1996

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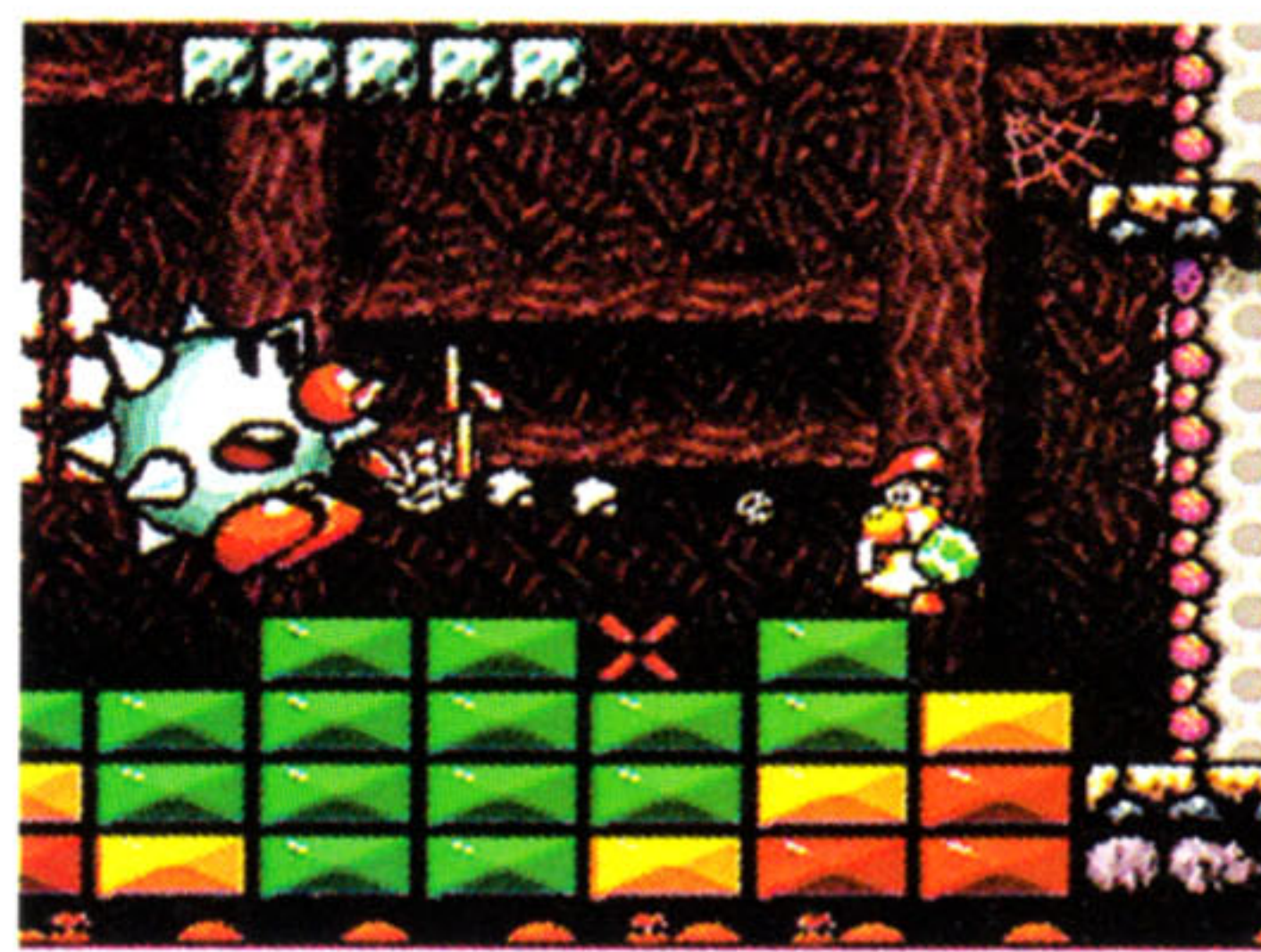
Mario's back in his biggest adventure yet.

Four years in the birthing, and now this bambino comes kicking and screaming into the world of

Morphmation graphics. A Nintendo brainchild that allows

the characters and back-grounds to ripple, rubberize and react like nothing you've ever seen ('cept maybe that nasty gelatin salad your mom puts out for company).

But there's more than eye-popping visuals to drool over. There's over



Egg fights, screaming babies, vicious attacks—it's like day care from hell.



Do not adjust your television. These graphics are supposed to be wavy.



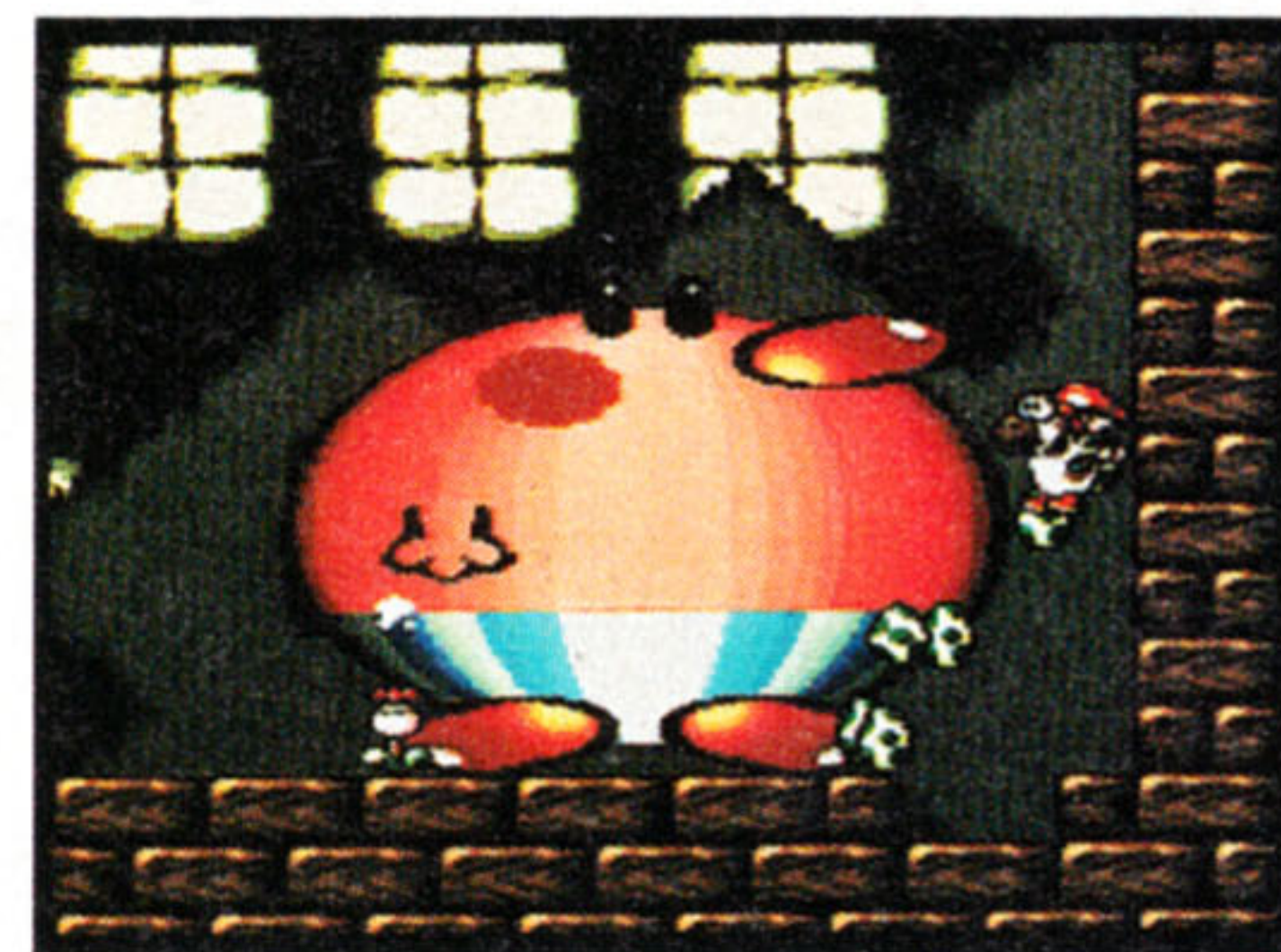
This baby's outta control.

60 levels packed with all-new surprises. Huge expanding bosses. And Yoshi — a cold-blooded baby sitter who spits fire and launches eggs out his butt. He even morphs into a helicopter...

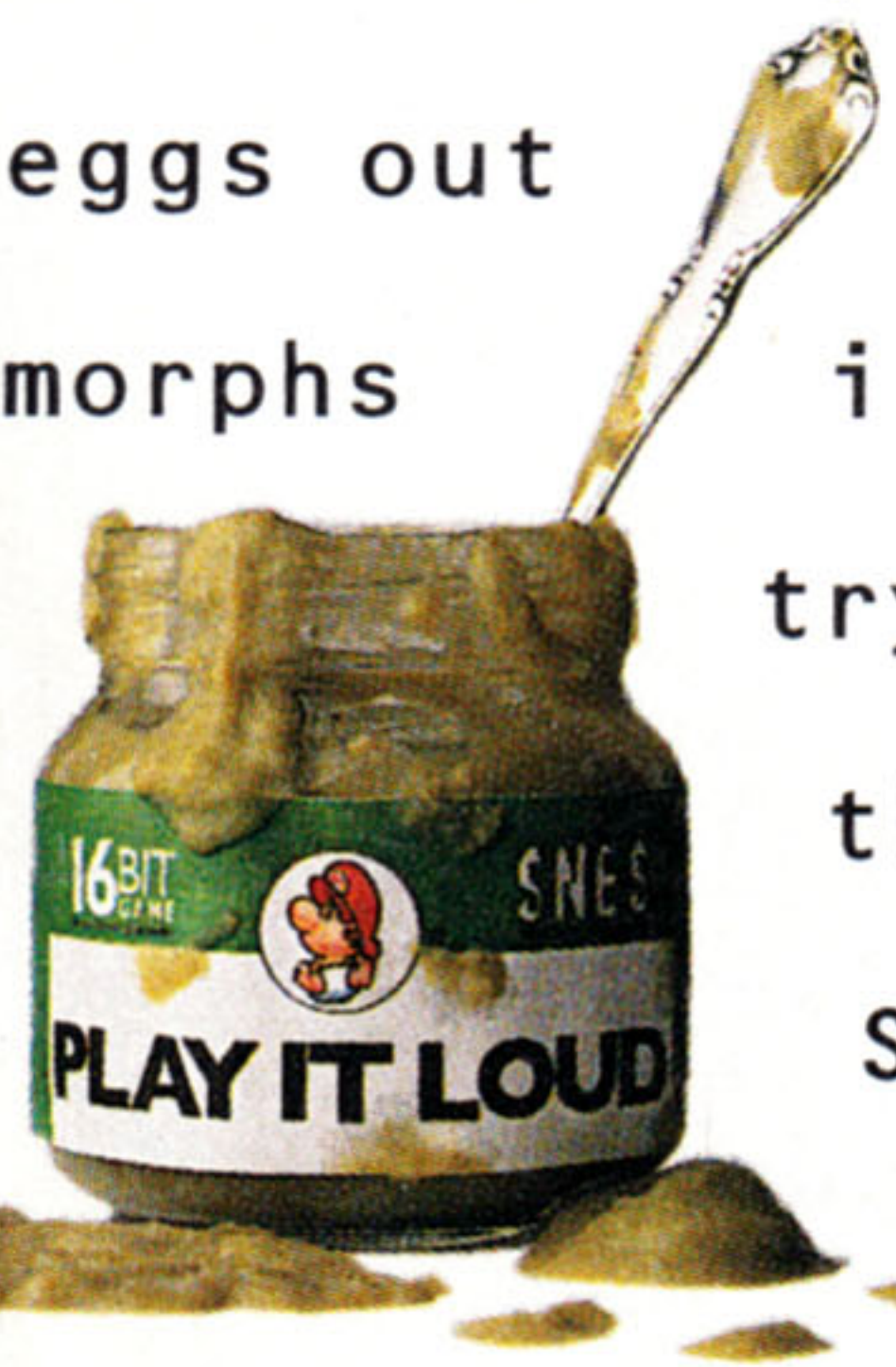
try that with your average lizard. And if that doesn't pacify you, there are over 130 different types of enemies. So, you may wanna put on a fresh diaper.



This little sucker doesn't just scroll left to right. He goes all over the place (and we don't mean Number Two).



Kicking, shrieking, crying, tantrums...and that's just the guys who bought new systems.



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ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM



NBA Live '96

Descent II

Panzer Dragoon 2

Iron Rain

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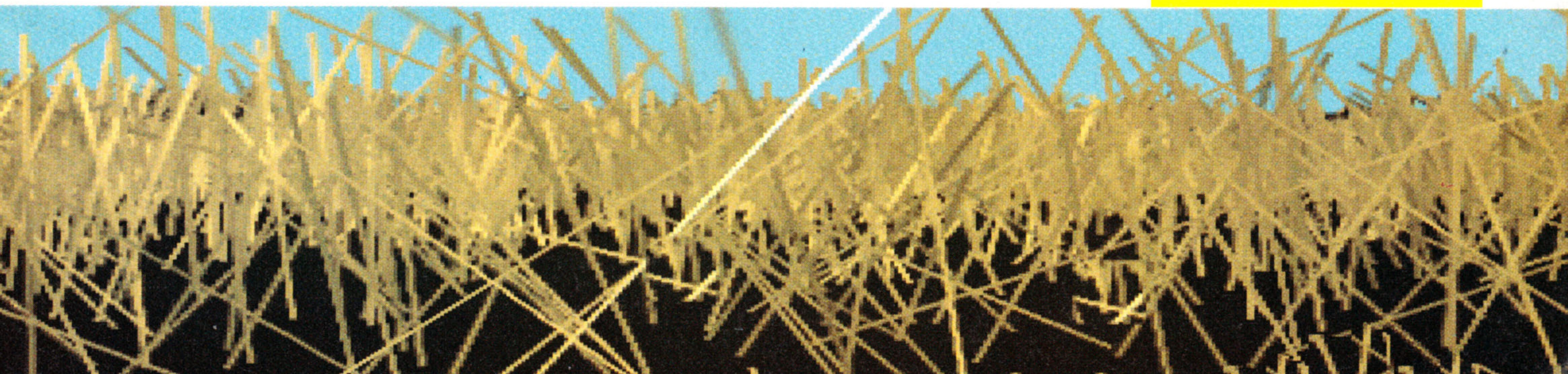
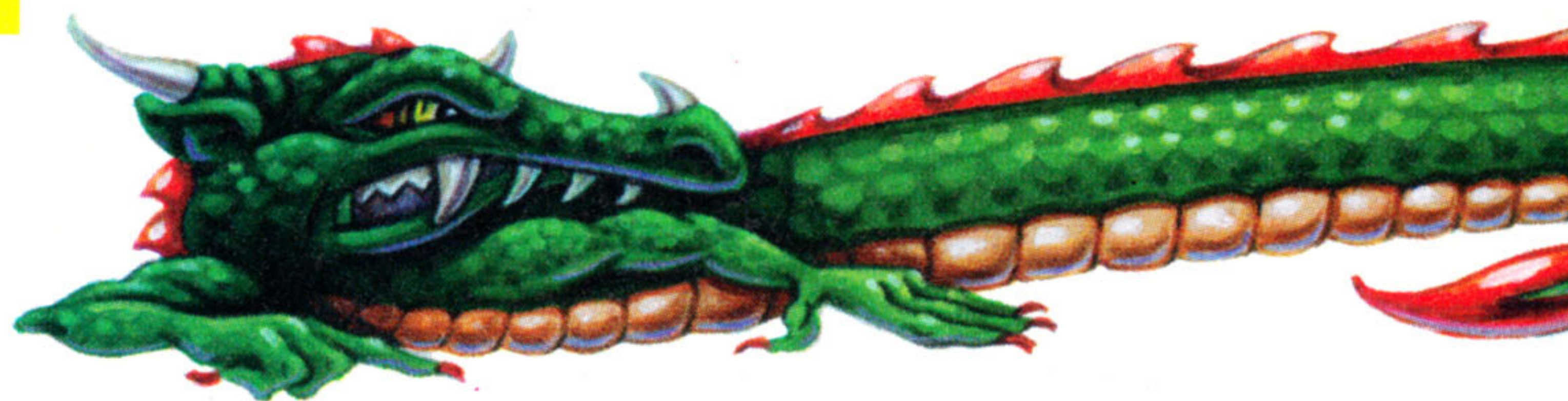
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Shifting Coalitions

The singular key to success in the video-game industry—and this is generally true within other businesses and social situations as well—is the formation and retention of a winning coalition. Sony does best when they get Namco, Williams and Electronic Arts to make exclusive games for their machine. Intel and Microsoft succeed when they lure well-known companies into development for x86- and Pentium-equipped machines. Etcetera.

So why is this important? We used to know that Nintendo could count on Capcom to deliver a Super NES Final Fight and Konami to show up with a Gadius, Castlevania or Contra game, but that's not necessarily true anymore. Studying the formation and retention of coalitions is the means by which we can predict—with some accuracy—the winners and losers of the 1996 video-game battle yet to come.

Nintendo no longer is guaranteed to have four aces in their hand: Konami is developing Gadius, Castlevania and Contra titles for the Saturn and PlayStation, and Capcom is releasing their hottest current software for those machines as well. Irem, a superb developer which backed the Super NES launch with Super R-Type, is now defunct and allowing software ports to migrate to the Saturn and PlayStation, at the same time as their old development team has moved on to developing games for the Neo-Geo.

Sega, which reaped tremendous benefits from Acclaim/Williams (Mortal Kombat) and Electronic Arts (Madden, NHL, FIFA), has seen those companies form broad alliances with other hardware manufacturers, and even Sony's 1995 grasp on hot Williams, EA and Namco properties appears to be loosening with the Nintendo 64 and Panasonic M2 machines looming on the horizon.

Wildcards include such developers as Doom's id Software, Toshinden's Takara and Tamssoft, Dark Forces' LucasArts, Solar Eclipse's Crystal Dynamics, Destruction Derby's Psygnosis and—surprisingly—SNK, whose recent decision to publish for both the PlayStation and Saturn will add a host of quality software to each of those machines.

In the months to come, these developers and publishers will give Nintendo, Panasonic, Sega and Sony the extra software push they need to thrive in the North American and European markets. The fact that most of the aforementioned companies have remained non-committal should tell you something about both the state of the video-game industry and the responsive consumer mindset in early 1996—until companies decisively line up to back one format over another, confusion will most likely reign supreme in the marketplace. Intel-based PC gaming is continuing to grow today largely because Microsoft has helped to assemble an exceptional coalition of developers from the United States, Europe and Japan: Who will step up and do the same for the console market?

Jer Horwitz
Editor in Chief



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Eisenberg Communications Group, Inc.
Woodland Hills, CA 91364
(818) 712-9400
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Virtual Pilot Pro (PC & Mac*)

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Jetstick (PC & Mac)

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*Coming soon. First Quarter 1996.



Hard(ware) Choices

Dear IG's FUSION, Whilst considerable confusion still seems to persist within the gaming community as to the best game system, it seems to me that the proliferation of platforms available is an opportunity for us to be able to select the platform that most suits our tastes. For example, if I want a family entertainment title, I can pick Twisted, Station Invasion or Zhadnost on the 3DO. If I want driving games, I can pick Virtua Racing, Daytona, Sega Rally, etc. on the Saturn. If I want arcade games, then it's the PlayStation or Saturn. In all cases, buying all three platforms is still a lot cheaper than buying a PC, and represents a good value.

I acknowledge that not everyone can or should own each platform, however the cost of a new machine is cheap in terms of the low multiples of games that equate to the hardware's cost. Why should I buy five poor Saturn titles when I can buy an alternate machine for the same cost and increase my options? The next generation is about choices and options and I'm glad it's not just a two-horse race.

Sheyne Walsh
Quakers Hill, Australia

The major benefit to having hardware competition comes in the form of increased year-to-year technical innovation. The quest for a more exciting experience pushes once-small companies such as Sega to eclipse the NES and software developers such as Electronic Arts and SNK to start hardware divisions to create what would eventually become the 3DO and Neo-Geo. Sadly, this generally means that the best software gets spread out over several maturing platforms, and that consumers are forced to buy more hardware just to play the most amazing games.



Where are Sony's RPGs?

Let's consider the hardware situation from a different perspective for one moment. Imagine that Sega and 3DO were cooperating on one game machine whilst Nintendo and Sony were working on another, or picture a world where there was little ambiguity about whose hardware every developer should support. Logically, you'd need to own less hardware to play the same games you're playing today, and consumers who wanted to buy a new machine would be faced with a much easier choice. Under today's scenario, you'll need four different machines to play the newest games by Nintendo, Sega, Sony and 3DO, which at prevailing prices will cost a total of a thousand dollars. Though it's great that people can choose different systems for their needs, the fact is that you can't play Ridge Racer on a Saturn today nor can you play Daytona on the PlayStation. Would this be a better world if companies spent more of their R&D money on developing hit games and less on developing expensive new hardware? We'd be interested in hearing your thoughts.

The fact is that you can't play Ridge Racer on a Saturn today; nor can you play Daytona on the PlayStation

The King is Dead, Long Live the King

Dear IG's FUSION, How is it that an industry rookie like Sony can come into the market and completely overwhelm veterans such as Sega and Atari? Could it be that some people still realize the power of quality gameplay and pricing over "name branding" and reputation? Thanks Sony for breathing life into the gamers who needed it. And to all those who are still loyal to the others, that's good for you, but I just hope you realize that no single platform will be perfect. Variety has always been the spice of life and Sony has done a hell of a job...except for the RPGs...where are they?

Devan Hammack
San Carlos, CA

We were with you right up until the part where you mentioned Atari. Let's set up a more appropriate analogy: If the 1995 holiday season was a war, Sega was an oft-decorated but overweight General and Atari was a bingo-playing, twice-demoted and now-retired Commander—Sega really needed to trim some fat and get back to releasing and marketing software (which it does best), whereas Atari has been humbled several times before and has hardly been in the thick of things for some time now. Pricing certainly helped Sony, as did an aggressive and interesting marketing campaign, but reputation and name branding (Sony, Namco, Williams, Electronic Arts, etc.) certainly seemed to be important to the PlayStation's success, as well. Where are Sony's RPGs? Look out for Beyond the Beyond and Arc the Lad directly from Sony itself for this summer and the holidays, respectively, plus Final Fantasy VII either late this year or sometime in 1997.

Send your comments, concepts and theories to IG's FUSION at iglee@aol.com, subject line: Communications.

Conspiracy Theory: The Fix is In!

Dear IG's FUSION, Why is Sony letting Psygnosis, the maker of their best games, make games for the Saturn? Even if they want to sell more games, and the games are a few months old, having those games out only for the PlayStation would only broaden the appeal of the system. I wonder if they instructed Psygnosis to make bad games for the Saturn on purpose so they could say that the PlayStation was superior?

T.J. Young
Woodstock, GA

If your theory was correct, Sony could do the Saturn much greater harm by porting over ESPN Extreme Games and Kileak: The DNA Imperative—clearly, there's money to be made in porting good games to multiple systems. See our Letters column from last month for the straightforward answer to your question.



Sony could do the Saturn much greater harm by porting over ESPN Extreme Games...

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Is it worth the wait?



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CD vs. Cartridge: Let the Games Begin

Dear IG's FUSION,
Why do so many people seem upset at Nintendo for making the N64 a cartridge-based system? Has anyone noticed just how DURABLE cartridges are? I can still play carts that are 15+ years old on my old Atari, for example. Does anyone expect to be able to say the same for the CD-ROM systems? The CD itself MIGHT last that long (if you haven't scratched it by then), but most players will have long since gone out of alignment or otherwise lost their ability to track the discs reliably. The cart-based system is NOT dead. Of course, today's gamer seems to have a much shorter attention span, or perhaps the games themselves just have less lasting power. It may very well be that people just won't care when their PlayStations and Saturns stop loading games in roughly five years...

Gregory Legowski
Venetia, PA

The angry parties are primarily developers, retailers and those in the games media who realize that 8- or 12-Megabyte cartridges will be more expensive than CDs to manufacture, sell and purchase. Developers hate to price their games out of the \$50-60 price bracket. Retailers hate having huge stocks of expensive cartridges which are harder to put on sale than CDs, and people in the games media are just beginning to become aware that third-party N64 cartridges could cost as much as \$80. Do average consumers care if the new StarFox game is \$69.99 instead of \$54.99, or if Ultimate Mortal Kombat costs \$79.99 on chips instead of \$49.99 on CD? Nintendo will be answering these questions in the next year.



It's a matter of control

Dear IG's FUSION,
As every hardware company tries to put out a new console, they also start to add neat stuff to get prospective buyers' attention. From Sony's memory cards and new design for the controller to Nintendo's even newer controller, these things enhance our playing enjoyment and definitely add some fresh air to this business. These days, it looks like controllers have been the biggest issue in the world. Sony's controller is very comfortable and looks very unique, and of course, becomes very useful when you need to find extra buttons. Looking at Nintendo's new N64, their controller carries even more hot stuff than Sony's. I'm just wondering: If Nintendo's controller is there to set some standard for 3-D action games, then how come there are only two action buttons? I mean, it probably will work great for SMB or those games that do not require a lot of action, but how about fighting games or even sports games? I never understood why Sony had put so many buttons on their controller until I played NFL GameDay, NHL FaceOff and In The Zone. Sometimes you just need more action buttons to have total control of your game, right? Besides sports games, SF Alpha and other fighting games will also need those buttons. So, can you tell me how are they going to arrange this problem? Are they going to use the four "perspective camera" buttons as action buttons too? If so, why don't they make those buttons the same size? Since I am on the controller topic, I would like to talk about button configuration. First, I wonder how come there are still a lot of games that would not let you reconfigure the controls? Sometimes you don't feel like using some buttons and it will cause some delays or inconveniences when you are playing that game. Second, since there are at least six buttons on either PS or Saturn, how come some games still force us to use two keys at the same time? For example, FIFA '96 is a great game but the control is just poor. I need to press square and X at the same time to do something and press square and circle to do something else, and that goes for both defense and offense. I think you know what I am talking about. What happened to those L1, L2, R1 and R2 buttons? A good game needs good control to make it better. I hope game companies will remember this.

Andy Cheng
San Diego, CA

Nintendo's controller was designed for versatility, and people have been confused by the functionality of the buttons largely as a result of their color scheme and layout: Four buttons are yellow, one is blue, one is green, a start button is red, a thumbstick trigger button is dark grey and the shoulder buttons are light grey. The four yellow "camera perspective" buttons are positioned north-west-south-east, with the green and blue "action" buttons to the southwest of the yellows. Let's make this simple: Those six buttons are arranged in two rows of three buttons, just as you'd need for any Street Fighter-style fighting game, and their "camera" or "action" designations will change based on the game you're playing. In a 2-D fighting game, those six buttons will probably be your punches and kicks, whereas a 3-D fighting game might use them in some other way. Why aren't the yellow, blue and green buttons the same size? Perhaps there wasn't enough room on the controller's face for six large buttons, or perhaps it was just a design issue. (Here's a little related trivia: The joypad "cross" design on Nintendo controllers has been patented by the company, as have the distinctive joypads on PlayStation and Saturn controllers.) The two light-grey shoulder buttons, the red start button and the special dark trigger button for the thumbstick will no doubt have their own specific applications.

Your point on customized control schemes is well-taken, and the staff of Intelligent Gamer's FUSION agrees wholeheartedly, except when simpler control schemes make games too easy. Street Fighter Alpha's use of mapped triple-punch and triple-kick buttons for super special moves is a great idea, but imagine a single mapped punch button on Street Fighter Alpha that automatically executes the best punch for any situation—yuck, unless you're a really sorry player. In rare cases, it's reasonable to force you to use two buttons at once, but otherwise, let's hope that game coders start utilizing the features that \$25-30 standard controllers can offer.

Healthy competition

Dear IG's FUSION,
Just what are all these new video game companies trying to do? Don't they know that they'll never get the market share that Nintendo had with the NES? All they're doing is fragmenting the market and reducing profits for all the others. Two companies are all that's needed, Nintendo and Sega. Each getting half of the market share is enough, and they'll keep each other on their toes. I feel that people are going to get sick of all these different systems and may switch over completely to PCs. I don't want this to happen, and the only solution is to let these newcomers into the system wars die. If they succeed, more greedy companies will try to get in and that will be a disaster.

Jeffrey Pacheco
New Bedford, MA

The 3DO Company entered the market with a different motive: Make a better game platform, release it before your competitors have their next-generation priorities together, and offer developers lower per-game royalties than they're used to paying out. In the process, many developers were given training wheels for their next-generation system development, resulting in much of the software we're seeing nowadays. The 3DO Company's goal was to make money on a universally adopted hardware and software standard, a dream which was obviously not achieved in any satisfactory sense of the words, but at the very least the company was not out there to simply fragment the games market—they helped it, in many small but significant ways. Is Sony considered a new video game company? If so, they've only succeeded in raising the bar for hardware development a notch or two, and in pushing Sega and Nintendo to work harder on churning out good software at low prices. Seems good from this vantage point.

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Is it worth the wait?



Only if you want the best!

NINTENDO 64

Nintendo



“N64 in Japan alone, in year one would easily exceed all worldwide sales to date for Sony’s PlayStation.”

**Peter Main,
executive vice president,
Sales and Marketing,
Nintendo**

In a move which will probably surprise few, Nintendo has announced that its flagship Nintendo 64 (formerly Ultra 64) console will be released on Sept. 30 in North America, instead of the late April '96 date that the company had been promising since November.

The Japanese launch is the reason for the delay, according to a letter issued to all of Nintendo's retailers and close developers from Peter Main, Nintendo's executive vice president of sales and marketing. Apparently, after the November Shoshinkai Show, Japanese media polls indicated that 65 percent of Nintendo's licensees felt that N64 hardware would surpass the three million mark in 12 months. If such sales indeed took place, it would place Nintendo in the market as a leader; as Main notes, “N64 in Japan alone, in year one would easily exceed all worldwide sales to date for Sony's PlayStation.”

Under the best circumstances, Nintendo would be hard-pressed to manufacture enough systems to meet demand in both the U.S. and Japanese market simultaneously. In addition, only a handful of titles will be available at launch in Japan, something that doesn't look good on store shelves here in the U.S. (as demonstrated by the six-title launch of the Saturn).

Nintendo also announced that it would unveil its mass storage device in late 1996 in Japan. The disk drive will use 3 3/4" writable

Squaresoft is developing Final Fantasy 7 for the Sony PlayStation rather than the N64.



N64 launch: delayed

magnetic media, have a capacity of 64 megabytes and come bundled with an additional one or two megabytes of RAM for extra program space. Currently, Nintendo has been indicating that the extra RAM size will be two megabytes. Rumors peg the disk drive's price at roughly \$150 U.S.

As we go to press, IG has just learned of a report out of Japan that states that Nintendo may be having more trouble manufacturing the systems than expected. The report, published by Japan's Daily Yomiuri Shimbun, states that Nintendo may push the release of the N64 back in Japan as well, possibly to July. The cause of this rumored delay is a shortage of parts, causing a shortfall of up to 300,000 out of the planned launch of 500,000 machines. This, along with the recent revelation that Square is developing Final Fantasy VII for the Sony PlayStation rather than the N64 (more on that story in this month's Japan Today column) could mean that the N64's launch in Japan may not be as stellar as Nintendo has forecasted.

From
Project Reality to N64

August 1993

Nintendo announces that it will be jointly developing a 64-bit system with Silicon Graphics, codenamed “Project Reality,” and scheduled to be released in 1995.

June 1994

At the 1994 Summer CES, Nintendo announced that the system would be called Ultra 64 and showed “the first two Ultra titles,” Killer Instinct and Cruisin' USA. Neither title used a significant part of the final N64 chipset in its arcade incarnations.

January 1995

At the 1995 Winter CES, Nintendo announced that SGI had completed the design and testing phases of the U64 chipset.

May 1995

At E3, Nintendo said that the chipset for the U64 was finalized. A simultaneous release date of April 1996 was set for North America and Europe, with the machine set to be unveiled in November at the upcoming Shoshinkai Show in Japan.

November 1995

Nintendo finally allowed the press and retailers to see the N64 in action. A release date of April 21, 1996 is set for the Japanese release, with the U.S. release set for some time in the same month.

February 1995

Nintendo delays the release of the N64 in the U.S., citing an expected high demand for the system in Japan. The new U.S. release date is officially announced as Sept. 30, 1996.

Virtual Boy relaunched

Nintendo's launch of its unique Virtual Boy system was somewhat less successful than they had anticipated, but Nintendo is trying to show stronger support for its beleaguered 3-D machine by announcing a new advertising campaign based around the following upcoming titles: Nester's Funky Bowling, 3-D Tetris and Bound High (working title).

Nester's Funky Bowling is a 3-D bowling title starring

Nester, of Nintendo Power fame, while 3-D Tetris is as you would expect: a three-dimensional version of Alexei Pazhitnov's puzzle game classic. Both of the titles

should be on store shelves by the time you read this. Bound High is a “action-strategy-puzzle” game scheduled to be released in May. Tests of the games, which have

either been released already in Japan or previewed at Nintendo's Shoshinkai Show there, have left many players wondering why Nintendo has forsaken Zelda,





Konami to create M2-based Arcade Games

One of the promises made by many of the next-generation game system manufacturers has been that their home machines would be powerful enough to be arcade machines, with the obvious side benefit of perfect effort-free conversions to the home console. Sony has one such joint-development arrangement with Namco's System 11 hardware, Sega has its ST-V board and Time-Warner Interactive has even used hardware derived from the Jaguar chipset in one of their recent efforts, Area 51. But the one player who never entered the arcade market was 3DO, despite rumors that first-generation title *Way of the Warrior* was to be released as a coin-op.

Today, all that has changed as Konami of Japan and America have both now announced that they have formed an alliance with electronics giant Matsushita Electric

Industries to develop arcade games based on MEI's newly acquired 64-Bit M2 technology. No titles have been announced yet, but the first games using the M2 chipset should be hitting arcades by the end of this year. The cost for each board should be under 200,000 yen (roughly \$2,000 U.S.), putting it squarely in the middle of the arcade game board price range, and Konami expects to ship between 5,000 and 10,000 pieces of each game. Konami says that the M2 games will likely be dedicated games, which means that at least the initial titles will not easily be upgraded to different games as time goes on.

Matsushita seems to be continuing to seek partners for its M2 chipset, and it follows that if Matsushita continues along this path in persuading coin-op manufacturers to use their hardware, the M2 chipset will have a strong

"...the first games using the M2 chipset should be hitting arcades by the end of this year."

bytes & buzz...

■ Sega of America will begin a press tour for its 1996 Saturn lineup in late February, showing off playable demos of titles such as *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*, *Clockwork Knight 2* and *Congo*, and previewing titles such as *Fighting Vipers*, *Indy 500*, *Manx TT* and *Sky Target* on videotape. ■ Electronic Arts has purchased the worldwide interactive software rights to the *Gen*¹³ comic-book series, and will develop games for the PC, PlayStation, Saturn and other advanced entertainment platforms. The first products will appear in 1997.

■ T*HQ acquired the license from Turner New Media to create games featuring *World Championship Wrestling* and its stars. The license includes *Hulk Hogan*, *Macho Man Randy Savage*, *Ric Flair*, *Giant*, *Sting* and *Lex Luger*. The first games should appear for the PlayStation, Saturn and PC CD-ROM in 1997. There has been no word on whether or not "Lobo" Shubert will make a guest appearance.

■ The Imagination Network will introduce *Cyber Park*, a 3-D virtual reality environment, this summer. It will be designed like a city, with buildings and neighborhoods housing entertainment activities and games. Non-player animated characters include sorcerers, waiters, butlers and others. For more information, visit <http://www.inngames.com>.

■ Late-breaking: Japan's Enix, developers of the *Dragon Quest* and *ActRaiser* games, is said to be on the verge of producing games for the Sony PlayStation and Sega Saturn. The company has neither confirmed nor denied the story.

StarFox and innumerable other in-house winners in favor of moderately interesting software for the machine.



Funky Bowling as Nintendo's ace in the hole? It may take a little more than strikes and spares to save this Boy.



Futuristic racing is the name of the game in Konami's *Midnight Run*.

Nostalgia hits the gaming industry

Whether you played your first game of Donkey Kong in a pizza parlor or Super Mario Brothers in a packed arcade, you probably have fond memories of your first experience with a joystick and video monitor. With decades of game history behind them, several established game companies have become wise to the fact that yesterday's gamers are now aching to play the old games that they grew up with.

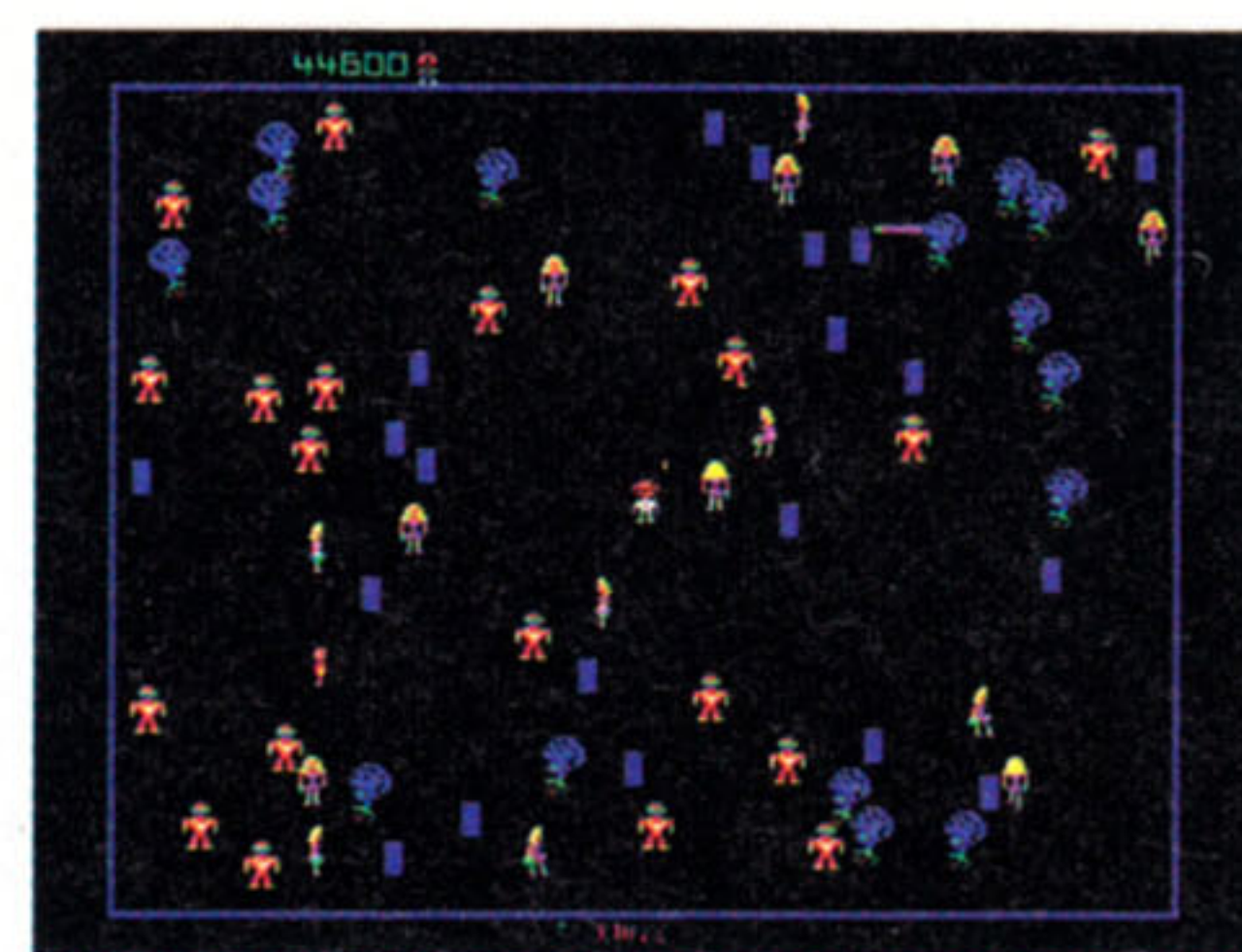
Now that selling a single 8-Bit translation for \$60 seems unreasonable, the arcade games of the early to mid-1980s can now be found in several home game compilation discs. The most faithful is Williams/Digital Eclipse's Williams Arcade Classics, now available for the PC and coming soon for the Sony PlayStation. (Macintosh owners have been able to play WAC for quite some time, although the Mac version only offers three of the six games available in the PC version.) The compilation features six arcade games from the early '80s that were based around Williams' then state-of-the-art arcade hardware, including Defender, Defender II (formerly Stargate), Joust, Robotron, Sinistar and Bubbles. What makes the WAC package particularly interesting is Digital Eclipse's emulation technology, which allows the actual arcade game code to be

run on a PC.

Console users also have a lot of classic games coming their way. Namco is bringing out their Namco Museum series for the PlayStation—the first volume of the Namco Museum features classics such as Galaga, Pole Position, Pac-Man, Bosconian and Rally-X; all very faithful versions of the arcade originals, right down to the DIP switches that arcade operators used to customize the difficulty of their games.

The second volume just released in Japan features Xevious, Mappy and Gaplus, among others. (As an interesting aside, Namco has also rereleased a few of its classics on a single arcade board in Japan. The board features Galaga, Mappy and Xevious, in both classic and "arranged" versions.) The first volume should be available this month in North America, and the next two volumes should be out by the end of the year here as well.

Namco is not the only company pursuing the classic game dollar. Konami has also announced that it will be releasing a compilation of their popular Gradius games for both the Saturn and PlayStation in Japan. Nichibutsu has released a package with Crazy Climber, Frisky Tom and Moon Cresta for the PlayStation and Super Famicom, and Taito has recently announced remakes of Darius II and Chase HQ for the Saturn.



Sinistar and Robotron, pictured above, were two of Williams' most popular arcade titles from the early '80s.



Classic arcade game aficionados will find a lot to like in Williams Arcade Classics.

Digital Eclipse

Digital Eclipse is a small company which has typically involved itself with writing emulation programs, which are designed to simulate the inner workings of one computer on another. Recently, however, they were tapped by both Williams and Activision to write emulators for two different platforms; the 6809-based Williams arcade hardware (for Williams Arcade Classics), and the 6502-based Commodore 64 (for the

Win95 Commodore 64 Game Pack). Currently in the works at Digital Eclipse are Windows 95 and PlayStation versions of Williams Arcade Classics, along with several other products that they could not talk about as of yet. The PlayStation product is currently in a rough beta state and reportedly performs very nicely, making the PlayStation the current platform of choice for gamers looking for a quick shot of nostalgia.

Quips & Quicks

entertainment news



Walter A. Forbes, CEO of CUC International, on the acquisitions of Sierra On-Line and Davidson & Associates: "Our goal is to be the nation's leader in content across all areas of consumer spending in the electronic marketplace. We are making these acquisitions for four reasons: First, we strongly believe that the rapidly expanding PC and interactive platforms worldwide are the future growth engines for how consumers will access information and

conduct commerce. Second, education and entertainment are two of the fastest growing areas of consumer spending, and Davidson and Sierra On-Line are pre-eminent in these sectors. Their products are ideally suited for the rapid penetration of the PC and Internet into consumers' homes. Third, CUC International has an unparalleled track record of providing high-quality goods and services to consumers in both traditional and interactive ways. And, fourth, combined with our plans for the electronic marketplace, these acquisitions will enable CUC International to broaden our content reach beyond our current offerings to establish one of the most compelling content areas in the interactive world—one that combines education, entertainment, value-oriented offerings and the ability to transact."



Ken Williams, CEO of Sierra On-Line, regarding Sierra's merger with CUC International: "I firmly believe that the Internet will become pervasive in society and represents an unparalleled opportunity. I am not certain whether interactive entertainment or electronic commerce will represent the 'killer app' on the Internet, but I feel that these two categories, [in] which Sierra and CUC are the industry leaders, are definite contenders for this honor."



Laurie Strand of Broderbund, discussing Myst, the first CD-ROM to sell 2 million units: "When Myst was released, we knew that it was a great game, but the way this product has affected the software industry is astounding. Myst is to CD-ROM what Charlie Chaplin is to silent movies and Pac-Man is to arcade games."



Doug Glen, President of Mattel Media, discussing the new company's line of children's products: "Most of the competition in the entertainment multimedia marketplace is crowded into the action game area...we believe that a real mass market will emerge for family-oriented software driven by trusted brands and built on interactive fun which is accessible to younger children, girls and adults alike."

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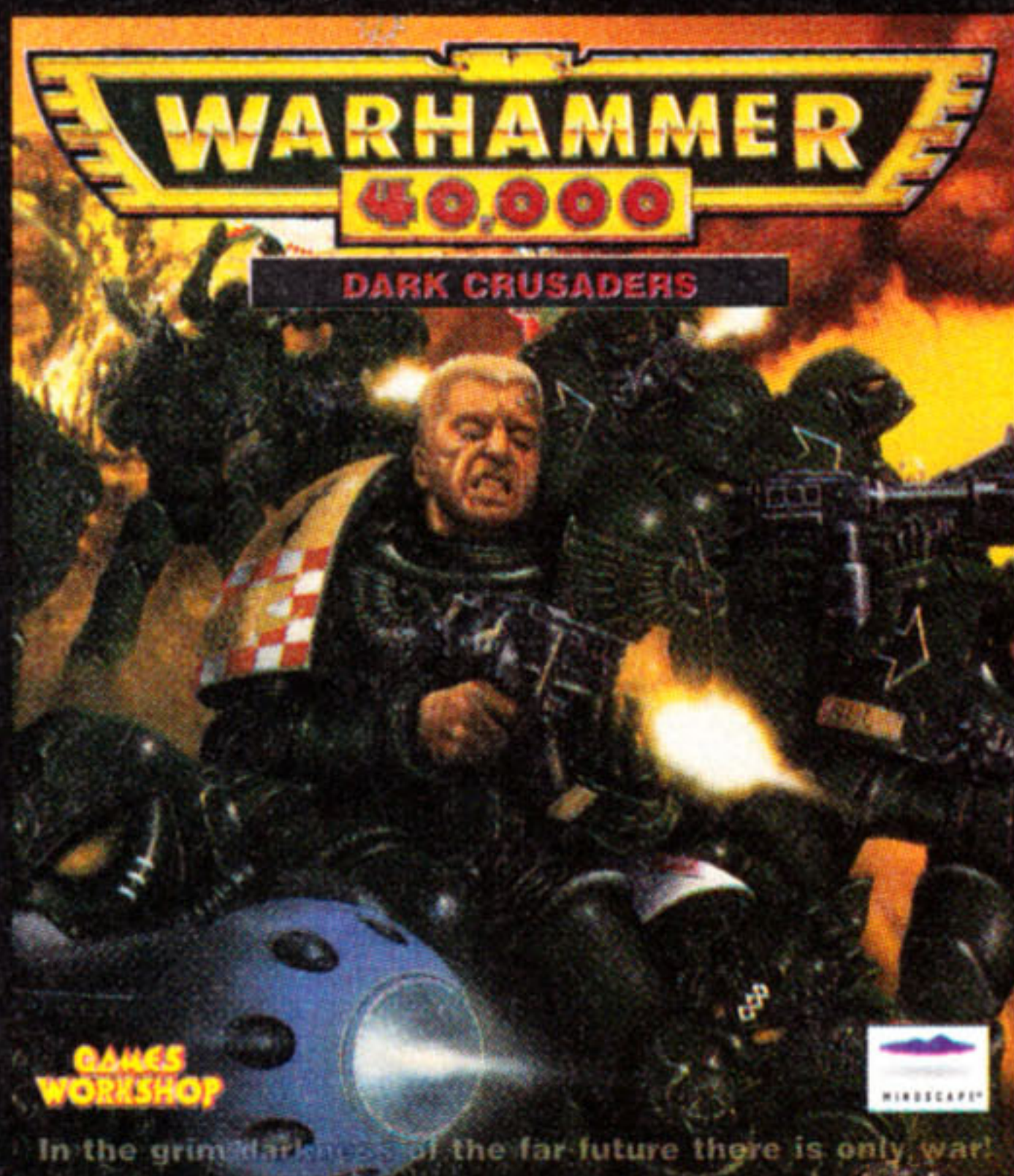
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IG Exclusive:**First Official Word on Rare's Killer Instinct 64**

Hot on the tail of its recent Killer Instinct 2 arcade release, the first actual details of Rare's plans for the Nintendo 64 update to the one-on-one fighting game series have started to emerge on U.S. soil. *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION* has learned that while conceptual work on the title (today proceeding under the working name Killer Instinct 64) began some time ago, the game's development team was occupied with finishing KI2 for the arcades and only started programming work on the home game in mid-January.

Contrary to Nintendo's original statements regarding a "100 percent perfect translation" of the first KI for what was then called the Ultra 64, the game that Nintendo will publish will be only loosely based on the two KI arcade machines. The official reason? KI and KI2 are actually just prerendered 2-D games, according to Nintendo, and they want a 3-D fighting game that will showcase the N64's abilities.

In a discussion with Rare's President Joel

Hochberg, *IG's FUSION* was told to expect a home version of KI that combines the floating camera 3-D visuals of Battle Arena Toshinden with the play mechanics and rendering quality of Rare's arcade KI games. "We're using our look, our feel and our expertise, and we're creating quite a different product," says Hochberg, noting that the new game will draw characters and background concepts from the Killer Instinct arcade games, adding original character and background designs while removing any characters or material that perform less than favorably in the new 3-D environment. As they will now appear in settings similar to Toshinden, characters will reportedly be able to sidestep attacks and further utilize 3-D movement (imagine how the N64's dual joypads might come into play), and characters will continue to retain the high-powered combination attacks that are Killer Instinct's distinctive trademark.



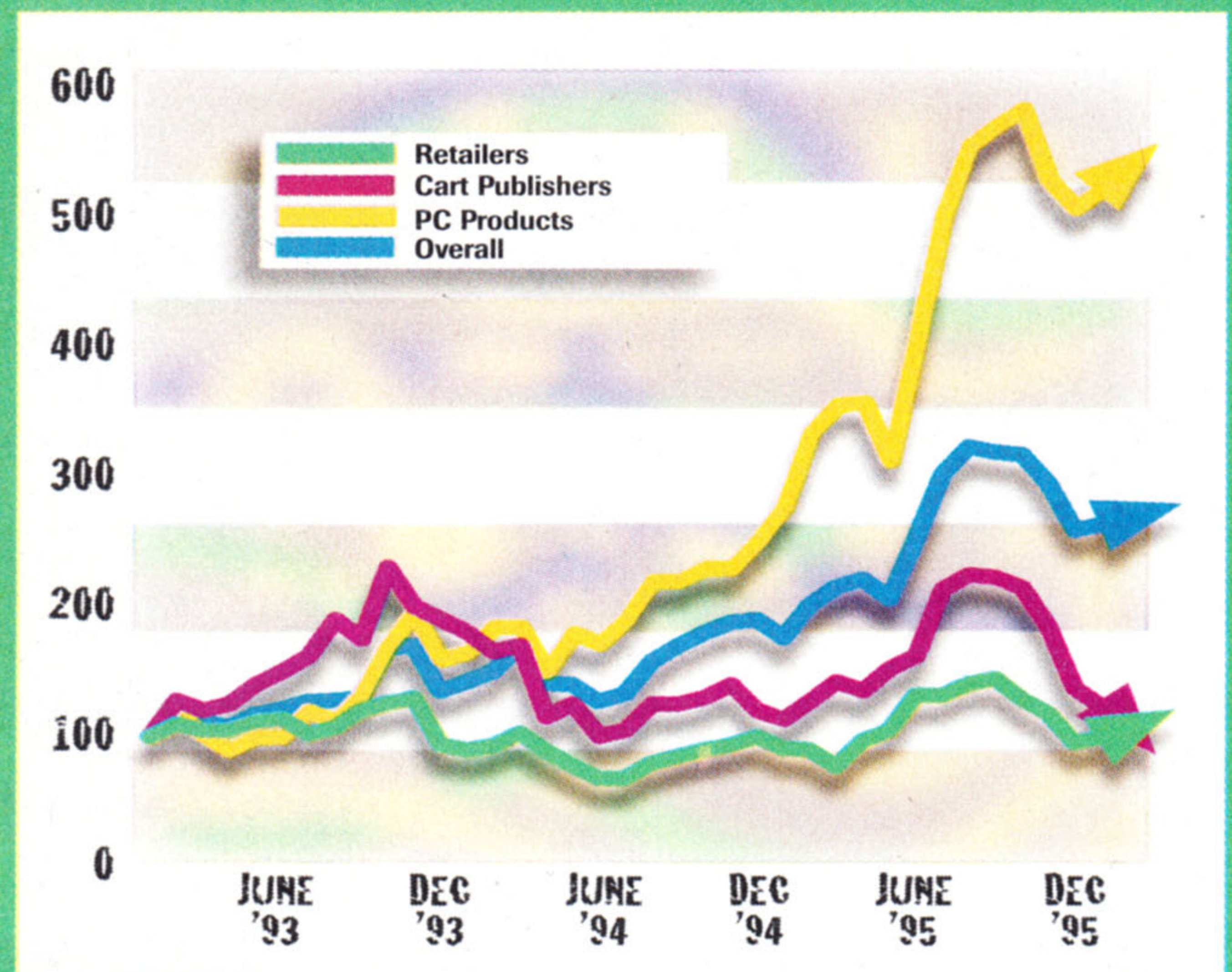
While the style of background artwork is "a company secret," according to Hochberg, *IG's FUSION* speculates that the backgrounds will feature 3-D polygon-based objects akin to the arcade backgrounds in *Virtua Fighter 2*, as opposed to the flat 2-D scrolling background artwork found in that game's home versions. Less memory-intensive and more versatile than the cycling movie backgrounds (saved picture-by-picture on a hard drive) found in the KI arcade games, polygonal background artwork, likely with prerendered textures, a la *Final Fantasy VII* for the PS, will add extra visual gloss. Rare reports that the game will be shown for the first time at E³.

FUSION STOCK MONITOR

The year 1996 began on a positive note for the interactive electronics business, as the *FUSION* stock price index rose 1.5 percent in January, reversing the 12 percent year end decline in December. Retail stocks fared the best as a group, up 5.4 percent, with PC segment stocks up 2.6 percent. Cartridge stocks sank almost 10 percent. Eleven stocks were down, while five were up and one was unchanged. January is always an unpredictable month, reflecting a number of cross currents. Investors on the one hand assess annual holiday performance while they try to anticipate the winners and losers of the next year. Is product momentum building or shrinking? Are the companies financially stronger or weaker for the coming challenges? Several early themes seem clear: 1) PC software sell-through was weaker than expected, 2) fewer PCs sold in 1995 went to new households than in the previous year, 3) peripheral upgrades other than modems are real slow and 4) retailers are looking for the new products that will drive people into the stores this year. In short, less visibility than at this time last year. One additional note: Nintendo announced the official U.S. launch date for Nintendo 64 is Sept. 30. This gives PS and Saturn an opportunity to generate some extra earnings, especially if the company or its licensees introduce some incredible software.

Gainers were few during January, but each was up nicely. Activision jumped 23 percent as several brokerage firms recommended purchase based on the low year-end price and promising upcoming products. America Online continued to rise, up 19 percent during the month in part because of a deal with Netscape. WMS rose 14 percent after reporting better than expected earnings in December, and CompUSA rose 14 percent because of strong relative sales, especially PC hardware systems.

Losers included NeoStar, down 29 percent because of poor holiday sales and rumors of inventory problems, Broderbund (-20



percent) after announcing sales and earnings shortfalls, T*HQ (-19 percent) on profit-taking and concerns about the platform transition, Davidson (-15 percent) on holiday sell-through concerns and Sierra (-13 percent) because of weakness in the publishers. Electronic Arts sank 8 percent, with Acclaim sliding 13 percent.

In the near-term, investors will probably focus on sell-through rates, looking for clues about the buying habits of computerized households. Publisher stocks will likely reflect the successes or failures of new product introductions. Retail stocks will be driven by comparable store results, which could be under pressure. The year 1996 looks to be more seasonal than 1995—investor sentiment will probably mirror the demand cycle of weakness in spring and summer, with a fall rally.

John Taylor, CFA Arcadia Investment Corporation



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NEWS

IG
rumors

most of the stories haven't been

Early 1996 wasn't supposed to be full of important announcements—after the holidays end, conventional wisdom has it that things are supposed to quiet down until right before E³ begins in May. Tell that to Nintendo, Sega, Sony, 3DO and Atari: Each has been involved in a major story since New Year's Day, though most of the stories haven't been pleasant ones. You can read IG's print and online news sections if you want to see stories on the Nintendo (Ultra) 64 delay, recent lay-offs at Sega and Atari, the management change at Sony Computer Entertainment and the big Konami and 3DO team-up announcement. Sure, these are big news, but just wait until you hear about what's coming for the rest of 1996.

Let's start with **Nintendo**. Third-party developers are incredibly worried about the near-term costs of making Nintendo 64 cartridges, and many informed developers are estimating that non-Dream Team game carts—those made by Konami or Namco, for example—will wind up with \$80-90 price tags, which is too much for the average consumer. Unusual as it may sound, developers are thus anxiously awaiting the pricey (~\$150) N64 Game Disk peripheral simply so that they can sell software within the \$50-60 range.

third-party developers are incredibly worried

According to sources intimately familiar with Matsushita's plans for 3DO's M2 technology, developers have been told to expect the next in 3DO's line of increasingly powerful M2 development kits quite soon. While the first kits were performing reasonably and showing off much of the core M2 special effects technology—features which are similar to those in the Nintendo 64—the most recent kits are reputed to be roughly four times faster than before, allowing the M2 to push 500,000 texture-mapped polygons on screen at once with all of the special effects turned on, which would be close to twice what the N64 can realistically do.

Impressive? Yes, and even moreso if the second part of our sources' story is accurate: It has been claimed that Matsushita now intends to include eight megabytes of RAM in its final M2 specifications, double the amount of RAM in N64 machines, and will still price their first M2 consoles at the bargain-basement price of \$299.99. While this sounds next to impossible to anyone familiar with current RAM and component costs for hardware—leaving IG's *FUSION* somewhat skeptical—our sources indicate that Matsushita would be relying on its massive internal production facilities to manufacture the necessary RAM chips, shaving some of the profit cost away from the price of the silicon. So that makes one core chipset, 8-Megs of RAM, one quad-speed drive and a packed-in controller for \$300? Sure, and would you like a frosty shake with that?

and speculation

pleasant ones

What's going on with Sony? Well, the company seems ready to bottom-load the year with good software, use North American manufacturing to drop the PlayStation's price appreciably, and sit in waiting here until then as its Japanese market is literally flooded with new games from month to month. The company's conservative strategy should give people plenty of time to pool their money...but will they use it on Sony products?

What's going on with Sony?

the first M2-compatible machines may not be released until 1997

Sega's situation isn't enviable, either. Sales of the Saturn picked up when Virtua Fighter 2, Sega Rally and Virtua Cop appeared, and now the company is praying that another round of Model 2 arcade conversions (everything from Fighting Vipers to Indy 500 to Cyber Troopers) will buoy the system again come September. Without an hit arcade game in the package—and let's face it, neither Indy 500 nor Sega Rally touched Daytona USA in the arcades—Sega is preparing new Sonic titles and a possible \$199 Saturn price tag to rejuvenate its hardware for the holidays. On another front, the company is still said to be working with Matsushita on a common DVD-based game system, which according to Matsushita's current plans will contain a M2 chipset at the core. What's happening with Sega's long-rumored dedicated VR game platform? Now that the whole VR craze has quieted down and both Atari and Hasbro have opted out of testing the home VR lawsuit waters, Sega may opt to change its plans for console-based VR.

The situation with 3DO is interesting, to say the least. Developers all say that M2's architecture is somewhat more powerful than the Nintendo 64 and that the CD-based games will be cheaper to manufacture than either carts or Nintendo disks, but many developers are now operating under the belief that the first M2-compatible machines may not be released until 1997. Delaying the underdog M2 would probably mean more to Matsushita than delaying the vaunted N64 has meant to Nintendo, but it would place a \$299 M2 machine in direct competition with a combined Nintendo and Disk Drive combo.

How does SNK intend to port over their Neo-Geo CD megabyte fighting games to the Saturn without bogging down Sega's users with the trademarked SNK juggling monkey? The Dual-ROM system. SNK's first game, King of Fighters '95, will be a combined cartridge and CD title which contains part of the game (reportedly the

character data) on a quick-access cartridge, and the other part (reportedly the backgrounds, game code and music data) on a CD. It's an ingenious strategy which—if properly implemented—will eliminate the character-to-character load time problems which have plagued many of SNK's best fighters and particularly the KoF series, and will still remain generally affordable to the average consumer.

Sega's situation isn't enviable

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Working Designs Acquires Dragon Force

Working Designs has announced that it has acquired the rights to translate and release the strategy/RPG game Dragon Force for the Sega Saturn platform in the U.S. Touting the game as similar to the vaunted Super Famicom/Super NES strategy/RPG title Ogre Battle, Working Designs notes that you see hundreds of fantasy-themed warriors on the screen at one time during battles—a visual feature made possible by the powerful sprite engine in the Saturn—and can cast catastrophic spells (pictured here). In addition, Working Designs hopes to appeal again to fans of Japanese animation with cinematic scenes filled with manga artwork in television-quality animations.



Lots of troops? *They're in there.*
Magic spells? *They're in there.*

HOT top ten...

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



Super Mario 64
Nintendo/Nintendo 64

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3
Midway

Tetrisphere
H2O/Nintendo 64

Tekken 2
Namco

Contra 32†
Konami/PlayStation-Saturn

Open Ice
Midway

PilotWings 64†
Paradigm/Nintendo 64

Marvel Super Heroes
Capcom

Final Fantasy VII
Square/PlayStation

Mortal Kombat 3
Midway

Resident Evil
Capcom/PlayStation

Viper
Fabtek

Panzer Dragoon II
Sega/Saturn

Samurai Shodown III
SNK

Killer Instinct 64
Rare-Nintendo/Nintendo 64

Raiden DX
Fabtek

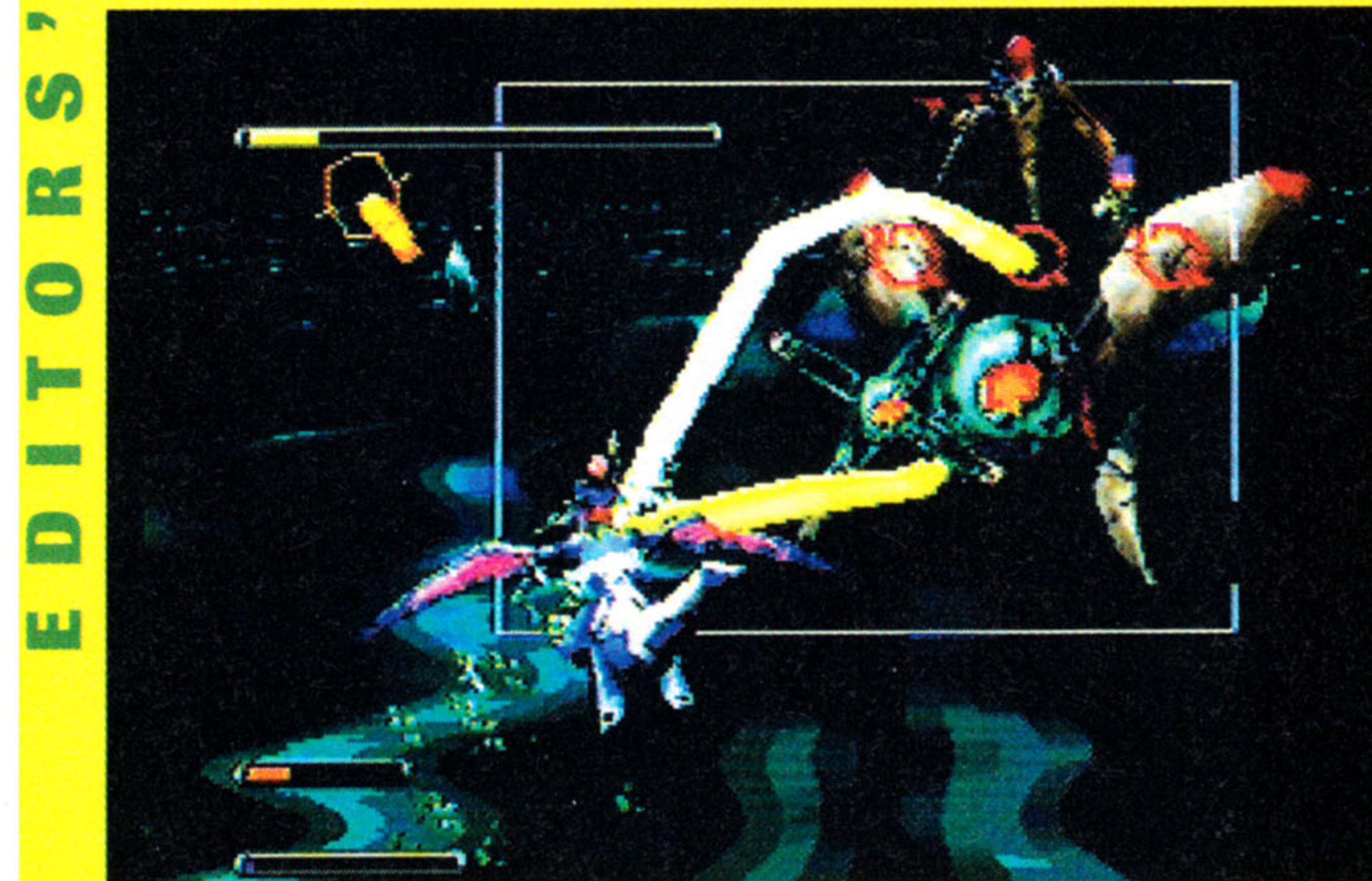
Tekken 2
Namco/PlayStation

Bucky O' Hare
Konami

Iron Storm
Working Designs/Saturn

Twin Eagle II
Seta

(† = Denotes Working Title)
Sega's Panzer Dragoon Zwei (2) knocked IG's editorial staff for a loop—we can't wait for the final.



Thai
(Green Curry Pork, Mee Krob, Shu-Shi Duck)

Vietnamese
(Hu Tieu Dac Biet, Summer Rolls, Beef Yum Salad)

Szechwan Chinese
(General Tso's Chicken, Szechwan Beef)

Indian
(Tandoori Chicken, Lamb Curry, Rasmalai)

Mongolian Chinese
(Mongolian Beef, Genghis Khan [not edible, but he rules])

Korean
(Bulgogi, Meat Jyun, Bi Bim Kook Soo)

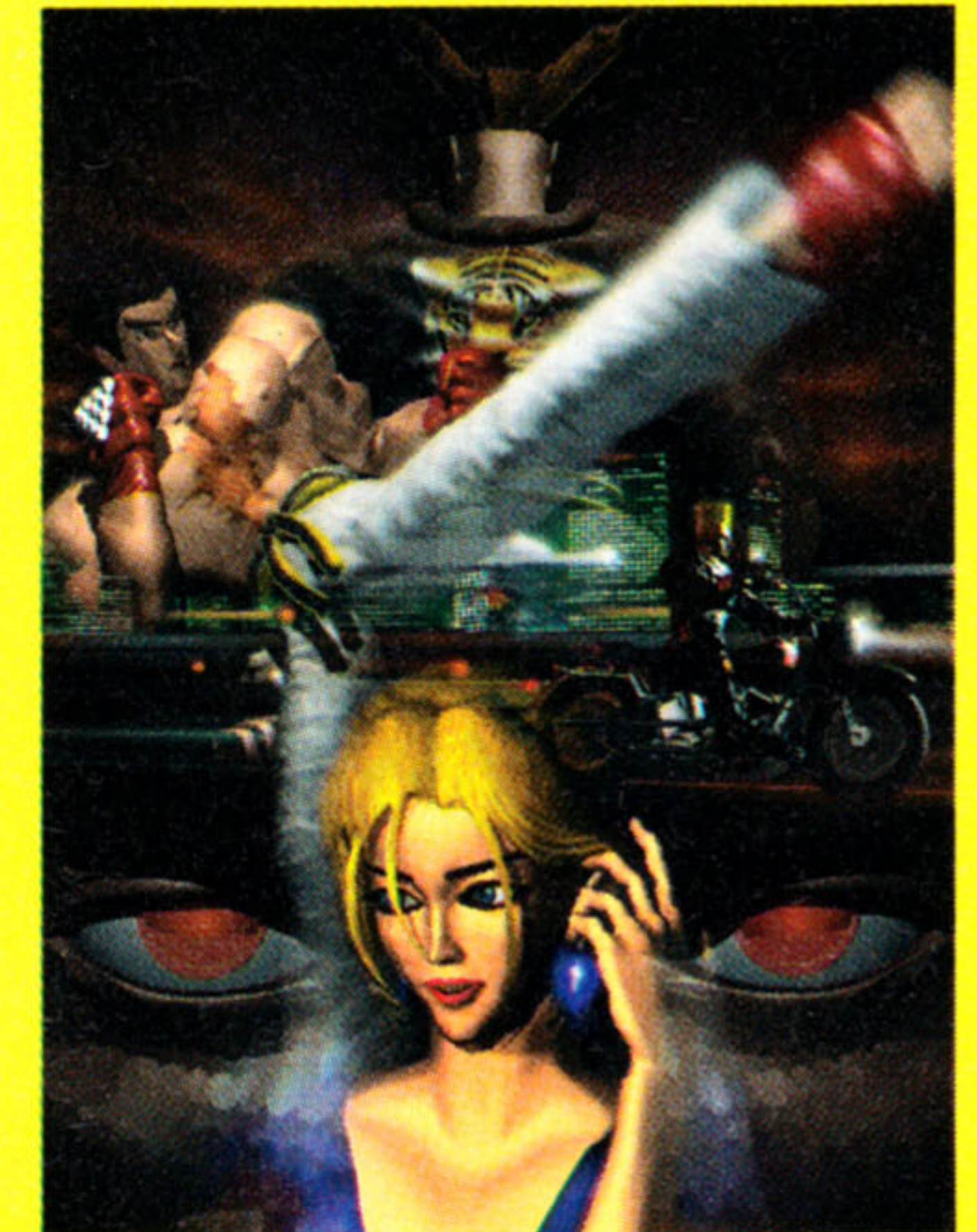
Japanese
(Tempura, Soba, Mochi, Tonkatsu)

Cajun-American
(Cajun Blackened Steak, File Gumbo Soups)

Moroccan
(Basteeya, Honey-Almond Chicken)

American Crap
(Pizza, Chicken Wings [Spicy], Pork Rinds, Hot Dogs)

Namco's Tekken 2 will be a better-than-arcade perfect port of the original game, yet original software dominates the majority of this month's Console Most Wanted.



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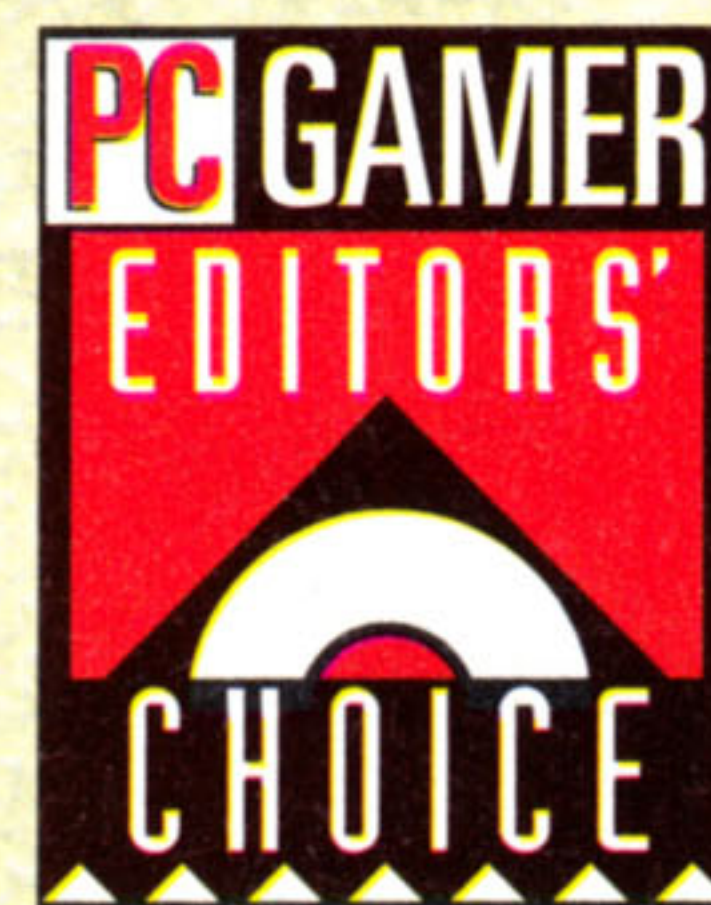


Computer Gaming Review



"5 out of 5"

Computer Gaming World



"A great game. A sleek, fast moving combo of MOM and WLII."

Wade Glasscock—CompuServe

"I've probably spent over a grand on games and I gotta say that this is the BEST yet! I've been spending too much time playing and not sleeping, my hat's off to New World."

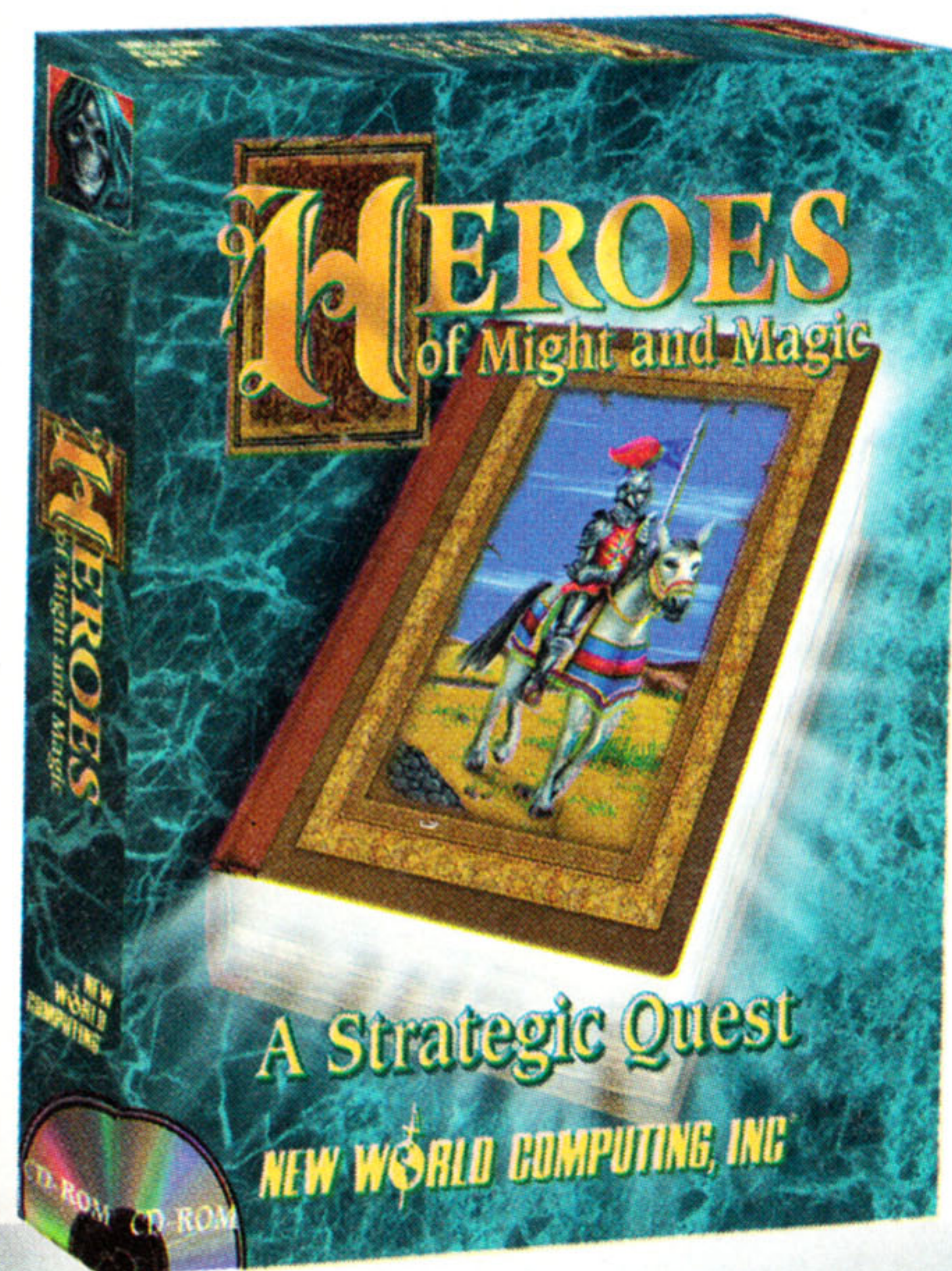
Scary.Jerry—CompuServe

"One of the most enjoyable games of the year."

Ned Gaskins—PC Gamer

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by Peter Bartholow

Dallas-based Paradigm Simulations has been working with Nintendo to develop a sequel to the classic Super NES flight simulation PilotWings...



The Nintendo 64 has largely remained a mystery to the world for over a year now. Nintendo has kept developers' mouths and doors sealed in a mostly successful effort to control the flow of information about upcoming software and accessories for its new machine. During the media blackout, Paradigm Simulations, a leading Texas-based developer and pioneer in the field of Silicon Graphics-based flight simulation software, was commissioned to work on Pilotwings 64, the sequel to one of Nintendo's earliest and best Super NES



releases. *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION* recently had a chance to sit down and discuss the game with Dave Gatchel, vice president of Paradigm's Entertainment Applications group, and Matt Yarbrough, Paradigm's new market developer.

how far is the game from completion?

IG: Tell us a little about Paradigm's past.

Matt: We're a five-year-old company that was started in 1990 by three men who came up from Merit Technologies: Wes Hoffman, Ron Topal and Mike Hingledinger. Right now, Ron is the president of the company and has basically taken over the business aspects as well as some programming. Mike is our main software engineer, and Wes our database engineer with Chuck Walters, who basically developed most of our databases for all of our simulations. Essentially, they set off to prove that one can develop real-time simulations using Silicon Graphics hardware. Before that idea was presented, companies needed to use proprietary equipment from companies such as Evans and Sutherland and Lockheed/Martin. The use of SGIs greatly reduced the price/performance ratio, and we've always been very successful with that. We've always been more of a tools company than a content company. Basically, we've had three flagship products. VisionWorks has already been phased

that run on the SGI machines, so we've actually been working on the Nintendo 64 far longer than we've actually had the silicon in hand. Developing content is something we enjoy doing because it helps flesh out our tools. All of our demos were made to show exactly what our tools were capable of. We also want to do that with the Nintendo 64. We were the first developer on the hardware when SGI first began implementing the chip, making Paradigm the first third-party developer for the Nintendo 64.

"We were the first developer on the hardware... making Paradigm the first third-party for the N64."

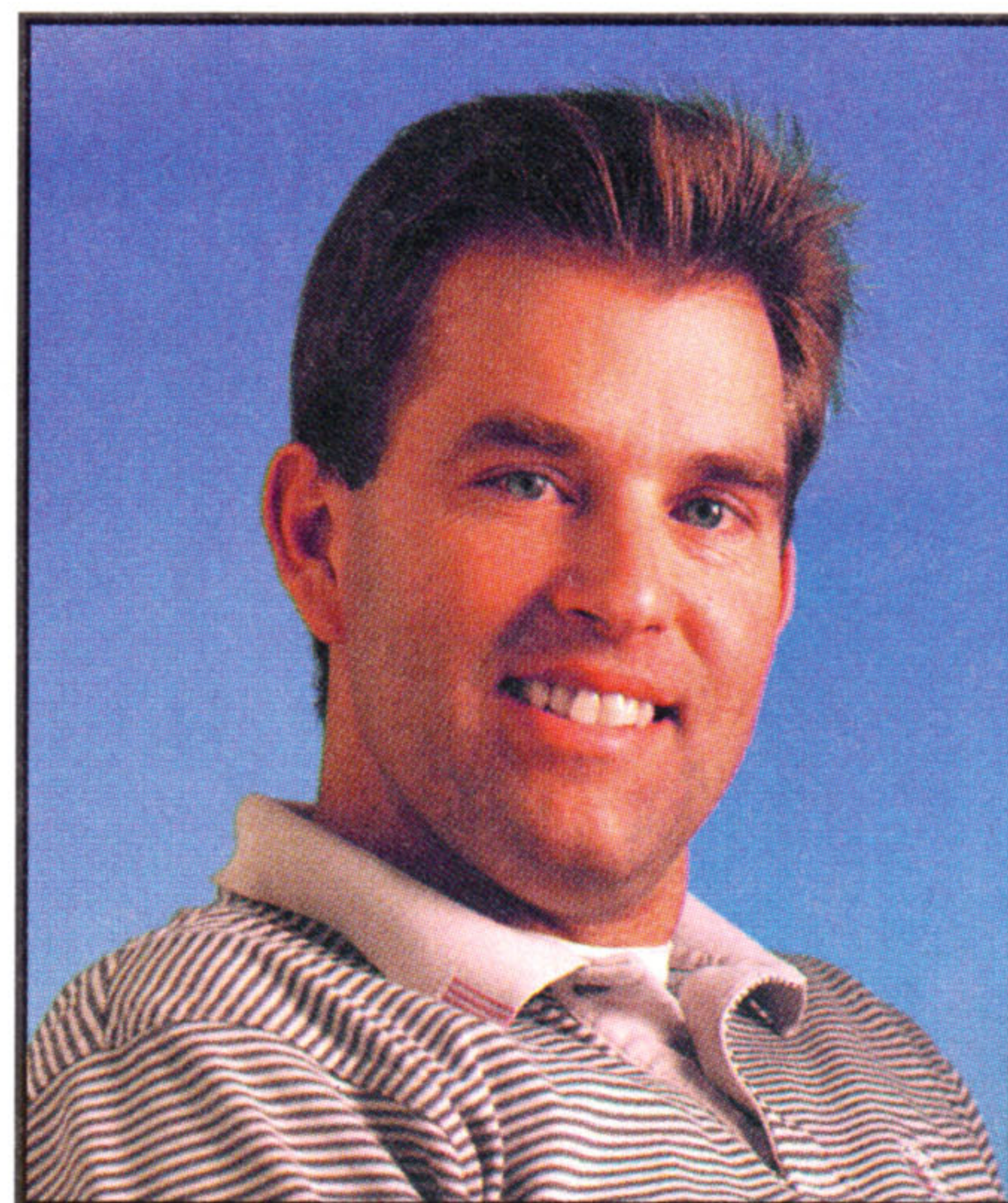
IG: What were the two of you doing before coming to Paradigm?

Dave: I got started in the sim business in 1979, and pretty much my whole career has been focused on that. I used to customize graphics software for Evans and Sutherland for the first five or six years of my career. After that, I went into Research and Development and developed hardware and software for graphics subsystems, all targeted at training applications.

Matt: I worked in film for a number of years, specifically for Sony and Miramax.

IG: What companies has Paradigm developed flight simulators for?

Matt: It's a huge list of companies. We get pigeonholed



Paradigm's Dave Gatchell

into the flight-sim market more than we deserve, since we've also developed a number of marine and driving simulators for everyone from BMW and Volvo, to the U.S. Navy and Air Force.

IG: Does being based in Dallas present itself as a hindrance, considering that Silicon Graphics and the rest of the industry are out in Silicon Valley?

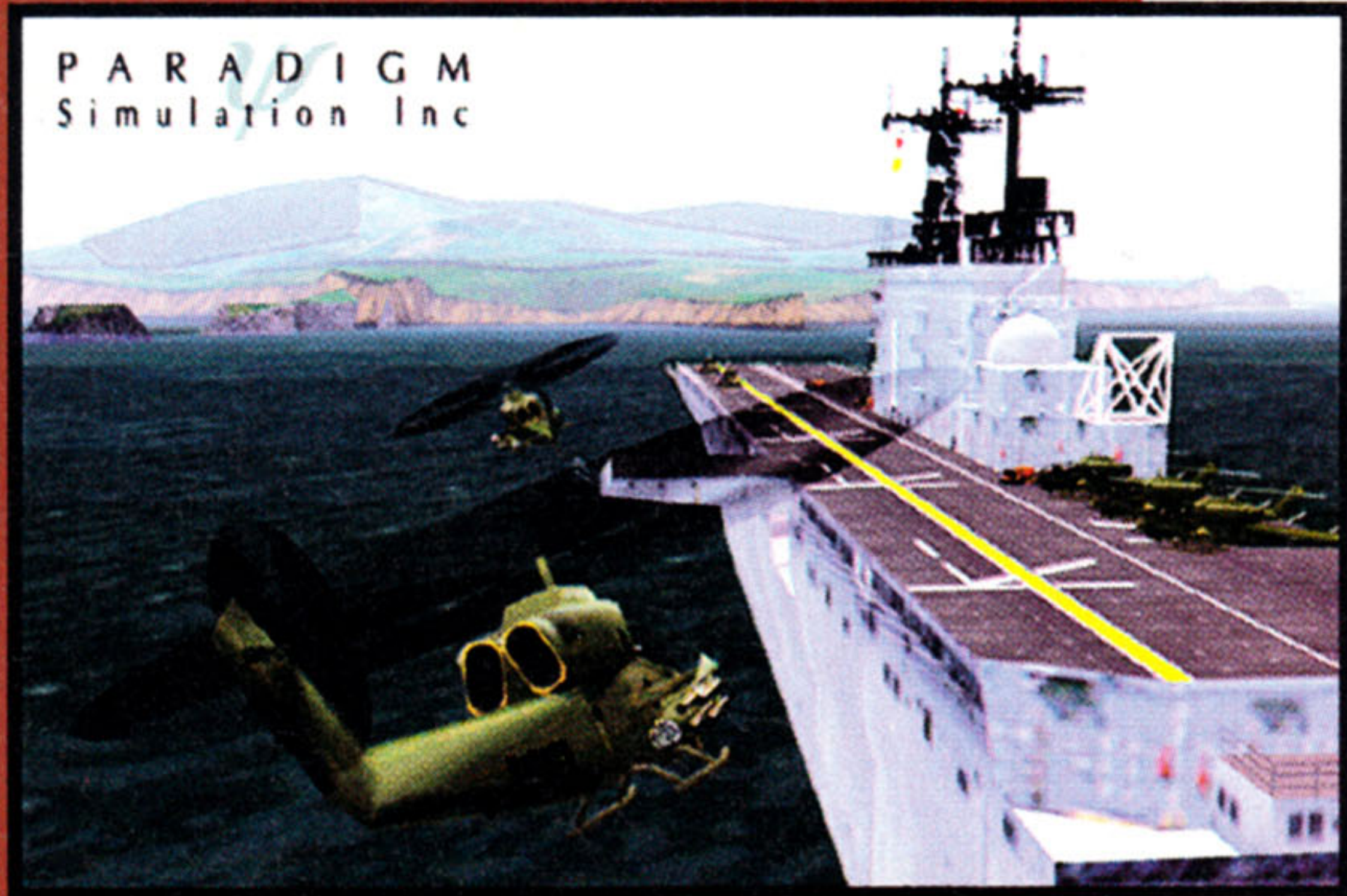
Matt: Actually, we have a lot of debates about that. I don't think so at all. It's been surprisingly easy for us to get some very key people out here—people very well known in the industry. They came to Paradigm because they liked what the company was doing, but also because they liked Dallas. Our standard of living is great, the weather's warm and there are no state income taxes. Also, one thing that Nintendo is very into is having its developers off on individual islands to



out partially due to SGIs own Performer software, but it was a graphical API for SGI. After that, we developed VEGA and AudioWorks, which are our 3-D realtime offline tools and runtime API's. That's pretty much the same approach we're taking with the Nintendo 64.

We've developed a set of tools for the Nintendo 64 built on top of VEGA called UltraVision. That allows us to build games modularly, develop entire environments and systems, do things like animation previewing and do a lot of editing of the levels without actually having to go down to the hardware: We've got emulators





prevent cross-contamination of the products. I can understand that as we go off and film things, show them on a worldwide level and we realize how good they are. I think being able to be away from the hubbub on the West Coast allows us more freedom. Having worked in the film industry, I've seen how one is watching what everyone else is doing. I like being off on our own and creating something original.

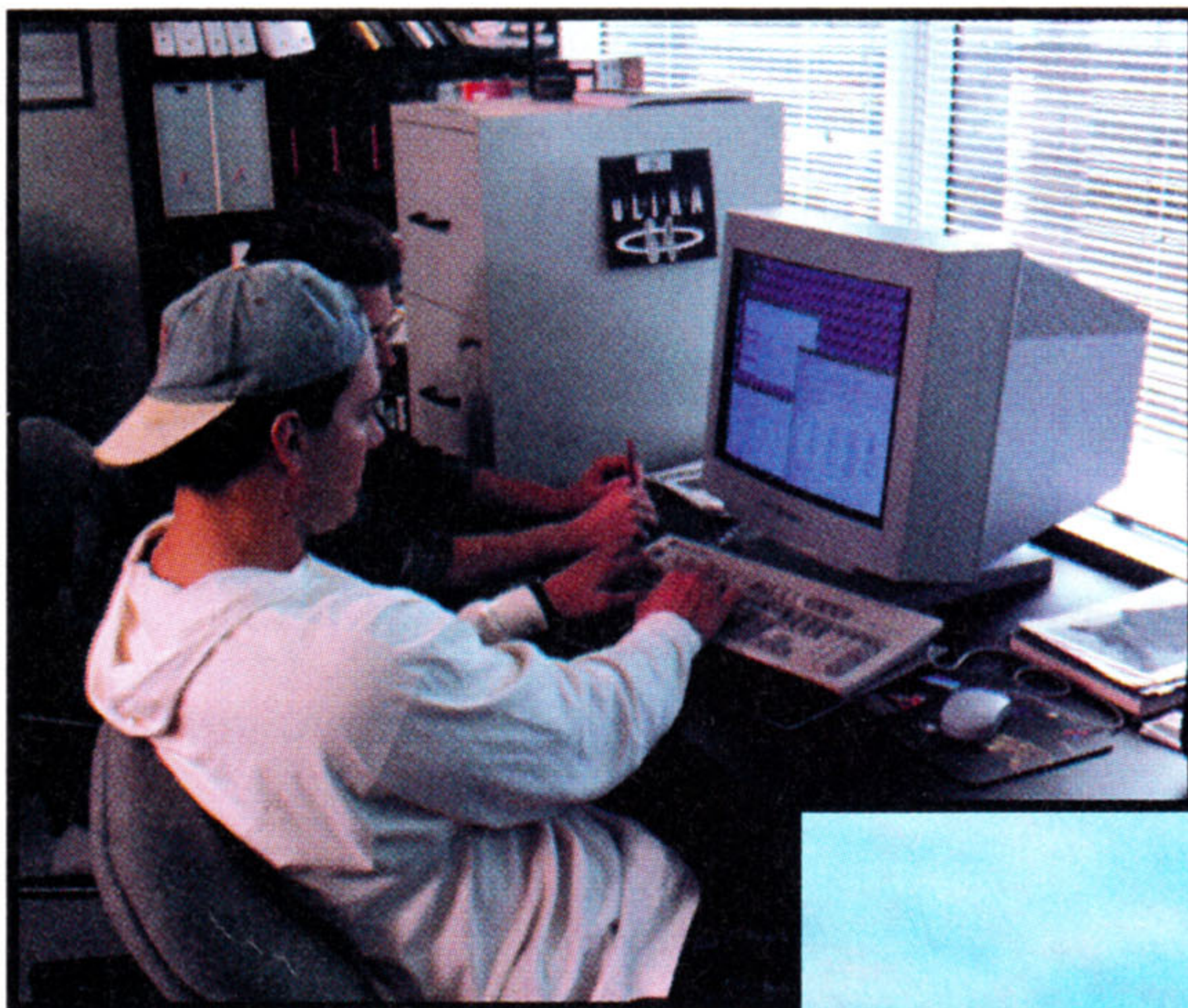
IG: How did Nintendo come to know Paradigm well enough to entrust PilotWings 64 to you?

Matt: I think it came about for a lot of reasons. One was that Nintendo wanted companies with a history in 3-D, but had also worked in entertainment. That's why they came to us and Angel, as well as some of the other developers they've hired. We're not known as huge game developers. The other thing was our close relationship with SGI throughout the years. Whenever they've come up with a

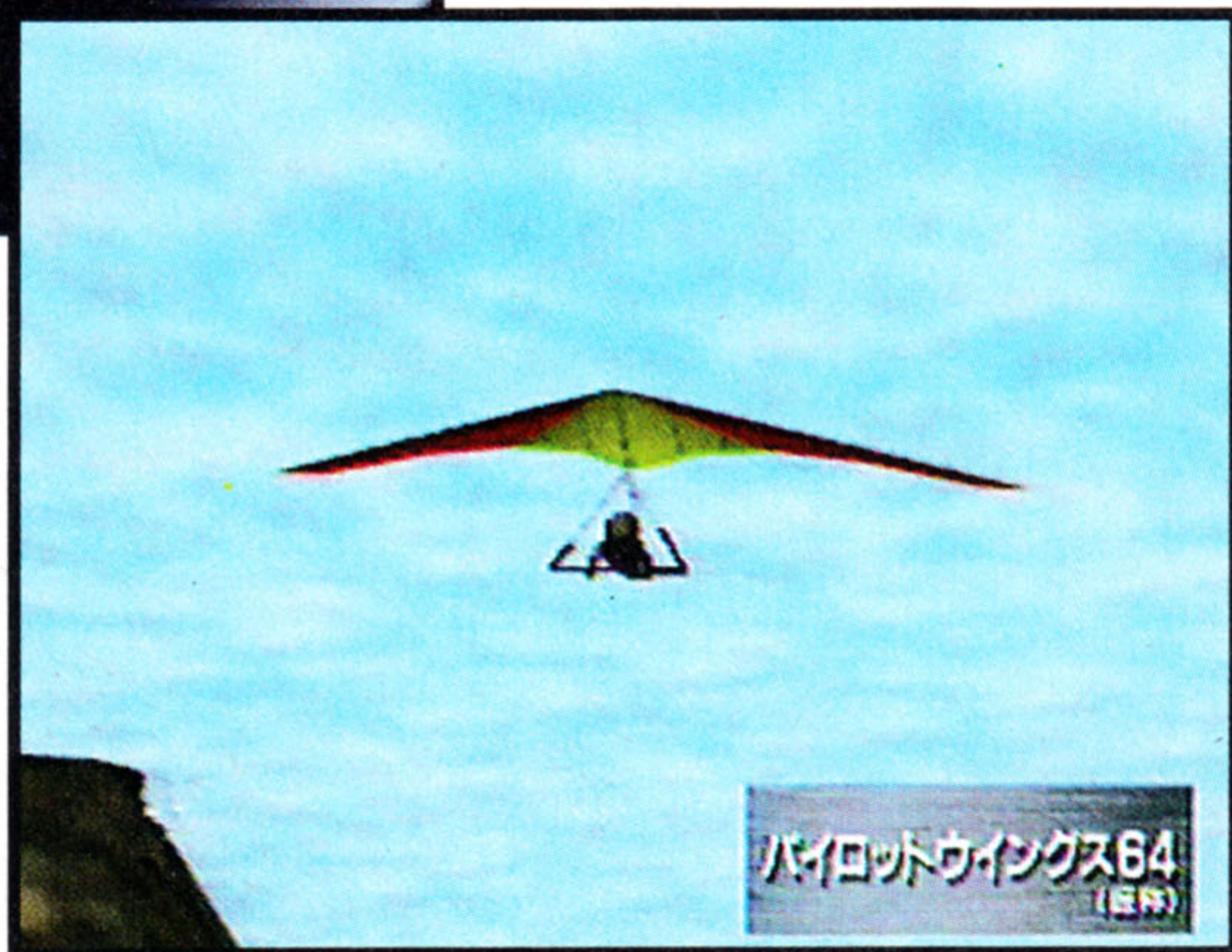
new graphics subsystem, such as the Nintendo 64's Reality Engine, they wanted us to make the demos for it. Silicon Graphics has always been a hardware company and has always relied on its partners to show what the company's hardware could do, and we've always been one of the company's favorites for that. It was a natural step for them to recommend to Nintendo that we be some of the first people to

BEFORE THE 64

Paradigm Simulations made a name for itself doing Silicon Graphics simulations (land, air and sea) and development software, including the very realistic-looking Cobra helicopter simulation (above and below) and Vampire, another impressive flight simulation. SGI software requires higher resolution monitors, tons of megabytes of memory and a large bank account: SGI workstations run from several thousand to literally \$100,000



Dave: I used to think that there was a hindrance involved with living away from everyone else, but I'm becoming less and less convinced of that as time goes on. A lot of our worries really came about when we started getting involved in entertainment, as there is an obvi-



ous push for it out on the West Coast.

"Our relationship with Nintendo has been so good that the only other platform we've been looking into is PC..."

or more. As you would guess, Paradigm's simulations have the power to be pretty amazing: They run in high resolution, show off flawless texture mapping and display worlds with more polygons than Raymond Babbitt could count. Load management makes it possible to display far-away cities which begin to use up more and more polygons as you get closer to them, just as they would become more detailed as you approached objects in real life. Guess what? The Nintendo 64 supports that feature, too.

I think you're seeing more and more companies developing games in this area, thanks to companies like Origin and id.

Matt:

Networks, the Internet and things of that nature have gotten to a point where the passing on of data doesn't really require local development.

Dave: Our location hasn't stopped us from spending a lot of time out in SGI's Mountain View-based operations contributing to its projects. Of course it'd be easier if we were down the street, but we're not, and we've adapted accordingly.

IG: Having been approached by Nintendo through SGI, have you been approached by any other video-game companies?

Matt: Actually, we have, but our relationship with Nintendo has been so good that the only other platform we've been looking into is PC exploitation, and we'll still do a large amount of location-based entertainment.

IG: What has working with Nintendo been like?

Matt: PilotWings 64 has been a complete collaboration with Nintendo. They've developed all of the intellectual property for which we've been the technologists to flesh it out.

IG: On the subject of the game itself, you'd targeted the game to be complete by the beginning of March. How close are you to achieving that goal?

Dave: I think we're approaching closure on it. It should be ready for playtest by the third week of March.

IG: Would that allow it to make the April 21 deadline for the Japanese launch?

Dave: Yes, we're coordinating the dates with Nintendo. As Matt said, our relationship with Nintendo is a collaboration, so they're prepping us for the dates we need to make in order to be ready for launch.

IG: So Paradigm's schedule has been unaffected by the U.S. delay?

Matt: Not at all. We hope we're going to be one of the titles available during the Japanese rollout, as we will have it to them in time for the rollout.

IG: What has the Nintendo 64's controller allowed you to do with the game that you could not do with something along the lines of a Super NES controller?

Matt: I think more than anything, allowing movement in a 3-D world. The analog joystick has such a nice, precise feel. It really shocked us when we first got it because we weren't expecting as much control over the crafts as we ended up getting. One of the major problems with simulations on console platforms have been the controllers, as they haven't been that accurate. Having a number of different buttons to input with also helped a great deal. From our standpoint, the controller is a great way to let the players integrate themselves into the simulation.

Dave: The smoothness of motion the controller gives us is much better than anything we could've achieved with other input devices. That's been a great benefit for us, since we are trying to create games with realistic flight models.



Matt Yarbrough



IG: PilotWings 64 has obviously been in development from before Nintendo had announced the controller's specifications—most people assumed that the machine would have a standard digital pad. How much of a rewrite was needed once you actually got the final controller in your hands?

Dave: Not a lot. Before it was announced, Nintendo had early ideas that it would be an analog input. We actually worked with a modified Super NES controller through most of the game, and by



the time we were ready to integrate the motion model, we had a mock-up to work with.

Matt: We knew what they were going to do even though we didn't have it in our hands. For a while we were using this big, beige box that had buttons all over and an analog joystick.

IG: PilotWings was originally the brain-child of Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto. What level of involvement has he had with this project?

Dave: Well, it's obvious that he originated the concept, but we haven't had a lot of direct contact, yet he's definitely directed the project. We have one of Mr. Miyamoto's assistants, a Mr. Wada, who spends time here and then relays the progress back to Mr. Miyamoto. Through Mr. Wada, he's directed the product's content and where he'd like to see it go.

IG: What sort of creative limitations have been set up for Paradigm in working with Mr. Miyamoto? Have you had the chance to put in things you want, or have you simply been constructing Mr. Miyamoto's vision?

Dave: It's definitely a collaboration, which is not to say that Nintendo doesn't have ideas as to where they want the game to go. I think it's part of Nintendo's whole creative process to let a game evolve. We've talked to a number of different game developers, and Nintendo's unique in that they don't like to set up a lot of structure for the developers to follow. They've given us a series of exercises to complete, and the game evolves from that. We've had ample opportunity to suggest different tasks, special effects and other things that we feel work out better.

IG: Does PilotWings 64 follow the classic Miyamoto "learning" style of gameplay, like that exhibited in the original PilotWings?

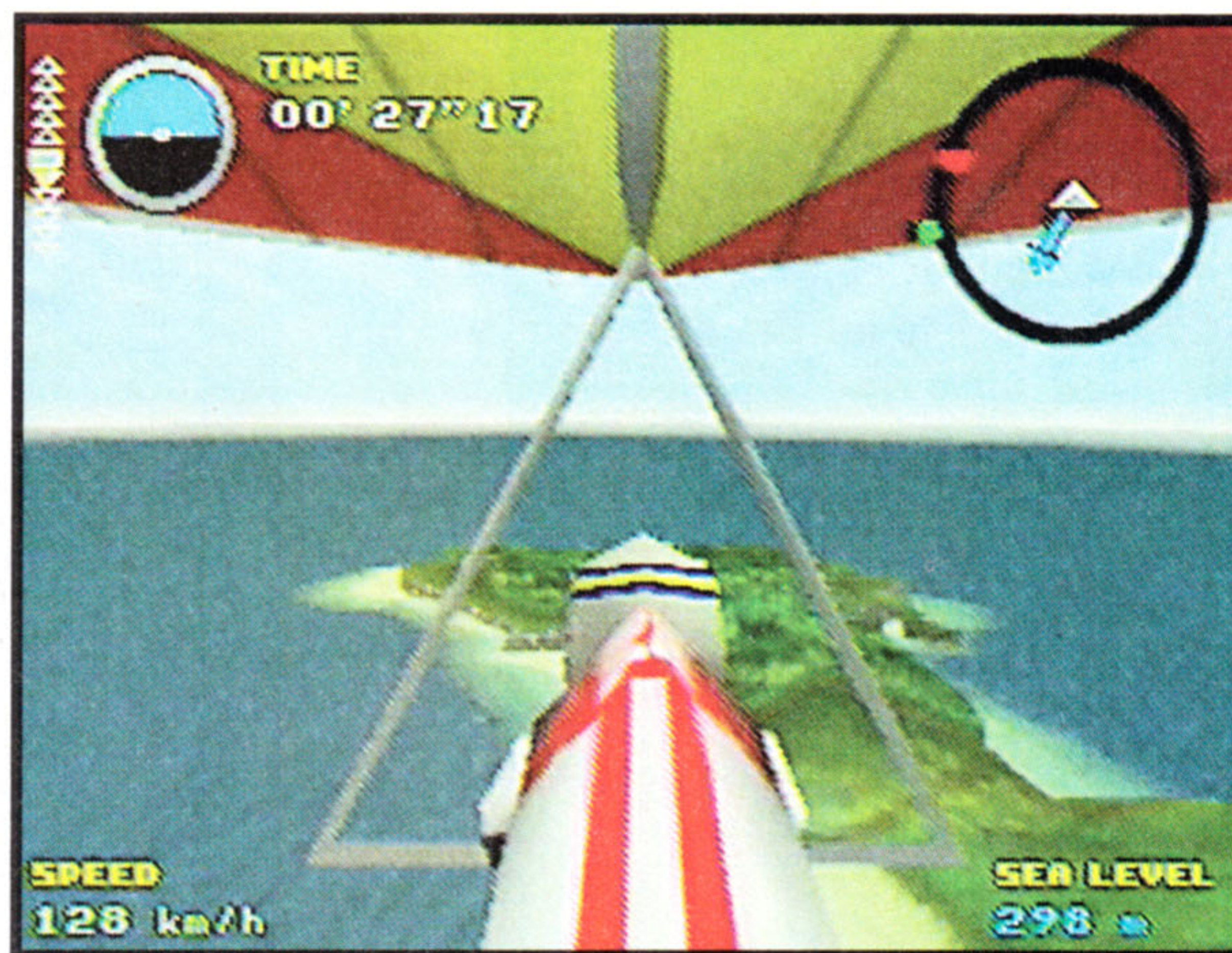
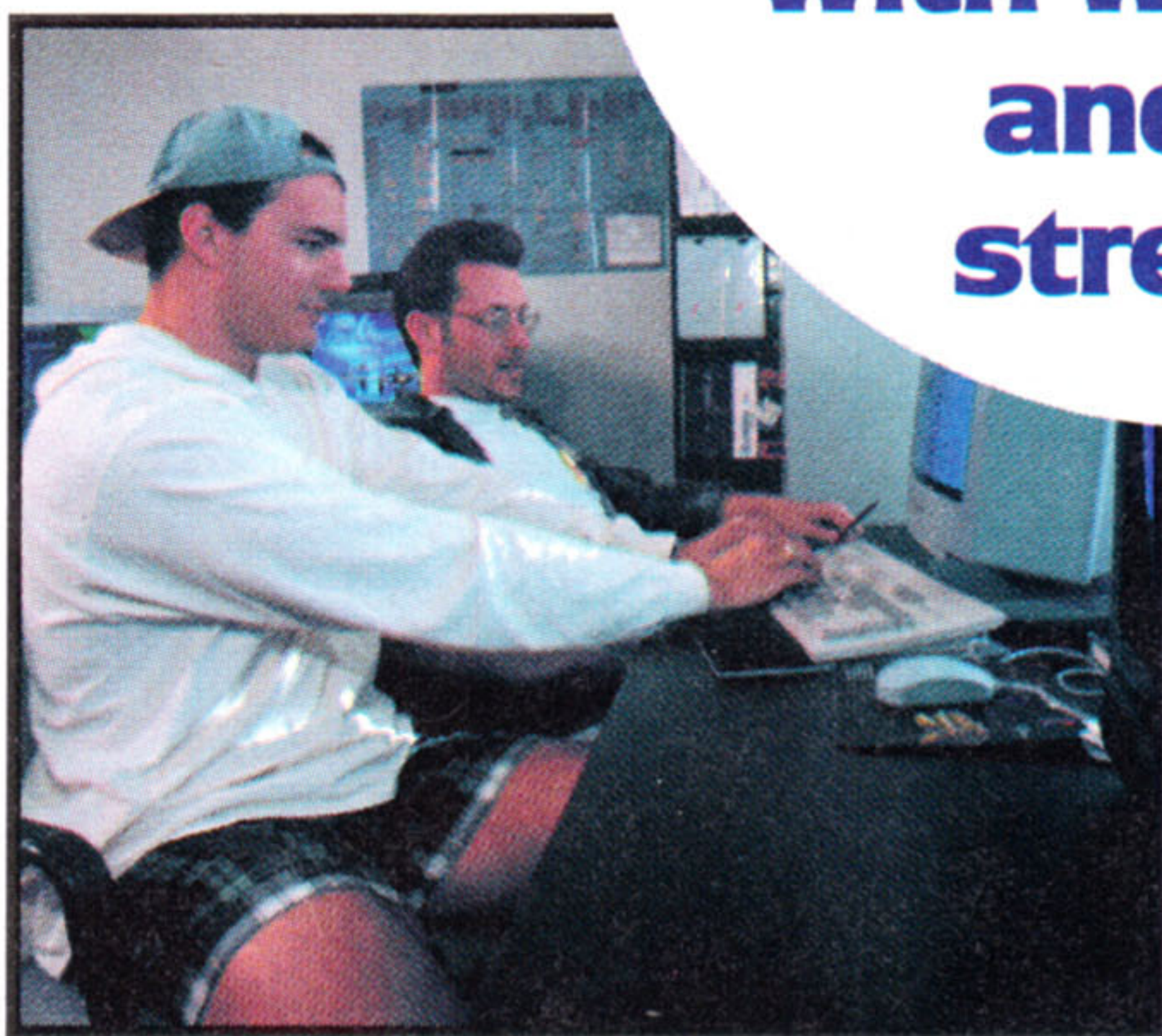
Dave: Yeah, it is. The early levels are designed to help the user build up skills to

help in later levels. The game is very much goal-oriented like the original PilotWings with tasks set out for the player to achieve.

Matt: I think one of the big differences between the 2-D [Super NES] version and the 3-D [N64] version is that, while there is sort of a linear flightpath with milestones, people are given the opportunity to explore with waterfalls and city streets. I prefer, myself, to stray from the set course and explore the rest of the environment. There are some pretty amazing things hidden out there. The

camera angles also allow us to give players a more exploratory view of the game than what was possible with the 2-D plane in the original game.

“While there is...a linear flightpath with milestones, people...explore with waterfalls and city streets.”



IG: What items did Paradigm want to add so that PilotWings 64 became a true sequel and not just a neat 3-D version of the original?

Dave: Well, being in a 3-D world does actually turn out to be enough. We wanted to integrate the actual environment more within the gameplay with geographic obstacles, something not possible with the 2-D plane of the original, which was more of a background than anything else. We tried to put tasks and Easter eggs throughout the game to

reward players with higher scores and increased skills. Things like local winds, the setting of the sun and other things also add a number of new elements to the game that were impossible before.

Matt: The motion models for the different crafts make a big difference, too. We've tried to strike a happy medium between physical accuracy and fun gameplay. We didn't want a steep learning curve to discourage players, but we also didn't want to condescend with a totally unrealistic flying experience.

IG: What flight vehicles are available right now?

Matt: Right now, there are the three

THEY CALL HIM “EGGHEAD SHRED”

Well, at the very least, he seems a little more creative than Bubsy the Bobcat. When Paradigm wanted to show off its 3-D development tools, the company came up with a bizarre little snowboarding “mascot” character named Egghead Shred—you know, the type that Rick James would say, “You don't bring home to mother.”



What's most impressive about Paradigm's engine? Highly detailed textures (see the villas, left) and environments that seem never to suffer from

horizon-line pop-up or texture distortion; the load management and perspective correction eliminate those graphics flaws, respectively. If only there was a hardware feature to fix weird mascots...

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shown on the Shoshinkai video: the gyrocopter, hang glider and rocket pack. There has been talk of some others hidden in there as well.

IG: Which of the announced flight models was the most difficult to code for?

Dave: The hang glider has provided the most challenge and given us the most trouble.

Matt: All of the others have some kind of manual propulsion, making for a very different model than a flight model based entirely on the environment around the player. The rocket pack was also interesting to work on because it's mostly a fictional model.

IG: The game has several flight characters to choose from to pilot the various vehicles. What effect, if any, do the characters have on the flight models of the different vehicles?

Dave: Physical attributes such as weight, dimensions and the like are needed to work into the motion model, since they change the overall size and weight of the vehicle, especially when dealing with the hang glider and rocket pack. Maneuverability, fuel consumption and things of that nature are affected.

IG: How is the camera movement implemented?

Dave: The camera is automated, with

options for user control. The camera is mostly confined to a following camera or first person, but the player can change the vantage point from those preset points.

Matt: That becomes really important in the game, most notably with the rocket

pack.

If you want to land on a particular spot, players are going to move to an overhead view to aim more carefully. Also, the camera angles gave us a good way of hiding and accessing Easter eggs.

IG: On the technical side, what kind of final framerate is Paradigm aiming for with PilotWings 64?

Dave: The target framerate is between 20 and 30 frames.

Matt: One thing players will notice about our game is the amount of detail we have in our game and the terrain.

Dave: One thing we've always tried to do with our products is to find a good level of detail that gave us good frame



rates. We didn't want players slogging through an incredibly detailed world, nor would we want them zipping through a lifeless one. Another thing I think is important is that the number of polygons doesn't point to the quality of the environment. Anti-aliasing and other effects add to the feeling that sheer numbers of polygons can't mimic, often.

IG: The Nintendo 64 does emphasize those anti-aliasing, Z-buffering and other special graphics features. Will PilotWings 64 include all of these? Which ones did you find the most useful in creating the world?

Dave: It takes advantage of all of them. Your second question is difficult, though. It really depends on what standpoint you're coming from. Sure, Z-buffering is great for prioritizing surfaces, but does nothing as far as image quality is concerned. The two most apparent things players will see in the Nintendo 64 are the MIP-mapping and anti-aliasing capabilities.

IG: Have you run into any walls developing for the Nintendo 64 hardware?

Dave: No, I can't say that we have. In fact, we were very surprised coming from very high-end development. For the price point, we were surprised and impressed with the system's features.

Matt: We found that the Nintendo 64 box has some features in it that the high-end SGI machines don't have.

IG: What are Paradigm's views on Nintendo's N64 Rewritable Disk Drive and do you have any future plans for it?

Dave: We've had some plans, but we can't really talk about anything now. It's an...interesting piece of hardware and we're looking forward to getting a crack at it. We definitely have ideas of ways that we could take advantage of the writability presented by the drive.

"The camera angles gave us a good way of hiding and accessing Easter eggs."





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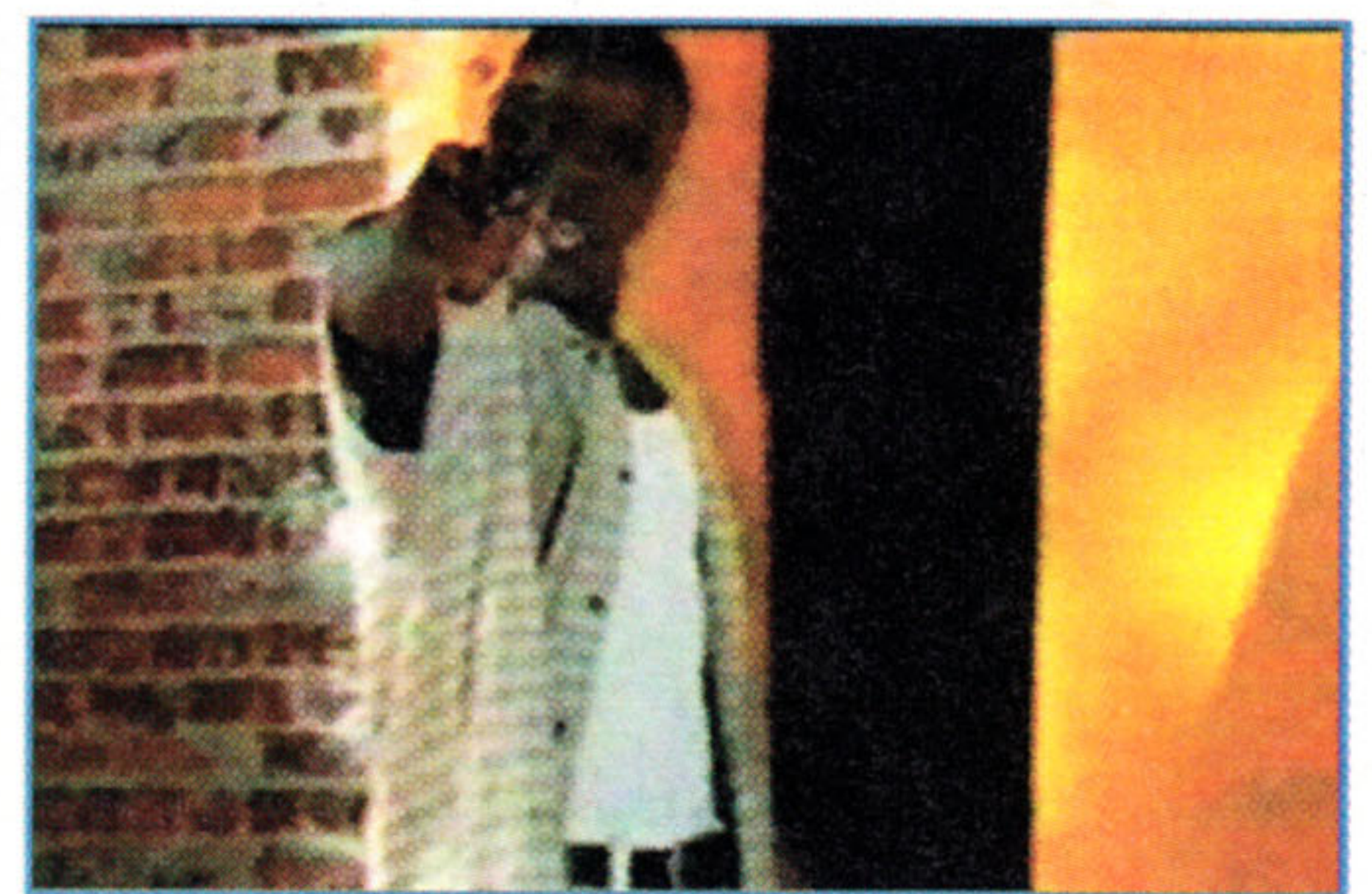
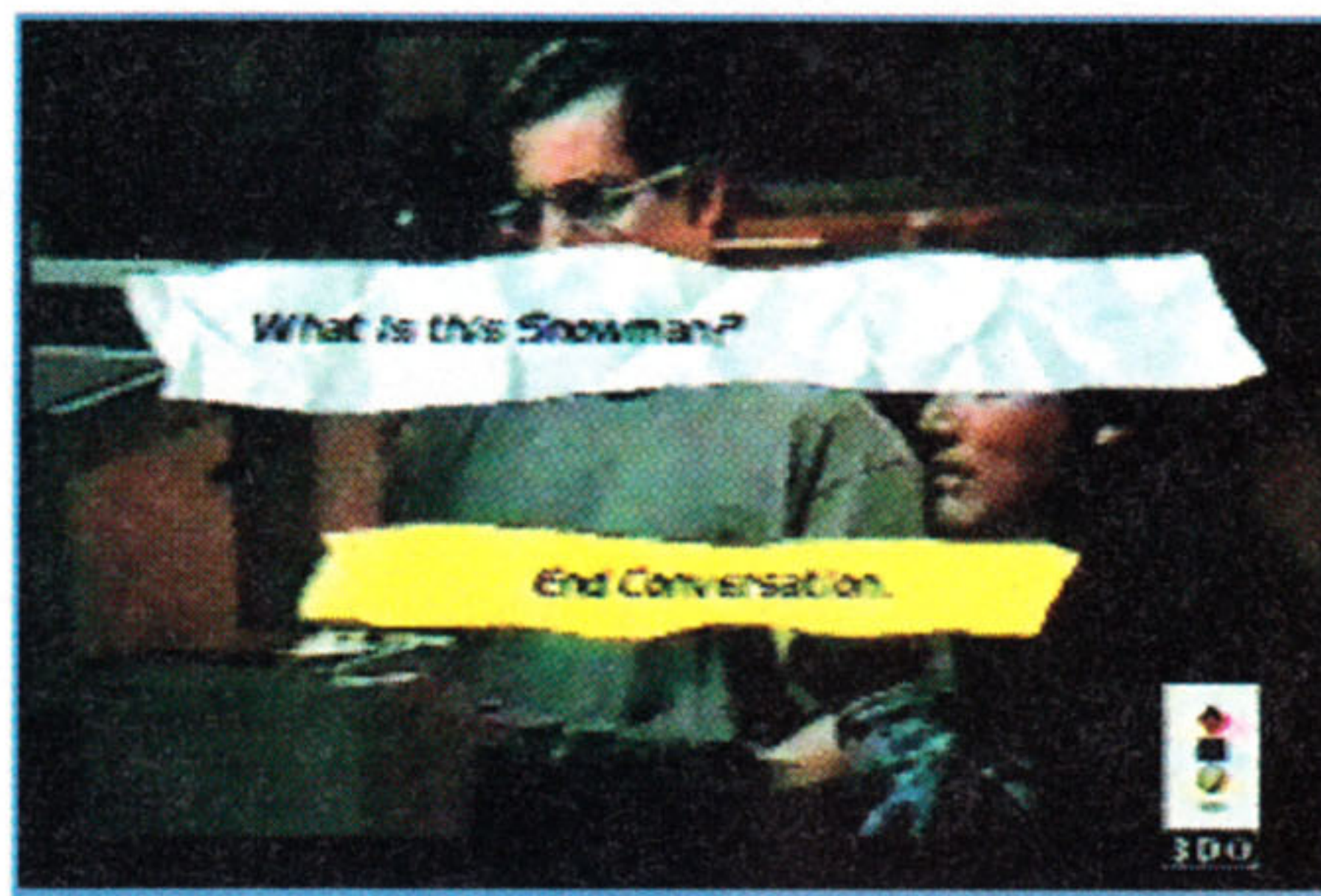
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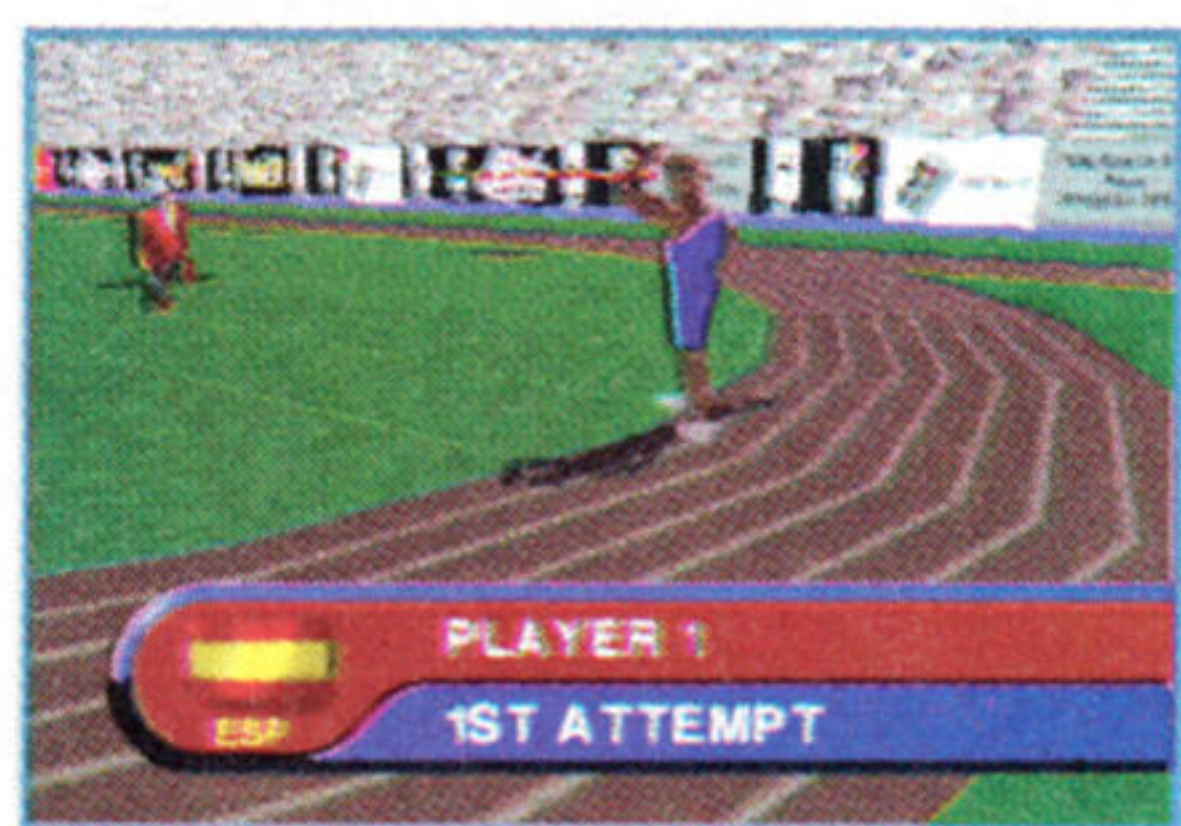
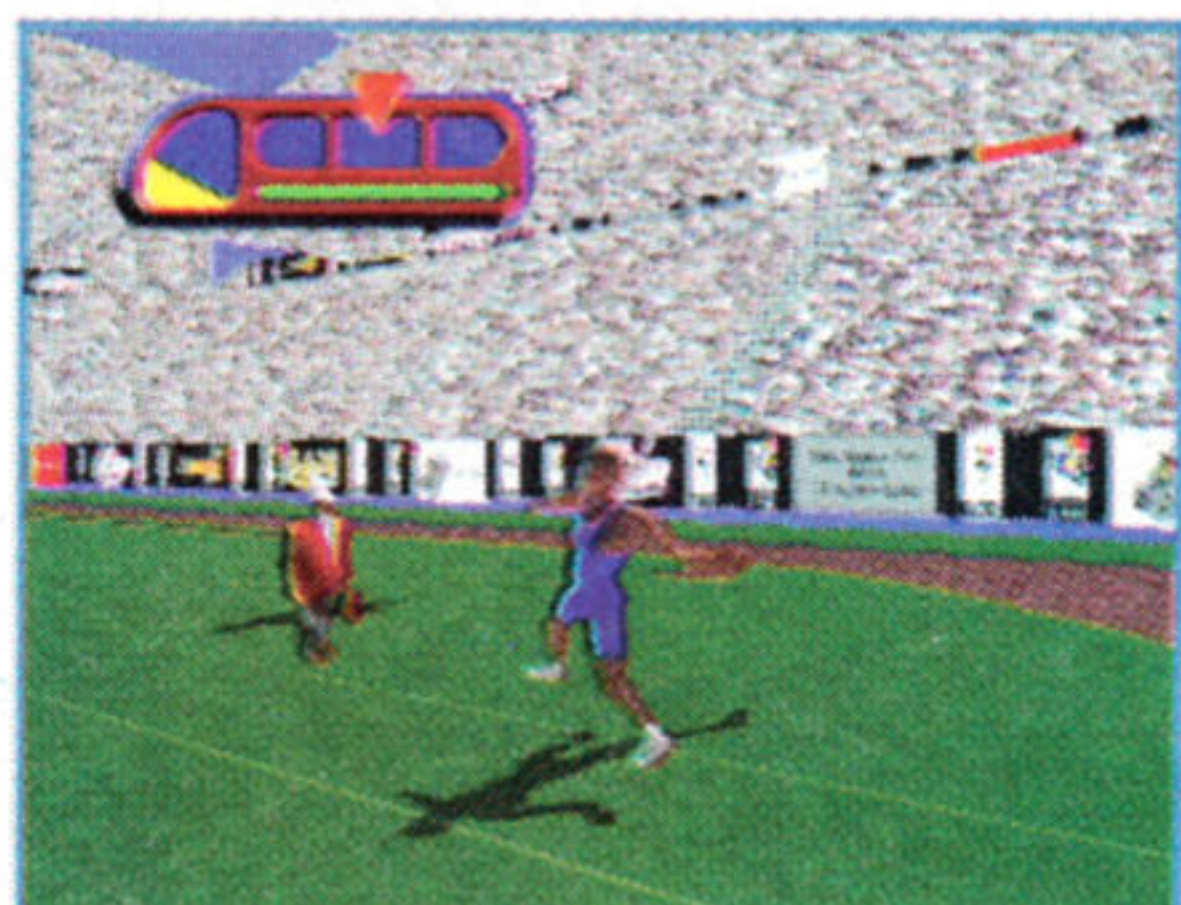
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Studio 3DO's Snow Job is a...well, Myst and a full-motion video game rolled into one big quivering ball.

M2. don't call it a comeback



3DO's Decathlon (above) brings 32-Bit realism to little-seen athletics.

3DO Shows Live M2 Hardware and Realigns Software Division

It seems like only yesterday: Trip Hawkins, the founder of Electronic Arts, was appearing before an excited audience to explain his most challenging endeavor to date—he was going to use his new 3DO Company to produce a 32-Bit, CD-based multimedia console with aesthetic powers to rival the latest arcade and PC games, and some of the world's biggest names in software publishing and consumer electronics were going to provide content and manufacture the hardware. The chips designed by 3DO—both the first-generation and eventual successors—would eventually

make their way into personal computers, set top boxes, car navigation systems and of course, console and arcade game hardware. That was 1991.

Over the last four years, Hawkins' 3DO Company has watched with disappointment as his goal of a world united happily under 3DO chips—which appeared so simple at the time—has instead proved elusive. Over the past 12 months, 3DO has undergone a complete shift of corporate strategy, which first manifested itself with the sale of the company's M2 technology to Matsushita this past December. The new 3DO Company couples two divisions—3DO Systems and Studio 3DO—within one complex.



The M2 vs. Nintendo 64

IG's FUSION asked Toby Farrand a few specific questions about the differences between M2 and N64.

IG: How many polygons can be handled at once by the M2?

TF: While Saturn and PlayStation can only handle a relatively limited amount of polygons and Nintendo is claiming around 125,000 polygons for N64, we've got 500,000 real polygon performance on our machine.

[Though TF claimed that polygons with Gouraud shading, MIP-mapping and other effects don't significantly lower the number of polygons that can be moved around per frame on the M2, it's clear that making comparisons between the machines' performance on anything other than precisely defined tasks will likely be worthless.]

IG: What difference does the media make?

TF: All the difference in the world. I have to question Nintendo's judgment with staying with the cartridge format. While Nintendo may save \$50 per hardware [unit], its software costs will be much higher than ours. As CDs cost less than a dollar each to press, carts simply cost much more.

IG: What types of differences are there in your and your competitors' hardware?

TF: The 32-bit market failed. Neither Sony nor Sega can be impressed with their numbers. We think the real game [is between M2 and Nintendo for the] 64-bit market. Our system truly is 64-bit. From the chips through the bus, the 64-bit processors through a 64-bit pipeline. [N64] may be 64-bit, but they're shuttling the data through a 32-bit bus..it doesn't make any sense."

IG's FUSION notes, for the record, that first-year performance of \$300 game hardware is unlikely to be stellar on a level that would satisfy any but the most optimistic analysts. Especially given 3DO's track record with hardware—introduction at a \$700 price point, for example—deeming the 32-bit market "failed" seems a bit self-serving at this point. The 3DO Company and Nintendo might have progressed on to greener pastures, but it's the most widely accepted standard—not the most advanced, as 3DO postulated once before—that succeeds in



Let's hope Killing Time's frame rate rises into the mid- to high 20s for PC-CDs.



Rendered sequences such as this one from the 32-bit Battle Sport prepared 3DO for M2...

The 3DO Systems division handles licensing of the company's current technologies and development of newer ones. While Matsushita controls the home console rights, 3DO retained rights to exploit the technology in the PC market and are planning major expansions in that arena. "We hope to leverage our experiences with gaming on the 3DO with the PC market and establish ourselves as the market leader," said John Orcutt, senior VP of business development. "We're looking into many partnerships now, and I think the market will be ready for packed-in 3-D boards by the end of next year." One possible scenario for 3DO is licensing the "M2 PC board" to a company, collecting both licensing fees and royalties.

On the software end, Studio 3DO doesn't plan on waiting for very long to get going as 3DO Games Decathlon, and Star Fighter are both planned as summer '96 PC releases—both games are also 3DO-compatible console titles. By June, Studio 3DO will have released 10 titles for Panasonic's and Goldstar's machines, and their newest titles, Decathlon and Snow Job, will be out this spring.

Decathlon is, as the name would lead you to believe, an Olympic decathlon with all 10 events (including the long jump, shot put, pole vault and 100-meter dash) using motion-captured athletes as realistic models. Considering that the version we saw was pre-alpha, the fluidity of the character animations was especially impressive, and Studio 3DO certainly looks to have a product in the bloodlines of the classic Summer Games.

Snow Job is an adult adventure game where you play the role of Jock Lamont, an ex-cop whose ex-girlfriend is in trouble—so much trouble, in fact, that she's caught up in drug trafficking. Tracy Scoggins of the *Lois & Clark* television series



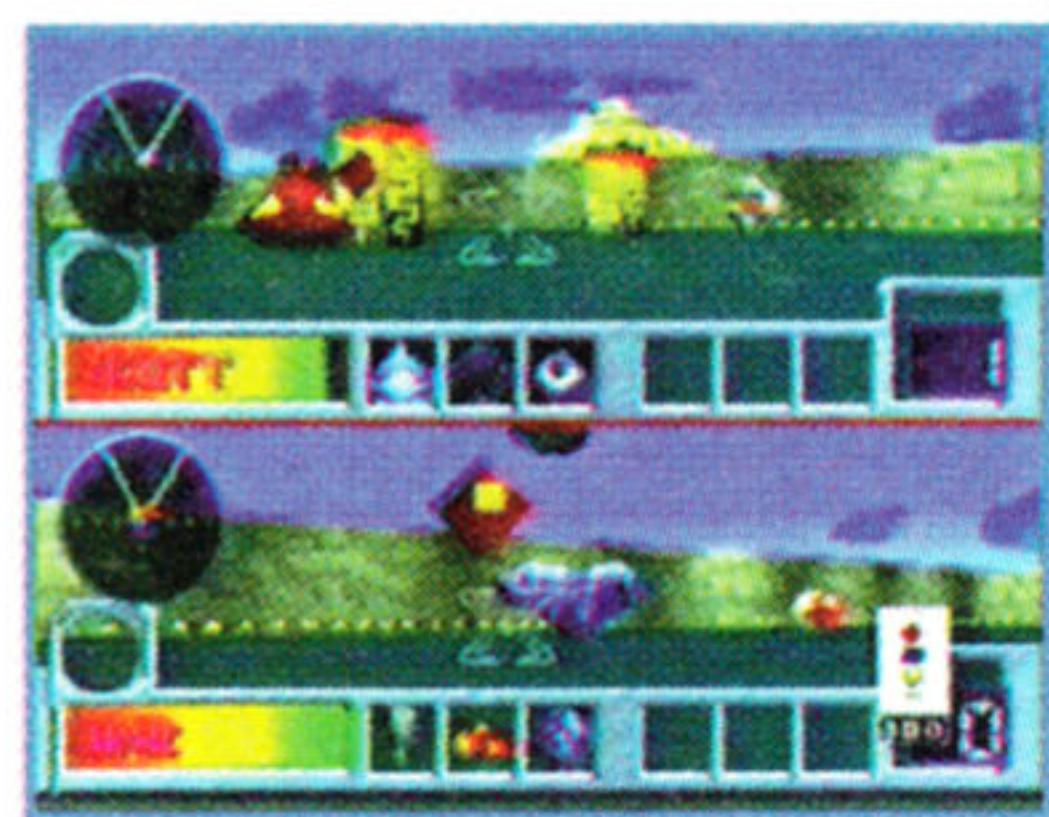
...everything on screen is a polygonal object.

stars as Snow Job's New York assistant district attorney, and you'll see her often throughout the game. What makes Snow Job unique? The 360-degree freedom of move-

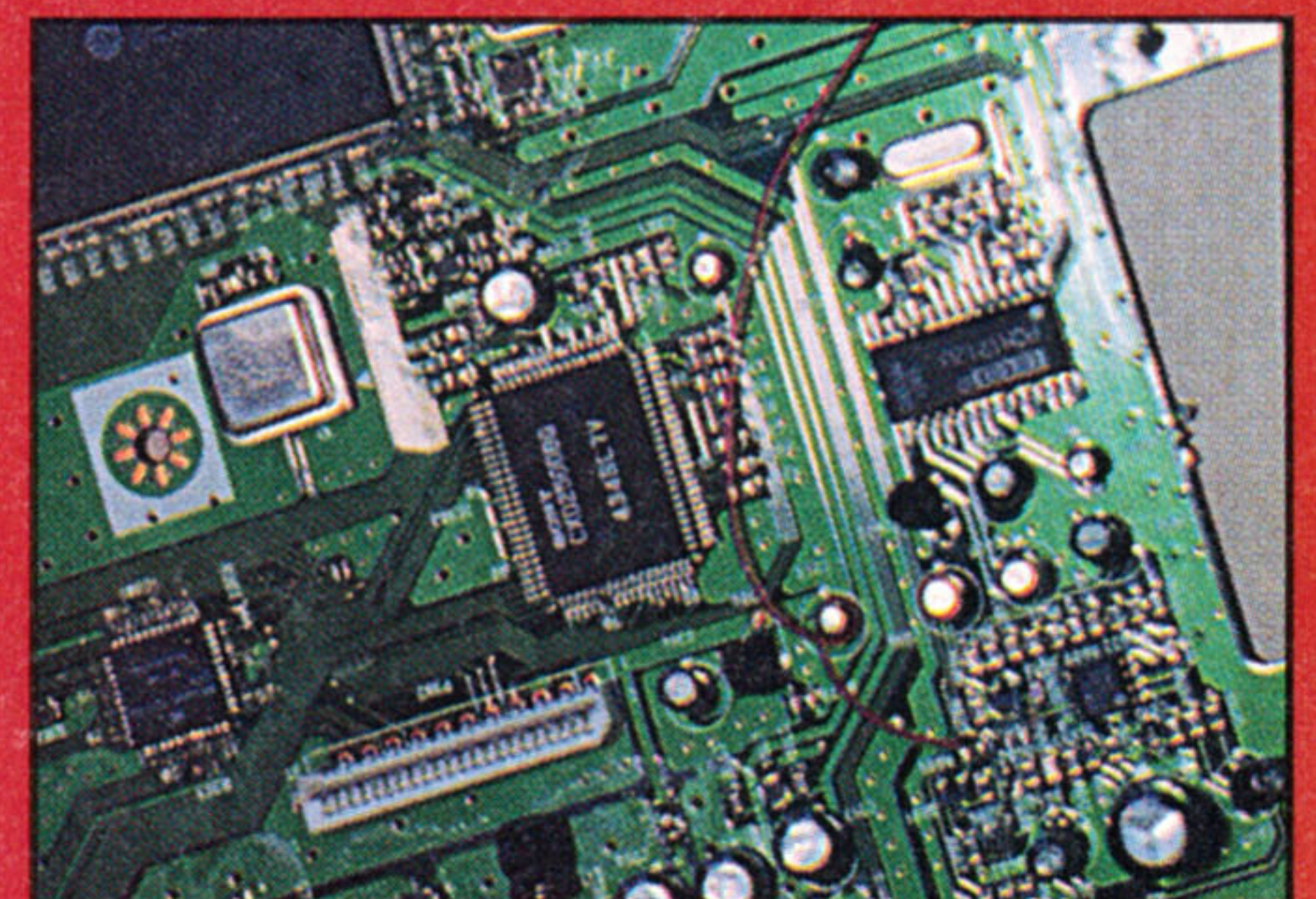
ment and an interface similar to Myst where every little detail might lead to a great revelation. Snow Job is not for younger audiences; however, in one scene you get into a fight with a bartender—inside of a strip joint.

With many games slated for 3DO and PC, will Studio 3DO be developing for platforms deemed competition only months ago?

"Quite possibly," says Orcutt. "We're not ignoring that option. But we're in a unique position here...when you develop a title like Captain Quazar, you have a great franchise. While porting them to the other 32-bit systems sounds like a good idea, it's a matter of timing. Can we get [a port of a 3DO game] out before M2? If not, it's just not worth it."



Be ready for PC ports of SF, Quazar and Battle Sport.



A Special M2 Update

AN INTERVIEW WITH **JOSEPH** YBARRA

Joseph Ybarra is a living legend in video games. He was one of the founders of Electronic Arts and created *Julius Erving & Larry Bird Go One-on-One*, among other groundbreaking titles, and as Studio 3DO's Executive Producer, it's his job to make sure that the games, in his words, "play sweet." IG's *FUSION* had a chance to talk with Ybarra about 3DO's present and future, and about the industry's ever-changing landscape.

IG: Why has 3DO changed its strategy so radically in recent months?

JY: We really like many of our games, of course. With the industry as fragmented as it is, we couldn't afford to only play toward the 3DO segment. We envision many platforms for our software...in developing the games, you need to take a "platform-agnostic" approach. While a PC version of, say, *Captain Quazar* wouldn't look quite as good as the 3DO version, we don't think PC owners should be shut out. Maybe if they play the PC version, love the game, and then see the 3DO version, they might go out and buy a 3DO.

IG: 3DO has been working on Internet software under the cloak of secrecy for some time now. What is it going to take to make a successful Internet game, as opposed to a "regular" game?

JY: Much of what we've learned will carry over. If the game's not fun, it won't fly. But more than that: We need to find an interactive game that will get people online and keep them there for large amounts of time. A *Doom* clone isn't going to do it, even if it was the best clone.

IG: Every platform has a "killer application" or two—*Virtua Fighter 2* was that for the Saturn, *Toshinden* and *Ridge Racer* were that for the PlayStation and the upcoming *Mario 64* will be one for Nintendo's new platform. What will M2's "killer app" be?

JY: We're not putting everything we have behind one game, yet. We have about seven great games in the works, but it's too early to tell what will be the break-out hit for the system. What we're doing is bringing these seven games along, all with the intent of being the best game out there and as things get a bit closer to launch, we'll step back and say to ourselves, "Which one of these games can do it?" We'll then throw more people and talent at that game.

IG: How do you know which one is "the one?"

JY: You will not know until you get to playtest. When you get there, you'll have a pretty good idea—it's almost guaranteed that you'll know then whether you have it or not, because it's impossible to hide. A really great application, you know when you have it. The problem is, "How do I get it?"

I've had the opportunity of being there, knowing we've got a great game. I could tell because on build day [when new copies of the game are being made within the company], say a Friday afternoon, there would be 20 people waiting to get a build. When I have a product like that I know, "Hey, I've done it. It's there."

IG: Compare *Mario 64* to what Studio 3DO is doing for M2.

JY: That's very interesting. Nintendo traditionally shoots for a lower age group with its products. This leaps at you when you look at the products the company will have for its launch. We choose to look at the history of the purchasers of the machine and find out that they are, in fact, older audiences. Our products are not targeted at the younger groups, ours are right zeroed-in on the teenage boy.

As it turns out, demographically speaking, we learned that for *Opera* [3DO's original hardware] the average user was around 24 years old. That in and of itself dictates how the product will look and feel. When you look at the throughput of the M2, I'm sure you've heard some of that today..

IG: "500,000 active polygons?"

JY: I'm not as concerned with the number of polygons after a certain point as I am with the use of the system resources efficiently. Managing memory, streaming stuff off the CD, managing the audio data vs. the video data vs. the coprocessor calls...

IG: Toby Ferrand noted that you can do whatever you want with the RAM.

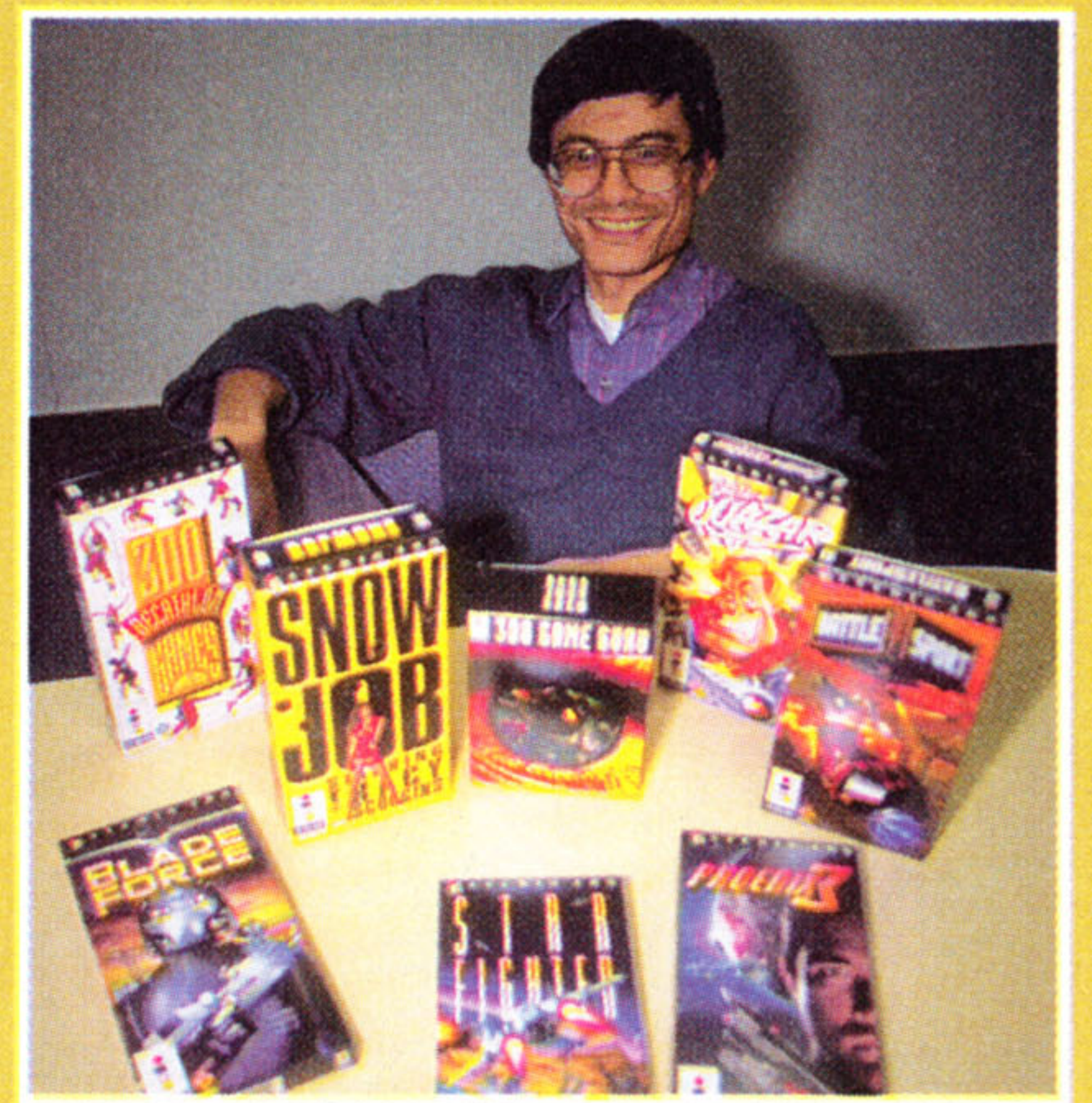
JY: That is really important. When you stop to think about it, I can cheat like a dog. I don't necessarily need the polygon engine to do the graphics, so I get more resources.

IG: Especially if it's not a polygon-based game.

JY: Exactly. Where it's more important is if I want to do high-res with a wide palette, 640x480x16-million color game, all of a sudden I'm chuckin' down huge amounts of RAM. That means I have got to have throughput that is really blindingly fast in order to support that level of detail.

The polygon engine is only one part of the problem solving. We're looking at it and want it to obtain maximum advantage at processing polygons... the whole other domain is that we can reproduce huge graphic images in hi-res 24-Bit color, while taking huge amounts of space, how do I overcome that problem?

If you stop and think about what customers want, while the industry is hyped on polygons, but the reality is that no one has ever seen a 24-Bit palleted bitmapped game before, in hi-res. So you



have to ask yourself, "If I want to show off a machine how do I do it?" I have two ways. I can do what other machines do better, or do something completely new, something they can't do at all.

The most important thing is how the tools are used. Having a great machine helps, but for the game to be successful, it has to play sweet.

IG: How do you define "playing sweet?"

JY: Tough question to answer because it depends on the type of product. First, all sweet products have the characteristic that they vaporize time. In other words, you sit down to play for 15 minutes and two hours go by. That quality speaks to every other aspect of the game.

Take, for instance, the user interface. It has to be transparent and be totally intuitive. If I'm spending any time figuring out what keys to press or what buttons to push on a controller, you've lost it. You've got to be really careful how you design it.

Another way a game is sweet is that it stands the test of time. It can stand up after a high degree of scrutiny on some level. A good example of this is something like a fighting product where the users are going to invest a fair amount of time to find the special moves and find out the different people you can fight against.

On the PC platform, the current rage are games like *Command and Conquer* and *WarCraft* because of the depth and the way they play. A further example is *Pac-Man*. It's still around. You'll notice that none of these games mentioned anything about graphics. Neither *Tetris* nor *Pac-Man* became hits because of their graphics. Even *Civilization* on the PC, or even *SimCity*—both had awful graphics and hard-to-use user interfaces but even they could overcome those problems to become the hits they are.

In some cases you can build a product that has long-lasting potential purely based around the subject matter. *SimCity* is a great example, as it's a great idea and was executed well enough to sustain it. And if we build something that good, you better believe we'll work it just like everyone else.

IG: What aspect of M2 are you most looking forward to dealing with, both from a developer's and gamer's perspectives?

JY: That's easy—I'm looking forward to its shipping. [Laughter]

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 (714) 562-1743

M2: 3DO's

FIRST SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY DISPLAY

IG's FUSION was invited to take an advance look at software running off of actual M2 chip-based hardware and bore witness to a demonstration of a M2 development unit's abilities. While no official date has been set yet for the system's release—Matsushita has indicated that third or fourth quarter 1996 is likely, though persistent rumors place the hardware in a 1997 release time-frame—if the games can make effective use of the technology in the company's software demonstrations, the machine will be worth the wait.

Clearly, a question worth asking is how the M2 differs from both its established and impending competition, and we posed that question to 3DO's Toby Ferrand.

The Saturn and PlayStation divide their RAM for use by several different chips: Graphics and sound processors have their own separate RAM chips, which limits how much memory specific code can take up. Sound samples are limited to perhaps half a Megabyte total in each machine, though the Saturn can be tricked by especially crafty coders into allowing the audio RAM to be used in other ways. By comparison, the M2's RAM is unified such that developers can use it in any way—if audio is only a quarter-Megabyte, they can easily apply extra memory toward better video decompression or something else altogether.

Another feature that sets the M2 apart is the on-board PCMCIA Type III slot, which can be used for future expansion. As PCMCIA is already a PC standard, developers can create

software for existing peripherals without needing to design custom hardware. Code could be written, for instance, that would allow the M2 to use popular PCMCIA card modems.

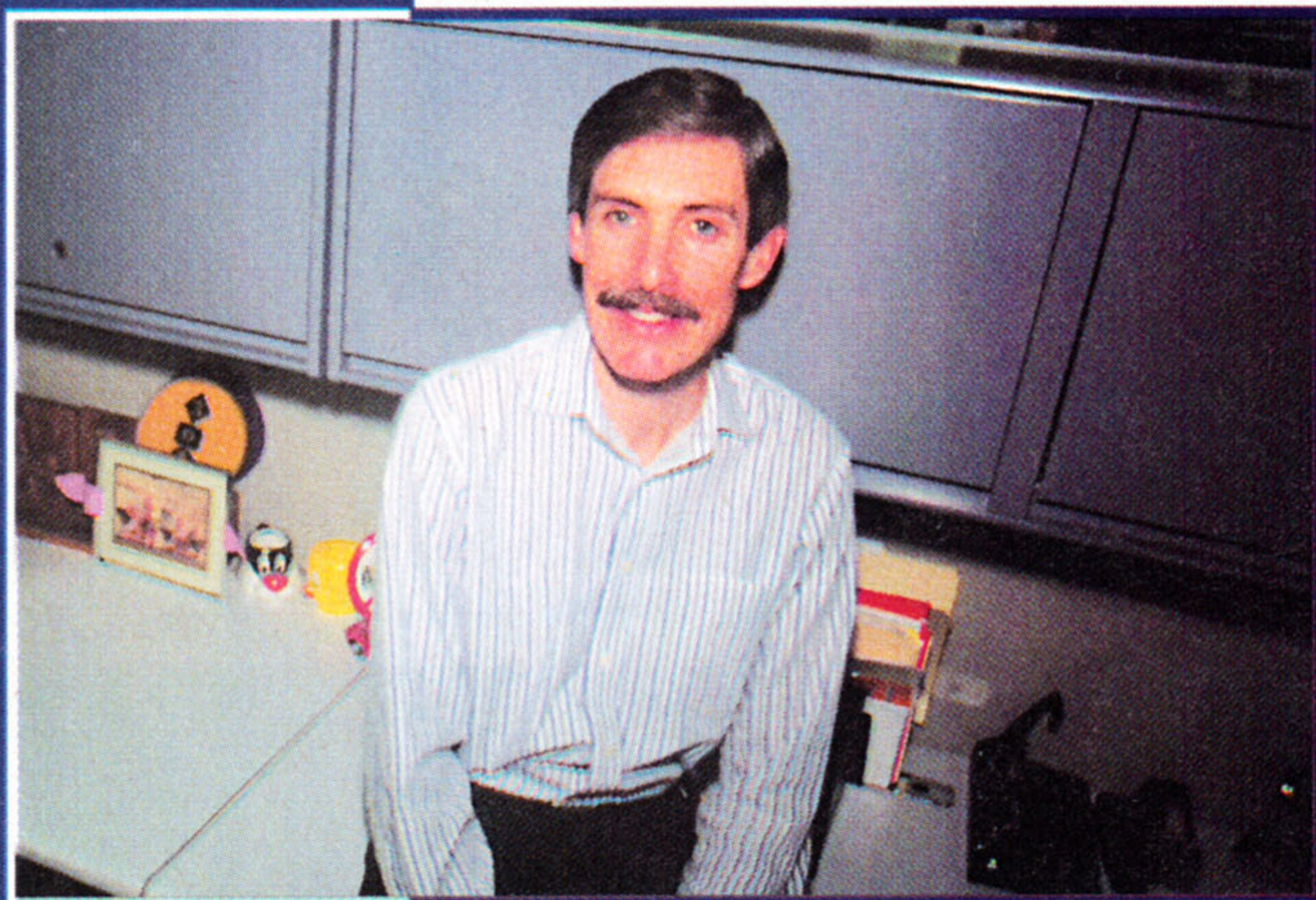
What can the M2 hardware actually do? You've seen the general specifications already: high-speed, high-polygon count texture mapping and video decompression on the fly, tri-linear MIP-mapping, Gouraud shading with RGB and alpha channel (for fog/translucent effects), hardware Z-buffering and 3-D perspective correction. All of these features put M2 on par with the Ultra 64 in the creation of realistic-looking 3-D worlds that can be displayed very quickly.

Next, a second movie was put on a different polygon, which bounced around on the screen while the first spun in the center. This sort of video-mapping has been shown both for the 3DO and PlayStation, though the video wasn't of such high quality, but at this point, the M2 began to depart from what we've seen before. The two polygons began to warp in, around and through each other with no artifacting or other noticeable glitches, and then a second copy of the first video was put on a polygonal torus (donut-shaped). While one object was passing through the center of the spinning torus, the other morphed into a cylinder and covered them both.

Another effect on display that was quite outstanding in many ways but mostly on the optical illusion level was the partial transparency. One movie was made to look like a window of a car while the other kept on playing. The effect was amazing. "One possible use of this effect would be a reflection of a moving image outside while separate movement occurred inside [the car]," explained Sell.

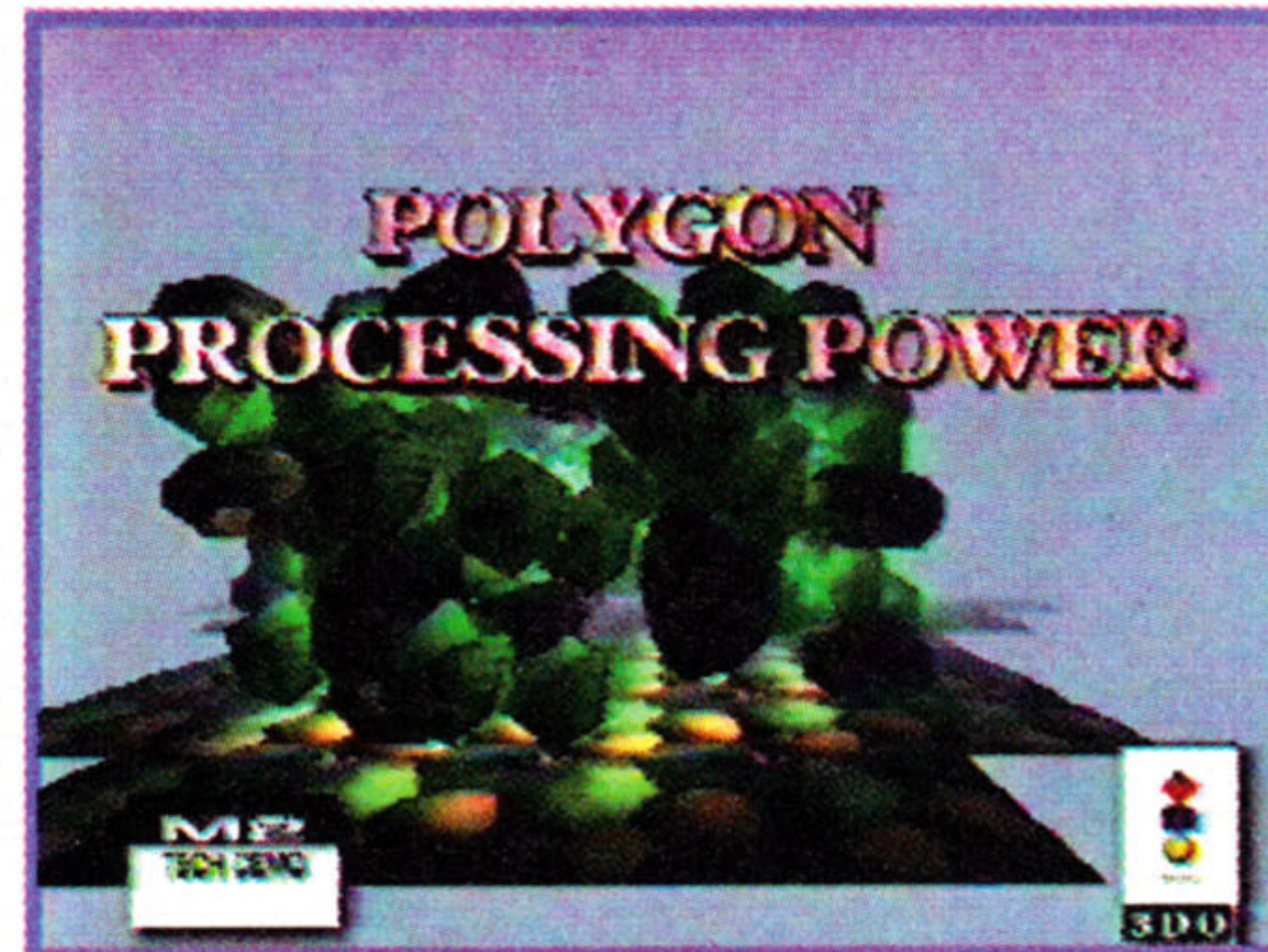
A light-sourcing demonstration had several dozen polygonal objects spinning around in a thick circle, atop a bitmapped floor with a spinning polygon in the center. The central polygon moved through all of the others on an elliptical path and acted as a point light source. As the center polygon moved around, and as we moved the game's camera around for better looks of what was happening within the virtual room, you could see the polygons and the floor change their shadings in actual realtime.

The real treat came when fog was added to the entire mix. The light refracted off the fog just as real light would; polygons came into and out of the fog and you could clearly see the difference. All of this occurred with no noticeable loss of performance—as you'd expect from a demo—but this one was showing a healthy 200,000 polygons on screen, according to Sell.



Joseph Sell

The 3DO Company's John Sell, "Vice President of Concepts," hosted a quick demonstration of what the M2 is capable of. His first demo was a full-screen, satellite broadcast-quality version of the movie Parenthood, which was in MPEG format streaming off a PCMCIA card. The movie was then mapped on a square polygon and warped in realtime.



"GAME OF THE YEAR."

SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER



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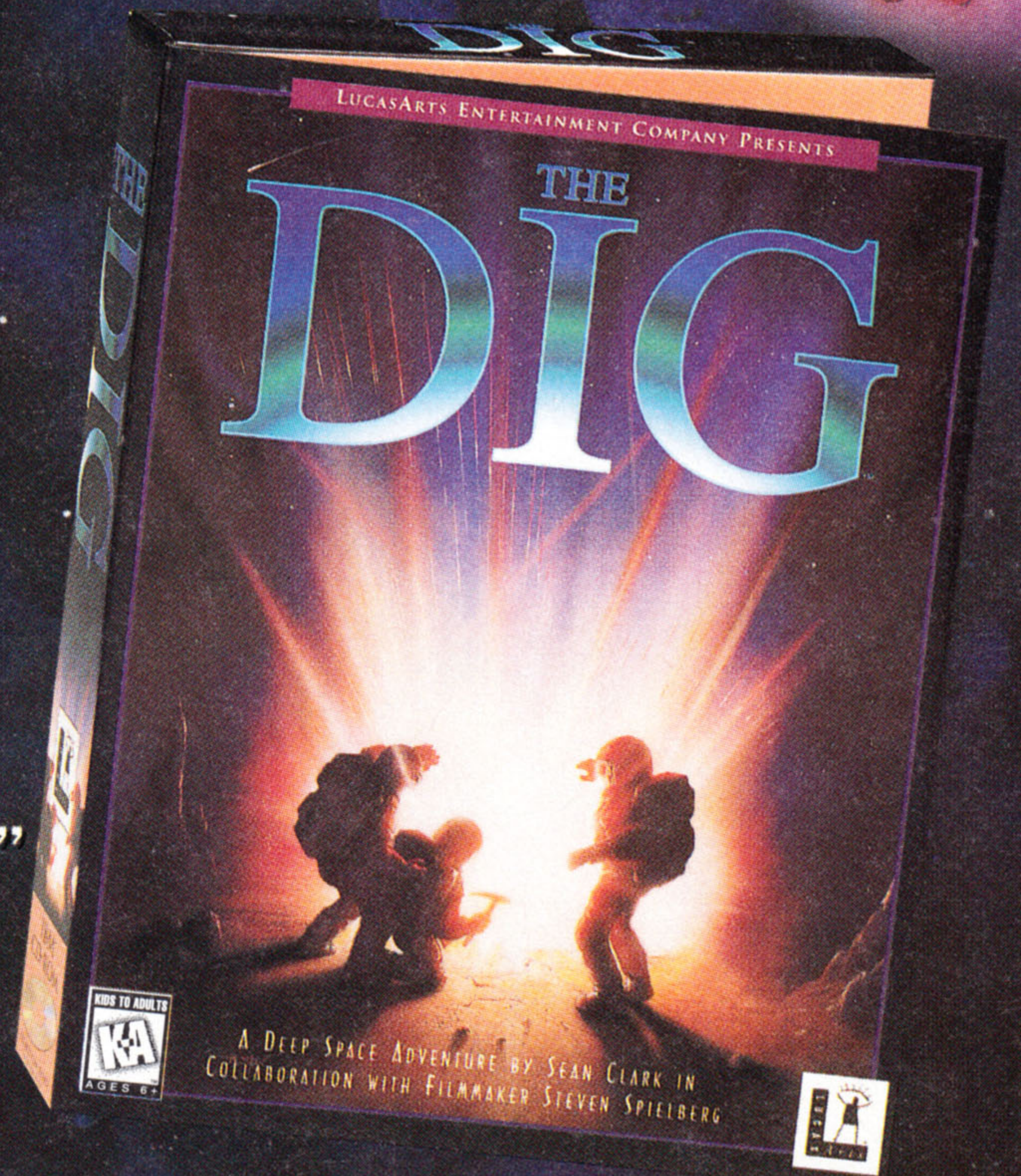
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PC ENTERTAINMENT

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APRIL FOOLZ



When this 50 percent translated SF RPG arrived in our offices right before deadline, I knew it was time to crack out my Japanese dictionaries and my English thesaurus—who would have thought that the greatest fighting game of all time would be turned into a RPG? (Please ignore what I said about Samurai Shodown being the greatest fighting game last issue. I didn't mean it. SF is still the king!) This game will likely take the dubious honor of most kick-ass game that ever was (for a RPG).

The year is 1972 and you control Charlie, Guile's buddy, as he goes on a secret mission to Vietnam to take out M. Bison and his cronies. You start in a small farming village and work your way through napalmed jungles and burnt-out cities, fighting text-based battles and using such items as spare tires, horse shoes and catnip to ward off your foes. (Yeah, they sound like weird items, but that's how my Japanese dictionary translates them.) All that's missing from this game is a bitch load of air-to-air missiles, but that's a feature we just don't deserve in an RPG of this caliber.

I hope Working Designs does its homework on this one and makes the translation more Japanese than the company did in Lunar: Eternal Blue—I'm still smarting over the U.S. version's omitted references to Pachinko machines, cheesecake mags and sushi bars, which completely changed the game! Let's pray that they fix the part where Ryu offers to serve Rose unchi, though, because I don't think U.S. gamers would want a sandwich like that.

DEVELOPER - KAPKOM

PUBLISHER - WORKING DESIGNS

FORMAT - CD-ROM

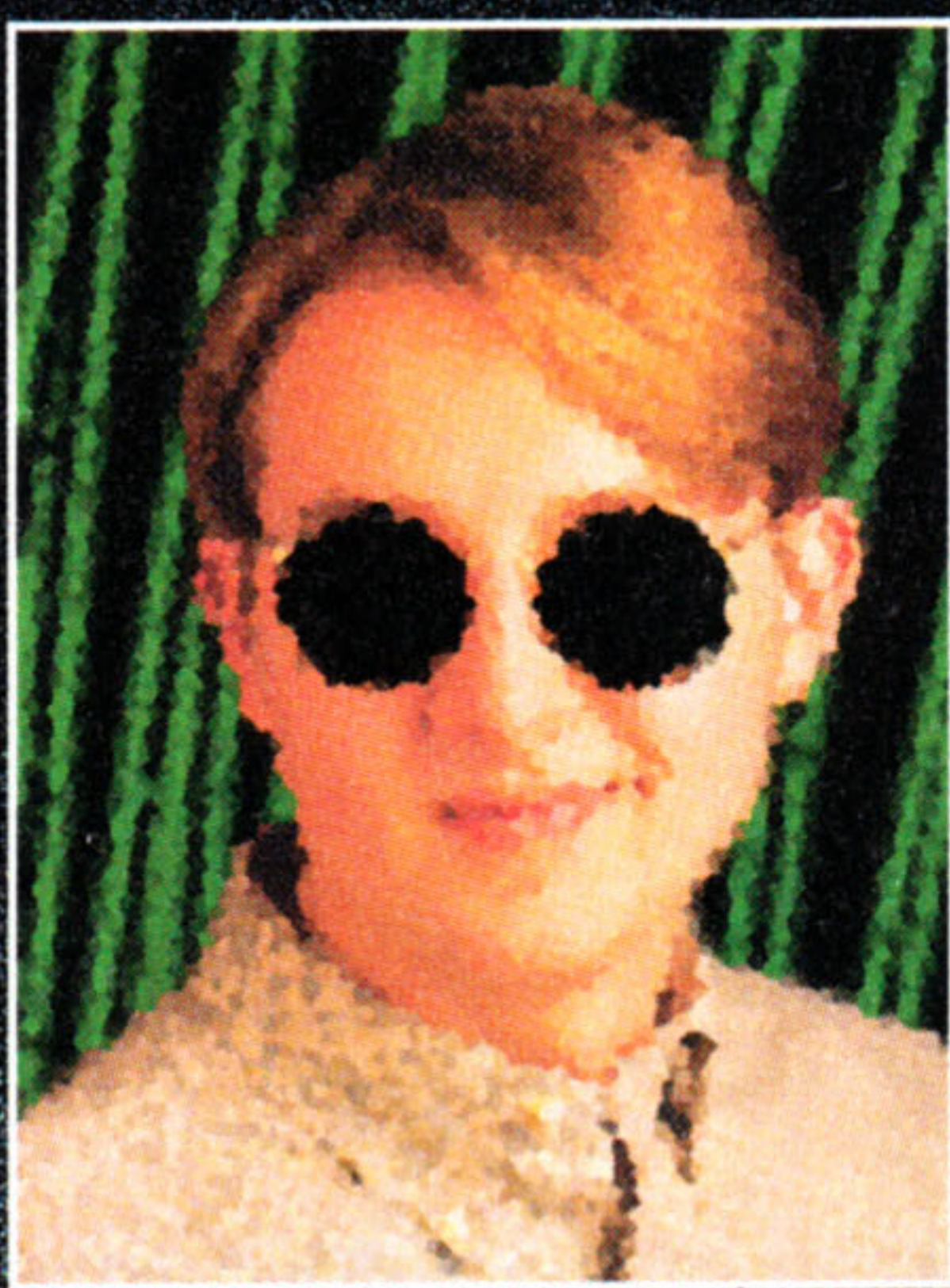
OF PLAYERS - 2

DIFFICULTY - SCORCHING

AVAILABLE - APRIL 1996



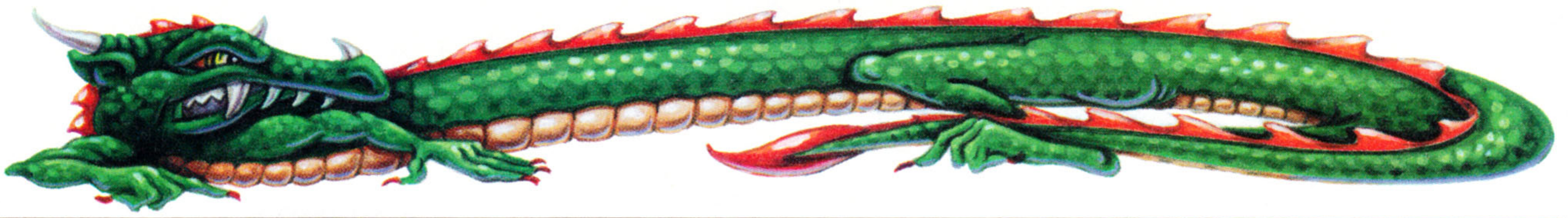
Let me just include in this preview that it's very petty for other people to knock our magazine, because we've never acted irresponsibly or knocked other mags for printing incorrect news. Now I'm going to do a test of our new preview and review format checklist, which will hopefully eliminate the need for us to write long, complicated reviews in the future. Make sure you write and tell us what you think!



PETER ROX
Working Designs shoots and scores again with Capcom!



- This is true gaming bliss!
- The (circle one: background line-scrolls/female manga artwork) gave me a woody.
- Me and the Letter Meister stayed up all night playing this one just to find the codes.
- No slowdown or flicker means that you've got smooth video sailing as you kick ass!
- Pure gaming joy²!
- A truly awesome experience, and I'm not just saying that to get quoted in an advertisement.
- Run, do not walk, to the telephone and order this game from us right now!
- This is another best game of the decade!
- Music just would have ruined the experience.
- 16-Bit has never looked so good!
- I never thought I'd say this, but this is one glorious full-motion video game!
- The more expensive import version is better, even though you won't be able to read it.
- A video-gaming member of the Ku Klux Klan snuck in and added racist comments and profanity to my otherwise glowing review.
- A saboteur held me hostage and made me write a bad review of this game, so it's not my fault.



The first in a series of IG reports by Akira Kishimoto from the heart of Tokyo, Japan

JAPAN TODAY

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big in japan 42

Culture Shock

We all know that Japan and the U.S. have vastly different cultures that result in different types of content for popular titles in each society, and one of *Intelligent Gamer's* goals with Japan Today will be to present some of the differences and similarities between our two countries from month to month. Japanese and American arcades are this month's topic.

In the U.S., places with arcade machines are often local hangouts for teenagers during and after school hours; but in Japan, arcades (known as Game Centers, abbreviated "ge-sen" [gay-sen]) have well-lit and exceptionally clean atmospheres, catering to both big arcade game fans and couples looking for fun dates.

To attract more couples—big spenders—arcade operators have put in many kinds of attractions that are rarely found in American arcades. Fortune-telling devices have become big here and crane games are perennial favorites. Crane games such as Sega's UFO Catcher earn lots of money and have only two buttons: One button which moves the crane device left and one which moves it backward in a glass-enclosed case. As soon as you release the second button, the crane drops down and supposedly attempts to pick up a prize in the bin below. Prizes range from plush toys, to watches, to mini Walkman speakers. Another non-game attraction is a machine that will first take a picture of you and your significant other, then morph the pictures to give you an idea of what your child will look like. On the ugliness scale of one to 10, my kid came out a 12 and my girlfriend left me...but life goes on.

Taito's New Capriccio is but one of the more elaborate crane games that offer a chance at tantalizing prizes for \$1's worth of pocket change.





Square's departure from Nintendo's camp leaves Sony with an increased software advantage in the Japanese console wars. Final Fantasy VII (above) combines pre-rendered artwork and realtime polygons.

Shaking up the industry

Changes in software development power have created dramatic shifts in hardware/software developer coalitions in Japan. Nintendo's N64 policy has been to limit the number of makers to ensure fewer but higher quality products; Sony's has been able to keep support for third-parties relatively open and allow many companies to develop for the PS platform. There are good and bad points of both sorts of third-party philosophies. However, with Nintendo, a loss of a key third-party developer can have a much larger impact, as it appears to have had with Square, which is already advertising the PlayStation FF7 to inform the public of its change of allegiance.

With SNK, Capcom and Konami officially backing the Saturn and PlayStation, who does Nintendo still have in their corner? Enix, for one, developers of ActRaiser and Soul Blazer and a huge stable of North American and European developers from LucasArts to H2O to Rare. Signs of Nintendo's Japanese support—from Capcom and Konami, if not Namco—should be starting to emerge in the near future, so keep your eyes open.

...who does Nintendo still have in its corner?



For the more athletically inclined, Taito's punching machine takes a picture of a person and lets you have three punches to deform the screenshot. It's a great way to relieve stress once you see your girlfriend in the morphing photo booth with some other guy.

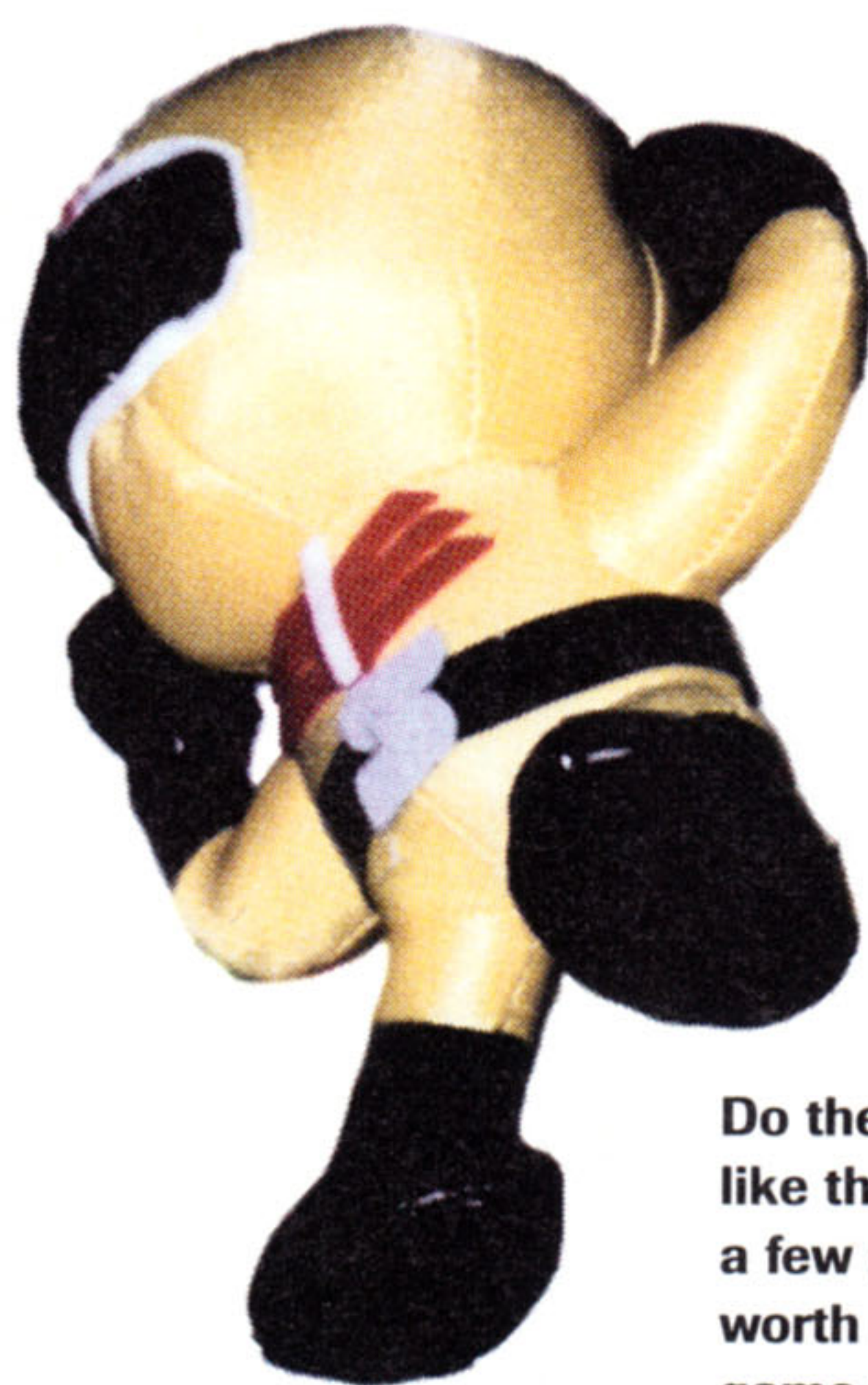
Many boyfriends want to show off for ladies in front of big audiences, and Namco's Alpine Racer lets them do just that. In this game, you stand on a platform that simulates skis and swivel your whole body to control the on-screen skier. Anyone watching will be laughing at you as you bounce your butt from side to side, so it's a good idea to let your date go first, watch as the crowd starts to laugh then mount the machine yourself to show off how it's supposed to be done. As you can see, there are a lot of attractions at Japanese game centers that make the experience considerably different from American arcades.



A profile of your average Japanese new-and-used games store, with cardboard Super Famicom boxes filling the shelves. The prominent yellow sign reads, "Used Famicom (Games)."

One other major difference between the Japanese gaming environment and the American one is the way games are sold and re-sold in Japan. You still have your standard game stores in Japan where you can buy new games, but after one week of release, many of the games start to appear in used-game stores. People rush to buy games here on the day of release, complete the game in a week, sell the game to a used-game store and buy another game with the money they've just received. By these means, a lot of games are kept in circulation while older, less-popular games start to disappear because used game stores will no longer pay out cash for them. Many people who aren't in a rush to get a brand-new game will wait a week and start shopping in used-game stores for the best bargain. The amount of access to a variety of software is dramatically larger here, but there's no video-game rental business here: Game companies have successfully prevented it.

As you can see, cultural differences make Japan and America what they are as nations, but what ties the countries together is their mutual love for great video games.



Do these look like they're worth a few dollars' worth of crane game tries?

Anyone watching will be laughing at you as you bounce your butt from side to side





Square Soft, Inc. of Japan shocked Japan on Friday, Feb. 9 by announcing that the company will produce its next installment of the best-selling Final Fantasy RPG series on the Sony PlayStation—not for the Nintendo 64. Final Fantasy VII will be the first of many titles to follow Sony's machine, with Romancing Saga, Seiken Densetsu (Secret of Mana) and Chrono Trigger games currently in the planning stages. There are rumors of even more titles in the works, but Mr. Iida, Square's press liaison, would only say that the world will have to "wait and see" what's coming next. Final Fantasy VII will be released in December 1996 for a price of only 5800 yen—at current exchange rates, that's only \$58, compared with the expensive Super Famicom FF6 price of roughly \$100. Moreover, FF7 will be a double-CD game, which means that we're going to see a Final Fantasy with over a gigabyte of combined graphics, audio and game data; an incredible leap forward from the 32-Meg Final Fantasy VI cartridge. Why did Square opt to join Sony? The official answer from Mr. Iida is that it was no longer feasible to shackle Square's creators within the memory limitations of a cartridge format, which had the unfortunate effect of making the next installment of its FF series unsuitable for the Nintendo 64. So why, then, would Square withdraw all support for the N64 format, especially with a disk drive forthcoming for the machine? That's open to speculation.

Final Fantasy VII:

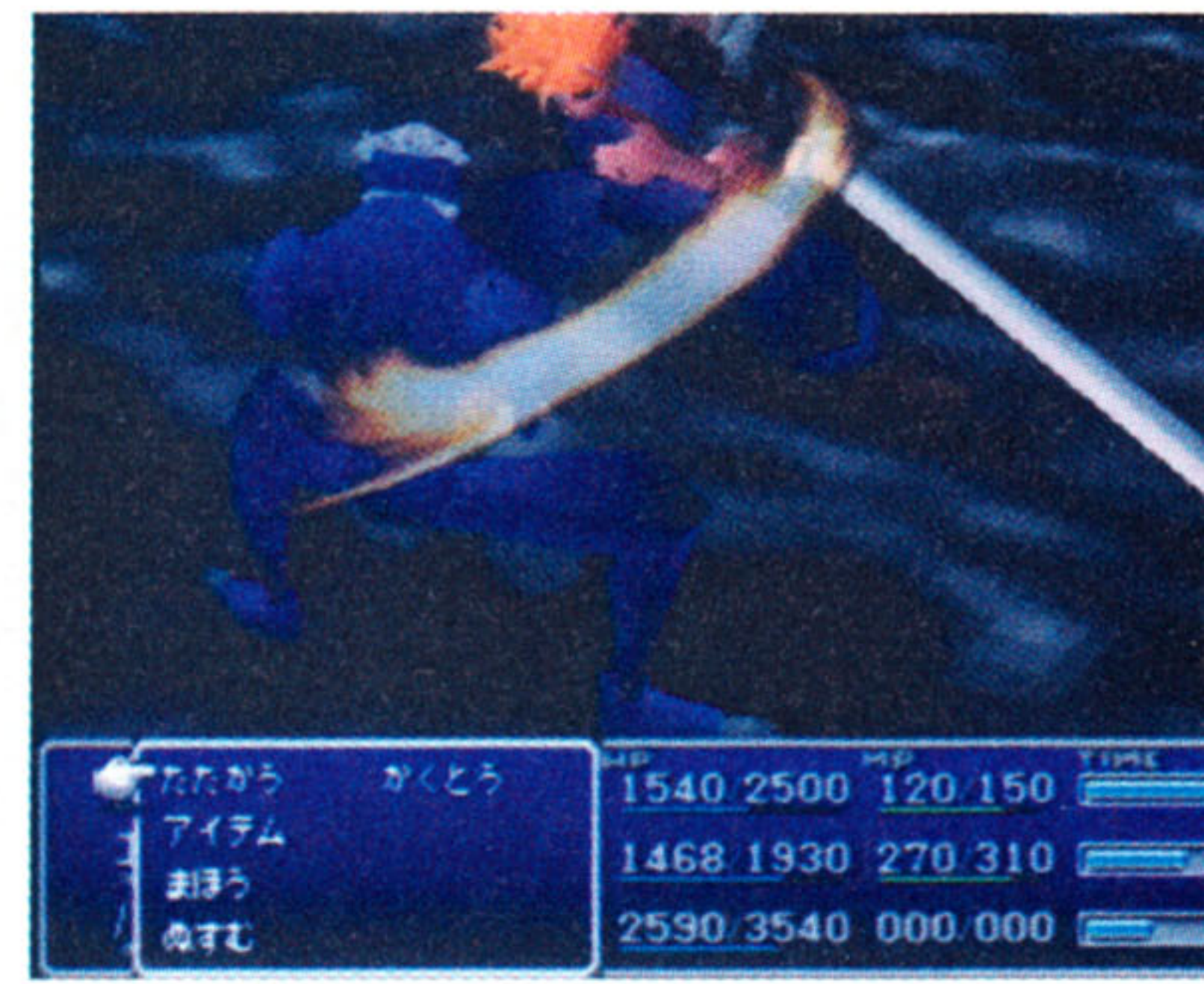
"...the world will have to wait and see what's coming next..."

Mr. Iida

Square's graphic magicians are taking Final Fantasy into a totally 3-D environment in order to make the game more visually stunning while also giving the player extra visual clues. The designers are planning to move the camera angle around during play so that the player can get a better feel for the world they are travelling in; the player will be able to peer through windows and doors to see action that is beyond his/her immediate vicinity. Mr. Iida notes that a lot of emphasis will be put on the camera angle to create a dynamic environment for the player, and that Square's design team has been very enthusiastic to work with the PlayStation because of its great graphic potential—truly intriguing comments considering the former hardware partner that Square has abandoned.

There will be at least three characters in your party, and the battle sequences will consist of at least three people on screen at once, but the details are certainly subject to change. The active-time battle system from Square's previous effort will be retained in this edition, as well. As to what other new innovations Square will put in the game...well, that's still a mystery, though a complete audio-visual overhaul seems like a pretty wild start. We're told that we'll be surprised by the other special features they'll include in the software...we can't wait!

In other Square news, the company will release the remainder of its Super Famicom software by the end of April, ending a long and successful relationship between Square and Nintendo for Super Famicom publishing. Their remaining titles are the simulation RPG Bahamut Lagoon, the action game Gun Hazard and the RPGs Treasure Hunter G and Rudora no Hihou (Rudora's Secret Treasure). Square will be porting over some of their games for the Windows 95 format for the American market...imagine the possibilities.



The realtime battle scenes in FF7 include dramatic close-ups of your character engaged in life and death struggles with villains.

On the PlayStation?

Square's modern Japanese headquarters



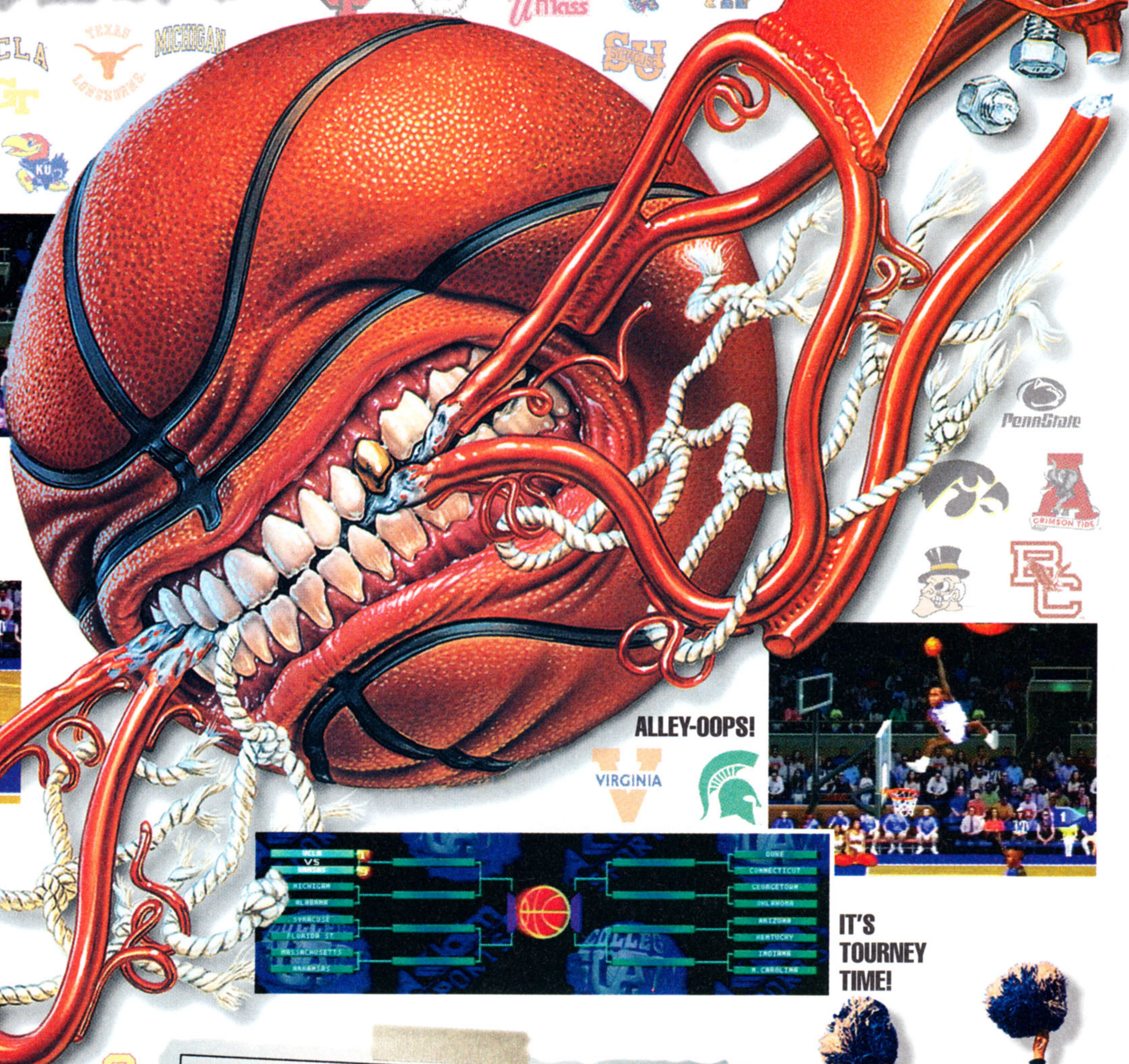
Final Fantasy VII textured polygon battle sequences make their Super Famicom equivalents look primitive by comparison.

... imagine the possibilities.



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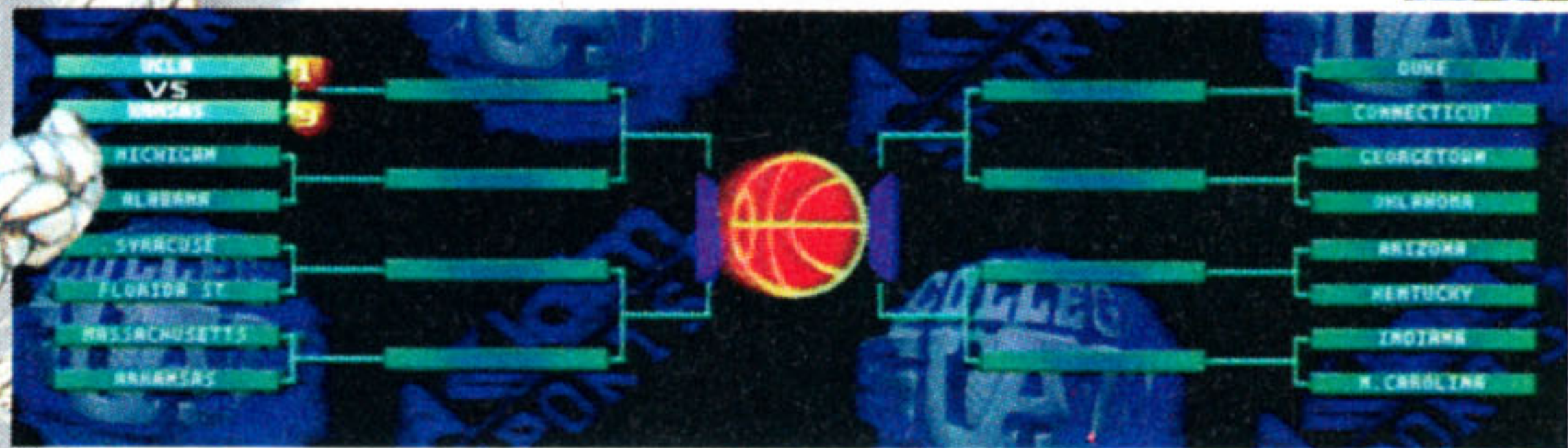
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ALLEY-OOPS!



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EXCLUSIVE: Sega Shows VF3

Sega arrived at JAMMA with its biggest gun blazing: Virtua Fighter 3 was previewed in video-tape form in what Sega Enterprises Ltd. representatives claimed to be from actual Model 3 arcade hardware. You could barely tell that the characters on-screen were polygon-based; it's awfully close to the quality of the pre-rendered graphics Sega sold on its Japanese character CG discs last year. The overall visual power of the Model 3 hardware is such that you'll begin to get pickier with what you see on-screen; while the VF characters' bodies were as close to perfect as could be imagined, you could tell that their facial features were made up of polygons, and with the quality of the rest of the images, you begin to get picky.

Moves look very similar to those from VF and VF2, though there are entirely new attacks and counterattacks for every character. You fight both in indoor and outdoor settings; one of Lau's attacks has him running up the wall of an indoor Chinese garden and grabbing his opponent for a throw. Another stage places you on an unfinished building of some sort with scaffolding scenery. Only one new character (of the two planned) was shown: a girl whose Aikido fighting style gives her plenty of counterattacks, kicks and throws. The other character, long rumored to be "a fat guy" like a sumo wrestler, was not there to be seen, but Sega has again confirmed that all of the VF2 characters will return for VF3. Remember Terminator 2? You'll get to see Dural morphing from a liquid puddle on the ground in real-time with nearly the same visual clarity of the movie. Model 3 is truly incredible, and the first game (VF3) for it will be released this summer. My view: In Japan, this will walk all over Street Fighter Zero 2, which will be released around the same time.

Sega has announced a new version of its Game Gear portable called the **Kid's Gear**. The hardware itself—surprise—is the same, but it will feature Virtua Fighter's Akira as an anime character on the unit's front. The Kid's Gear will also come packed in with Virtua Fighter Mini, a fighting game as its namesake implies, but will not be polygon-based for obvious reasons. The package will cost 14,800 yen (about \$150) and will be available in Japan on March 29.



Namco's Soul Edge characters show off the company's continuing expertise in the use of rendering technology; these shots illustrate the level of facial detail that Namco has achieved.

Here are the
Model 3 specs
Sega has
just made
public:

Big in Japan


Main CPU:	Power PC 603e
Resolution:	496x384 to 640x480
Rendering Specs:	1 million polygons per second created by the Geometizer. 16 million pixel per second rendering. 16 million color textures. Trilinear interpolation of microtextures.
Shading Specs:	High specular Gouraud shading. Fixed shading. Flat shading. Multilayered texture and edge anti-aliasing.
Special Effects:	Zoning Fog 32-level translucency.
Lighting effects:	Parallel lights. Four spotlights. Pin spotlights.
Audio CPU:	68EC000
Sampling Rate:	44.1kHz SCSP x 2 MIDI interface 16-Bit, 64-voice, four-channel output (mixing in hardware)

This is one of the first pictures released by Sega from their upcoming VF3.



We'll have a full report on the arcade show of record next month, but here's a brief list of some of the more exciting titles on display Feb. 21-22 in Japan. Sega's Virtua Fighter Kids (Super-Deformed VF characters and backgrounds); Capcom's **Street Fighter Zero 2** (a.k.a SF Alpha 2); Namco's **Soul Edge**, a brand-new snowboarding title called **Alpine Surfer**, and—tantalizingly mentioned but not shown—a System 11 (PS-compatible) Xevious 3-D game. In addition, SNK has shown the new fighter Ryu no Ken Gaiden (**Art of Fighting Legend**), which was an improved but still not revolutionary Aof title, a new soccer game, a new shooter and a new racing game; Taito has shown **Psychic Force** (the sequel to Ray Force) and Konami brought both **Sexy Parodius** and a PS-compatible board containing **Hyper Olympics in Atlanta**, a 3-D polygon Olympics title (Track and Field, anyone?). Sega brought **Gunblade NY**, an upright helicopter-based gun shooter a la Operation Wolf and Namco brought two unexpected titles, **Victory Lap: Ace Driver 2** (with three circuits) and **Tokyo Wars**, a terrific new concept: Four machines are linked and you're put in the center of a 3-D battlefield full of tanks. Two sides are fighting a war, and the four linked machines can be used for combinations of four tanks against the computer, three tanks against a human opponent or two-on-two versus each other. Computer tanks fill in the blanks on your team, and you fight to eliminate the other side's 21 total vehicles.

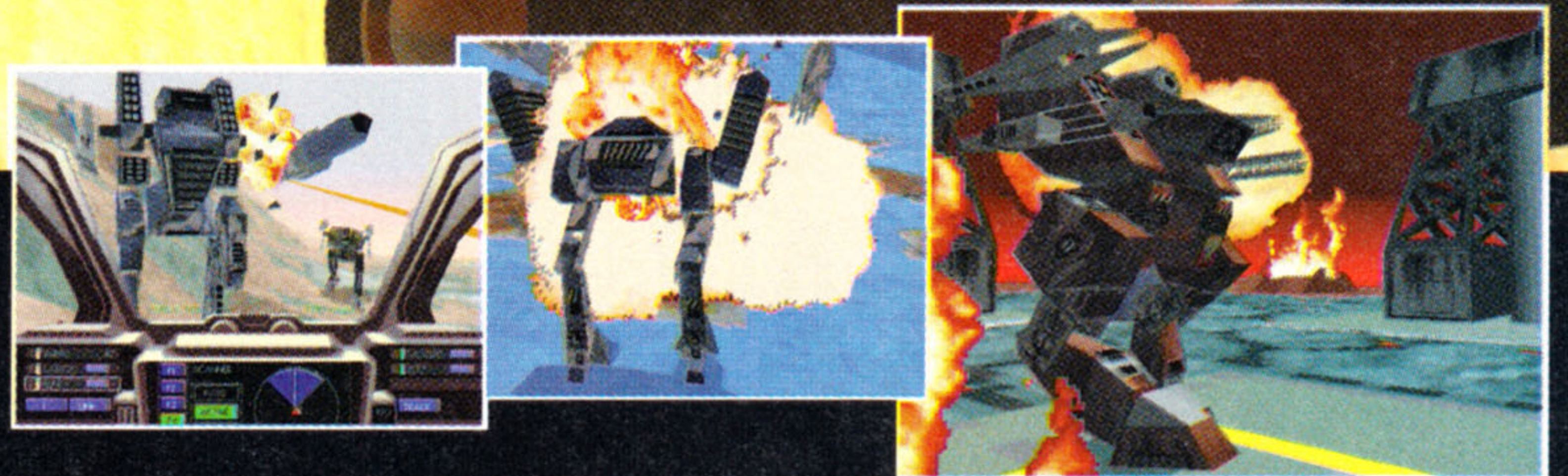




DO YOU EVER WISH YOU WERE 60 FEET TALL,
HAD CANNONS FOR ARMS, GUIDED
MISSILES ON YOUR SHOULDERS AND COULD FLY
AROUND AND KICK ROBOT BUTT?

WEIRD, US TOO.

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Your wish has been granted: EarthSiege 2. You'll get more than 50 missions, true 3-D texture-mapped terrain and incredible new burn-your-eyebrows-off pyrotechnics. The controls and cockpit interface are easy to use and infinitely customizable. And get a load of this: when you get tired of stomping Herc butt on the ground, our new flight sim feature called the Razor lets you rain death from above. Cool? Yeah, we thought so too.



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AGES 6+

new releases



RECENT RELEASES

- D&D Tower of Doom - Capcom
- Deadly Skies - JVC
- Fox Hunt - Capcom
- Return to Zork - Activision
- Shanghai Triple Threat - Activision
- Slayer - SSI
- Extreme Pinball - Electronic Arts
- Wing Commander 3 - Electronic Arts
- Descent 2 - Interplay
- Gunship 2000 - Microprose
- Resident Evil - Capcom
- Top Gun - Spectrum Holobyte
- Castlevania Bloodlines - Konami
- Casper - Interplay
- Fade to Black - Electronic Arts
- Psychic Detective - Electronic Arts
- NFL Full Contact - Konami
- Rise of the Robots 2 - Acclaim
- Myst - Sony Interactive

APRIL

- Family Feud - GameTek
- Legacy of Kain - Capstone



RECENT RELEASES

- Twisted Metal - Sony Interactive
- Warhawk - Sony Interactive
- Cyberia 2 - Xatrix
- Silent Hunter - SSI
- Ripper - Take Two Interactive
- Dungeon Keeper - Electronic Arts
- Duke Nukem 3-D - Formgen
- Jagged Alliance Gold - SirTech
- Grand Prix II - Spectrum Holobyte
- Rise of the Robots II - Acclaim
- D - Acclaim
- Warhammer 40K - Mindscape
- Muppet Treasure Island - Activision



RECENTLY RELEASED

- 3D Baseball '95 - Crystal Dynamics
- Night Warriors - Capcom
- Blazing Dragons - Crystal Dynamics
- Braindead 13 - Readysoft
- D&D Tower of Doom - Capcom
- Dragon's Lair 2 - Readysoft
- Dungeons & Dragons - SSI
- Fox Hunt - Capcom
- Prime Time Football - Sega
- Return to Zork - Activision
- Congo: The Movie - Sega
- Guardian Heroes - Working Designs
- Supreme Warrior - Digital Pictures
- Toshinden Remix - Sega
- Casper - Interplay
- VR Baseball - Interplay
- MLBPA Bottom of the Ninth - Konami
- Prize Fighter Heavyweight Edition - Digital Pictures
- Rise of the Robots 2 - Acclaim
- NFL Full Contact - Acclaim



FUTURE RELEASES

- Cruis'n USA - Nintendo/Williams Entertainment
- Body Harvest - Nintendo/DMA Design
- Turok: Dinosaur Hunter - Acclaim
- Ultra Doom - Williams Entertainment
- Pilotwings 64 - Nintendo/Paradigm Simulation
- GTE Interactive Media - Name TBA

RECENT RELEASES

Dragon's Lair 2 - Readysoft
 Casper - Interplay
 Theo the Dinosaur - Panasonic
 Return to Zork - Activision
 Varuna's Forces - JVC
 World Cup Golf Pro - U.S. Gold
 Striker - Acclaim
 Golden Gate - 3DO

APRIL

Deadly Skies - JVC
 Jeopardy - GameTek
 Wheel of Fortune - GameTek
 Snow Job - 3DO

MAY

Clayfighter II - Interplay

JUNE

NHL '96 - Electronic Arts

Tommy - Interplay
 Urban Runner - Sierra
 Elk Moon - Activision
 Wizardry Gold - SirTech
 New Order - Electronic Arts
 Full Tilt - Maxis

APRIL

Hind - Interactive Magic
 The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes: The Case of the Rose Tattoo - Electronic Arts
 Blood & Magic - Interplay
 Chaos Overlords - New World
 Cry.sys - Sierra
 Star Trek Generations - Spectrum Holobyte
 Klingon - SSI
 Syndicate Wars - Electronic Arts

MAY

Vegas Games '95 - New World
 Subterrane - New World

JUNE

Dragon Dice - Interplay

RECENT RELEASES

World Tour Racing (CD) - Atari
 Attack of the Mutant Penguins - Atari
 Robinson's Requiem (CD) - Atari

APRIL

Iron Soldier 2 (CD) - Atari
 Brett Hull Hockey (CD) - Atari

MAY

Soulstar (CD) - Atari

JUNE

Breakout 2000 - Atari
 Demolition Man (CD) - Atari
 Varuna's Forces - Atari

JULY

Zero Five - Atari

AUGUST

Skyhammer - Atari

SEPTEMBER

Phaze Zero - Atari

MK3 - Williams

OCTOBER

Rocky Horror Interactive (CD) - Atari

BattleSphere - 4-Play

NOVEMBER

Magic Carpet (CD) - Atari

VR Golf - Interplay

VR Soccer - Interplay

MAY

3D Baseball - Crystal Dynamics

JUNE

Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - Acclaim

Magic Carpet - Interplay

Rock-n-Roll Racing 2 - Accolade

Waterworld - Interplay

playstation

Top Gun: A New Adventure - Spectrum Holobyte

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 - Williams Entertainment

Red Baron - Sierra Online

Creator - Nintendo/
Software Creations

Buggie Boogie - Nintendo/
Angel Studios

Robotech Academy - Gametek

Monster Dunk - Mindscape

Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball - Nintendo/
Angel Studios

Shadows of the Empire - LucasArts Entertainment

FIFA Soccer '97 - EA Sports

Super Mario 64 - Nintendo

Super Mario Kart R - Nintendo

StarFox 64 - Nintendo

Kirby Bowl 64 - Nintendo

Wave Race 64 - Nintendo

Blastozer - Nintendo/Rare

GoldenEye 007 - Nintendo/Rare

The Legend of Zelda - Nintendo
for the 64DD

Wayne Gretzky Hockey - Time Warner Interactive

Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - Acclaim

Ace Driver - Namco

Mission: Impossible - Ocean

SoulStorm - Virtual Hollywood

Alien Trilogy - Acclaim

Quake - GT Interactive/Id Software

Stacker - Virgin Interactive

TetrisPhear - Nintendo/
H2O Entertainment

Prey - Apogee/3D Realms

Dragon Quest VII - Enix for the 64DD

Donkey Kong Country 3 - Nintendo/Rare

Killer Instinct 64 - Nintendo/Rare

WWF Wrestlemania Arcade - Acclaim

X-Men: Children of the Atom - Acclaim

APRIL

Deadly Skies - JVC

Jeopardy - GameTek

NBA Action - Sega

Wheel of Fortune - GameTek

Wing Commander 3 - Electronic Arts

MAY

3D Soccer - Crystal Dynamics

Alone in the Dark - Interplay

Descent 2 - Interplay

Raw Pursuit - Acclaim

Project Overkill - Konami

Maximum Surge - Digital Pictures

JUNE

Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - Acclaim

Extreme Pinball - Electronic Arts

Hell - GameTek

Magic Carpet - Electronic Arts

Prize Fighter - Digital Pictures

VR Pool - Interplay

NBA In The Zone - Konami

Castlevania Bloodlines - Konami

Varuna's Forces - JVC

saturn

nintendo 64

jaguar

pc-windows

3DO



LIVE '96



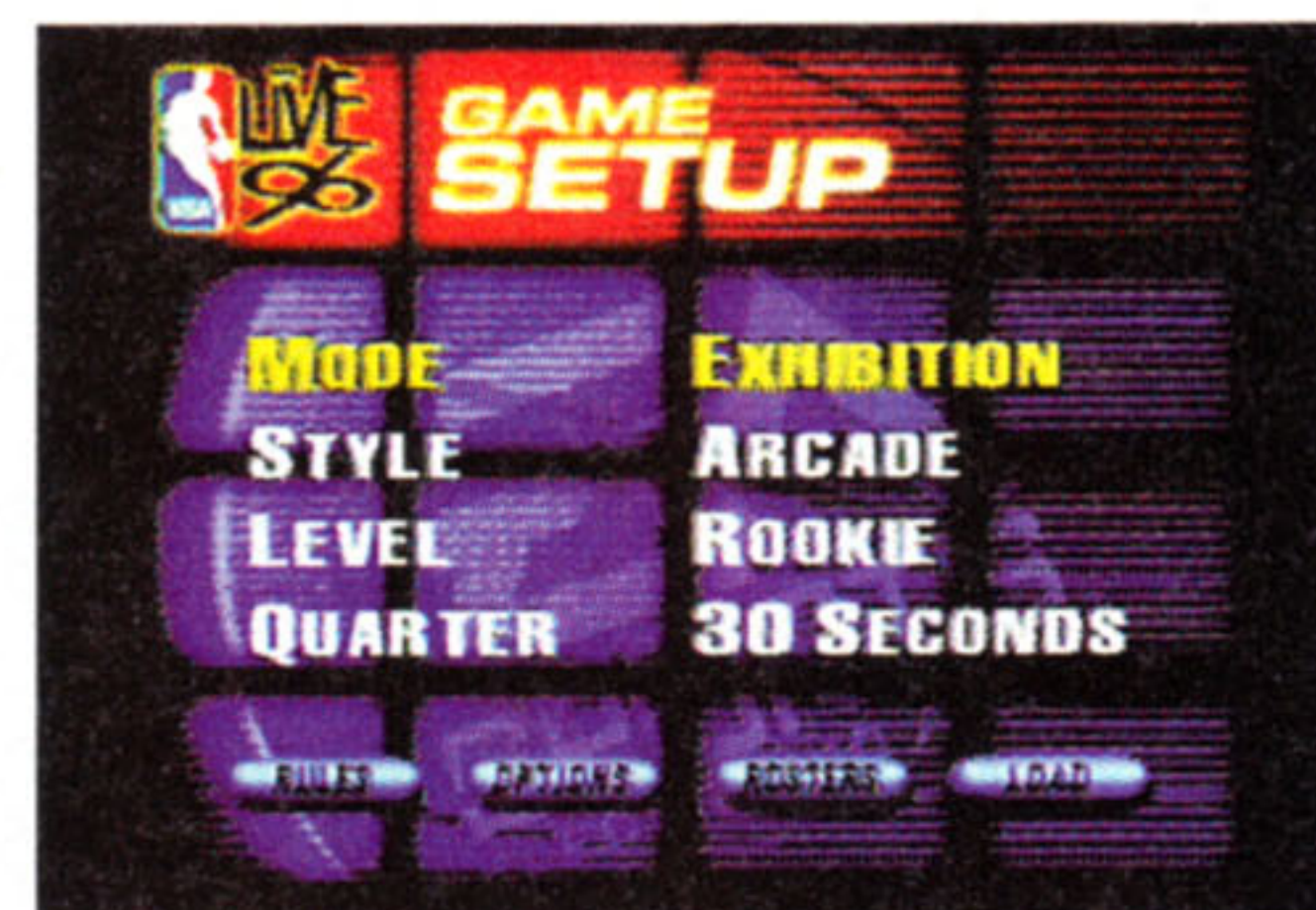
Round ball mania hits the PS in EA's NBA Live '96

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 6 CD-ROMs
Developer: Electronic Arts Canada
Release: March/April

It's well known that Electronic Arts' series of basketball games for console systems have sold millions of copies worldwide. Starting with *Lakers Vs. Celtics* and continuing on to *NBA Live '96*, EA has been the foremost producer of basketball video games; especially on Sega's Genesis, as yearly updates are awaited anxiously by fans of the series. EA's sports games are regarded by many as one of the key reasons the Genesis system was so popular.

EA Sports has been translating many of its award-winning sports games for use on other console systems such as the Super NES and 3DO, with occasionally impressive visual improvements and substantially fewer fans; EA's biggest user base has remained its hardcore group of Genesis fans. When the Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation were introduced last year in the United States, EA geared up to bring newly stylish versions of its sports software to the 32-Bit platforms. *NBA Live '96* for the PS certainly lives up to the gameplay standard that the title has set in previous years, and brings a new type of basketball game home with enhanced graphics and features not found in any other b-ball simulation.

Players will be happy to discover that—even with a fully polygon, texture-mapped 3-D basketball world on screen—EA has kept the load time minimal and the gameplay moving at a good pace. The player can choose to play an exhibition, season or custom game, and there are also options to edit the game's rosters, making it possible for gamers to put together teams that are made up of their favorite players. Viewable stat screens are present, with photos of every player and his latest stats. Players can edit each team's roster and save the changes to



▲ Electronic Art's NBA series has done very well on the 16-Bit systems but its performance on the PlayStation has yet to be proven. So far, it's looking good.

PlayStation memory cards. In the past, one of the more important features of the *NBA Live* series (and any of EA's sports games) has been the Multiplayer Option. There's nothing better than getting a bunch of your friends together and duking it out on the video court, and the PS version delivers in that area, taking full advantage of the PlayStation's networking capabilities. Players can hook two systems and two televisions together for head-to-head play, and the game also supports Sony's multitap for up to eight simultaneous players.

NBA Live's intro is an astounding display of the PlayStation's full-motion video capabilities. A hip-hop soundtrack accompanies the video clips of NBA superstars making spectacular dunks, and the full-screen, full-motion video shows no hint of being grainy. The programmers have put an excellent presentation into the game's opening shots, getting players ready for the game ahead.

One design element that really makes *NBA Live '96* stand out is the attention to detail that the programmers have given the code to make sure that their game is the best out there. Everything—from the game's broadcast-like





“NBA Live '96 for the PS certainly lives up to the gameplay standard that the title has set in previous years.”

presentation to the glossy, reflective surface of the court—is refined, and even when you move your camera into the heart of the court, there is little (if any) pixelization to be seen.

As far as presentation goes, NBA Live excels in many areas. Every venue that you play in has its own special characteristics. From the detailing of the court (team insignia in the middle), to the design of the floorboards in the court itself, the game follows through with an amazing graphical presentation.

During gameplay, the camera's view shifts to follow the ball, and

it does a great job of keeping the ball carrier on the screen most of the time. There are a few times where the camera will be tilting to meet a player and immediately have to shift if the ball is passed, where the carrier won't be visible for a split second—this will no doubt be ironed out in the final version. There are several different perspectives, including top, side, and frontal views. One of the views makes NBA Live '96 look very similar to Crystal Dynamics' Slam 'N Jam.

Free throws are handled in a similar manner to EA's previous sports games. The view is from the front of the basket, and you must line up the “+” so that both basketballs are lined up in the center to make the shot. Depending on how the player is rated, the meter will move at a different pace.

The other graphics are extremely well done, with an animated, realistic scoreboard high above the court, and fluid character animation sequences. NBA '96's visual presentation is not all that different from EA's previous games: The default view is a sideline camera that follows the action, just like the early Genesis incarnations, but on the PlayStation, the user can choose the view of the game from the aforementioned angles or from a sky cam high above the action. With the game's instant replay feature, the user can choose a unique camera angle and zoom into the action as the playback takes place.

The sound and music use CD-quality audio to the fullest, immersing you in the on-court action. After every point is scored, you'll feel a rush of adrenaline as the crowd cheers you on, and the music has a hip-hop style that



complements the gameplay.

Listening to the crowd noise, I was immediately reminded of FIFA Soccer for the 3DO. The crowd cheers and jeers at the players on the court during the game, booing when a foul is called and cheering wildly when either team scores points. While playing, I tried to listen to the crowd closely to see exactly what mood they seemed to be in to accompany the on-screen action. For instance, when a ball is



▲ The Bulls may be unstoppable in actual life, but in NBA Live '96 you can yank the reigns on Chicago and shut down their unbelievable winning streak.

Basketball Terms

collected from the NBA's official web site

Backdoor play:

A fundamental basketball play in which one player passes to a teammate in the high post, and when the defenders follow the ball, another player cuts to the basket from the opposite side of the court to take a pass for an open shot.

Deny the ball:

Prevent an opponent from getting the ball by guarding him closely and staying between him and the player in possession of the ball.

Double dribble:

A violation in which a player dribbles the ball, stops then begins to dribble again.

Double-team: The defensive tactic of two players guarding one.

Downtown: Far from the basket, often synonymous with beyond the three-point arc.

Fast break: A play in which a team gains possession and then pushes the ball downcourt quickly, hoping to get a good shot off before the other team has a chance to get back and set up on defense.

Field goal: A basket, worth either two or three points, depending on whether it was taken from inside or outside the three-point line (set at 22 feet from the basket).

Give-and-go: A fundamental

play in which one player passes to a teammate, then cuts to the basket to receive a return pass for an open layup or dunk.

Hang time: The amount of time a player can stay in the air while attempting a shot.

Point guard: Usually a team's primary ballhandler and the man who sets up the team's offense.

Power forward: The larger of a team's two forwards, whose duties generally involve rebounding as much as scoring.

Sky-hook: A hook shot in which the ball is released while the shooter's hand is at the top of the arc; used most effectively by the great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the NBA's all-time career scoring leader.

Trailer: An offensive player who trails on a fast break but often is in good position to score after the first wave of defenders goes by.

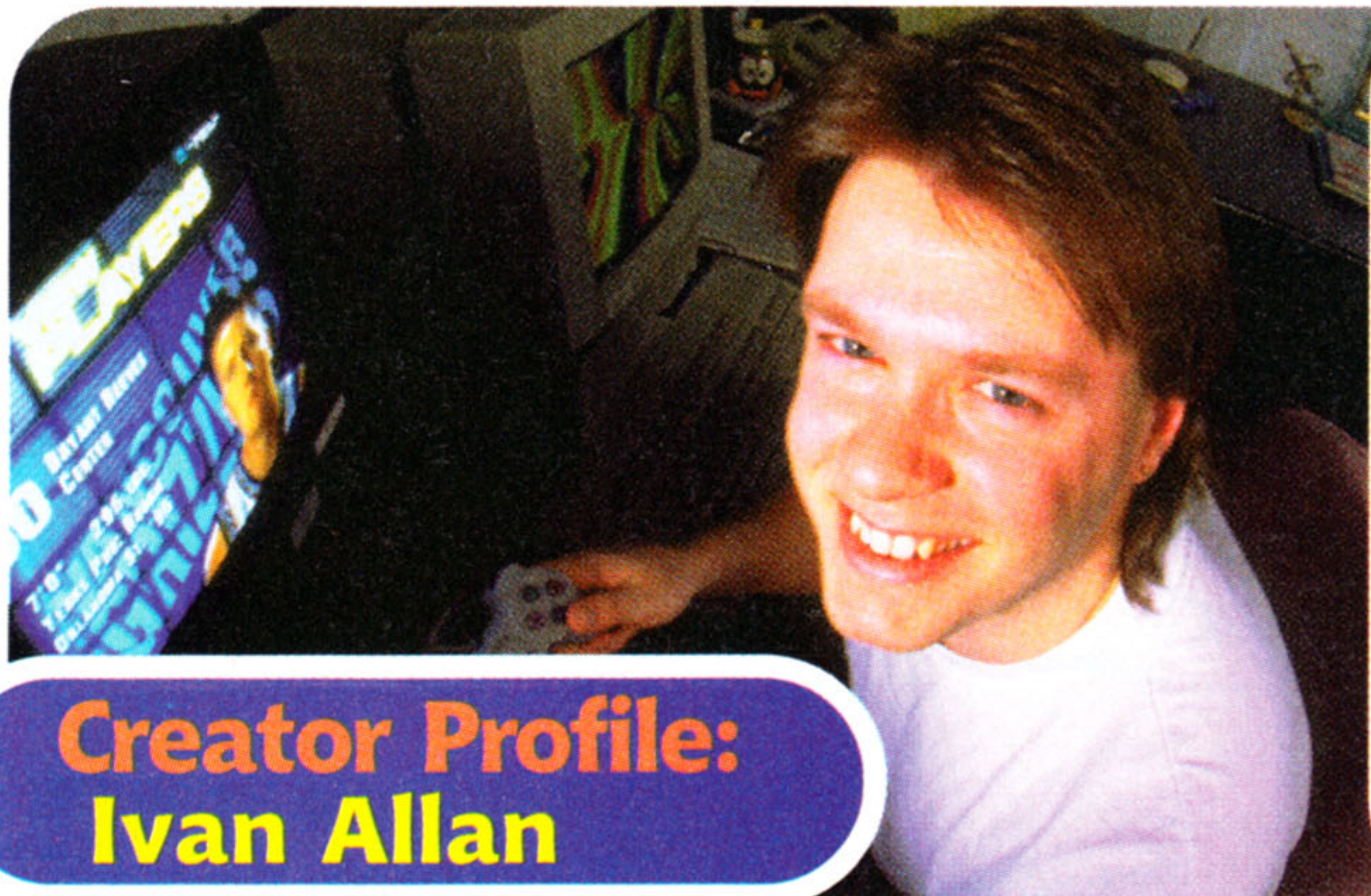
Transition: The movement from offense to defense, or vice versa, when the ball changes hands.

Traveling: A violation in which a player takes too many steps without dribbling the ball. Also: walking.

Turnover: Loss of ball, either through an errant pass or dribble or an offensive foul.

Zone: A defensive tactic in which players guard areas of the court, rather than specific men. Illegal in the NBA.

Bounce Pass: You remember the bounce pass? Forth grade gym class, right, well don't ever forget it.



**Creator Profile:
Ivan Allan**

Age: 30

Hobbies: musician, plays drums and guitar.

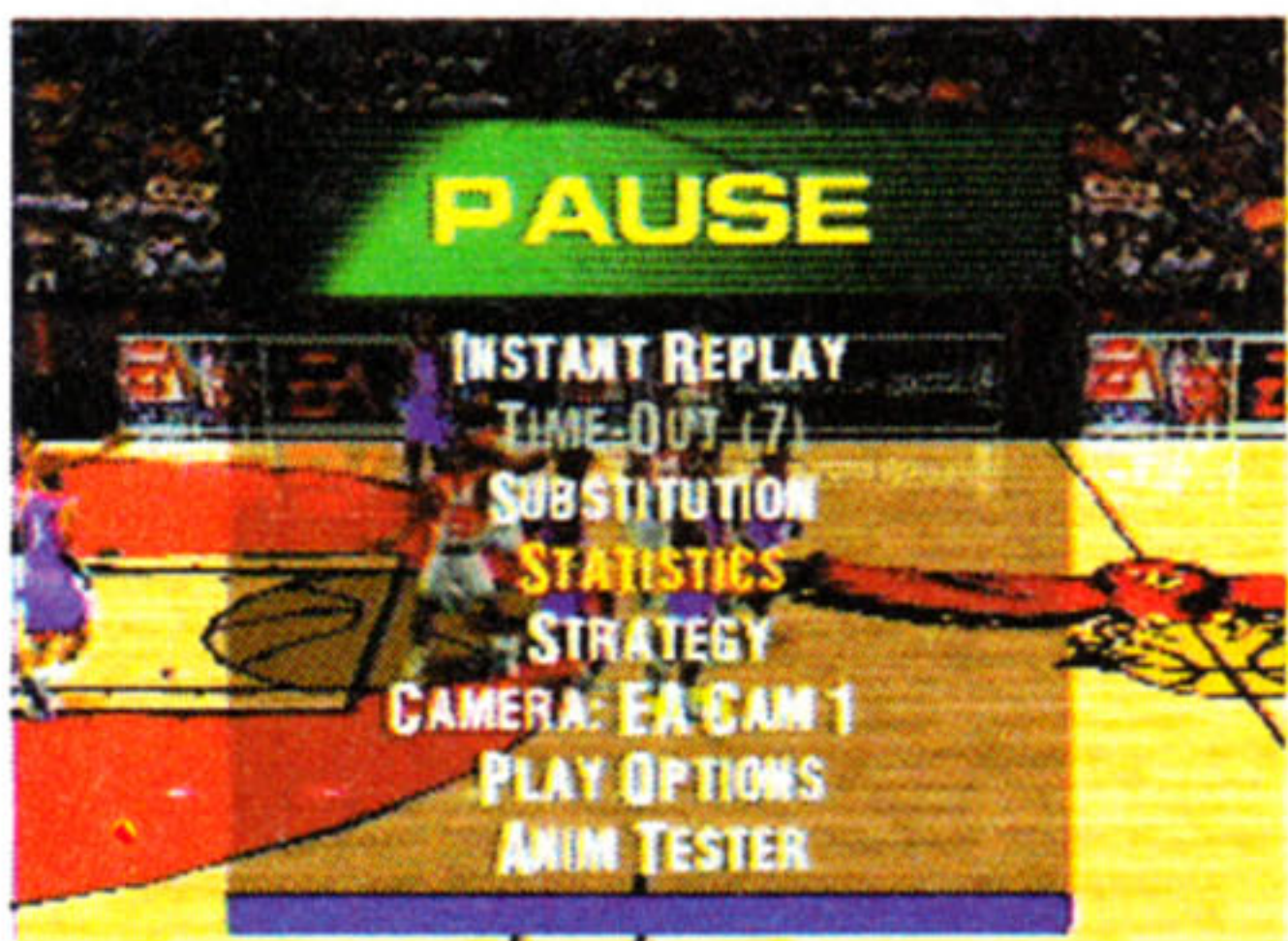
Favorite video games: EA's NBA Live games, Doom, Duke Nuke 'Em 3-D-- "What a way to relieve stress."

Music: "I like garage, Canadian alternative. A lot of the guys here are into progressive, but sometimes there are battles between Ministry and country. There's one guy here that's into country."

Favorite movie: "I like dumb action movies. Anything James Cameron. You know, Pulp Fiction."

When he's not programming video games: "I mow my lawn."

If left on a desert island, but could have an endless supply of three things he would take: his wife Denise, beverages and musical and sports gear.
Other games he has worked on: "I've been leading the whole NBA Live series, and I've been here for 6 1/2 years; I've worked on tons of games."



◀ **Although this version was not complete, the graphics were impressive.**

stolen, the crowd lets out a collective "Ooohh," and when a shot is missed, they react accordingly. The surround sound makes you instantly feel as if you're a part of the action. It's a spectacular effect. Music is non-stop, playing even through Options Screens and when the disc itself is being accessed. The soundtrack fits the game perfectly.

Playing against a friend is perhaps the best thing of all and where NBA Live truly shines. After playing in the All-Star game verses a friend, it was clear that this was a game not to be reckoned with. A lot of the things that make it great are the small details so common to EA's sports games. I

remember long hours spent playing Bulls Vs. Lakers on the Genesis, and after playing this game the memories of that are back. It adds so much to the sports gaming arena that you really can't appreciate it until you experience the step up in presentation from 16-Bit to 32.

In a simulation game like NBA Live, realism is clearly the key. Sports gamers know when a game has been put together correctly, and that's what EA has become famous for—its translations of sports to video game screens are second to none. NBA '96 follows in that vein with versatile options and features: Plays and quick-plays can be browsed on the fly and activated by specific buttons, making gameplay

more intuitive to the player. Teams are outfitted with signature plays as well, such as the Bulls' sideline triangle, which gives you the feeling when you're playing against the computer that you're actually playing against the team itself.

EA was able to include such minutia by getting together with coaches and players to create a CD containing the plays that real teams use during a regular game. The programming team spent time to research with experts on offense and defense the different plays that would be used during the games.

Season and playoff play is included in the package, making NBA Live a fantastic simulation of the real game. The Arcade Mode of



He's not about to hide his confidence. "This will be, without a doubt, the best 32-Bit basketball simulation game," says Tarrnie Williams, who is close to finishing his stint as the associate producer and designer of EA's NBA Live '96 for the Sony PlayStation. "The blood and sweat that have gone into this game has topped the development of any of our other basketball titles."

Starting Line Up

Everyone here is an artist, working 24 hours a day for this game."

IG's FUSION recently spoke with Williams and Ivan Allan, NBA Live '96's development director, both

of whom work out of EA's Canadian offices. It's clear that Electronic Arts is making a real effort to have its first PlayStation basketball game be the best that it can be.

Allan and Williams were both quick to note that playing with new hardware has brought them a set of advantages, but has also given them new challenges to deal with. "It's kinda neat to program on the PS, because there's a lot more horsepower under the hood and we can produce a better-looking



the game is fast and furious, with both teams going head to head in a knock-down drag-out battle. Arcade head-to-head play is really what the game is all about, and there is nothing better than human competition. After playing a few games on the 90 percent complete version, I began to appreciate the details that the programmers put into the title.

After each game, move through each player's stats, and there is even a Player of the Game. After the end of each quarter, you can review statistics, and during the half, you have a wider range of options to choose from as far as substituting players.

Having played NBA Live for an extended period of time, I'm confident that EA—as long as its production deadlines are met consequence—will have yet another hit on its hands. There's a give and take that comes with developing under a tight schedule, however, and it's not always possible on a development schedule like that of NBA Live '96 to

▲ When not designing games this group enjoys bowling, hockey and consuming huge amounts of beer.

get everything done on time; the game is scheduled to be released in late March/early April at this point, and as of this writing, the game is at the 90 percent point. In its final form, the game will have more additions. A victory video will be played after each game has completed and character animations will be improved. If the game's opening video is any indication of the kind of quality to expect from this team, then the victory video will be excellent too.

Even though the preview disc we've received has a ways to go before completion, NBA Live '96 on the PS is a fantastic game, and players will immediately notice the time and effort the team has put into it. Sports fans will no doubt be impressed, yet again, by EA's much appreciated efforts.

—Chris Johnston



game," comments Allan. "Every piece of hardware has its pros and cons. We have to load the game information into the PS's 2 megabytes of RAM, and that can cut down on the amount of space we have to put artwork in."

"Nothing is easy to develop for," says Williams, "it's always a challenge."

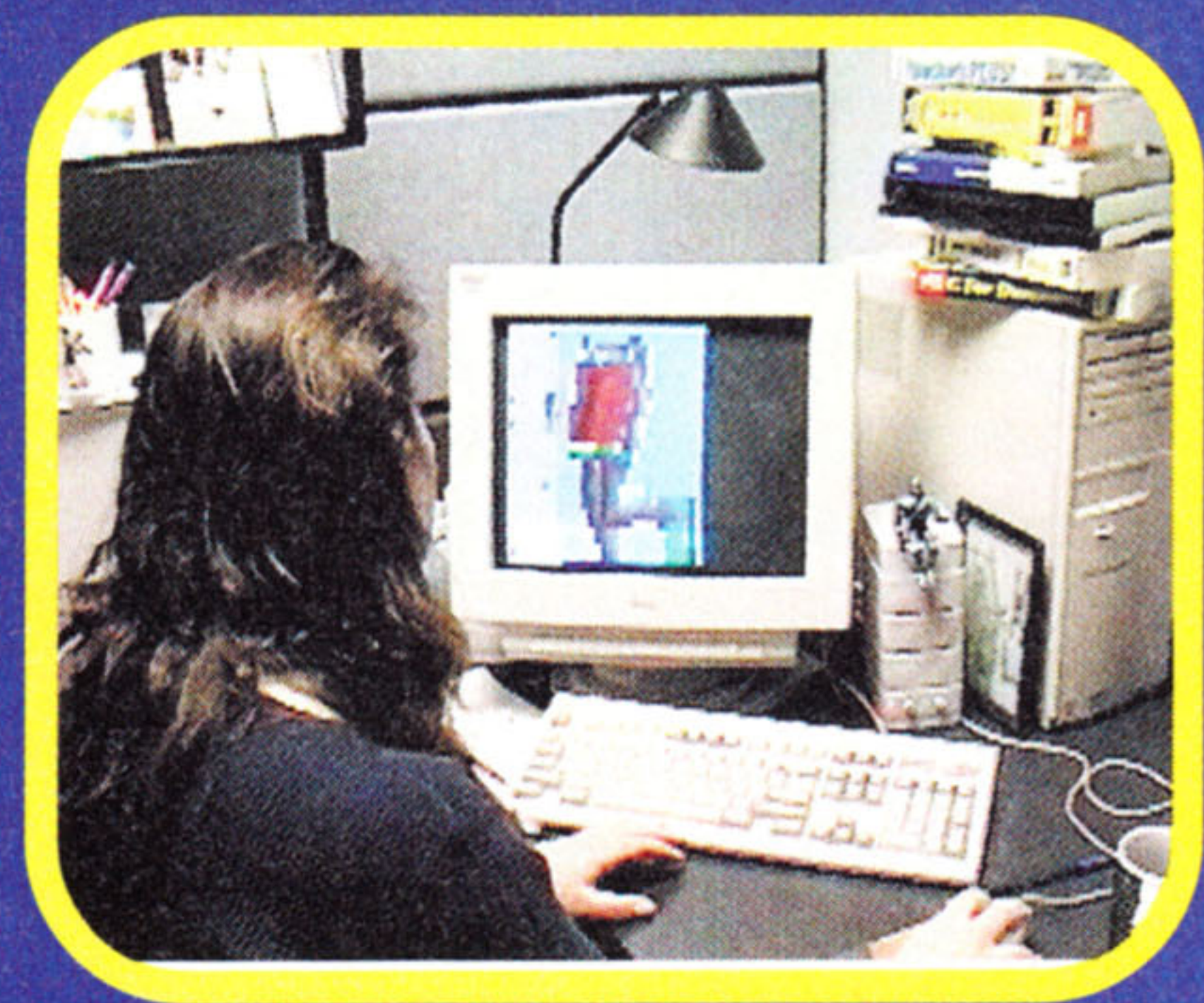
To produce NBA '96, EA put together a strong team of programmers and designers. All in all, around 25 people have worked on the game, though during the first four months of production, the team was significantly smaller. After those first four months, the team size was increased in order

"It was the first game for two of the youngest members of the development team..."

to speed up production—some of the game's coders were sleeping overnight in their cubes after hours of work. "Everybody here works hard, and they know that it's a superior product. They are all really talented and dedicated to this game," says Williams.

"There's lots of pressure to make this game better than the previous ones," Allan explains. "We spent more time in R&D [research and development] on this project. We assembled a team with the top guys in it, a real strong team," Williams adds. "So when we started, we began focusing on tasks—figuring out the best processes for getting the game together."

Most of the ideas for improvements on the series come out of the team's own ideas. "We don't really do a lot of focus groups or playtesting. Out of that you get general concepts. The ideas come from in-house, from talking to NBA players. It gives you a different perspective on the game," Allan states. "People don't realize



A Short History of EA's Basketball Video Games

Electronic Arts started producing Genesis games when Sega first released the machine into the U.S. market in 1989. Since then, EA has produced some of the best basketball software ever made, including:

- 1 **Lakers Vs. Celtics**—two players—EA's first Genesis basketball game was released in 1989, around the time that the Genesis was released in the U.S. Who would have thought then that its popularity would grow this much?
- 2 **Lakers Vs. Celtics and the NBA Playoffs**—two players—1990
- 3 **Bulls Vs. Lakers**—released in 1991, Bulls Vs. Lakers was an immensely successful sequel to Lakers Vs. Celtics.
- 4 **Team USA Basketball**—two players—Released in a limited quantity for 1992's Summer Olympic games, this game broke the chain of NBA titles that had previously been released. Not as widely heralded as some of EA's previous and future efforts, the game was renamed and released in other countries as Bulls Vs. Celtics in a limited quantity.
- 5 **Jordan Vs. Bird**—After being a hit on other platforms, such as the Commodore 64 (on which it appeared on Dec. 19, 1988), it came to the Genesis in 1992.
- 6 **Bulls Vs. Celtics**—two players—released only in markets outside of the United States in 1992.
- 7 **Bulls Vs. Blazers**—two players—1993 rolled around and EA put out its next in the series of games. Like the previous games, this one was hugely successful, but marked the end of EA's team-named releases.
- 8 **NBA Showdown**—In 1994, EA changed the title of its award-winning series.
- 9 **NBA Live '95–1995**
- 10 **Coach K. College Basketball**—1995 saw EA's release of this, its first such college basketball game. Played much the same as its NBA line, and was a hit with game players.
- 11 **NBA Live '96**—Brings us up to date with its releases thus far.

the amount of work that is put into the AI, plays or quick-plays.”

It was the first game for two of the youngest members of the team, Daryl Amfelmo and Dom Humphrey. Amfelmo worked with Virtual Studio Modeler, creating half of the textures for the courts present in the game, and the virtual stadium. Humphrey wrote the rendering engine for the virtual stadium graphics and worked on the artificial intelligence as well as the programming tools for the game.

“I live here,” admits Humphrey. When asked what he would tell gamers about the game, he states without modesty that “it is simply the best basketball simulation. The



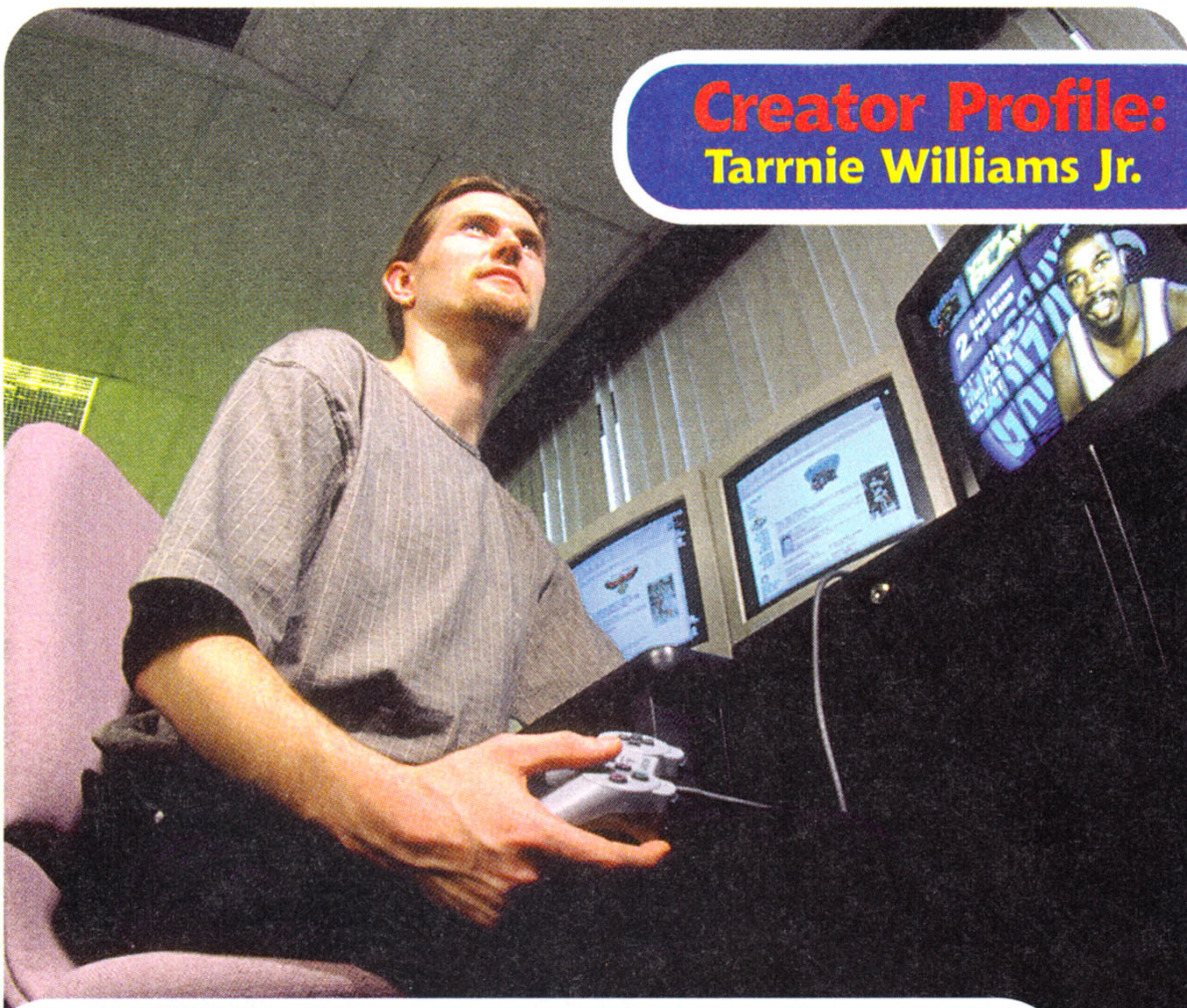
graphics look really cool.” NBA '96's players are not digitized humans, but instead were pre-renders through Microsoft's SoftImage 3-D

modeling package. The players are nicely animated, giving the viewer the impression that he is watching a real basketball game.

Audio wasn't neglected, either. “There was quite a bit of R&D involved in the music and the sound effects...with a CD, we also had to figure out how to cut down on the loading times,” Allan explains. “By nature, you have to do a lot more planning with a CD game—how you're going to get stuff done. Sometimes you have to cut down on the complexity of the screens just to bring the load time up.” They can now provide the game



Creator Profile: Tarnie Williams Jr.



Age: 26

Hobbies: Partying, snowboarding, playing video games.

Favorite video games:

EA hockey and b-ball games, or T-Mek in the arcades.

Music: "I like evil stuff like Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, 311."

Favorite movies: Aliens, Total Recall.

When he's not programming video games:

"I like snowboarding, driving fast, partying."

If left on a desert island, but could have an endless supply of three things he would take: "My girlfriend Shannon, music and plants." (he's a vegetarian)

Other games he has worked on: "I've worked on the NBA games and Need For Speed."

NBA <http://www.nba.com> EA <http://www.ea.com>

player with aesthetic details that cartridges couldn't have provided, such as Redbook CD audio, full-motion video clips and Dolby Surround Sound.

What about the growing number of competing 32-Bit basketball games? Allan isn't worried. "We're constantly surveying new games and watching TV to see how basketball is presented to the public, making sure that our game will be the current style and provides as much of a simulation of the real thing as possible." Citing Konami's NBA: In the Zone as one PS competitor, Williams points out that "Konami's game is good, but it lacks in basketball gameplay; there's not a lot of sub-

stance to it. Where In the Zone lets you play the starting five, ours lets you choose from all of the players on the team."

"We've put an enormous amount of data into this game. We have three different size portraits for each player in the game and stats for every player. Those are some things we just couldn't do on a cartridge," says Williams. "We do what is important to the people. The stats, the strategy and gameplay are top-notch."

"The most important elements," notes Allan, "were getting the feel of b-ball and what that means to the end user. We put in the right kind of music and sound so that the

player can get into the vibe."

What happens when NBA Live '96 is completely finished? As has been the case with many of EA's games, new features and player stats are added to updated versions every year. The same will be true with NBA Live when an updated release is put out next year on the PlayStation, and in fact, the designs on the next installment are complete. No detail will be overlooked on this or future upgrades to the game. "We're ahead of the game, and we'll be starting on the next one as soon as this one's done," Williams states.



Descent II

Parallax and Interplay unleash an incredible sequel to the original masterpiece

Blowing up planets and destroying enemy robots has never looked more appealing than in Interplay's *Descent II* which, like its predecessor, is a full freedom of motion 3-D texture-mapped action/shooting game. When development began, the game was supposed to simply be a CD-enhanced version of *Descent*. However, as development proceeded, Parallax's increasingly ambitious goals turned it into a full-blown sequel.

The look and feel of their result shows an incredible metamorphosis from an already superior and popular game to an experience taken to an entirely new plateau of design capabilities.

When taking the controls of your ship, total planet annihilation is still the master plan—both *Descent* and its sequel are perhaps the quintessential plotless games. In Single-player Mode, your mission is to destroy a sequence of alien mines by blowing up their central reactors and finding the exit before being incinerated in the ensuing blast. Of course, Multiplayer Mode has even fewer objectives, with the purpose being simply to kill your opponent(s) as many times as possible.

Descent II is a first-person perspective textured-mapped blaster. Fly your ship through the tunnels, rooms and caverns of alien mines on six distinctive worlds, attempting to survive the onslaught of enemy robots long enough to blow up each mine and get out.

As in the original, nearly everything is a 3-D object, most notably including the enemy robots. Flat sprites are restricted almost entirely to power-ups, weapons and explosions. Level design is notable in that it is no longer sufficiently entertaining just to have vertical forks in tunnels or six-way intersections of tunnels.

Parallax has clearly spent a



▲ The mission has remained the same: Destroy everything. In this supercharged sequel, however, many features, including a new variety of weapons with strengths and weaknesses tailored to different combat situations, have been introduced.



great deal of time and effort to emphasize its engine's lack of restrictions, and as a result, tunnels tend to be less rectangular, rooms are often quite complex and most levels have at least one area that makes you do a double-take. ("Wait, this room is actually shaped like this?")

Also added are a host of hidden doors and rooms for players to stumble across on their missions as well as new cheat codes to move

things along more rapidly.

As with the original, *Descent II* is primarily an action game, with one of its major attractions being the complete freedom of motion in all three dimensions. Also as with the original, the result is exceedingly complex controls, only made more so by the addition of the afterburner and various other power-ups. However, those who take the time to master the controls will find the effort well worth it, as they will find themselves able to use a variety of entirely new maneuvers, particularly when dogfighting against other people.

One extremely noteworthy addition to *Descent II* is a new system of destructible control panels, locked doors and forcefields, which are used primarily to make secrets more interesting without distracting from the focus of *Descent's* action-oriented nature. It should be noted that the inevitably forthcoming user-made levels will by no means necessarily restrict themselves in the same way.

A variety of new weapons have been added, and as with the 10 weapons of the original, Parallax has done a good job of making them all functionally different enough to add new elements of

Publisher: Interplay
Platform: PC CD-ROM
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Parallax
Release: APRIL

GRAPHICS: **A+**
 + Unrestricted 3-D texture mapping
 + Very well done lighting effects
 + SVGA support is very impressive

SOUNDS: **A-**
 + Sounds are well-sampled and in stereo
 + Robots' differing sounds give them added personality
 +/- Few nice touches, but burbling water and lava are good

GAME PLAY: **A**
 + Full freedom of motion
 + Advanced bot AI
 + Great network play
 - Complex controls will deter some

LASTING POWER: **A+**
 + 30 large levels will take a while to beat
 + High difficulty levels are very challenging
 + Robots behave a little differently each time through
 + Multiplayer play can hold interest indefinitely

OVERALL:
Intelligent Gamer
"HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"



tactics for use of each weapon; each has its strengths and weaknesses, and each can be highly appropriate in certain situations.

For multiplayer games, there is a weapons sharing option that can be used at any time, as well as a realtime camera view from your partners cockpit to see what he or she needs.

Also added are a number of new power-ups, which do a good job of adding depth to the game. The

similarities end.

The Guide Bot is on your side; it starts in a cage, and should you release it, will search for whatever you want to find; from keys to shields to rechargers. (As a side note, the Guide Bot is being named by Descent fans through the Interplay web site at <http://www.interplay.com>.) The Thief Bot, in contrast, will attempt to steal items from you (which it can do if it comes into contact with

The Afterburner...adds a whole new dimension to multiplayer play

Afterburner in particular adds a whole new dimension to multiplayer play, while the combination of the headlight power-up and the ability to blow out lights can also get quite interesting.

Thirty new robots, mostly enemies, come complete with their own distinctive behaviors: The two most notable additions are the Guide Bot and the Thief Bot. Both move extremely quickly and open doors to get where they're going. They are also both very challenging to hit, but that is where the

your ship). If you manage to kill it (and it can take a lot of damage before finally succumbing) it will spit up everything it stole from you—probably.

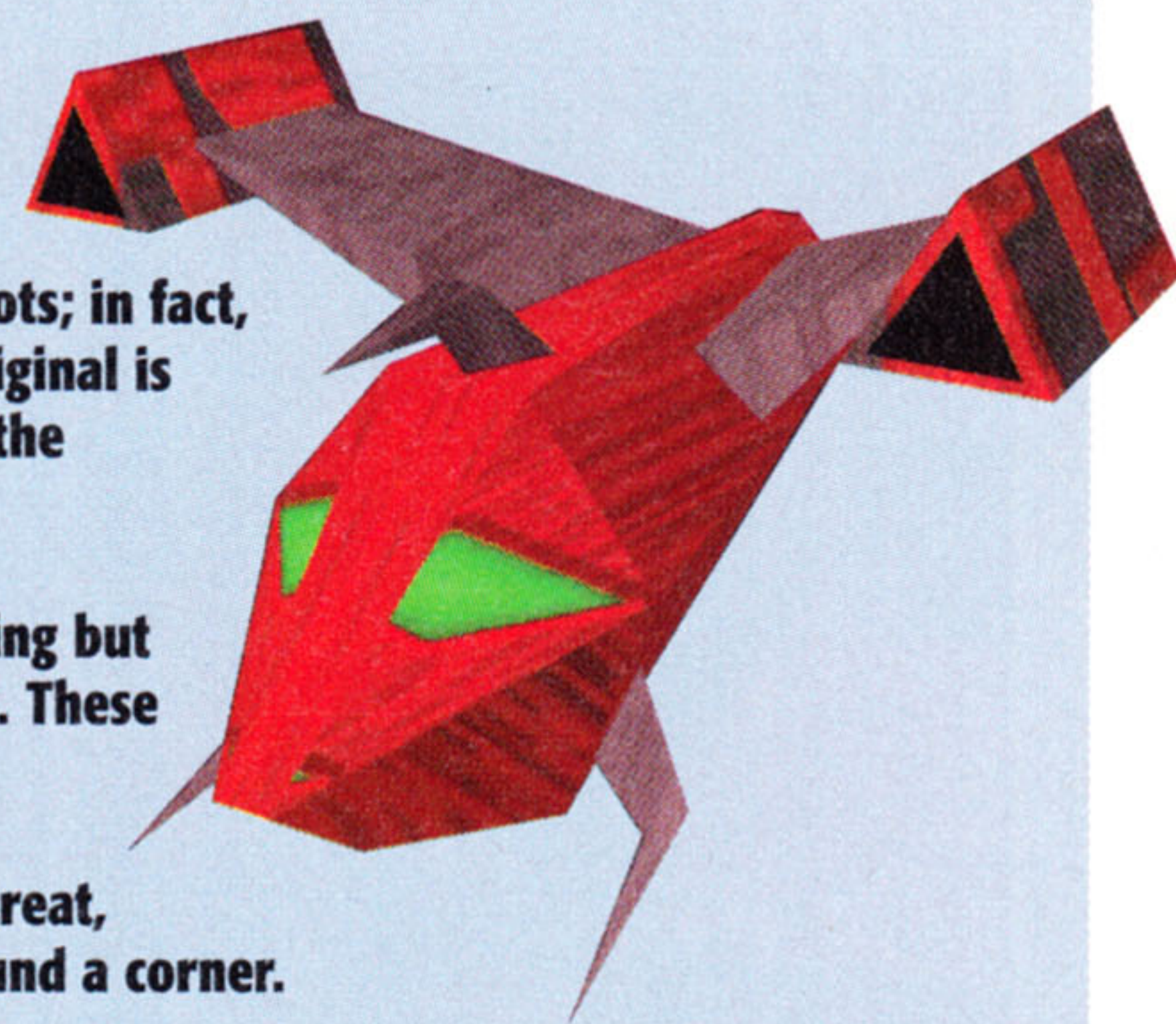
In general, the most notable additions to robot AI include a higher tendency to open doors, a predisposition to setting up ambushes, a higher intelligence in attempting to get at you (often from behind) and a general increase in the bots' independent mobility. Finally, they also have a tendency to spray their shots a

Maneuver your ship through Descent II's tunnels, polygonal rooms and caverns of alien mines on six different worlds.



New Bots

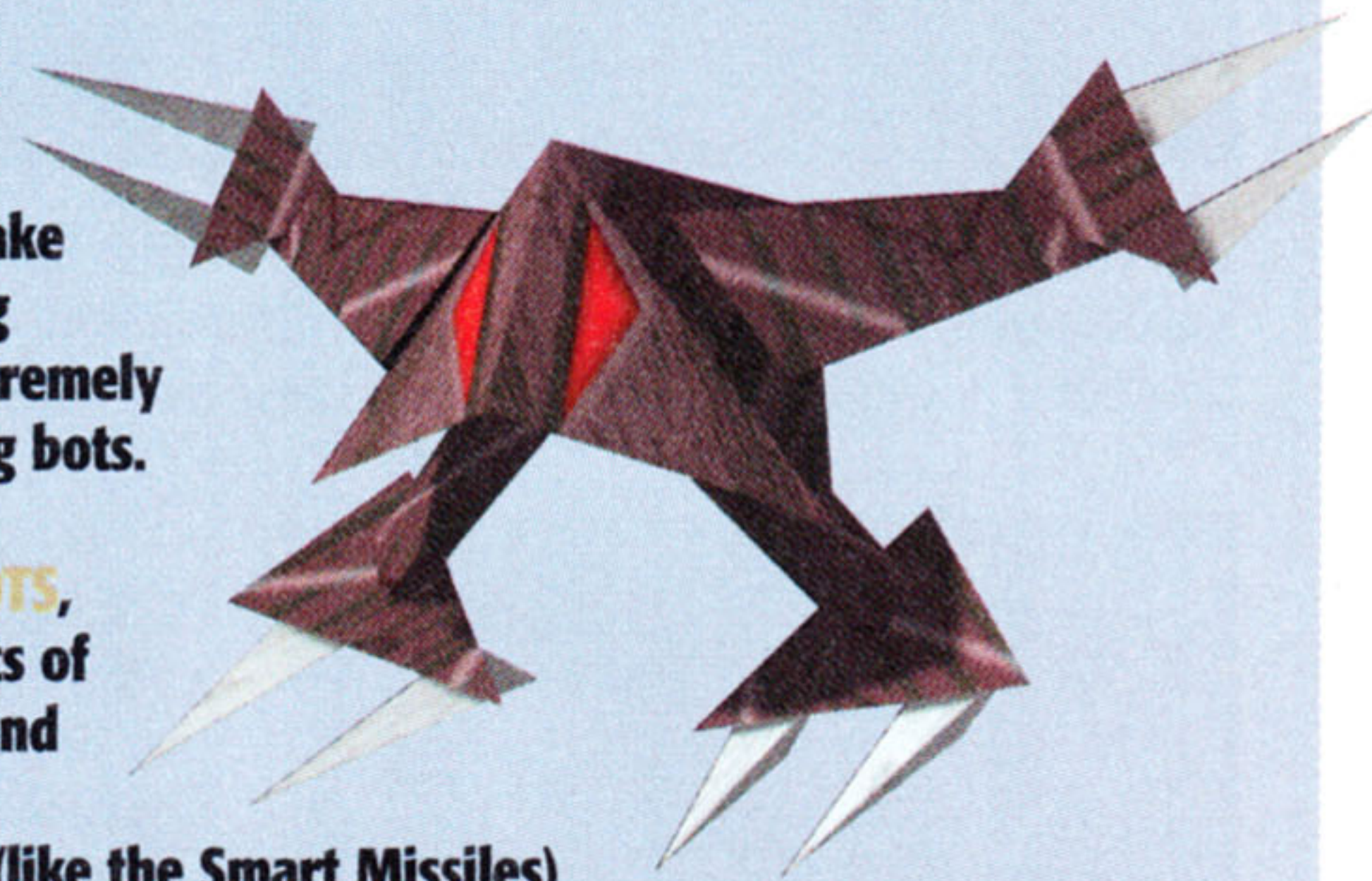
Descent II has a large cast of new bots; in fact, the only one remaining from the original is the blue coordination bot. Some of the standouts are:



BLUE SNIPERS, which fire fast-moving but not particularly damaging red shots. These bots move extremely quickly, open doors to get at you, and are more than happy to execute a fighting retreat, and then hide and wait for you around a corner.

YELLOW BOTS, which look cute, but fire shots that bounce off walls, and get very nasty in tight areas. They don't move very quickly, but are pretty good at getting their shots to bounce down curved corridors.

SLOW GRAY HULKS called "sidearms," which fire off fast-moving explosive balls, take a lot of abuse, and upon being destroyed break into tiny, extremely hard-to-hit, flash-missile firing bots.

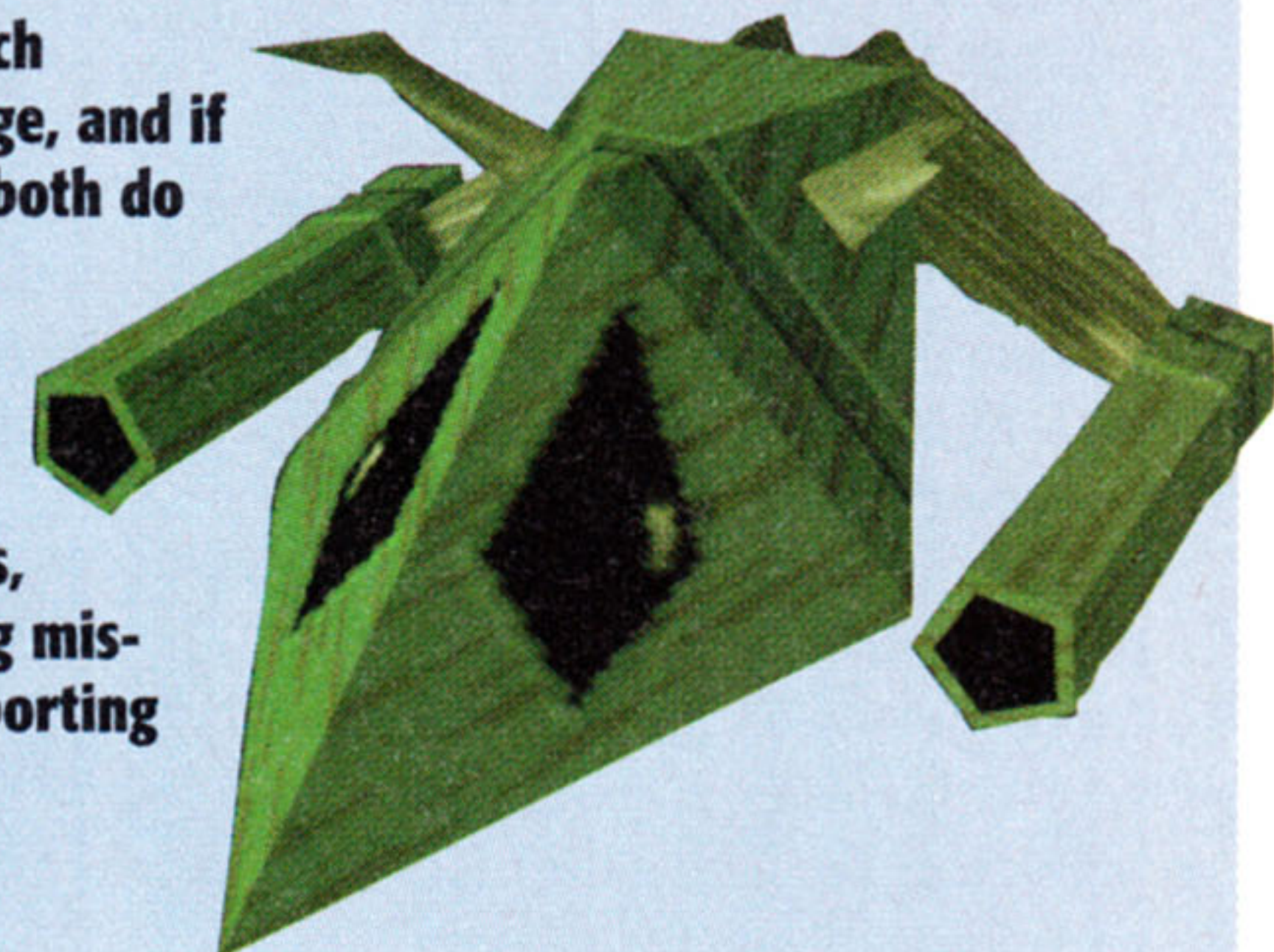


BROWN DIAMOND CLAW BOTS, which, like the green claw bots of Descent, attempt to move in and attack you with their claws, but also emit homing plasma (like the Smart Missiles) every time you hit them. These get extremely nasty when there isn't room to maneuver, and good choice of weaponry can be vital in dealing with them.

BLUE BOTS, superiors to the snipers, which in addition to the snipers' light vulcan weapon, have a healthy supply of concussion missiles, and spend most of their time unloading both on you at once.

YELLOW ENERGY DRAINERS, which attempt to attack you at close range, and if they succeed in touching you will both do damage and steal energy.

MINI BOSSES, one at the end of each world. The first one, at the end of level four, has three barrels, and fires flash missiles and homing missiles extremely rapidly while teleporting around the room, typically ending up behind or above you.



Multiplayer Descent II

Descent defined the state-of-the-art in multiplayer gaming when it was released more than a year ago, with up to eight-player networking, the ability to join games already in progress, five levels designed specifically for multiplayer play, and a game engine that was extremely well-adapted to competitive play. So, how has Parallax gone about improving Descent II's network play? With style.

A multitude of new features and options are available in Descent II, from basic improvements in the engine's handling of networking, to the ability to specify which weapons and power-ups can and can't be available during play.

While the original Descent had no way to preset when a level would be over (although it did allow preset amounts of time before the reactor could be destroyed on each level), Descent II allows the person starting the game to force the end of a level after either one player achieves a preset number of kills or a preset amount of time passes. The original allowed either open or closed games, but Descent II adds the options to preset the

maximum number of players allowed in a game to anywhere from two to eight (in the original, the maximum was always eight), and there is an option to have a restricted game: Any time someone wants to join a game in progress, someone already playing has to allow them in, or they won't be able to join.

Also, a number of other new options have been implemented: Every single item or weapon may be allowed or disallowed in a given game, and each player may handicap themselves by specifying that instead of starting with the usual 100 shields after they die, they will start with any amount they choose between 10 and 100. Players may modify their handicaps at any time, but all the other players are notified each time a handicap is changed.

Finally, in addition to the multiplayer modes of the original, Descent II has a new mode: Capture the Flag. This is just like Team Anarchy, except that each team has a flag and a goal, and if one team successfully brings the opponent's flag back to their goal, they get a five-kill bonus.



▲ Complete freedom of movement comes with a few barriers. Mastering the complex controls has been made even more difficult with the addition of the afterburner and other power-ups. Players will find these new features are well worth the effort.



bit unpredictably, making self-preservation an extremely difficult task at times.

Multiplayer play is boosted by the new weapons, the addition of a number of new features specific to network play and the incorporation of two five-level missions designed, much like the Total Chaos levels, explicitly for network play. The first of these consists of larger levels and is intended for games involving between four and eight players. The other is made up of smaller levels for two to three player games, although neither have any hard restrictions on how many can play (except for the absolute restriction of eight players maximum in any game).

Descent II's graphics are nothing short of stunning. While enhancements to the actual engine are few and far between, a number of improvements in implementation succeed in making Descent look obsolete, something which no other game has managed to do to date.

The first and most obvious improvement is the full SVGA support. Now all out of game screens are in sharp SVGA. The in-game SVGA Mode is fully supported, and much better optimized than in Descent. Those with Pentiums will find SVGA Mode to be quite playable in One-player Mode, although probably only those with the fastest systems will

find that it plays at an acceptable rate for multiplayer games.

As mentioned above, levels are designed in a much more impressive fashion and really show off the nearly restriction-free Descent II engine. Similarly, the enemy bots are more complex and impressive, incorporating more moving parts and animated textures to really bring them to life.

The five different worlds have different themes: One has flowing water all over its mines; another is a fiery hell-hole with lava flowing and pooling everywhere. The overall effect is nicely done; although the flows don't always look right, they add a lot to the atmosphere.

The beginning of the first water mine is particularly spectacular, showing a huge cavern with water flowing all the way at the bottom, it truly feels like you have stumbled onto a vast and alien world. In fact, aliens are actually not far behind. While wreaking havoc on these worlds and erupting their cores, there is also an appearance of an alien mothership that will have to be dealt with as well.

Movie cut-scenes are plentiful and very nicely rendered. They are available in high or low resolution, and include a movie-like introductory sequence and a beautifully-lit escape sequence. Objects are rendered in incredible detail, and the end result is a very impressive set of interludes that add to the atmosphere quite nicely.

Sound, while nothing stunning, is good. The music is Redbook CD audio, and it does a good job of adding to the atmosphere without being intrusive. For those gamers

Levels are designed in a much more impressive fashion, and really show off the nearly restriction-free Descent II engine.



◀ Many improvements in style have been made in this ambitious sequel, including tunnels and rooms that will keep players guessing.

NEW WEAPONS

While keeping all of the original 10 weapons, Descent II introduces one new weapon for each weapon in the original for a total of 20 weapons. These are:

SUPER LASER: Really simply a nastier laser that does more damage, allowing laser levels up to six. (This also has the advantage that picking up a Super Laser will boost a laser from level one to level five.)

GAUSS CANNON: Uses Vulcan Ammo, fires rapid explosive shots which, like the Vulcan Cannon's, move almost instantaneously. This can do some serious damage to bots or opposing players.

HELIX CANNON: Similar to the spread fire, except that it fires five shots at a time, and the plane of the shots slowly rotates as you fire. This uses a lot of energy, at 1.5 per shot (vs. .5 per shot for most other weapons).

PHOENIX CANNON: The much awaited sequel to the Plasma Cannon, the Phoenix Cannon fires shots which can bounce off walls. Just don't let them bounce back and hit you instead.

OMEGA CANNON: Like the Afterburner, the Omega Cannon has a separate power source which is recharged from energy. It fires an instantaneous and continuous stream of energy, but can only be maintained for a very brief period of time.

FLASH MISSILES: These dumbfire missiles do very little damage, but are extremely disorienting—in a multiplayer game, a direct hit will turn your opponent's screen completely white for a few seconds. Bots are simply stunned if you hit them with one.

GUIDED MISSILES: When fired, the guided missile can be hand-controlled until you press fire again, at which point they behave like homing missiles. These do good damage and are very maneuverable with practice.

SMART MINES: The sequel to the much-maligned Proximity Bomb, the Smart Mines break up into golden homing plasma when hit, and a single mine can do more than 100 damage to an opposing player.

MERCURY MISSILES: These are simply extremely fast-moving dumbfire missiles, hitting nearly instantaneously and doing nearly 50 damage.

EARTHSHAKER MISSILES: If you had fun with Mega Missiles, wait until you get to try out Earthshakers. On impact, these break up into multiple extremely large homing missiles, each of which packs a very large punch. Just be careful not to fire them when you don't have room to get out of the way!

who think the music sounds familiar or find their toes unconsciously tapping to the beat and can't get enough of it, the rock score of the game is written by Ogre, from the band Skinny Puppy.

Weapons each have its own distinctive effects, as do most of the enemy robots. Sample quality is extremely high, and effects are generated in effective stereo. The distinctive sounds of the bots add to the overall effect, as do the burbling sounds of waterfalls (and, for that matter, lavafalls).

Descent II is remarkable in that, despite all the hype, it actually manages to exceed expectations. Discovering new enemy behaviors and trying to figure out how to deal with them is highly enjoyable. The "wow" value of SVGA graphics cannot be over-emphasized; it is almost painful to go back and play



▲ While interest in multiplayer Descent remains high, Descent II's enhanced network capabilities are certain to add to the excitement. Even in One-player Mode, Descent II's improvements will hold a player's interest for a long time to come.

The "wow" value of SVGA graphics cannot be over-emphasized; it is almost painful to go back and play games in 320x200 now.

games in 320x200 now. Best of all, the many additions will add to multiplayer depth as new uses and counter measures are discovered over time.

Descent II will provide a lasting challenge to all who play it; even solely in One-player Mode, the difficulty levels vary from relatively easy to extremely hard ("Insane" is just that). The advanced behavior

of the enemies mean that while they may not always learn from their mistakes, each time you play, they will behave a little differently to keep you on your toes.

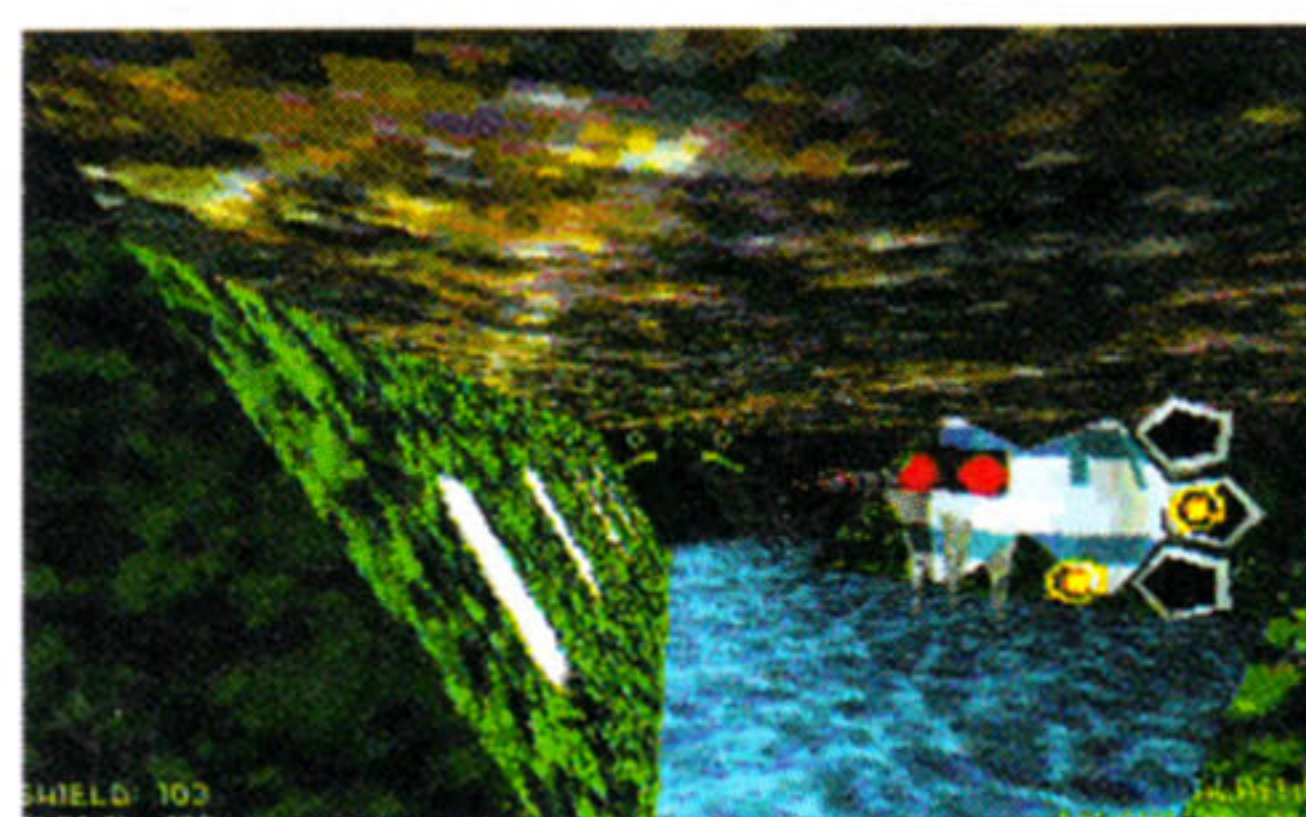
Of course, Descent II's real lasting power is in its network capabilities, and judging from the fact that multiplayer Descent is still going strong, it's safe to say that people will not find themselves getting bored of Descent II any time in the near future.

Overall, anyone who thought that Descent was a great game will love Descent II. Those who only like games with simplistic controls, or who dislike action games, will not find the game as appealing, but anyone looking for great action with a modicum of depth, and truly unparalleled multiplayer capabilities cannot go wrong with Descent II.

- Brian Osseman



▲ New features, new enemies and a variety of play modes ranging from easy to insane are tough to master, but provide plenty of entertainment.



▲ Redbook CD audio background music and distinct sound effects for weapons and robots adds to the atmosphere of Descent II.

NEW POWER-UPS

Of course, Descent II also adds a number of new items which may be picked up during play. In addition to Descent's shield and energy boosts, cloaking devices, invulnerabilities and extra ships, Descent II boasts five new power-ups:

Headlight: This will light the way in front of your ship, and comes in extremely useful if all the lights in a room have been blown out. However, it uses up energy when on and also serves as a beacon to opposing players.

Afterburner: Just what it sounds like, the Afterburner gives you a boost of extra speed should you need it. It uses its own fuel, which is automatically recharged out of your ship's energy (effectively limiting the speed boosts to a maximum of about three seconds).

Full Map: This useful item, as the name suggests, lets you see the map of the entire level, with areas you haven't been in showing up in blue.

Ammo Rack: After grabbing one of these, your ship can carry more of each secondary weapon, as well as extra Vulcan/Gauss ammo.

Energy-to-Shield Converter: If you have more than 100 percent energy, this will allow you to transfer as much of the excess as you want into shields, at a rate of two energy/one shield.

The Bottom Line:

When Descent was released more than a year ago, its fully 3-D graphics engine, devilish AI and extensive support for multiplayer play combined to set the standard for PC gaming. Although there are no major changes to the engine itself, Descent II does have significant improvements in nearly every area and has once again redefined the state of art. Boasting 10 new weapons, 30 new robots and 40 new levels, it also incorporates improved enemy AI, a number of new multiplayer features, a better-optimized SVGA Mode and a variety of other cool new enhancements. While it won't appeal to those who didn't like the original, the many avid fans of Descent will find that Descent II is just what they've been waiting for.

IG: With a combination of a highly advanced graphics engine and well-balanced playability, *Descent* took the gaming world by storm, remaining one of the most popular PC games a year after it was released. Given its incredible success, how did you approach making its sequel? What were your primary goals?

MIKE: The sequel started out being called "Descent: CD-Enhanced." It was going to be about five new levels, maybe five new robots, several new weapons, plus redbook audio and cinematic cut sequences.

About the time D1 was released, we decided to make the CD-Enhanced version larger. At this time, we decided on 30 new levels, 18 new robots, 10 new weapons, in addition to the Redbook audio and cut scenes. Our targeted release date was June 1995. Once we got started working, we realized a lot of other things we wanted to add and the schedule started to grow. Concurrently, Interplay decided to change the name to *Descent II*. Since we were now working on a sequel, and not just a moderate enhancement, we decided to add lots of things we had talked about, but didn't think we'd have time for.



ADAM: I think it's worked out very well. The team has been able to do new and fun things, and the *Descent* world has evolved a bit in the process.

IG: One of the most immediately apparent differences between *Descent* and its sequel is the introduction of a system of switches, force fields and locked doors. Yet, it is clear that *Descent II* remains primarily an action game. Could you talk a little about how you ended up integrating these features into *Descent II*, and what was the overall effect you were aiming for?

ADAM: We wanted to add some new depth to *Descent II* without adding too much complication. Adding switches was an easy way to do this without changing the action nature of the game. Giving the player a switch-puzzle to fly through before reaching a new weapon is great, but you'll never see something required (like a key) behind one of them. I think that feature has worked out quite well, without turning it into a puzzle-solving/RPG-type game.



JASON: There are also new options for multiplayer that will put a twist on a standard solo player level. Capture the Flag comes to mind right off the bat. In that type of net game, you

inadvertently learn the level because you are forced to search out your flag and goal.

IG: One of the more impressive aspects of *Descent* was the bot AI. What are the major enhancements that have been made to the AI for *Descent II*? Did you approach creating the AI differently, or was it more a question of having bots react differently to certain situations?

MIKE: There are new classes of behavior for the bots. For example, the Sniper bots will

open doors to come at you. They will sometimes charge at you, other times retreat, but remain facing you and firing their weapon. This is much the way a human player would behave. Seldom would a good human player turn and run in the middle of a battle. Backing out is much more realistic and interesting.

In D2, some of the robots will try to hide from you, even after they've engaged you in a battle. So you'll have to go looking for them. Again, this is the kind of behavior you'd expect from a human player.

There are two new bots called the Guide-Bot and the Thief-Bot. The Guide-Bot is an ally, leading you through the mine, helping you find things such as keys and power-ups. The main impetus for adding him was to help people who get lost in the mine. We don't want *Descent* degenerating into a key hunt, so the Guide-Bot should prevent that. Also, it's nice to have a companion when you're tearing things up.

The Thief-Bot will steal your power-ups and run and hide. He is very fast and very difficult to track down. It's been our experience that he introduces a more emotional aspect to the game—people really get mad at him when he steals their Quad Laser, and they often do self-destructive things trying to track him down.

ADAM: There have been plenty of "I hate that Thief-Bot but he's great!" type of posts on Usenet...very satisfying.

MIKE: There are lots of other smaller things we added to the AI, like robots who fire two kinds of weapons, robots who focus on getting behind you and better leading of the robot firing. If there was a unifying goal in the AI for *Descent II*, it was to make playing against the robots more like playing against human opponents. We play a lot of multiplayer games here and we've gotten a lot of feedback from other people, so we've tried to put some of the things a human will do into the robot behavior.

IG: There are

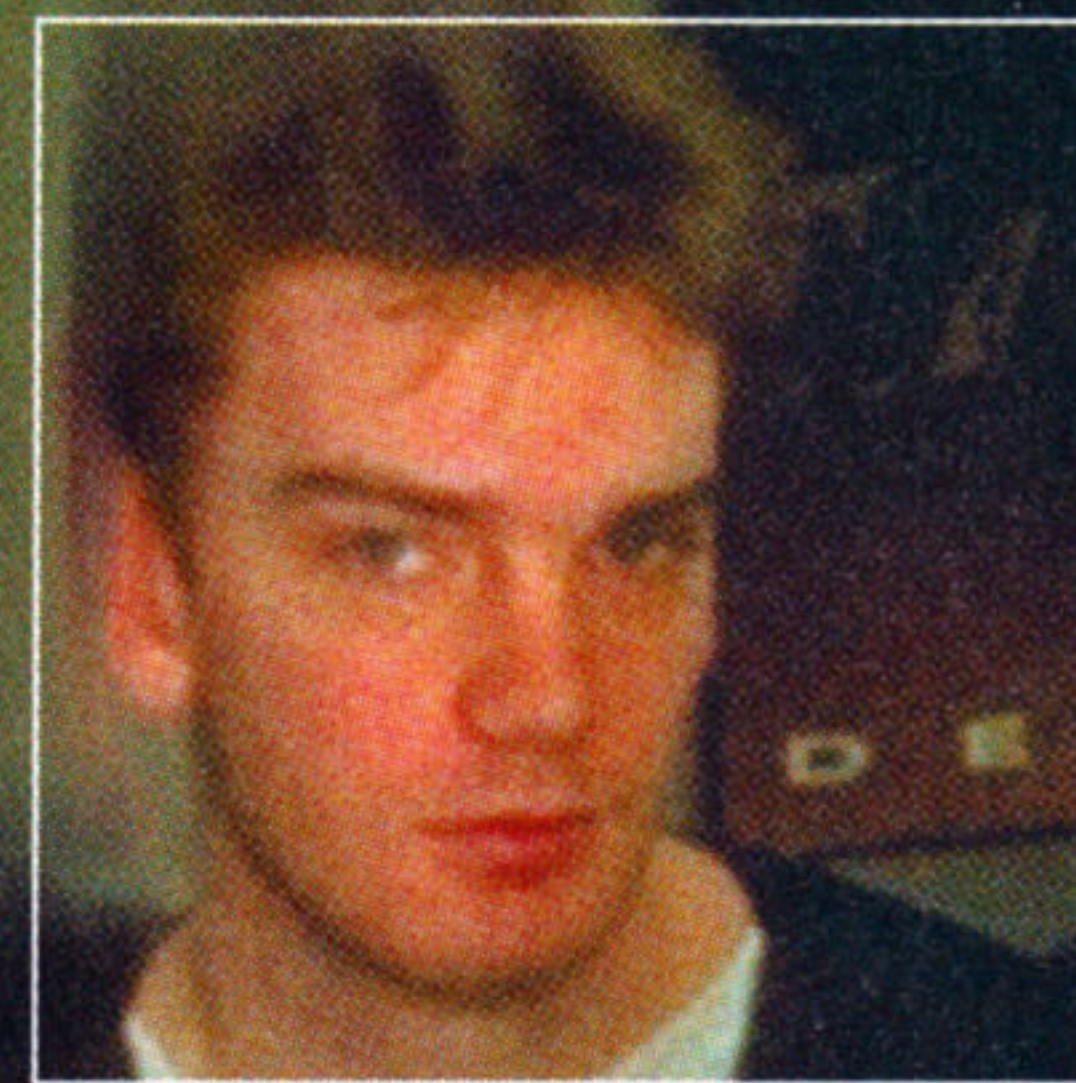
10 new weapons in *Descent II*, each of which can be compared directly with a weapon in *Descent*. How did you approach the problem of coming up with new, different and useful weapons that aren't overpowered enough to throw off the balance of the multiplayer game?

MATT: We make them up at the last minute!

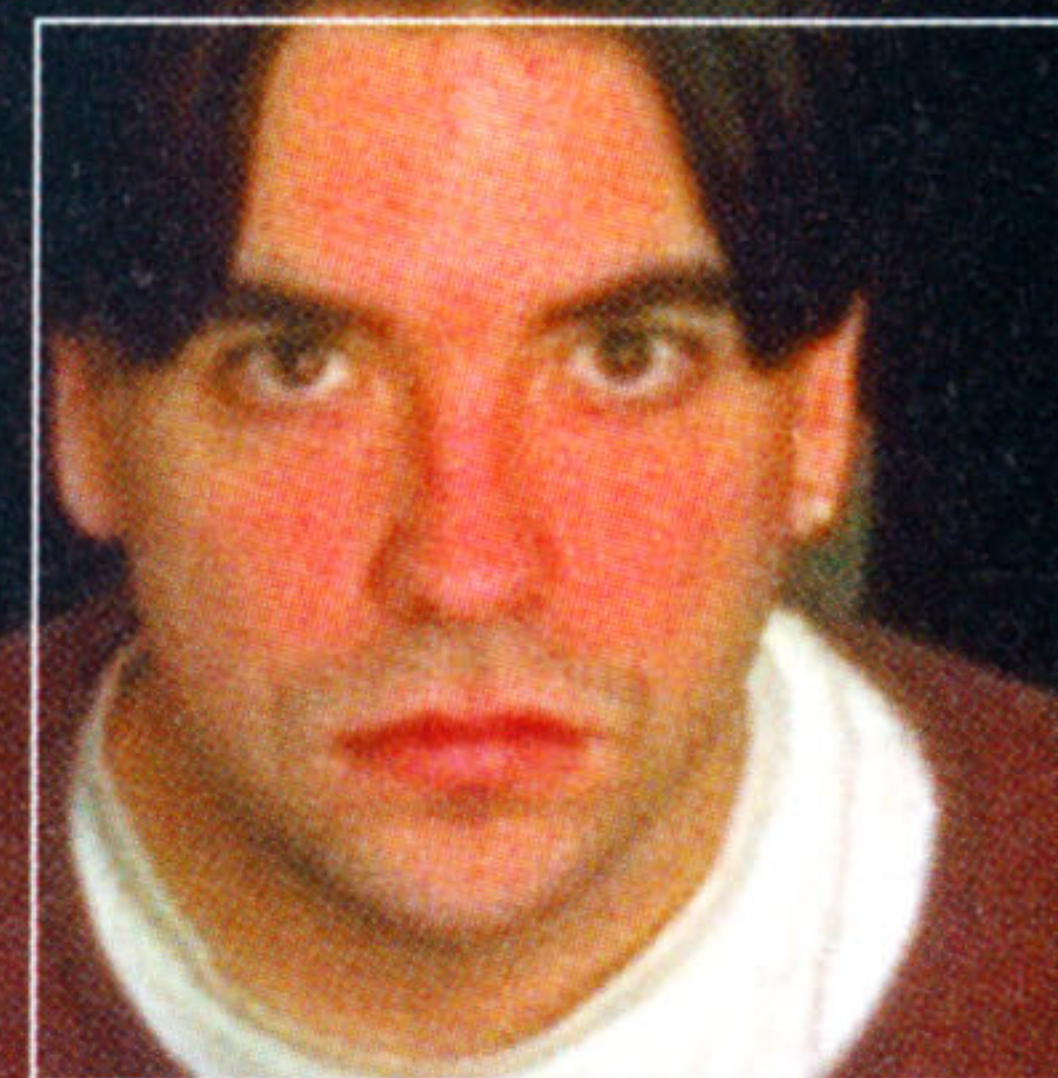
ADAM: Shh! Don't tell them that! Actually, it's been very hard. It's easy to add a barrel onto a cannon or to increase its firing rate, but we wanted the new weapons to behave a bit differently too.

It was difficult to top the Mega Missile without totally imbalancing the game, but the Earthshaker has become an office favorite. It has ultimate power but you have to use it carefully or you'll tear your own ship apart pretty easily.

As a whole, it's constant work balancing the weapons. Every couple of days we'll re-evaluate the latest changes to damage, speed, firing rate, etc. and tweak them a little more until we're all happy.



JASON: Jason Leighton, programmer



ADAM: Adam Fletcher, artist/animator



JASON: Jason Y. Beside, level designer/artist



DOUG: Doug Brooks, 3-D artist



JEREMY: Jeremy Sandmel, programmer

Descent

IG Talks to the *Descent* Dream Team



IG: During the early stages of developing *Descent II*, you took a number of suggestions from people on Usenet on what should be incorporated into the game. How do you

feel your interaction with the Internet affected the final product, and how do you see the internet influencing game development in the future?

MIKE: It made it much better. Even though we have a pretty strong idea of what we want the game to be like, we're not going to think of every good idea. While it's important to not just throw unrelated ideas at the game, it would be foolish to not use such a rich resource to improve our games. I'm sure we'll continue to read and contribute in relevant newsgroups.

IG: One of the major issues on Usenet since the release of the *Descent II* demo is the new aesthetic approach. Clearly, you have made an active effort to make bots and levels more three-dimensional and less boxy than in the original, but a number of people have complained that the new bots look too cute, and the new flashier textures make the environment less realistic. Could you explain your overall goals in



MATT: Matt Toschlog, co-owner, programmer



SAMIR: Samir Sinha, programmer



MARK: Mark Dinse, level designer

creating *Descent II*'s aesthetic, and how, if at all, they changed after the release of the demo?

ADAM: One of the drawbacks to doing a sequel is that everyone will have pre-conceived notions of what it should/will be like. With such expectations, it's foolish for us to think that we're going to make everyone happy in all respects, so we often have to evaluate how well the product has met with the goals we've set for it ourselves. In that sense, I'm thrilled with the way *Descent II* has turned out.

To explain briefly, *Descent II* takes place on six different alien worlds, each with its own distinct look and feel. One has huge subterranean rivers, with a largely green, organic feel to it. Another takes place on a frozen ice planet with these great iridescent walls and fissures. Of course, each world has a subset of enemies and Bosses that you would expect to be in such alien environments.

Our goals in that sense haven't changed much since the demo, really. Three levels isn't a lot of space to fit all this stuff into, so we tried to give the players a taste of everything. I'm sure there would be a few people who would dislike *Descent II* if we hadn't done anything ambitious and different. I'm glad we did; it's been fun.

IG: You have been working on a Windows 95 version of *Descent II* for simultaneous release with the other versions. Has working with Windows 95 lived up to Microsoft's hype—that it is easier to code for and can actually perform better than DOS alone?

SAMIR: I have learned that the Win95 version will be released in the next revision (1.1?) because we're behind in the testing department. It is definitely easier to program a high-speed, SVGA game under 95 than it was in DOS or especially Windows 3.1. Network and MIDI sound support are integrated seamlessly in 95. Joystick support was also

simple, and supports more features than the DOS version.

Using DirectX for graphics and sound proved a little tricky at first (given that there are no books out on it). For high resolutions (640x480), it rivals the Mac version. Still, *Descent II* was made with DOS in mind, so I've had to work certain limitations in the code that could have been sped up if D2 was initially programmed with Win95 in mind. I expect in the months following the release of D2, we'll see more games that will be written taking full advantage of Windows 95, and plans are that our next few projects will be programmed under W95.

IG: What projects are you looking at, now that *Descent II* is nearly ready to hit the shelves? Is *Descent III* in the works, or will you be focusing on something new and different?

MIKE: *Descent III* is not in the works, except that we occasionally scribble down ideas for it. *Descent III* will virtually start from scratch from a code standpoint. Unlike the evolution from D1 to D2, D3 will have a completely new engine. Frankly, we don't know what it will look like or even...what it will play like. Except that it will be a first person, six degree of freedom shooter. We're also going to be doing something very different than *Descent*.

ADAM: It's going to be a space-combat-saga-type game. It'll have more of a plot, as well as strategic elements. And great multiplayer, of course! That's going to be increasingly important in games, I think.

IG: *Doom* set a milestone in PC gaming, and *Descent* did the same. Both were great games whose engines went well beyond what any previous game did. Do you have any idea what the next milestone will be, and what will set it apart (technically) from its predecessors?

MATT: I think sound will be a bigger and bigger thing in new games.

ADAM: Multiplayer. And anything else that will bring the player further into the game. This could be advances in graphics, sound or any number of other things.

MIKE: I can't think of anything obvious to do graphically that will stand far above a six degree of freedom, almost arbitrary geometry engine. There are huge things that could be done to improve the look of *Descent*, such as greater detail, higher resolution textures, bump mapping, colored lighting and directional dynamic lighting. The environment could be much richer by being modifiable during play. But I don't think these things will be immediately obvious and dramatic to most customers.

I think games will continue to make huge evolutionary improvements in graphics and sound. I think the next revolution in game development will be in AI and multiplayer. We've barely scratched the surface there.

JASON: I agree. There's a strong emotional element in multiplayer that isn't present in a solo situation. The number of people playing across the Internet is going to skyrocket in the next five years, and the developers who go out of their way to make Net games intense are going to win in a big way. I've already got some ideas for *Descent III*...

Exposed

Panzer Dragoon Zwei

SEGA pulls out all the stops with this eye-popping dragon-rider sequel

Publisher: Sega
Platform: Saturn
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Sega
Release: 3rd Qtr. '96

When doubts first began to surface about the relative 3-D abilities of Sega's Saturn hardware as compared to Sony's PlayStation, Sega used a classic public relations move in an attempt to change the terms of the debate: Despite the fact that they had been working on the Saturn architecture for years, they said that the hardware was irrelevant—it was Sega's experience in "original" software development that would boost the Saturn over the PlayStation in the end. To be quite honest, it's hard to buy that sort of argument at first, as most people find it easier to judge horsepower than reliability, and most of Sony's launch games were pretty powerful visually.

Thus for several months Sega has labored to prove that their words were not merely intended to boost the sales of a media-challenged machine, and to some extent, they've succeeded. Slightly lackluster but nevertheless impressive translations of Sega Rally, Virtua Cop and Virtua Fighter 2 were part of the plan, and several sports and original action efforts from Sega have also been interesting enough to keep the

company's fans entertained. The jewel in Sega's "originality" crown, however, was a fantasy 3-D flying and shooting game called Panzer Dragoon, a game which truly showed off the machine's architecture in ways that arcade translations simply cannot; arcade conversions must attempt to use weaker chips to emulate something invariably better-looking, and original software has no built-in expectations of what to expect when the power light first flashes on.

Today, *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION* has had the opportunity to sit down and play an incomplete but thoroughly interactive version of Sega's Panzer Dragoon Zwei (2)—the first playable CD-ROM that has arrived in the hands of the American press, as all previews published to date were based solely on photography—and it will suffice to say that Sega has produced one incredible piece of software.

What? You need to hear more? Let's start at the beginning. In Panzer Dragoon, a lengthy Silicon Graphics-rendered cinematic opening drew you into a story line wherein evil creatures and fantasy-

◀ **In the beginning of the game you can not fly and must hop, skip and jump your way through the dangerous landscape.**



<http://www.sega.com>



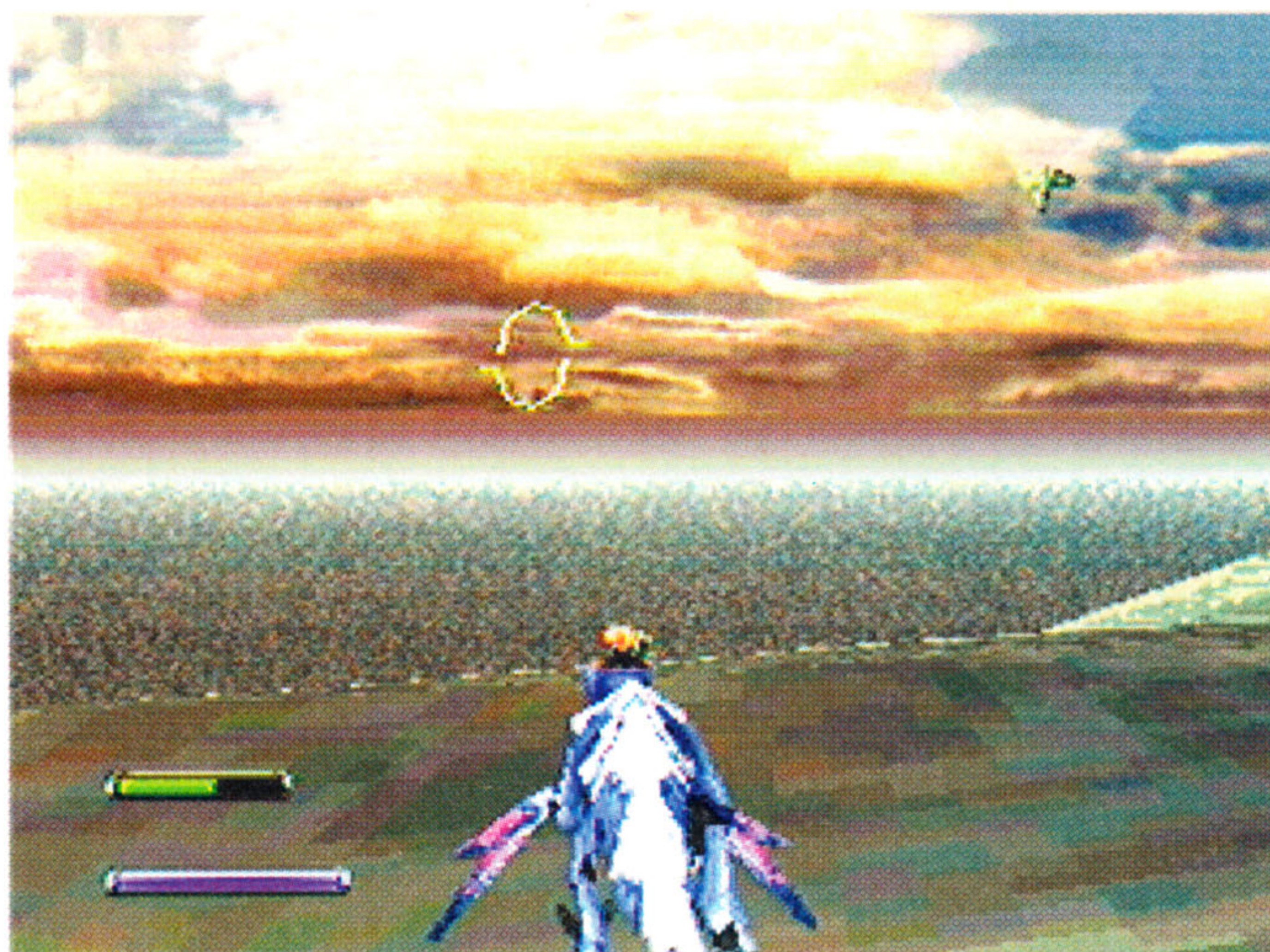
Gameplay was in the arcade vein and relatively simple: As you flew around, you moved a cursor on the screen to target enemies and could turn your camera view to the left, right, fore and back of your dragon-mounted character. Pressing a button would fire your laser immediately, and holding that button while moving your on-screen cursor would automatically lock-on to targets you touched; releasing the button would unleash a flurry of pent-up homing energy pulses.

Panzer's Space Harrier-style gameplay was made novel via two techniques: the need to change your camera view to look at targets coming up behind you and to your sides and the breathtaking audiovisual composition, which mixed soulful fantasy-inspired audio tracks with rich colors and convincing 3-D environments. On rare occasions,

your camera would twist automatically to show you a huge menace lurking in the background.

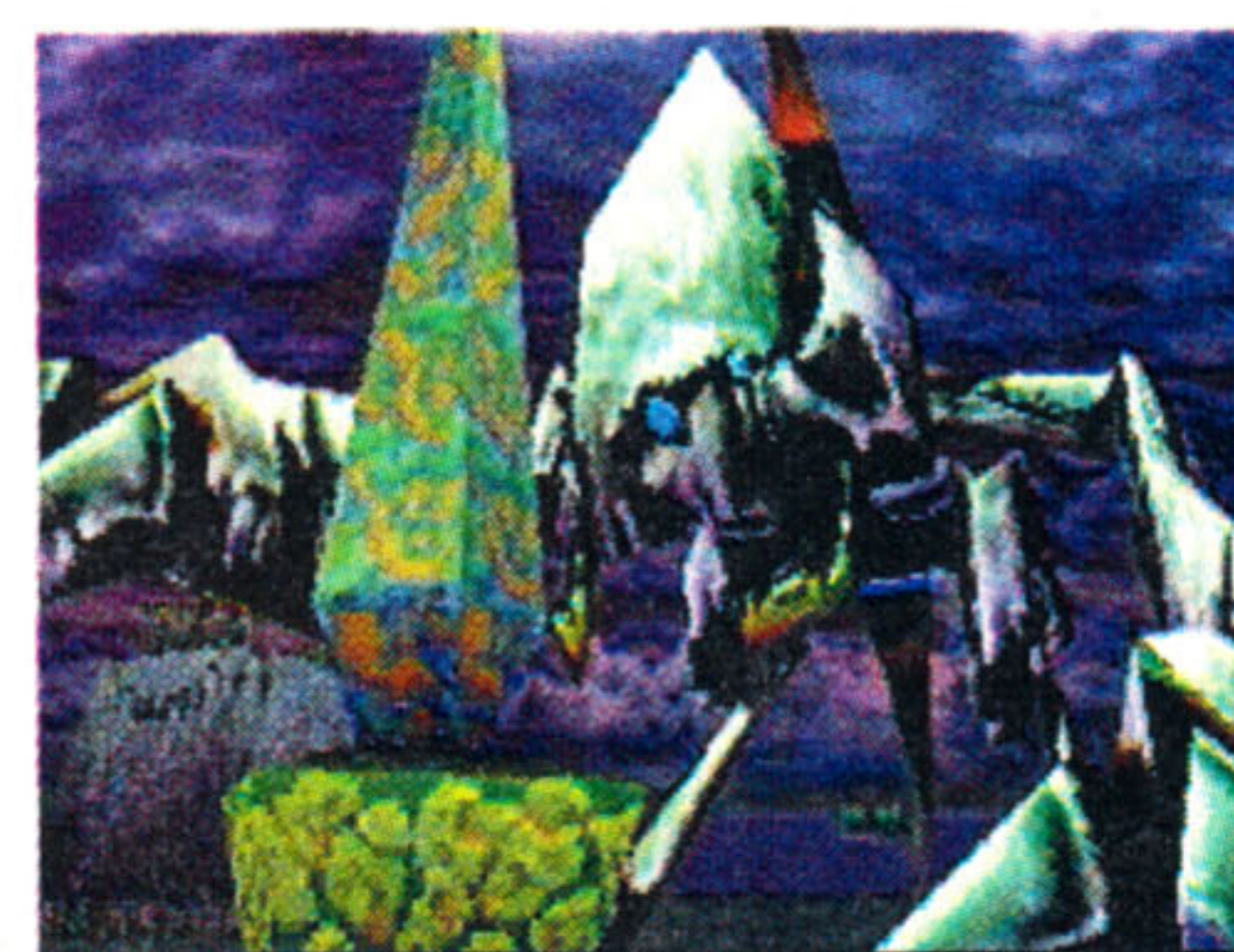
The result is a game which does for the Saturn in 1996 what Panzer 1 did for the machine in 1995—through the constant movement of your camera and improved 3-D polygon graphics, Panzer Zwei is far more engrossing and visually stunning from scene to scene.

Why is this the case? Sega begins by changing the game's structure a bit, such that you now begin on a baby dragon who has nary a means to fly, and you spend the first part of the game running on the ground and glancing upward at the gothic, blemish-free scenery. PD2's characters use a combination of intentionally simple polygonal designs and highly detailed textures, which makes the individual characters less complex but—quite impressively—almost



▲ The photo-realistic sky really gives you the feeling of being up in the clouds.

entirely free of pixelization. Background artwork features realistic terrain and gorgeous structural design; your first episode is a "learning the controls" romp through a medieval valley at dusk, followed by an episode where you run through the canyons shown in Panzer 1's rendered opening only to fall off of a cliff and sprout true dragon's wings. Once you've earned your wings and destroyed a base full of rock-mounted artillery, you'll fly away from the ruins only to find gunfire barely missing you from the rear. Turn your head and you'll see a couple of hidden turrets left to polish off—you'll always have to be on the



“Once huge enemy airships start to make their way through the branches, you'll see leaves flying everywhere.”

lookout. The scenes are classic, and they're made even better by the newly freed camera.

In episode three, you're in the center of a richly detailed forest, which no doubt sounds boring—forests are just trees and animals, right? Wrong. You'll see rays of light peeking through the thick foliage, and highly detailed trees rather than just flat bitmapped objects. Once huge enemy airships start to make their way through the branches, you'll see leaves flying everywhere and smoke clouds flying as you litter the once-beautiful scenery with metallic debris. Panzer 2 impresses by creating realistic worlds, populating them with simple but realistic creatures, and then allowing those two elements to interact.

You still retain the ability to change your camera's perspective to look to your left, right and rear, but Panzer Zwei takes the initiative to move the camera by itself more often and accordingly presents you

with a combination of frightening and intense new scenarios. Within the first few moments of play, you'll be chased by a runaway boulder, attacked by giant iguana-like monsters, and impressed as ancient windmills twist in the night air. When Bosses and sub-Bosses are ready to attack—and these instances are now more frequent—you'll watch a dramatic realtime set-up of the scene prior to the actual battle, and it's these realtime movements of the camera that really help Panzer 2 to surpass the simple label "game" and bring it closer to the "interactive adventure" category.

As you can imagine, these screenshots can only do the game so much justice—it really deserves to be watched in motion—and having played through several incomplete levels, IG's FUSION is now more anxious than ever to sit down with a reviewable copy of Panzer Dragoon Zwei.

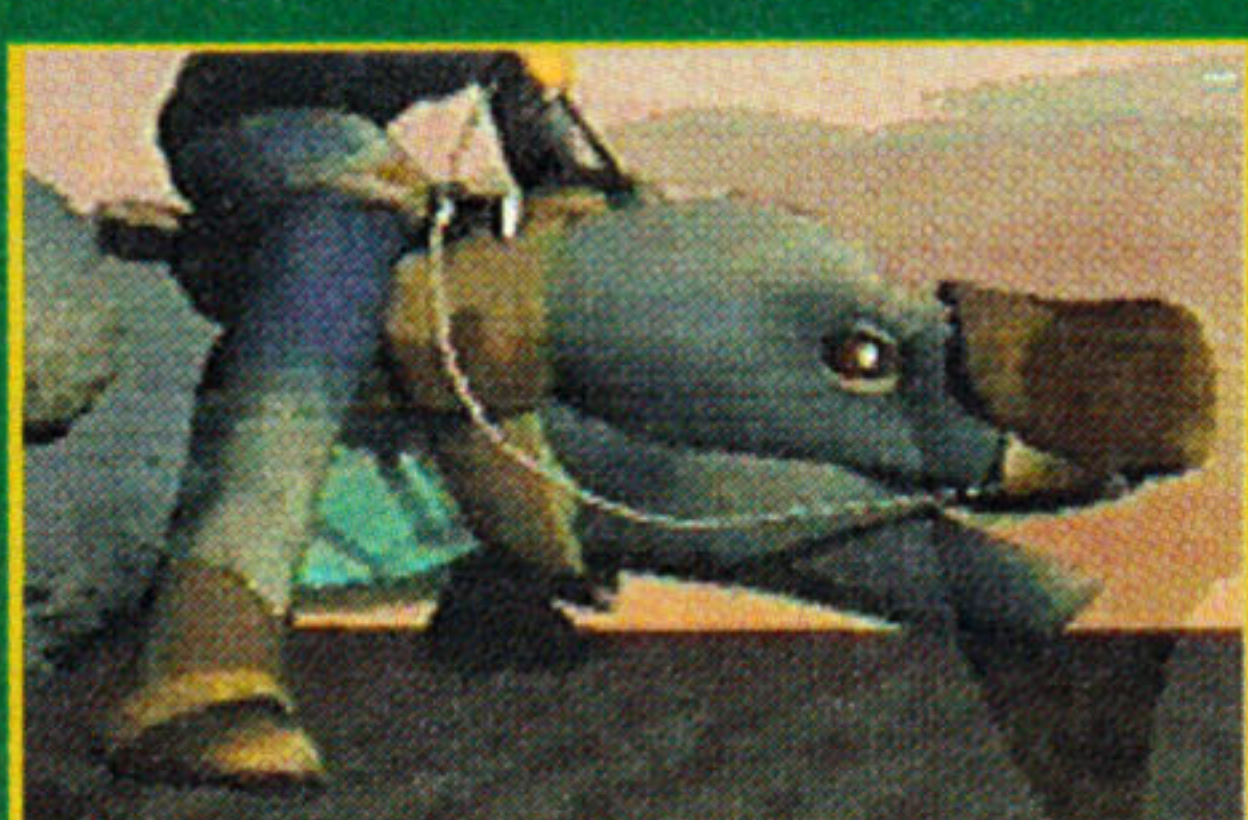
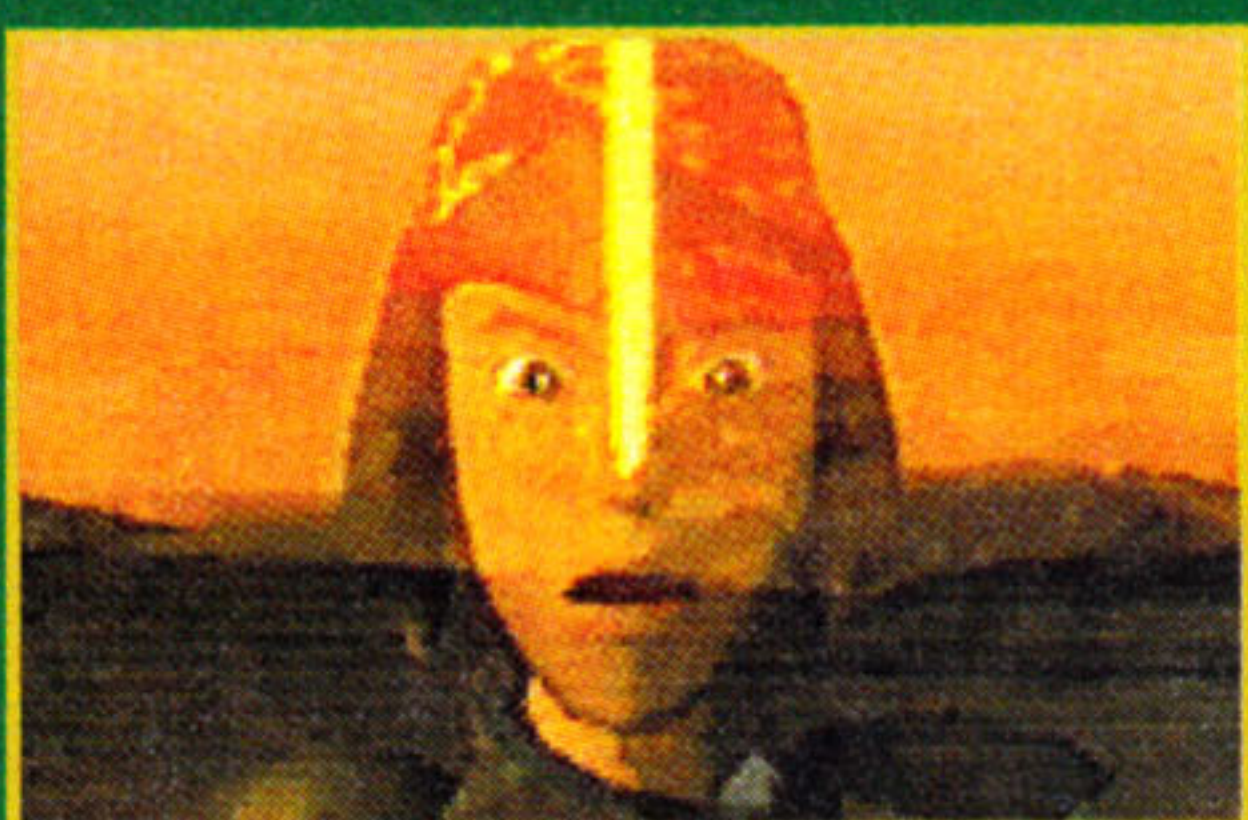
- Jer Horwitz

In the BEGINNING...

Panzer Dragoon II opens with a short (compared to the original Panzer Dragoon) rendered introduction. The video is fairly clean, with some blurring, but that may have more to do with their cinematic style than any flaw in their video playback engine.

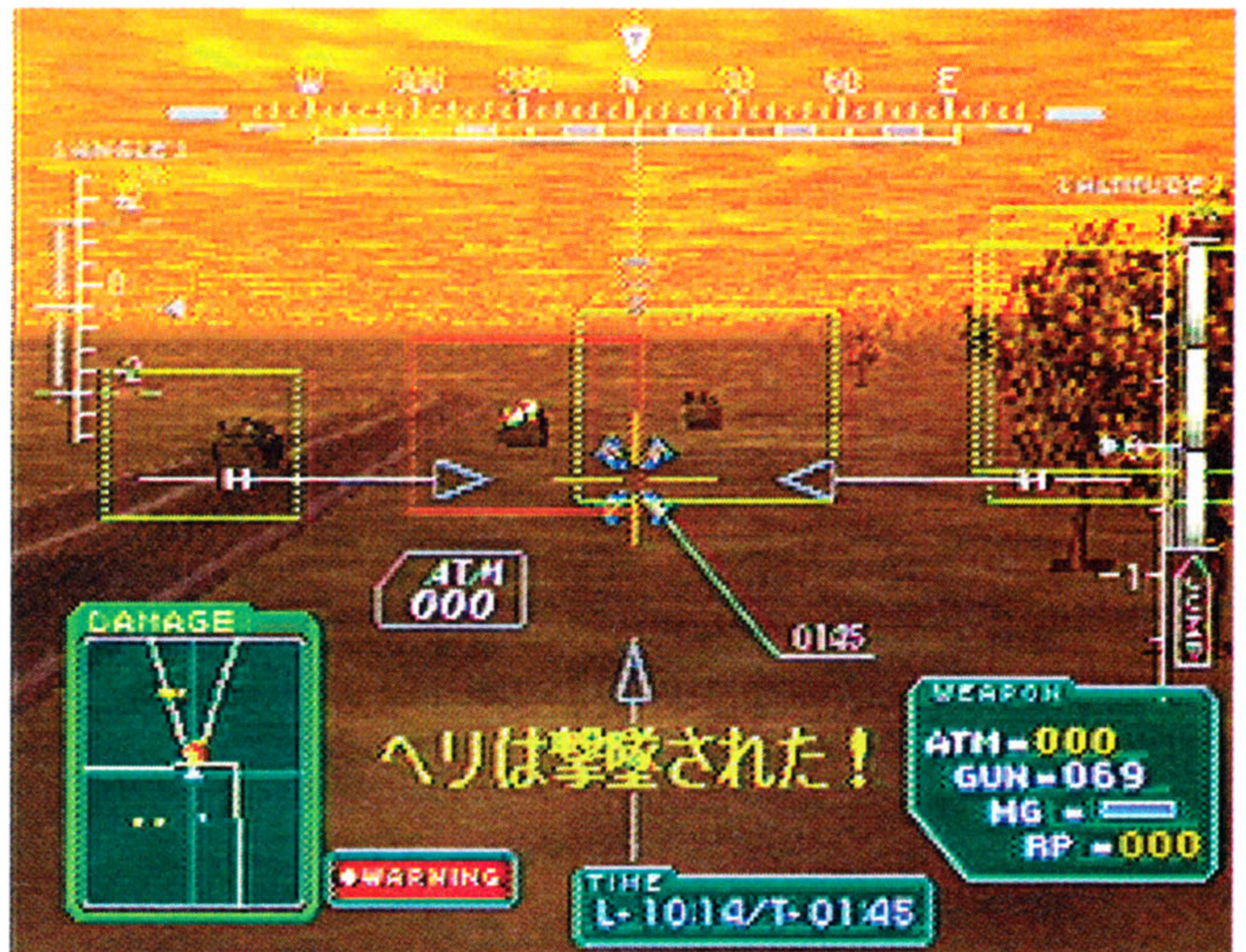
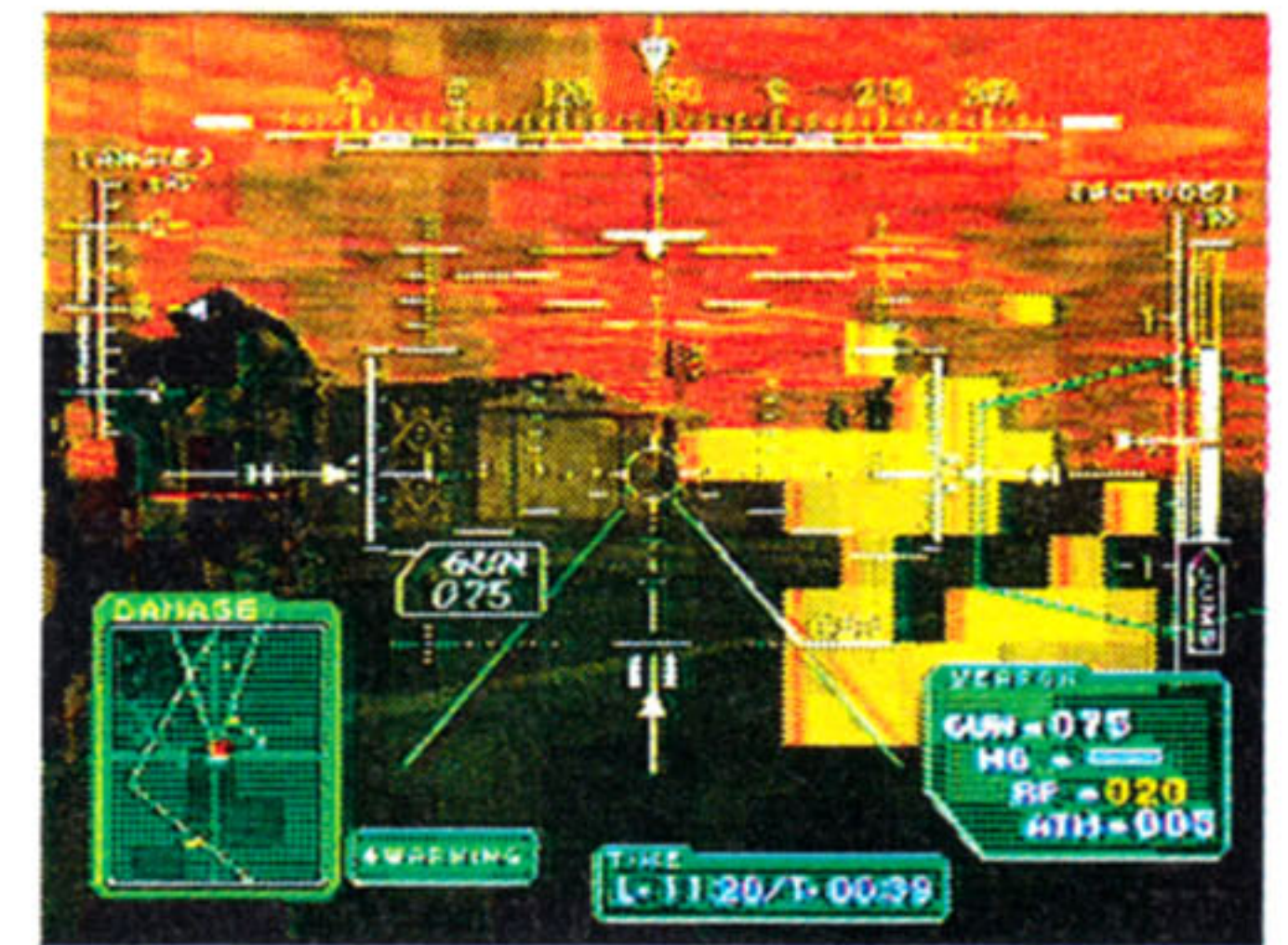
At first glance, the intro is very busy and slightly confusing; it blends elements of the past in the game's story line with the present, by cutting quickly between shots of your player-character discovering the infant dragon to shots of the now-adolescent dragon firing the same homing shots that the dragon in Panzer Dragoon wielded at an enemy ship.

While the intro may not have quite the same impact that the original's did (my jaw was on the floor during the intro for the original Panzer), the game more than makes up for it with the fabulous realtime rendered cinematics during actual gameplay.



Iron Rain

Futuristic armor is all that stands between you and extinction

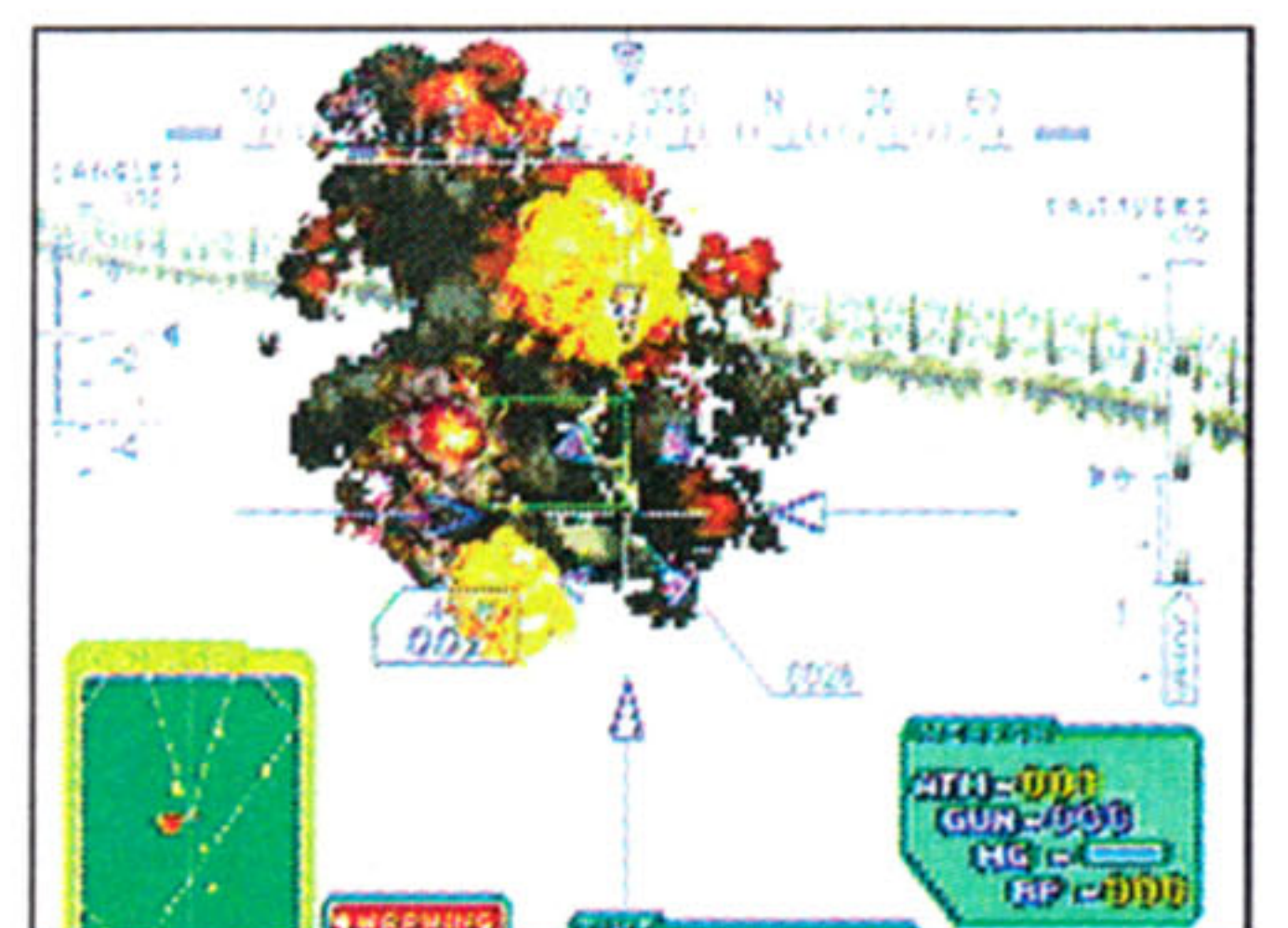
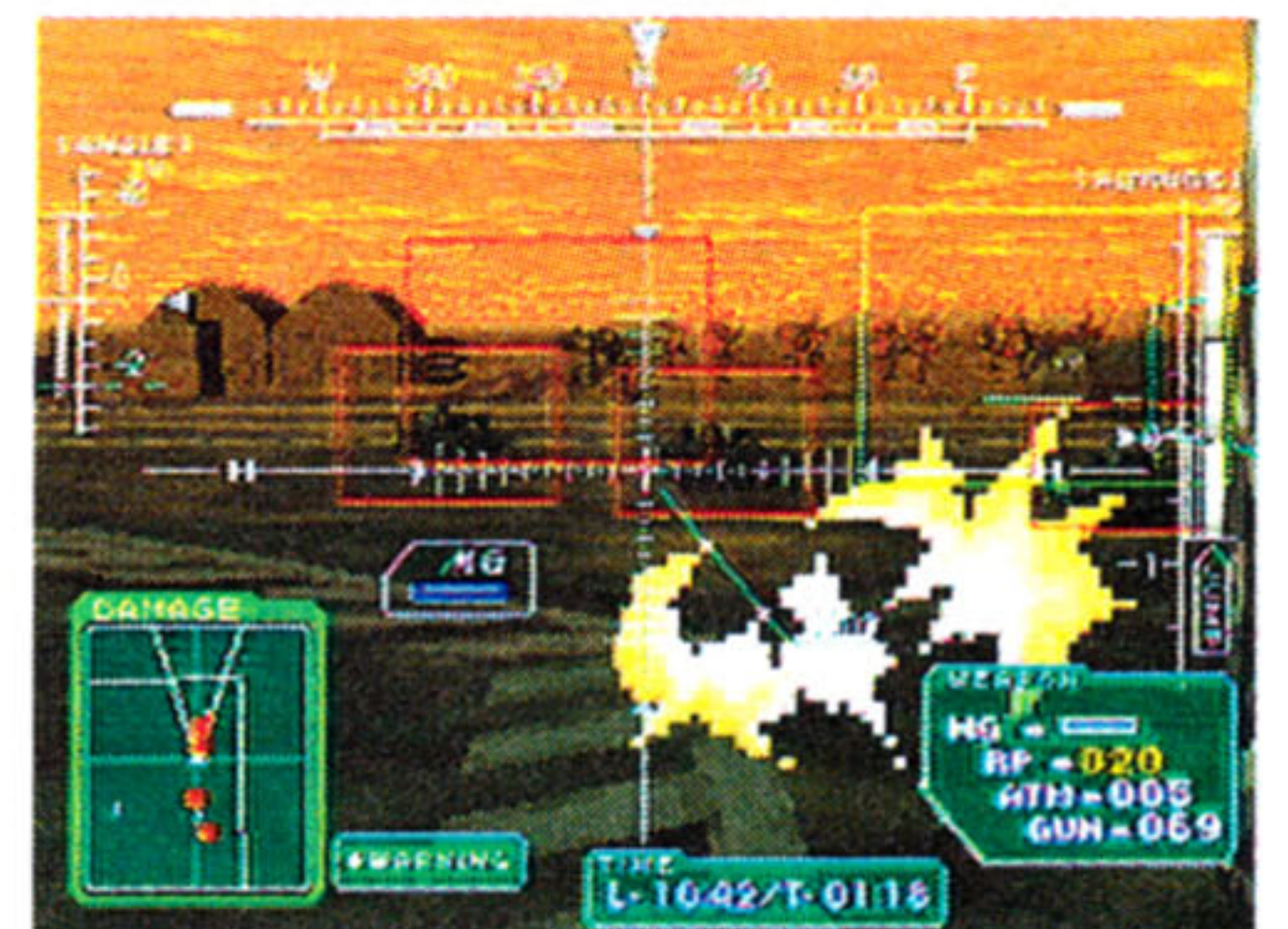


▲ In this futuristic wasteland, the Earth can no longer support humanity, so elite mercenaries have been hired to save what is left of their land from encroachment.

elite mercenary group hired to save what is left of Europe and Asia from their encroaching neighbors. These new mechs feature strong armor, unparalleled maneuverability, uncontested weaponry, advanced stealth capabilities and lightning-fast response time, making them the ideal killing machines to end the fears of these few sanctuaries of life.

Iron Rain is essentially a first-person, Doom-style game with a number of original features not usually found in Doom-clones. Thrown into the mix are objective-based missions structured ala MechWarrior 2 on the PC, but the game never loses the feel of being an action game. Unlike most mission-based games, players can take on the missions in any order they desire. There is an implied order for tackling them, based solely on the varying difficulties of each mission, but can and probably will be ignored by players.

While the elimination of enemy forces is at the hub of each of the eight missions, all but one have other objectives as well to keep the gameplay from becoming hackneyed.

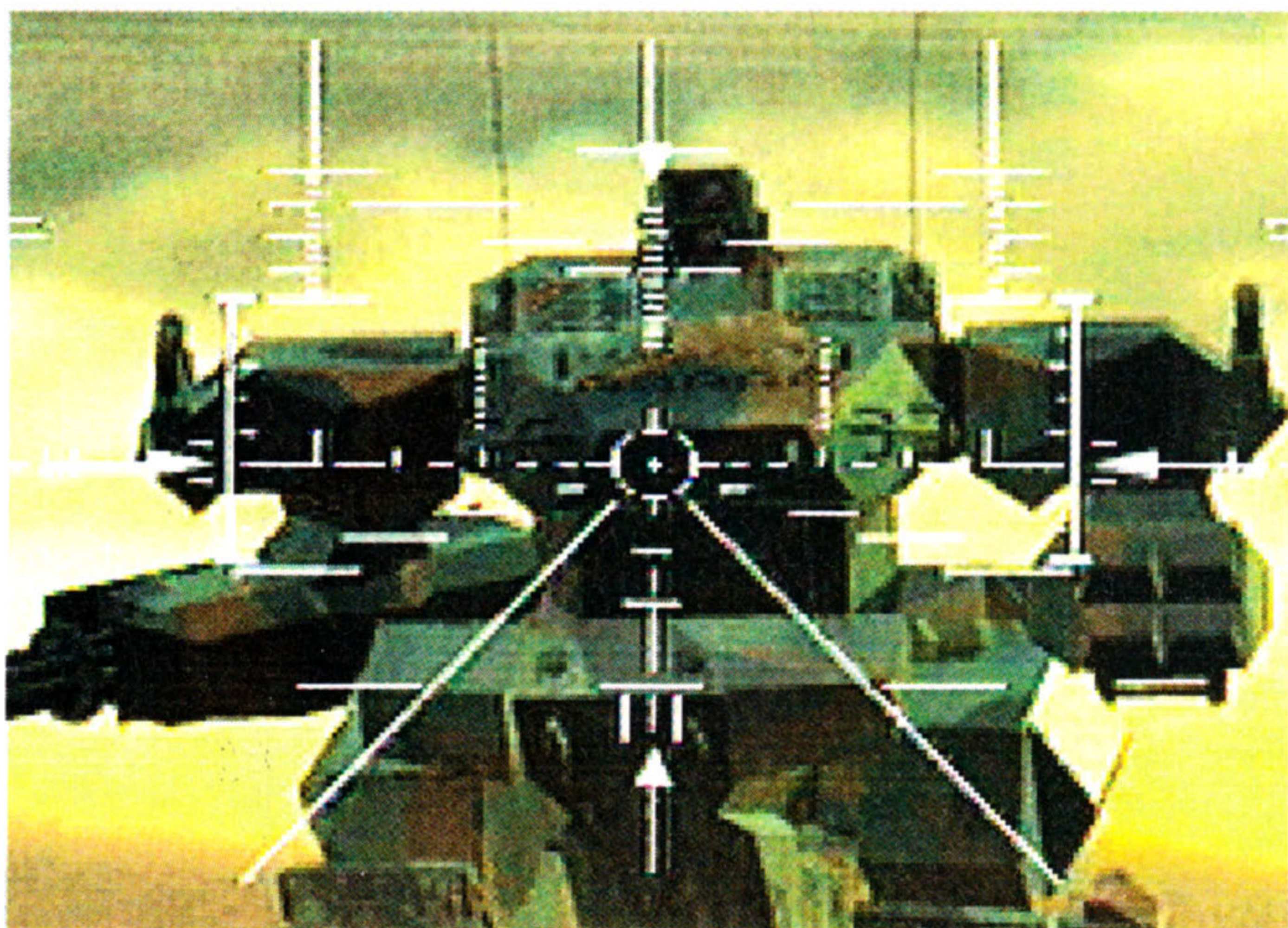


Missions range from escort missions to reconnaissance missions, containing all of the mission types to be expected from a MechWarrior or Wing Commander game. Missions take place within defined borders, leaving which simply ends the game. As the version previewed was almost entirely in Japanese, the reason is currently unknown as to why this happens. Players are also given a certain amount of time to complete each of the missions, also resulting in the big "Game Over" when the limit is reached. Players, however, have a slew of gadgetry and

Since its classic game Thexder, Game Arts has always had strong roots in all things mecha. Iron Rain, Sega of America's translation of the Japanese game GunGriffon, is its first foray into bringing mecha to the third-dimension on a 32-Bit platform.

In the not so distant future, the Earth has begun to lose its tried and true ability to sustain itself. People begin to die in vital areas of the world drained of resources by the overbearing parasite of humanity, and these resources remain unreplenished by unforgivingly harsh weather. Famine spreads like wildfire, with disease and civil unrest following in its deadly wake. The once-green pastures of the world decay into vast, dusty plains incapable of supporting life, human or otherwise. Life on Earth has become grossly imbalanced. Military forces rise from their growing wastelands to claim what little food, energy and viable land is left before it too disappears for good. To aid in the eradication of the opposition, the nations of the world make a leap in military technology: mechanized armored suits. The newest model mech is available exclusively to an

Publisher: Sega of America
Platform: PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Game Arts
Release: TBA



weaponry at their disposal to aid in the completion of these missions. Most important are the weapons, of which there are four. Each of the weapons has a specific purpose in mind, but are effective for any purpose. A cannon provides fast, effective relief of slow-moving ground units, a homing missile easily annihilates aerial targets, a powerful grenade launcher is ideal for close-range killing and an armor-piercing chain gun is an all-around backup, but also good for fast-moving targets. Strategic use of the weaponry is recommended, as players have limited quantities of ammunition for all but the chain gun. All weapons are mounted on a turret to give players better tracking speed against some of the game's speedier foes, as well as vertical freedom, allowing players to aim at their feet or into the air.

nery skills. The jump jets can also be used to land atop buildings, mountains, and hills for sniping at unaware enemies. The final gadget is essential for the single night mission, which would be virtually impossible without the standard-equipped nightvision capability, a must for finding nocturnal enemies before they find you. Some missions have specific weapons and gadgets deactivated, adding layers of variety to the gameplay, as well as requiring players to adopt new strategies for each mission.

The tools at the players' disposal definitely add depth to what could have ended up as nothing more than another mediocre Doom clone, but one cannot help but wonder why they did not take the concept to the next obvious step.

Being a game centered around mercenary activities, a logical devel-

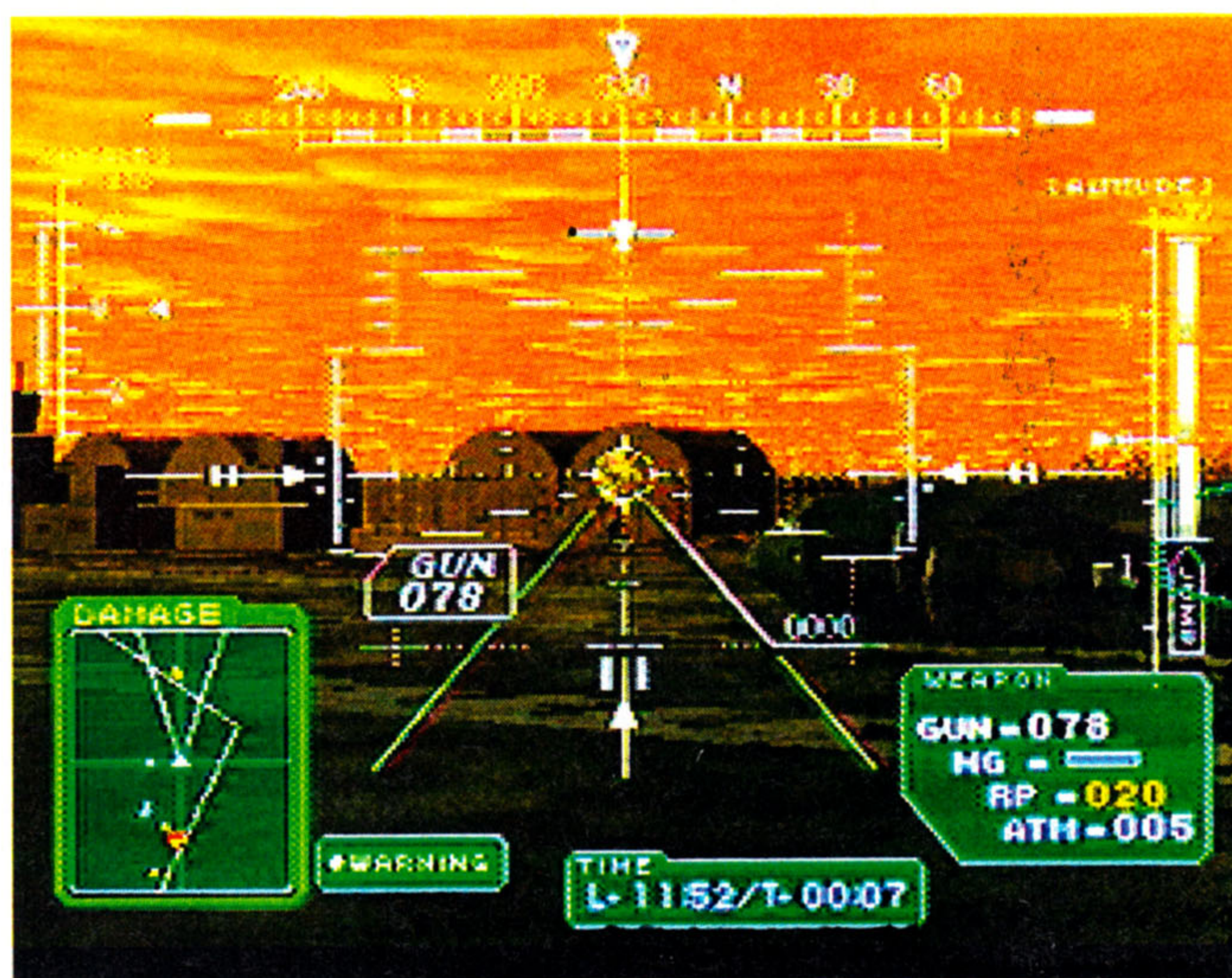
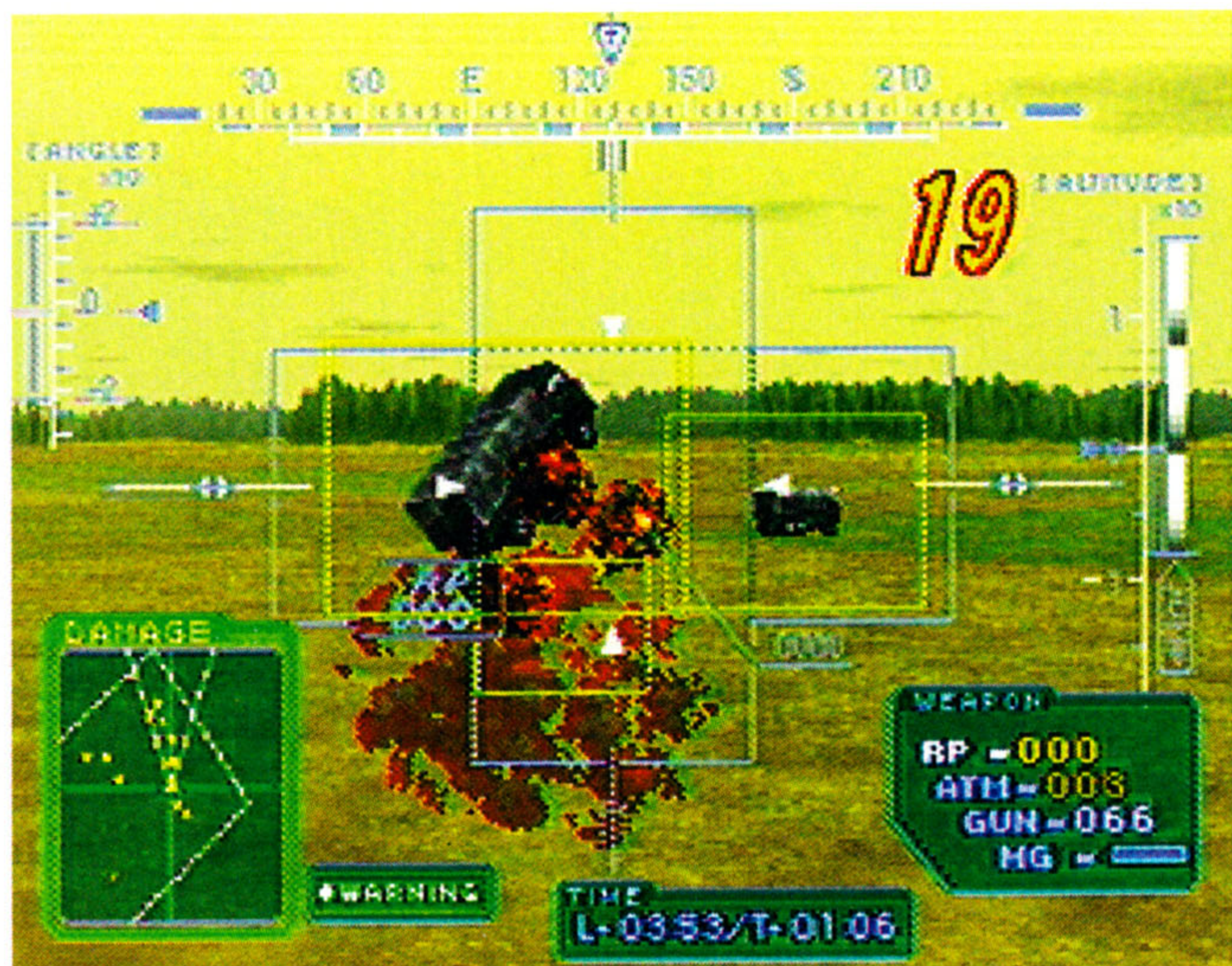
“Iron Rain is essentially a first-person, Doom-style game with a number of original features not usually found in Doom-clones.”

Jump jets provide another means of demolishing aerial enemies and also provide a stealthier approach to the elimination of the enemy.

Jumping sends players soaring to a preset height where they hover until the current fuel cell runs its course. Hovering is particularly useful when squaring off with airborne assailants or unsuspecting ground units, levelling the playing field with the former and giving the latter a distinct disadvantage, as many of the ground units are incapable of angling shots skyward. Players, however, cannot move in quickly while airborne, making the elimination of airborne targets based solely on gun-

opment would seem to allow for mech upgrades including the purchase of better weaponry and the like. Without even more variety of play and/or link capability, Iron Rain's eight missions cannot hope to have significant staying power with players, even with varying difficulty levels. The lack of a save feature seems like a cheap way of extending the life of a game, no matter how fun it may be the first few times around: Repeating the same missions over and over will become tedious with time.

The answer to this question lies in Iron Rain's control scheme, to be certain. Iron Rain already uses every button on the Saturn controller, and



▲ Jump jets can be used to land on mountains, buildings and hills to set up enemy ambushes. Practice courses allow players to hone their skills before heading into combat.

are impressive. Everything, from the excellently rendered and beautifully compressed opening movie to the 3-D models of the mecha in the actual gameplay, drips with detail and forethought. The 3-D engine for the game is impressive, especially for the 3-D deficient Saturn. Each of the eight missions is geographically diverse, and the terrain accurately reflects these differences. Mountains, hills and structures are all presented with texture-mapped and shaded polygons, as are all vehicles, leaving the only aspect of the game not constructed from polygons the bitmap trees, city accoutrements, such as lamp posts and explosion animations. Each mission has appropriate lighting and weather effects. The city is dark as one would expect, the jungle rainy and the snowy wastelands of Siberia foggy. As complex as the environments sound, the game is surprisingly free of dreaded pop up, even then hovering above them. Iron Rain's sound is top-notch on all counts, as well. The accompanying soundtrack carries a futuristic beat with overtones of urgency, intrigue and destruction in CD audio. The sound effects also received good attention during production, giving everything from the often used jump jets to the satisfying explosion of a tank its own distinctive sound. Also, missions are briefed in full speech, as are the various ways to fail and complete the missions.

Iron Rain has great amounts of potential as both an action and strategy game, with its only real drawback thus far being the extremely limited number of missions available, even taking into consideration the varying difficulty levels available and the missing save feature. Iron Rain definitely has the originality factor on its side, a rarity when dealing with first-person based games these days.

— Peter Bartholow

the crowded layout is less than intuitive for the uninitiated. Controlling the mech's weapons, jump jets, walking and flying speeds, as well as the direction of movement is a momentous task, especially given the limited number of buttons available. While players can choose from one of four preset control schemes or build their own, the controls are bound to become muddled at some point. Fortunately, Game Arts saw this problem coming and included two training courses to make the learning curve less steep. One course is designed for simply learning the basics and the other is designed for mastering them in combat. Thankfully, both prep the player for the full game perfectly, leaving minor tweaking of technique and strategizing the only things left to learn for ultimate success.

Throughout, Iron Rain's graphics



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96

Spectacular rendered video sequences bring additional appeal to Hind's visuals.

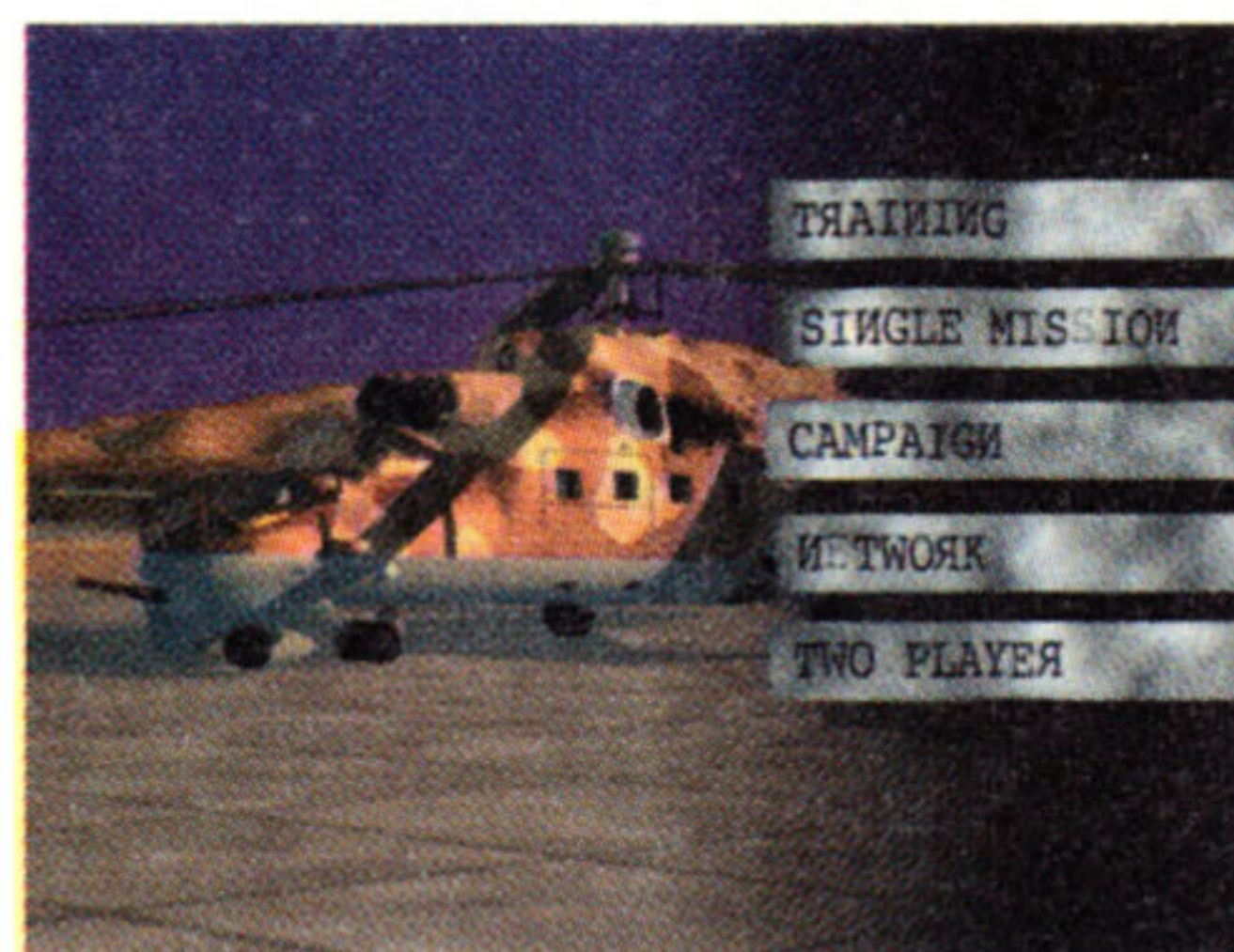


Hind

Prepare to kiss your babushka goodbye as Hind's proud comrade in the Soviet Air Force is intent on making the world a better place

After years of blazing across battlefields in the European and Middle-Eastern theaters, the U.S. Army AH-64 Apache Longbow helicopter subsequently shot onto PC CD-ROMs last year to popular and critical acclaim in Digital Integration's helicopter simulation/blast-a-thon Apache. Garnering a number of industry nominations and awards, it blew away most of the competition to become tactical top-dog in the eyes of many discerning warbird aficionados.

Hot on the vapor trail of this rotary raven comes Hind, Interactive Magic's second salvo in its bid for total air supremacy. A proven performer in the Iran-Iraq, Nicaraguan and Afghanistan conflicts, the formidable Russian Mi-24 Hind-E attack helicopter, also referred to as "Winged Tin" or "the Bogeyman," is now billed as the perfect compliment to the U.S. Longbow. Although it can't match the Apache's agility, its larger size and payload capabilities enable it to carry out many maneuvers and missions not possible on the U.S. bird.



send all those Matlock watchin' marshmallows and their Lockheed limburger straight back to hell and Disneyland!

While Hind's similar play structure, options and graphics do not appear to raise the bar set by its predecessor, it nonetheless contains several noteworthy enhancements and additions. Among these are troop insertion, logistical support, special forces deployment, rescue/medivac and the delivery of bombs (always a favorite male pastime). According to DI/IM, we can

"The similar play, options and graphics don't appear to raise the bar set by its predecessor."

▲ The detail level of the in-game helicopter graphics is astonishing; though the crafts and terrain have been computer modeled and rendered, they look as real as can be.

oops, they have Hinds too. Provided you survive that little skirmish, grab your vodka and caviar and head to occupied Afghanistan, circa 1985. Greeting you will be a friendly Mujahideen guerrilla welcome wagon including mortar, F-16s, SAMs and RPGs—we're not talking about Air Combat or Shining Wisdom here, either.

And now for the best part (cue "Flight of the Valkyries"). During the Korean campaign you'll be supporting a Northern offensive into Southern food storage and distribution centers. In this raid you'll be facing mainly Western technology, including—you guessed it—the U.S. Apache Longbow. Yeah! Time to

also look forward to new low-altitude terrain technology, advanced AI (based on actual Russian army activity) and improved network play including up to 16 players with Apache link-up capability. The sim will also provide an array of arcade/realistic control schemes and

<http://www.imagicgames.com/>

modes in order to appeal to both novice and veteran leathernecks a la the first effort.

While it doesn't appear that Hind will fly far afield of its star-spangled cousin in concept or execution, the game's tempting combination of legendary Soviet hardware and exotic Russian perspective will no doubt prove irresistible to many PC chopper jocks upon its April release. Das Gradonia! - Allen Skurow

Publisher: Interactive Magic
Platform: PC CD-ROM
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Digital Integration
Release: May



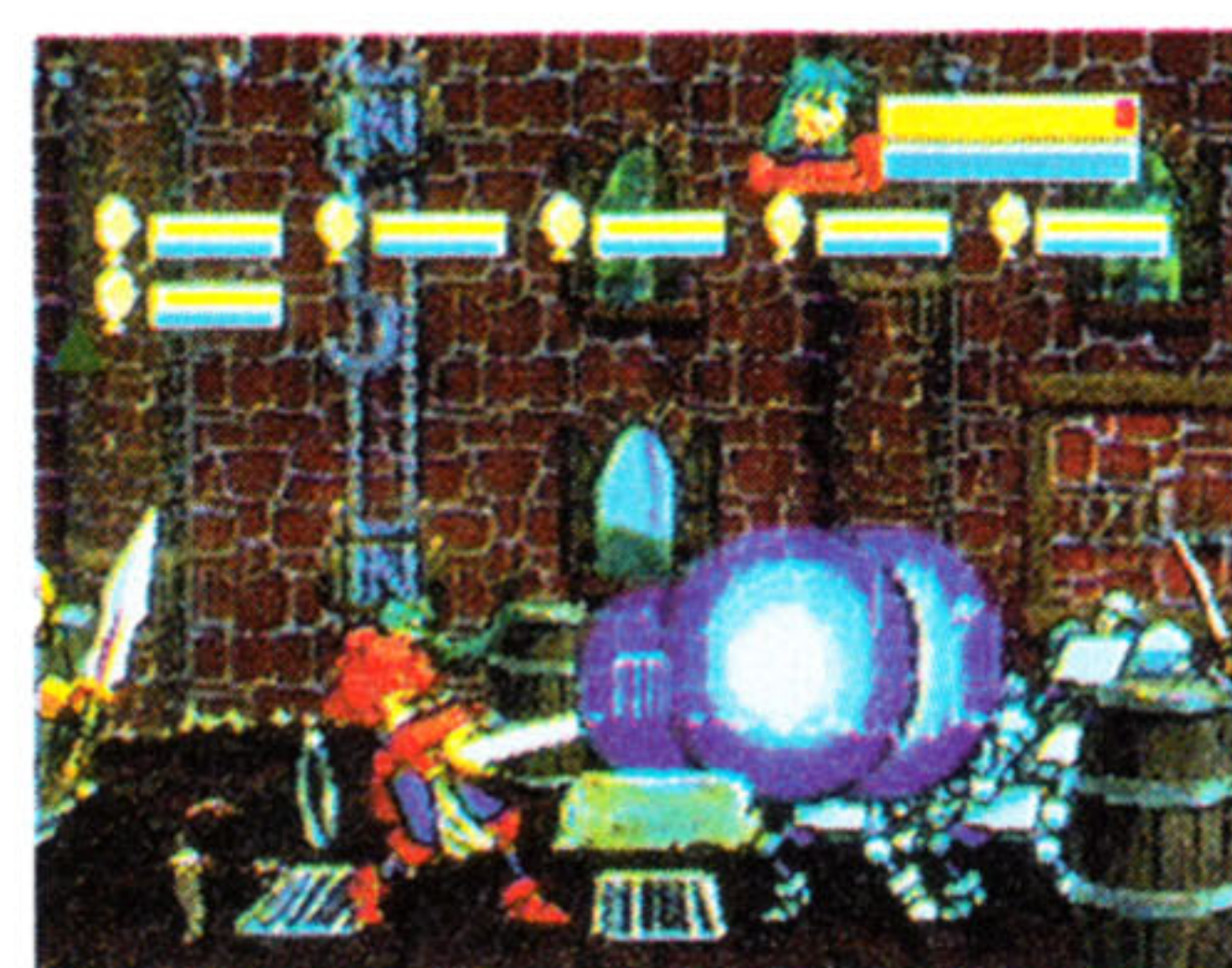
▲ The silhouette conveniently masks an arsenal of missiles and ammunition that would scare the Voxels out of a Comanche or Werewolf pilot.

Having almost gotten your Yankee butt shot off in Korea, Cyprus and Yemen in the former game, prepare to kiss your babushka goodbye as Hind's proud comrade in the Soviet Air Force is intent on making the world a better place for old-style communism. Your first mission will find you radically lowering property values in your very own Kazakhstan while quashing a Republic rebellion—

Guardian Heroes

Guardian Heroes takes the best elements of side-scrolling fighting games and mixes them with traditional RPG elements to create a truly unique battler for the Saturn

Publisher: Sega
Platform: Saturn
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Treasure
Release: April



The best part about the Vs. mode is that you can pick from up to 45 different characters...

▲ Multiple characters can fight on screen at the same time, and the Saturn's heavy-duty sprite engine makes the action flow smoothly.

enemies over multiple paths that, in total, add up to 30 different stages. In Vs. Mode, up to six players get together (with Sega's six-player tap) and fight to the finish in a virtual free for all. The best part about the Vs. Mode is that you can pick from up to 45 different characters, depending on how well you've done in

the Story Mode; every character you come across in Story Mode—even peasants and children—become playable characters in the Vs. Mode once you clear their particular stages.

The five main characters all have a variety of special moves and magic attacks, with Harn being the most well-rounded and Ginjiro having the most unique special moves. Serena is the fifth main character, and can't be accessed until you finish the game at least once. In addition to the main characters, you also gain the help of an NPC (non-playable

Guardian Heroes marks Treasure's first entry into the flourishing next-generation game market, and as we've come to expect from the talented development crew, it's full of non-stop action from the beginning to any of its multiple endings. Known as a "fighting-RPG" in Japan, Guardian Heroes takes the best elements of side-scrolling fighting games and mixes them with traditional RPG elements to create a truly unique experience on the Saturn.

At first glance, one might think that Guardian Heroes is just another run-of-the-mill side-scrolling fighter. A good second look, however, will reveal a lot more in the CD than just a mere Final Fight clone. The addition of several role-playing elements adds a touch of much-needed variety to the game, and the multiple paths, Street Fighter-style moves and great combo system help differentiate the game from the rest of the pack.

Not to be confused with Treasure's incredible Genesis title Gunstar Heroes, Guardian Heroes is the company's first-ever CD-ROM effort. The story line revolves around a group of five heroes out to put an end to the reign of the fraudulent Royal Family and their leader Balga, accomplished by harnessing the power of the mysterious "Royal Magical Sword."

There are two modes of play, Story Mode and Vs. Mode. In Story Mode, one or two players team up to do battle with the

GRAPHICS: **B+**

- + Beautifully drawn backgrounds and wild magic spell effects.
- Large characters get highly pixelated when up close to the screen.

SOUNDS: **A-**

- + Nicely orchestrated, mood-fitting video-game tunes.
- + Good all-around sound effects that add to the game's realism.

GAME PLAY: **B+**

- + Multiple-hit combos are very easy to pull off and are a delight to watch.
- +/- The gameplay doesn't offer anything outrageously new as far as strict fighting is concerned.

LASTING POWER: **A**

- + Multiple routes make for new experiences every time you play.
- + Plenty of in-game options and six-player support will keep you from losing interest too quickly.

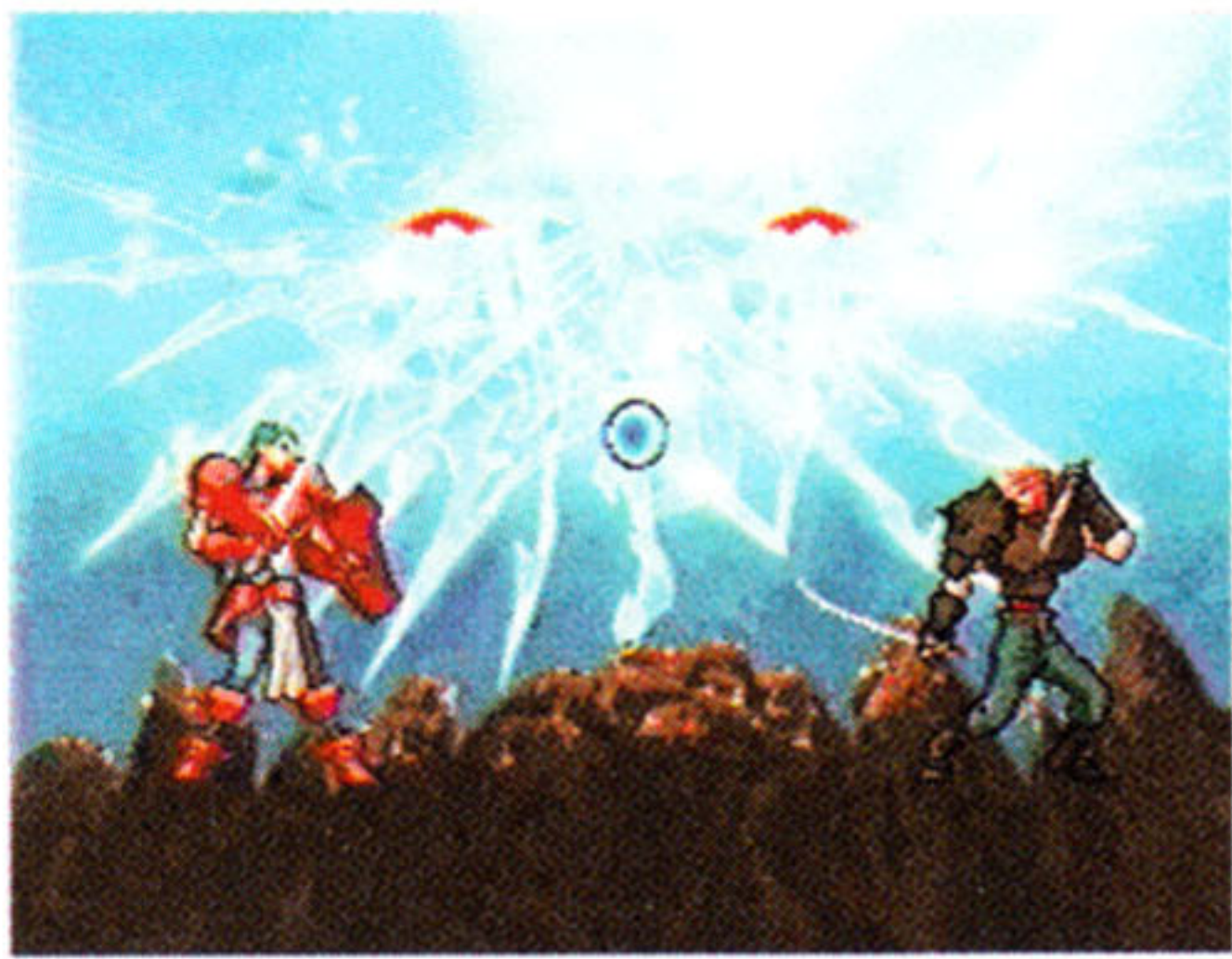
OVERALL: **A-**

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▲ The backgrounds in this game feature multiple levels of smooth parallax scrolling, and are quite diverse, from fiery lava caves to an arena.

character) known as "The Undead Hero," a zombie warrior with infinite strength who comes in handy often throughout the quest. Unlike Final Fight, where you move freely in a world with 3-D depth, GH's fighting takes place over three distinct planes of action: far, medium and near. While it could be argued that the game would play better had the characters been given freedom of lateral movement, it would be a hassle to try and pull off some of

the special moves that way, so it's probably better that the three-level method was used.

Juggling attacks are allowed, so multiple-hit juggling combos are rather common. Some purists may argue that 50+ hit combos are ridiculous, but personally, I can't begin to express how much I love being able to continually pound the daylight out of my enemies. You can even continue to juggle enemies after they've perished, and you'll still gain experience for it! Due to the game's tight, clean control, dishing out these combos is thankfully an easy task.

The graphics in Guardian Heroes are nicely done. The full-screen animated intro looks great, and is of the highest quality yet to be seen on the Saturn (similar to Magic Knight Rayearth). Backgrounds are filled with gorgeous artwork, and the multiple layers of parallax scroll quite smoothly. All of the characters have a strong anime feel to them, not unlike those found in Darkstalkers or Street Fighter Alpha; however, some of the characters are fairly huge and get horribly pixelized when scaled in towards the screen. There is a bit of slowdown too, particularly during a 2P game, but it never seems to kick in to the point of frustration. The magic spell effects are animated nicely, and some of the Boss magic and special attacks are truly spectacular, with multiple streams of lightning and other elemental forces filling the screen in vibrant explosions that really add to the excitement.

Guardian Heroes' audio has a



Adios, Konami— Hello, Treasure...

It isn't every day that a company comes along with as much talent as can be found at Treasure. Formed by a group of ex-Konami employees, Treasure has gone on to become one of the most impressive development houses in gaming today.

Before forming Treasure in June 1992, the group who brought us Guardian Heroes was just a bunch of creativity-hungry Konami employees who were eager to get out on their own to design an original game. Having worked on such immortal classics as Super Castlevania IV, Contra III and Axelay for the Super NES, the crew was ready to go with their first original effort, but when they presented the game Konami insisted that the game wouldn't sell. Having had enough, the team decided to leave Konami to start up a new company. Within a year, the newly-formed Treasure had produced its first game; the highly underrated but utterly superb action game, Gunstar

Heroes, under the Sega label.

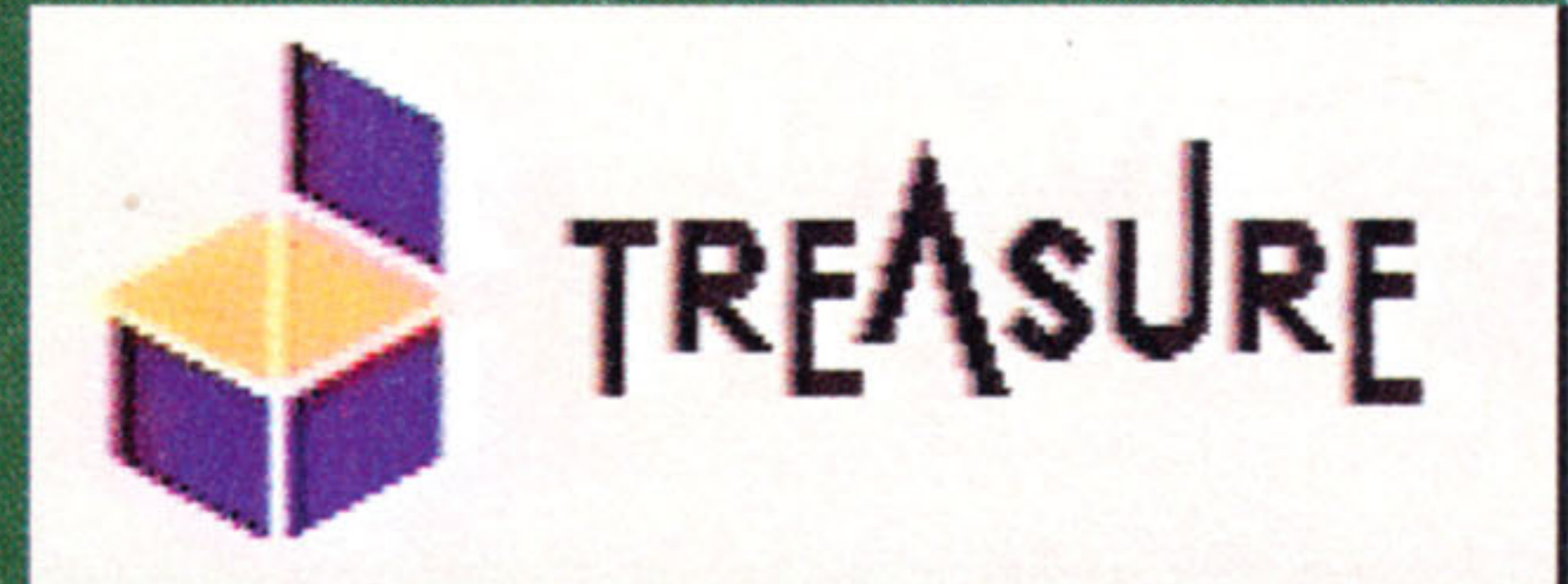
Gunstar obviously was inspired by Konami's Contra series, but had its own

share of original ideas, like the ability to throw enemies as well as shoot them, and a level that consisted of a board game (complete with dice).

Later on in the year, Sega had Treasure go to work on a new platformer bearing the McDonald's license, McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure. Unlike most big-name licensed games, this one was actually good, but again, thanks to a miniscule marketing effort by Sega—and who could blame them, it's McDonald's—it didn't do nearly as well as it could have. Following that title was another unique platform adventure, Dynamite Headdy which was released in early 1994. Headdy was an interesting character—a bug who could sling his head outward to grab platforms and attack enemies. Unfortunately, it too failed to make a big splash in the U.S. market. In September 1994, Treasure released YuYu Hakusho, considered to be one of the best fighters ever to hit the Mega Drive system. It's obvious that some of the elements of Guardian Heroes were taken directly from YuYu (most notably the multiplayer fighting concept), but since that game was never released in the U.S., it's doubtful that many gamers will even notice it.

Treasure's final two 16-Bit titles were Alien Soldier, a high-powered and highly difficult action game that never made it to the U.S., and Light Crusader, Treasure's first role-playing effort that bore a striking resemblance to Climax's blockbuster hit, LandStalker.

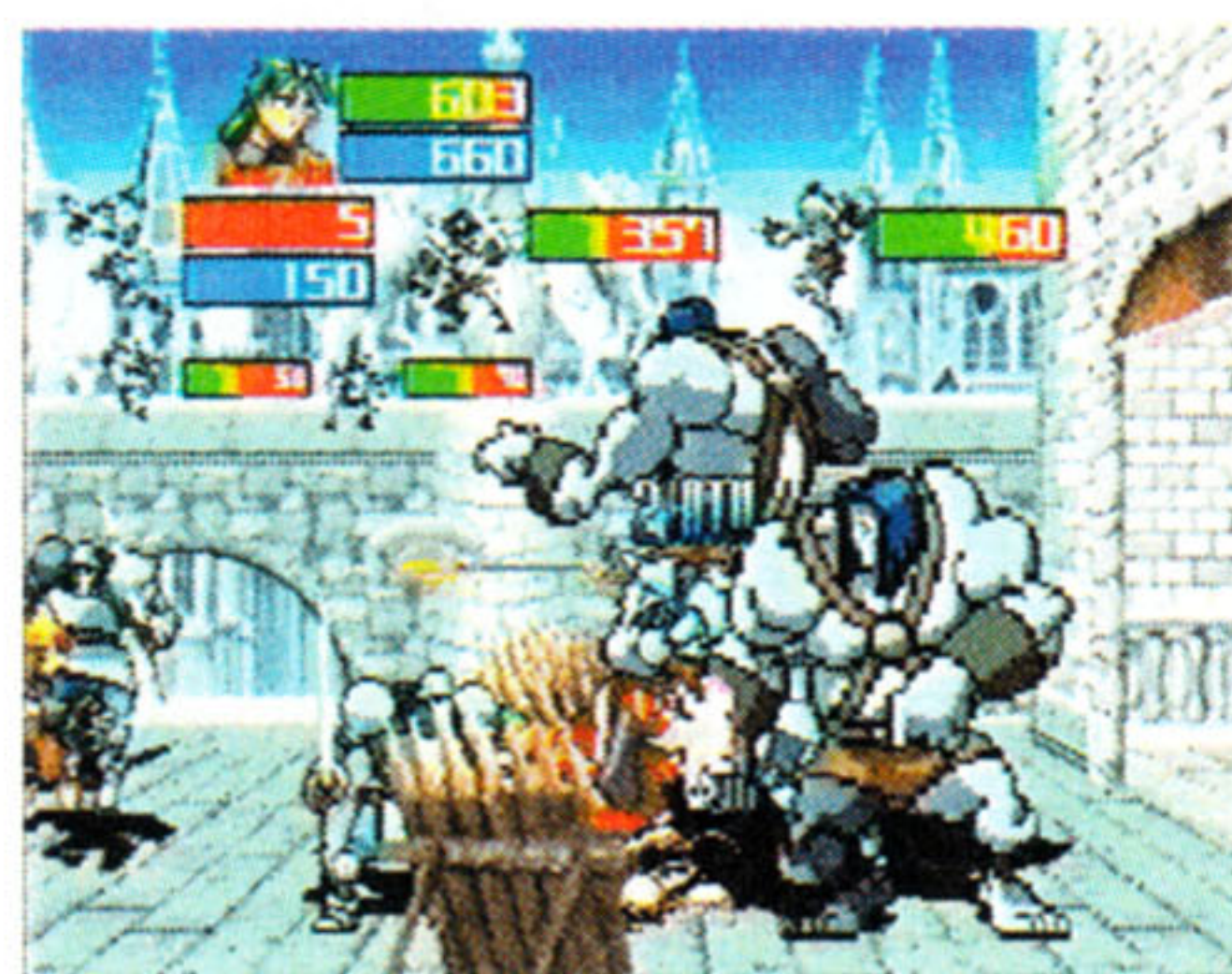
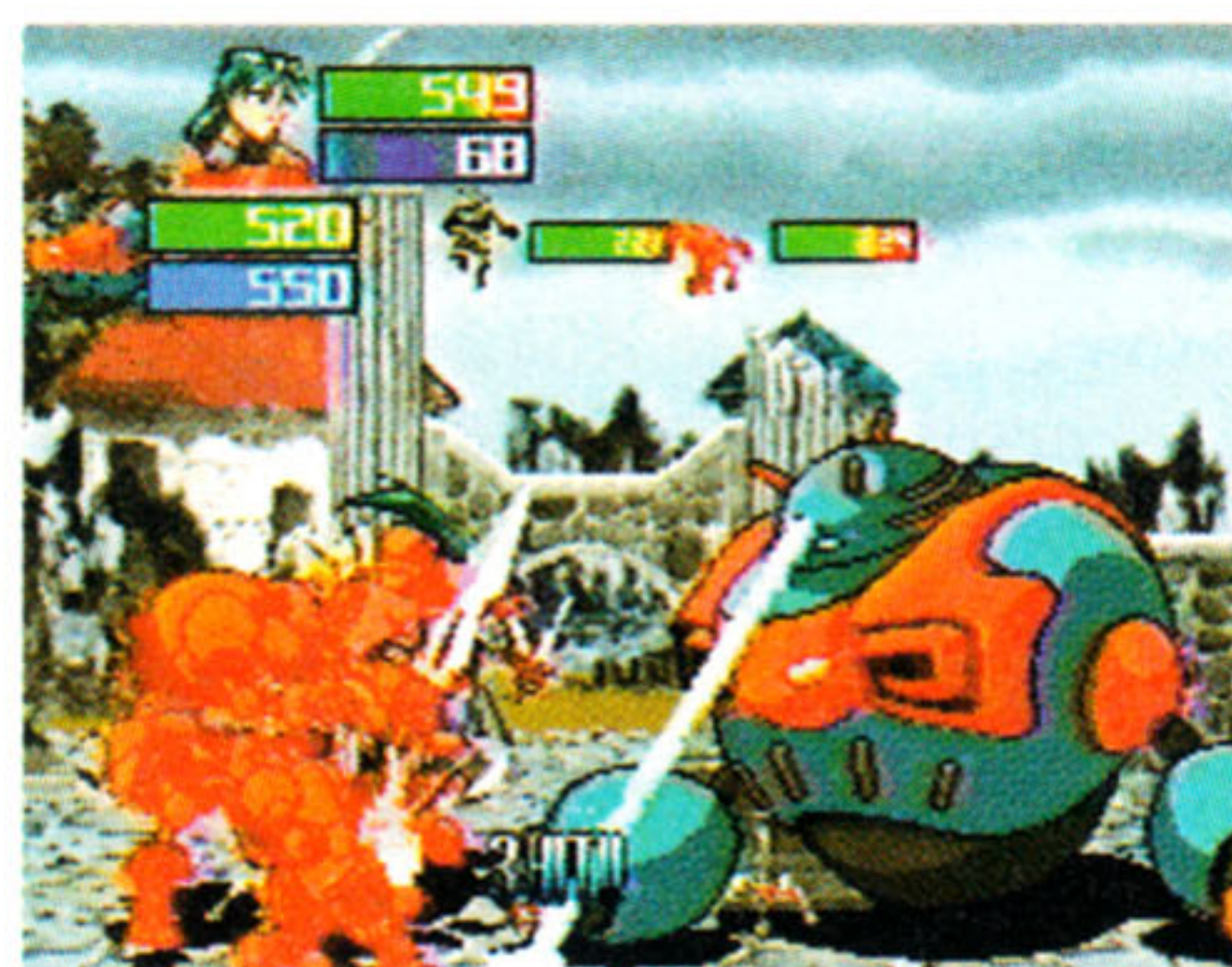
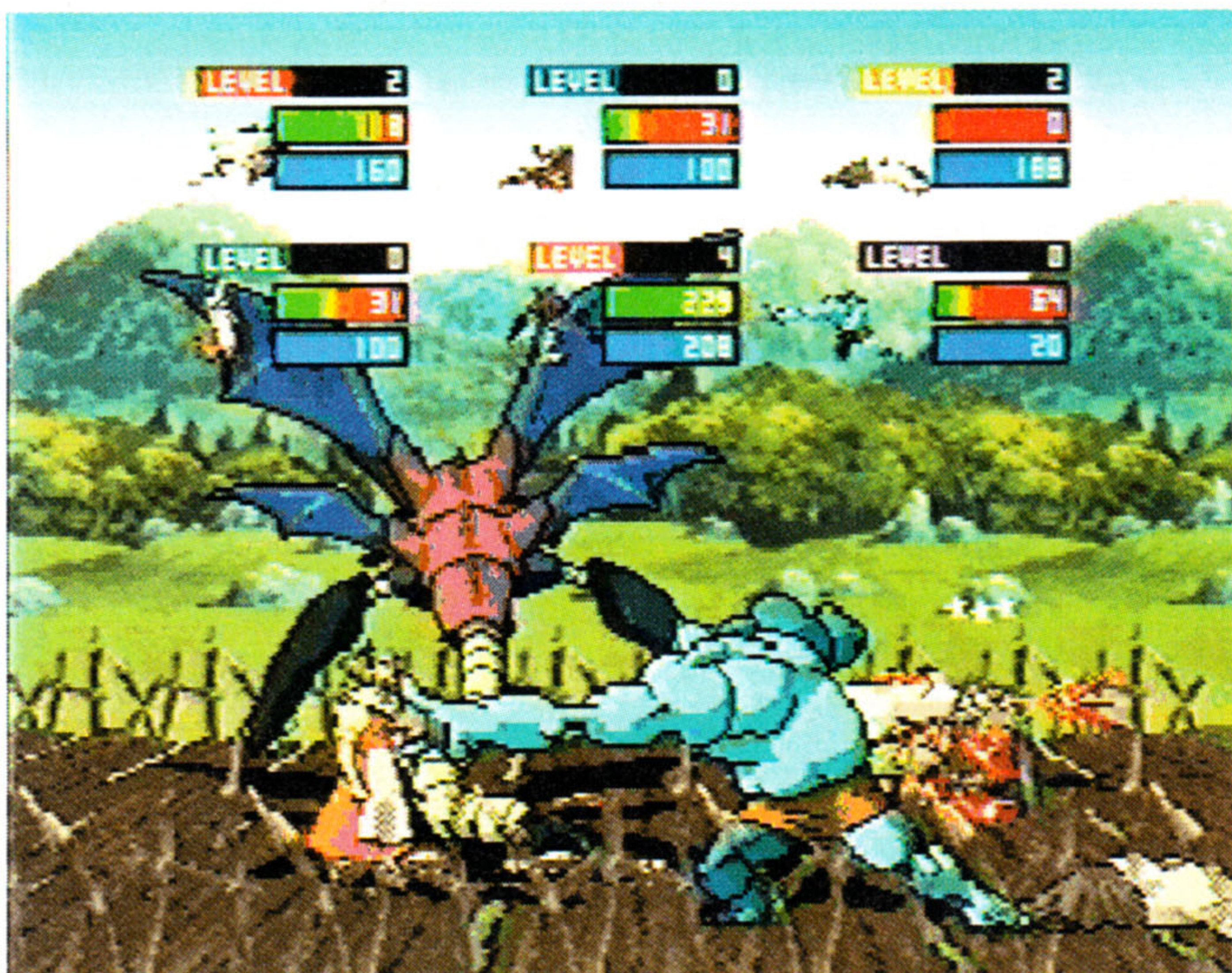
With the release of Guardian Heroes, Treasure prepares to enter its fourth year of game development, and their commitment to producing quality original software is still going strong. Did somebody say Gunstar Heroes 2?



Are you ready for Gunstar Heroes 2?

lot to offer. The music is well balanced and full of variety, though the soundtrack sounds decidedly like game music. Some tracks are fast-paced and upbeat, similar to the rock music found in the Castlevania series, while others have a more serious, orchestrated tone that seems to always mix well with the current surroundings. The sound effects are great, with every punch, slash, crackle and grunt coming in crystal-clear and really adding to the realism of the action. There isn't a lot of voice in the game other than the occasional one-line comment, but it doesn't detract from the game in any way.

Without a doubt, the most admirable trait of Guardian Heroes is that the game offers



“unlike most RPGs, Guardian Heroes lets you decide which skills get enhanced and which stay untouched”

a load of great features and options, ultimately leading up to great replay value. In both Story Mode and Vs. Mode, your character gains experience points for every hit they deliver. Just as in a traditional RPG, once your character's experience rises to a certain point, their level goes up, as do their abilities. However, unlike most RPGs, Guardian Heroes lets you decide which skills get enhanced and which stay untouched. After every major fight sequence, you are awarded points depending on how many levels you raised during that sequence. You then take the points and distribute them amongst various character attributes such as strength, defense and agility. So if you'd rather put all of your hard-earned points into making your character a barbarian of a man or a wizard at magic, the decision is in your hands to do so. In addition, the Story Mode offers multiple paths to choose from during the game, making for a new and different experience every time you play. After playing

▲ Many of the enemies you face (and characters that you can play in Vs. mode) are quite literally larger than life.

through the game four times, I witnessed a variety of changes in the story line and even fought three different end Bosses. As a bonus, when you finish the game, not only do you gain the use of the extra character (Serena), but some extra features are added to the Options Screen, including an option to add a small bar above your HP meter notifying you of how much more experience you need before reaching the next level.

Three separate difficulty levels are offered, and all three take their names to the extreme. The Easy setting offers practically no challenge whatsoever and almost guarantees a quick and easy romp through the game. Normal offers a moderately challenging quest, but nothing most skilled gamers won't be able to handle within a day or two of play. The Hard setting takes the game to

the extreme however, cutting your available continues to just three (from nine at the other two skill levels) and offering a good deal of challenge. Speaking of continues, there are great continue options available. When you lose, you are given three choices: continue from the exact spot of your demise, continue from the beginning of the stage or save and continue at a later time. Even better, if you have to leave abruptly, you can hold A, B and C while pressing START to initiate the Saturn's auto-reset, and the game will save your place for you!

All in all, Guardian Heroes is a solid game that will not only appeal to fans of the fighting genre, but to fans of heavy-hitting action games as well. The additional RPG overtones help set it apart from mainstream fighting titles, and that tried and true Treasure touch help to push GH over the edge of typical side-scrolling mediocrity into a class all its own—above the rest.

-John Ricciardi

The Bottom Line

Treasure's initial 32-Bit effort adds a unique twist to the traditional Golden Axe style fighter by adding a touch of RPG to the action. The result is an enjoyable game that provides plenty of thrills and great replay value. Recommended for anyone into heavy action games and side-scrolling fighters.

The video sequences are the most impressive graphics you'll find in *Shining Wisdom*, but the solid gameplay makes up for the so-so in-game art.

Shining Wisdom

Less than 32-Bit artwork is okay... but only when the game has Zelda-quality play

Publisher: Working Designs

Platform: Sega Saturn

Format: 1 CD-ROM

Developer: Sonic Team/Sega

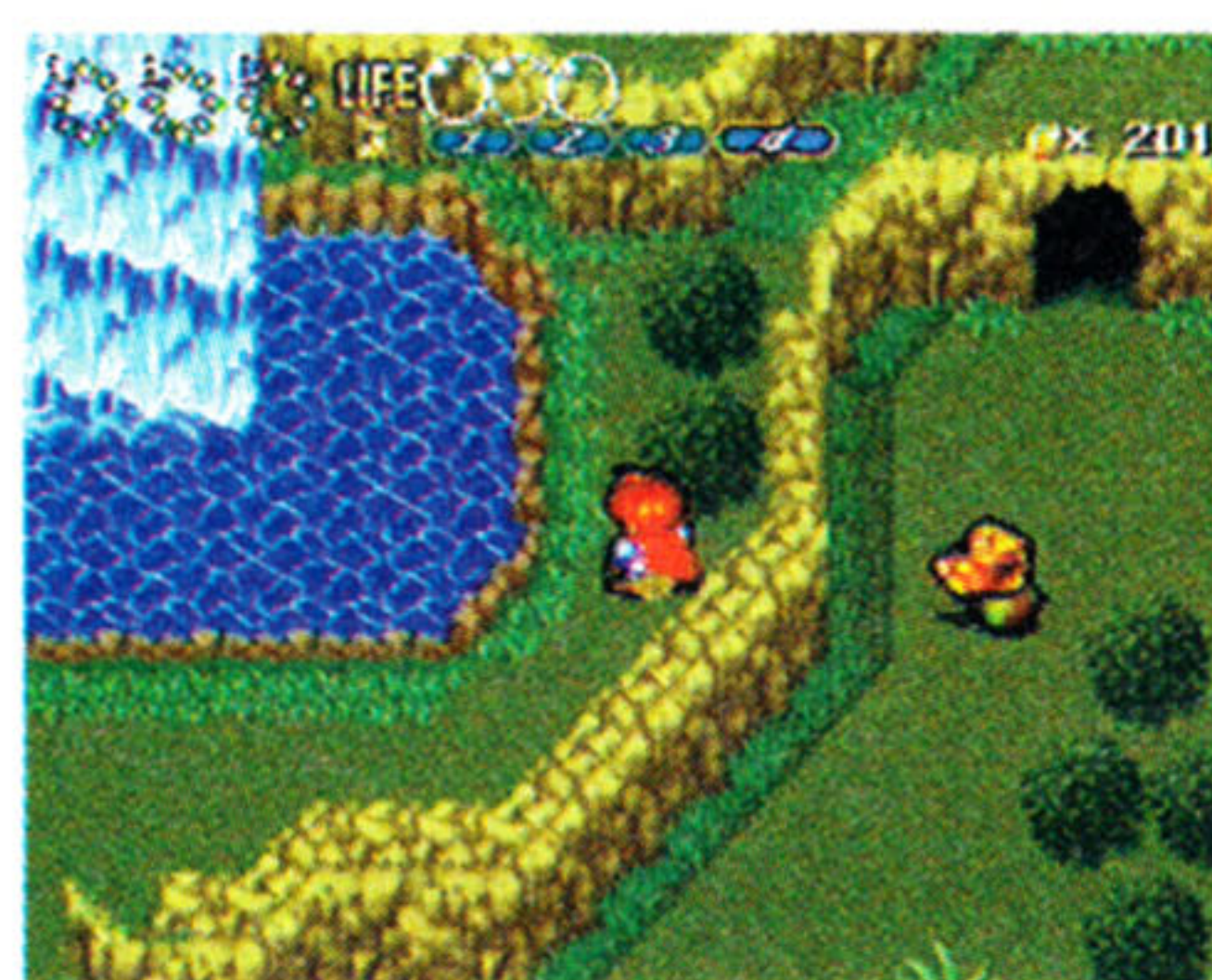
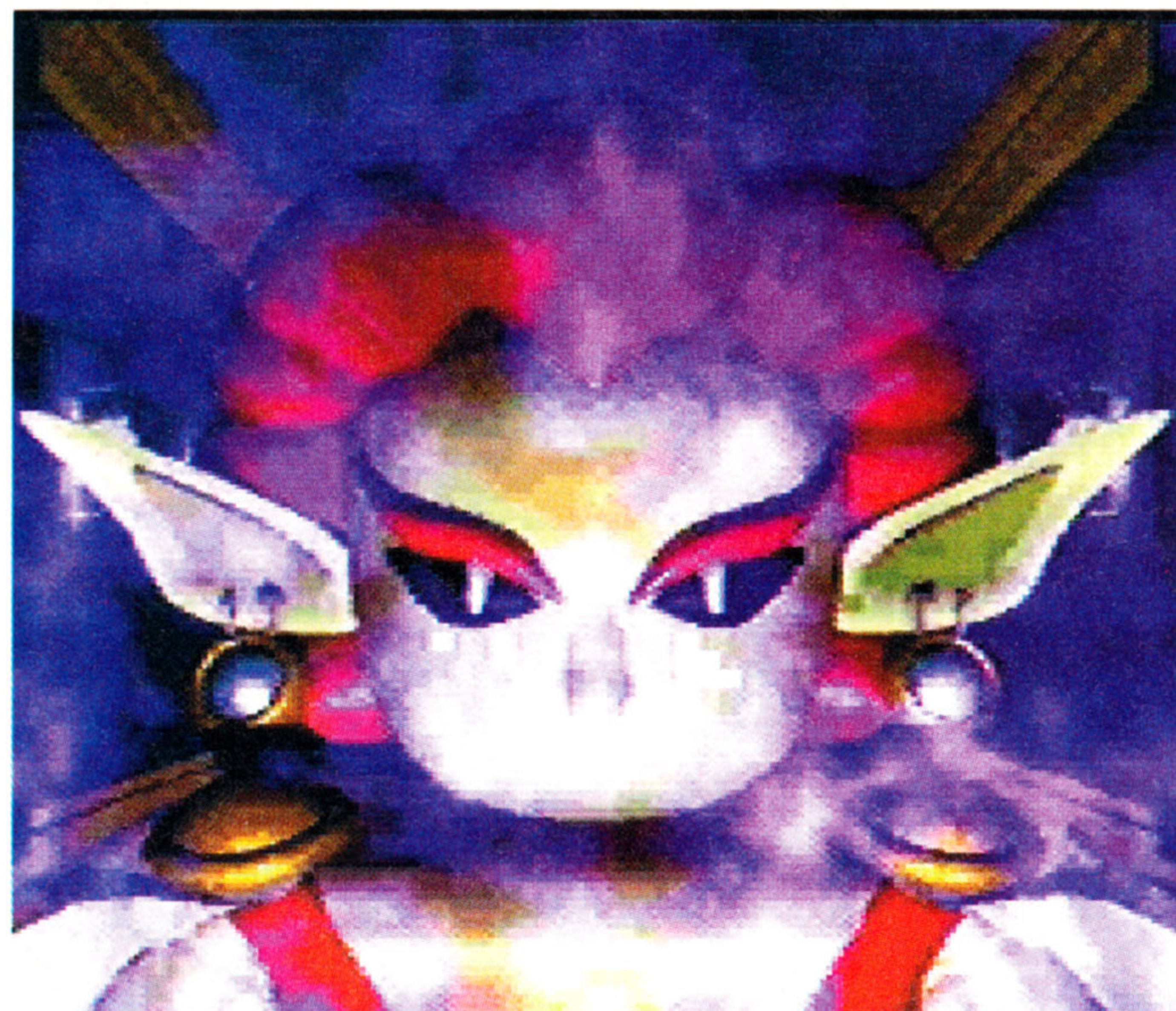
Release: Late April



▲ SGI character designs aren't quite as striking as those in games from DKC to Super Mario RPG...and those are 16-Bit titles.

While Mario adventures are certainly system-sellers, the Zelda games have always been another major reason to own a Nintendo system. Sega of Japan's Sonic Team, the group responsible for the somewhat Mario-esque Sonic the Hedgehog and RPG/strategy "Shining" (Darkness/Force) games, among others, has now come up with an answer to the Zelda games: *Shining Wisdom*. By design, players will notice the similarities from the very first moment they sit down with the game. A teenage boy sets out to Castle Odegan, filled with dreams of knighthood and adventure. Upon arrival, our hero finds himself placed on guard duty protecting the princess and, following a bizarre series of events, is knighted. Our hero is then given the task of defeating Pazort, an elven wizard, and preventing him from reviving an evil being with the power contained within the four elemental Djinns.

As with the Zelda games, *Shining Wisdom* is decidedly item-acquisition oriented; finding new items not only allows players access to new areas, but also leads to the discovery of additional items for the observant player. For example, near the beginning of the game, players will see a vine. At the other end of the vine is a handy item for regaining life after death, but players will not be able to reach that object until they discover the monkey suit, an item found later in the game. The items and weapons are also required to defeat the large Bosses, many of which require special strategies to defeat—does this sounding familiar yet? In addition to the gloves, suits and other items scattered throughout the dungeons, players will also eventually discover the orbs of the Djinn. Equipping an orb will grant our hapless teen with elemental powers often used for both attack and transportation purposes. The game's map is large indeed and features a number of



▲ "Hey, man, don't forget to translate the text about Pachinko machines before bringing this game out."

"Sonic Team...has now come up with an answer to the Zelda games."

large, puzzle-ridden dungeons to explore.

Other than the dead-on Zelda impersonation in terms of game style and enjoyment, *Shining Wisdom* is not likely to blow gamers out of their seats. While the monster and character graphics are

SGI-rendered, one has to wonder why Sonic Team needed SGI machines at all: The character design resembles that of Lego men and Fisher Price children's toys, and while fluidly animated, they do not even begin to show what SGI machines are capable of.

With that said, the graphics are far from bad, but hardly anything to get even mildly excited about. The tile-based terrain could have been duplicated on a 16-Bit system without a hitch, and as a matter of fact, most of the game could have been done on a 16-Bit system. Transparency and scaling effects abound, but nothing taxes the Saturn's 2-D power the slightest bit. *Shining Wisdom's* sound is also reminiscent of the 16-Bit era, and would be easily achievable on a Super NES.

While a few catchy tunes are hidden in *Shining Wisdom's* soundtrack, the music in general is decidedly mediocre PCM tunes. The sound effects are equally unimpressive. *Shining Wisdom's* control is smooth as silk, save the small annoyance of having to build up running speed by rapidly tapping a button.

While the version we've previewed was in English, we're anxiously waiting on an updated version with a complete reworking of the text, hopefully complete with some of Working Designs' trademark humor. Hopefully, Working Designs will opt to fix a few of the game's minor flaws, with such meaningful tweaks as letting players simply hold the run button to build up speed and adding some dialogue to the introduction so players will have some idea of what is going on.

So far, *Shining Wisdom* is a great playing game, if still a work in progress aesthetically. While the graphics and sound will not change, the final U.S. version of the game will hopefully benefit from a good translation and a few minor gameplay tweaks.

- Peter Bartholow

Once a toy is launched, it's on its own in the struggle to cross the playfield horizontally and exit from the opposite edge



Gearheads

Take a surreal journey to the land of battling toys

Publisher: Philips Media

Platform: PC-CD-ROM

Format: 1 CD

Developer: R/GA

Release: April

Fans of the hit 1995 animated movie *Toy Story* will instantly grasp both the charm and the logic of Gearheads. Gamers wage realtime battles with a force entirely composed of ram-bunctious mechanical wind-up toys.

Don't be deceived by the cartoon-like cuteness and slap-stick interaction. Like Q*bert and Earthworm Jim, Gearheads' challenge and subtlety belie its whimsical art and animation. Beneath the gingerbread is a lightning-quick contest that requires a lot of practice to play well.

This game's brilliance shows most vividly in its play-mechanic, not the rulebook. The Gearheads instructions would barely fill a page in *IG's FUSION*, with plenty of room left for illustrations. A quick scan of the tiny folder or the on-screen help module is enough to get anyone playing within minutes.

As with Tetris, that's just the first step on a long journey. It only takes a few minutes to play a round of Gearheads, but there are so many possible moves and interactions that it is capable of holding the most demanding computerists' interest through many entertaining hours.

Indirect control, the same element that made Lemmings such a favorite, is the catalyst for the sometimes-chaotic action in



50 progressively tougher levels. The game accelerates after each level. Only someone with fast fingers as well as quick wits will ever see level 50 or beyond.

Every fourth level is a single-toy duel. Originally intended as bonus duels, the one-toy face-offs are now analogous to the Bosses which guard the end of each level

Scott.Zafran@Aimla.com

in a platform side-scroller. The one-toy duels are an excellent way to study toy interaction, but the gamer must win those rounds in order to keep advancing through the levels.

Two-player showdowns against the computer or another human are the focus of Gearheads. A Computer vs. Computer Option would've been a useful learning aid, but few will actually suffer from its absence.

The three difficulty settings (Gearheads Huh?, Gearheads and Gearmaster) are more than mere

Beneath the gingerbread is a lightning-quick contest that requires a lot of practice to play well.

Gearheads. Once the gamer launches a toy, it's on its own in the struggle to cross the playfield horizontally and exit from the opposite edge.

The Gearheads program offers two solitaire versions. One assigns toys at random, while the other gives the player a chance to pick specific ones. Obviously, the former option is mostly for those who want to get right into the game.

The single-player challenge teases the grey matter with over



◀ It's a question of quality or quantity when winding up attack toys in this cartoon-like but lightning-quick contest.

GRAPHICS:

A+

- + Crisp lines and major color schemes.
- + Very well done lighting effects and shadowing.
- + Almost cartoon-like in texture.

SOUNDS:

A-

- + Sounds are well-sampled and in stereo.
- + Robots' differing sounds give them added personality
- Volume seemed to cut in and out at times.

GAMEPLAY:

A

- + Full freedom of motion.
- + Advanced bot AI.
- At times the movements of the characters seemed too awkward.

LASTING POWER:

A

- + Many unique levels to keep you entertained.
- + High difficulty levels are very challenging.
- + Characters behave a little differently each time through
- Sometimes it gets a little redundant.

OVERALL: A

Intelligent Gamer
"HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"



speed adjustments. In duels against the computer, difficulty reflects the depth of the artificial intelligence (AI) that powers the robot adversary. "Gearhead Huh?" generates a digital foe that just pumps the pieces onto the field and hopes for the best.

At the "Gearmaster" setting, the AI takes into account long-range as well as immediate goals. The computer will actually sacrifice a point or two if it paves the way for a big scoring opportunity.

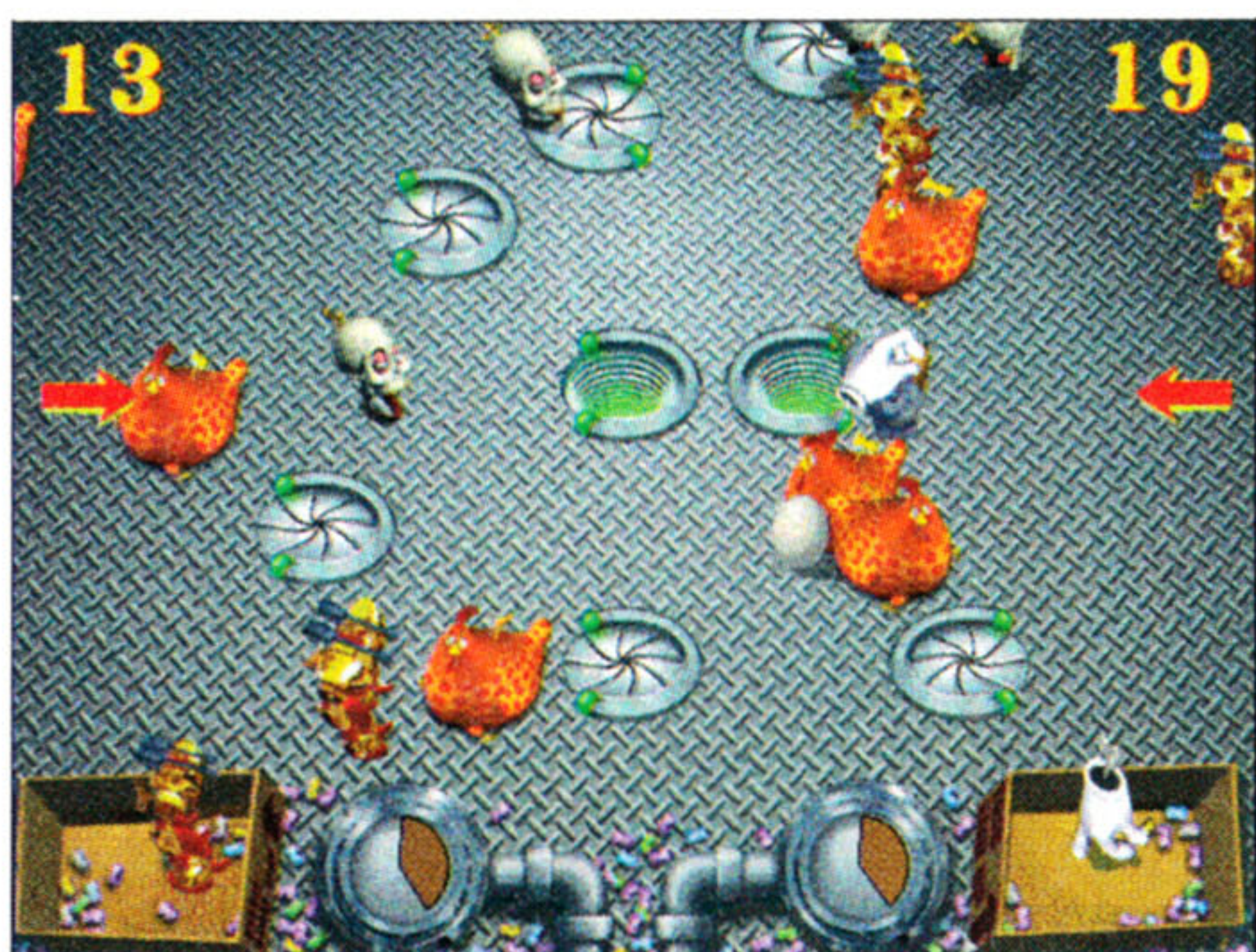
"Gearheads is a breath of fresh air in a computer software field plagued by imitation."

As with many classic games, Gearheads' play-procedures and victory conditions are exceptionally clear-cut. A toy box for each

that deflect scoring drives. The factory also has teleporters, which force the development of innovative strategies to cope with such rapid movement.

R/GA made its reputation with cinematic special effects. It brings the same high audiovisual standards to the interactive screen. The technical quality of

Ephraim Cohen's coding is impressive, especially the way complex objects



◀ The complexion of the game varies by the basic playfields: kitchens, frozen ponds, gardens and factories.

clockwork army is located in a bottom corner of the main display screen, one on the left and the other on the right.

A pair of keys chooses a toy from the box. Then the player winds it up. How much to wind each toy is a prime tactical consideration. Too little and the toy grinds to a halt in the middle of the screen, but taking time to fully wind every toy may allow the opponent to overwhelm the defense by sheer force of numbers. After setting the toy's desired entry point, a final keystroke launches the mechanical marvel into action.

There are four basic playfields: kitchens, frozen ponds, gardens and factories. The complexion of Gearheads varies tremendously, depending on which type is currently active. Kitchens are a good place for beginners to sample the action, because they incorporate relatively few obstacles and diversions.

The factory is full of hazards

move across the screen without telltale aliasing under Win95 is particularly noteworthy.

Face-to-face Gearheads provides no solution to the frustrating problem of trying to put two people at one keyboard. Philips is mulling a network enhancement, but many will choose to play solitaire until it is available.

Also coming is a Macintosh version of the game, which should roll into stores this month.

Gearheads is a breath of fresh air in a computer software field plagued by imitation. Although the excitement level is only middling for a realtime title, the clever game system makes it a real treat for brain-gamers.

— Arnie Katz

The Toy Box

The wind-up wonders are a combined arms force with highly individualized strengths. The successful player strives to gain favorable matchups and orchestrate combinations of toys that sweep across the board for batches of points.

Here's a quick guide to the contents of the Gearheads toy box:

Disasteroid:

This science-fiction monster blasts through any toy unlucky enough to get in its path. It's a terrific counter to a mass attack.



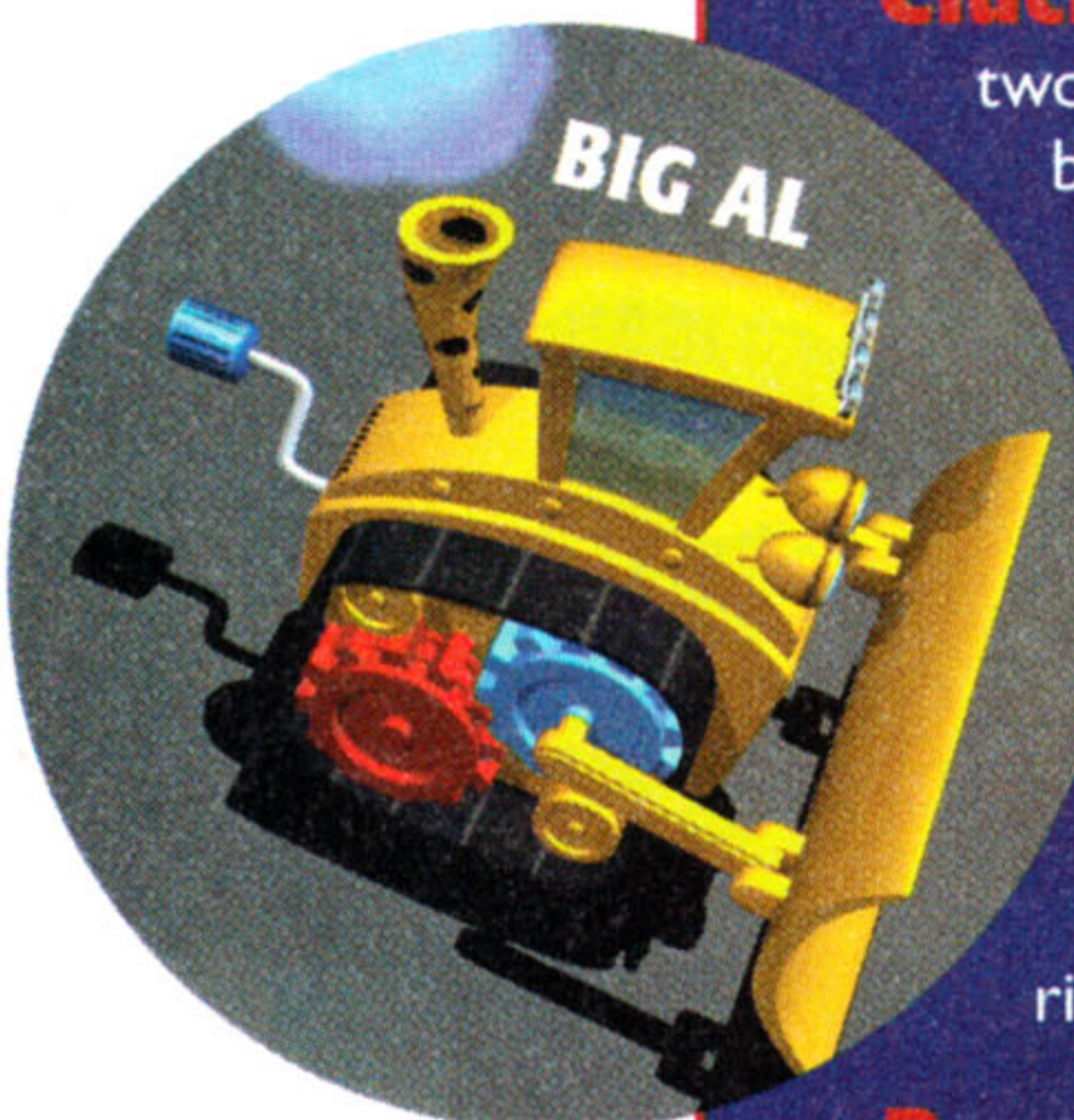
Deadhead: When this stalwart defender bumps into an opposition toy, it causes a reversal of direction. This boomerang effect sometimes causes a player's toy to score points for the opposition.

Clucketta: This is a two-stage toy. The original bird lays an egg which hatches into a scampering chick.



Big Al:

The animated bulldozer possesses more physical strength than the other wind-ups. It can plow into an enemy and push it right off the edge of the playfield.

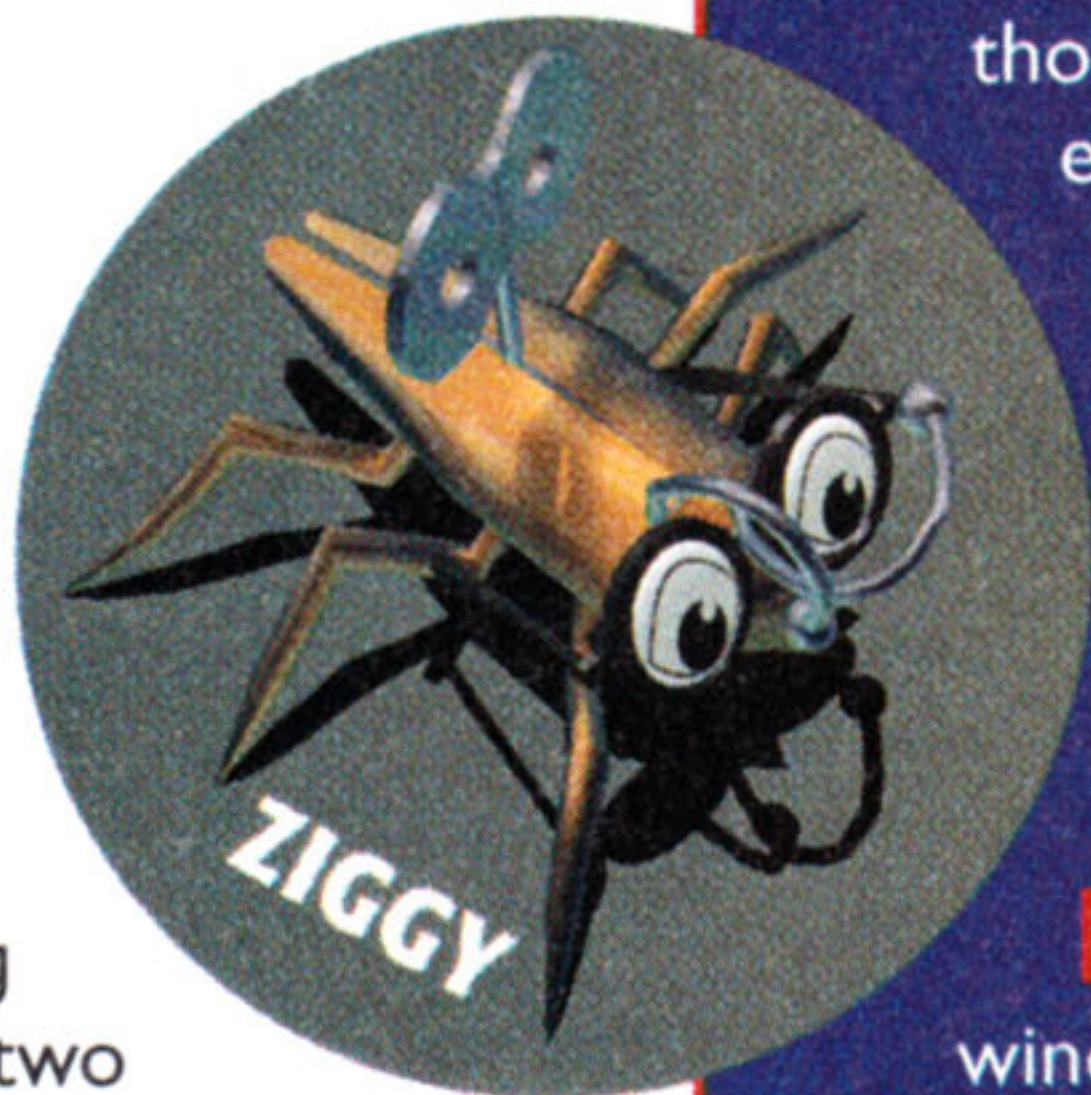


Presto: This mechanical magician has a disappearing act that's hard to stop.

Krush Kringle: This wrestling Santa Claus is another direction-switcher. It is more powerful, though, so it affects any nearby enemy toys.



Ziggy: Ziggy the roach is the fastest wind-up in the game. Ziggy can dash for a quick score, especially when the playfield is temporarily under-populated.



Handy: Always ready to lend a hand, Handy winds up run-down toys on the playfield.

Zap-bot: Watch the sparks fly as this rickety robot electrifies oncoming toys.

Walking Timebomb:

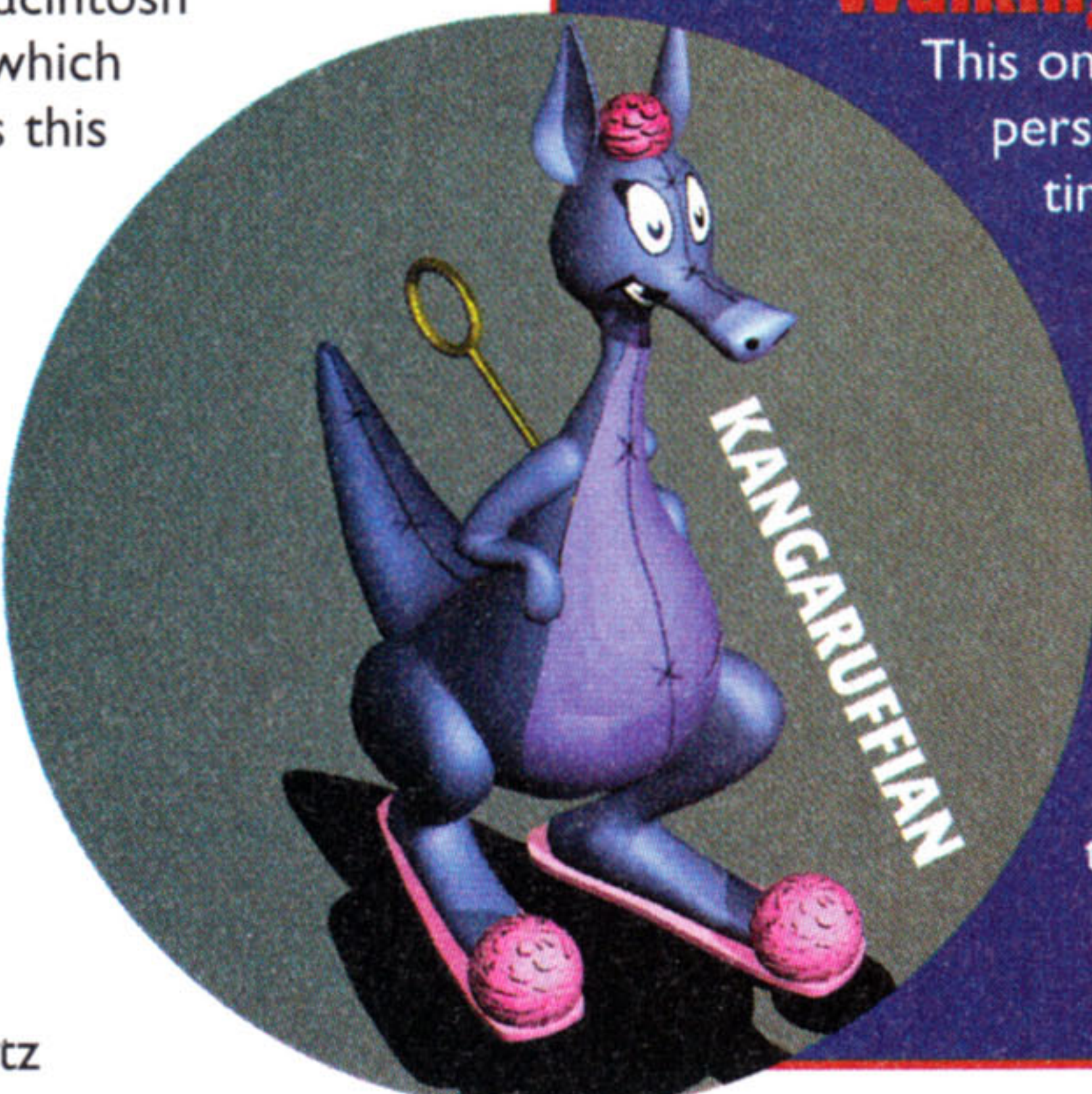
This one has an explosive personality with a timed fuse.



Orbit:

The unidentified flying object bobs and weaves past enemy toys.

Kangaruffian: A pugilist from down under, Kangaruffian punches through anything in her path.



High Concept in High Gear

Many Americans now look toward political outsiders to bring fresh attitudes to the U.S. Presidency. Similarly, electronic gaming is counting on talented newcomers like Eric Zimmerman to reinvigorate a software market plagued by imitation.

"I conceived Gearheads at R/GA with another designer, Frank Lantz," says Zimmerman, co-author of the action-strategy game for PC and Macintosh. "We wanted to create a game that presents a new play-pattern. We wanted a fun, addictive game that has real-time action, but that doesn't fall into one of the ruts of game design. You see a very limited handful of different genres of games. There are platform scrollers, point-of-view shooters, overhead shooters, driving games, fighting games, sports games. There aren't that many. What we wanted to do is present a game with a new kind of interactivity."

That's a lofty goal for a first-time game designer, but Zimmerman was no stranger to either gaming or technology when he marched into R/GA with the ink hardly dry on his MSA from the Advanced Computer Center at Ohio State University. "Gearheads is my first game, but I've worked with technology in several contexts."

Zimmerman also brought a lifelong love for all forms of gaming to his

"Actually, winding is the secret, hidden art of Gearheads." - Eric Zimmerman

first project. "It's definitely games that have led me to technology," he observes. "I have designed games since I was young, in elementary school. I've always had a penchant for designing non-digital games. I made a Mother's Day game for my mom one year. In high school, I was very much into role-playing games, so it seemed like a natural place for me to go."

"I joined R/GA's interactive unit and sat in on a design discussion for another game," he says of his first days on the job. "As a game designer, I think my strengths are as a conceptual designer and also as a writer." He worked on a promotional CD-ROM, but Gearheads is his first product to reach the commercial market.

Zimmerman and Philips Media's project manager Jenny Sward believe that an innovative design philosophy paved the way for the unique interactive experience of Gearheads. "Frank and I and others in our design team share a concept we call 'risomatic gaming.' A risome is a kind of plant-like grass, as opposed to a tree. A tree grows vertically and hierarchically. Grass grows horizontally rather than vertically, and it's never clear exactly where the grass begins and where it ends...There's a certain amount of chaos in its growth."

"We like games that are nonlinear in structure. The whole idea of Gearheads is that, with the 12 wind-up toys, it's almost like there are 12 different particles with different properties. You set them loose, let them bounce into each other and you end up making a sort of little chaos engine. Through that engine, surprising behavior arises."

"We wanted to make a game that would surprise us. Gearheads definitely has. Because there are 12 different characters, and each one interacts with all the others, there are still things that surprise us after playing it intensely for a year and a half."

"One of the really interesting things about Gearheads," adds Sward, "is that there are things they didn't expect to have happen." A typically surprising interaction yielded the strategy of sending Krush Kringle, then

Zimmerman and Lantz have created chaos in Gearheads with wind-up toys running loose in different directions.

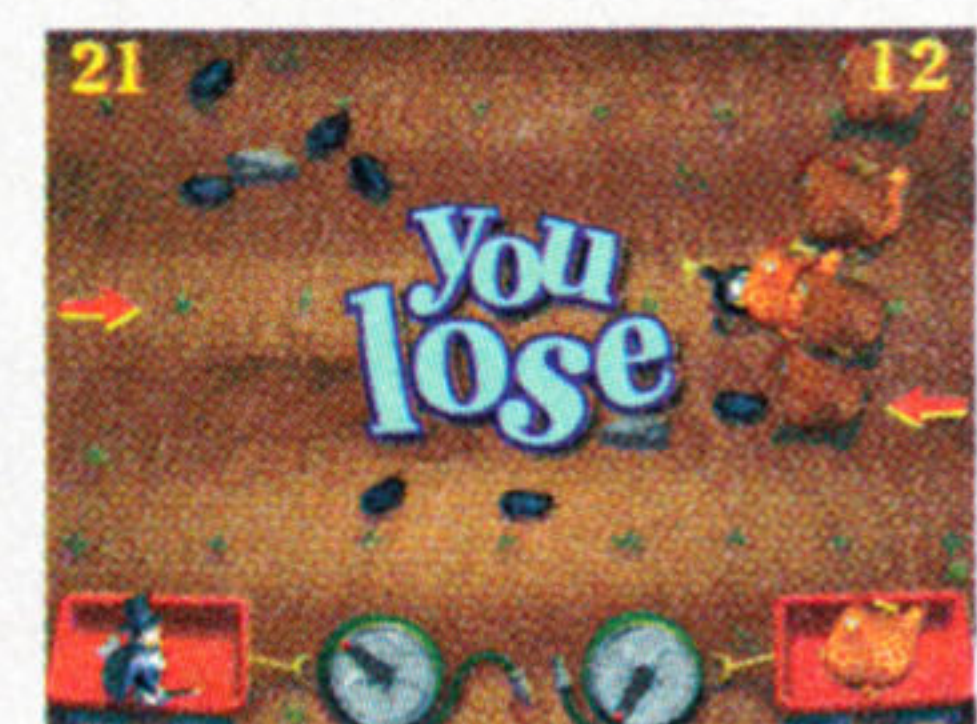


Handy and then another Krush, which makes Handy shuttle back and forth between the two winding up both of them. "That's not something we expected to happen, but it was very cool when it did."

Zimmerman and Lantz came up with the kernel of the game in fall 1994 and official production started in January 1995. The R/GA design group came to Philips Media with more than a vague paper dream, explains Jenny Sward. "They started off with an early prototype immediately rather than spending a lot of time designing and then implementing at a later date. R/GA got a working version early that everyone could play."

R/GA's outstanding track record, which includes graphics work on everything from *Last Action Hero* to Paula Abdul's Coke commercials, gives its designers confidence that what they imagine can be made real. "We almost have the luxury of taking for granted that our games are going to look great, sound great and feel great. The challenge is to create an experience for the player."

"Right from the start, we knew that we wanted it to be made out of reshufflable elements," Zimmerman says. The nature of those elements changed several times during the project's first stage. A military-themed version called *Generals* had some of the elements, but it lacked the concept of launching the units.



Choose from 12 different toys to wind up and let loose in the chaotic action of Gearheads.

Control was direct in *Generals*, but the emphasis shifted to indirect control as the development cycle continued. It was only when Lantz and Zimmerman removed

direct control from the one-toy duels that Gearheads' play-mechanics attained final form. "The toys add the concept of winding," notes Zimmerman. "Actually, winding is the secret, hidden art of Gearheads."

"We knew that we wanted it to be something with very simple controls that led to complex behaviors and game effects that we like to call emergent complexity."

"We put lead programmer Ephraim Cohen onto the project. He's been doing pioneering graphics since the 1970s. We sort of stole him from the R/GA graphics department," Zimmerman states. "In one month he banged out a prototype for Gearheads, based on the specs Frank and I gave him." Zimmerman's awe at Ephraim Cohen's technical expertise is boundless. "He'll write a screen saver during a lunch break," the designer says.

The AI program went through progressive elaborations. "It began with a table of weights," says Zimmerman. "If there is a certain number of toys on the board, the computer would tend to go toward this toy rather than that toy. That ultimately didn't prove to be enough. It didn't give the computer an edge. So then we had to add specific toy-to-toy strategies." This created some problems for Cohen, because the designers were constantly adjusting the relative power of the pieces.

"What really made the difference was making the AI offensive as well as defensive," Zimmerman suggests. "We had gotten the AI to the point where it could keep a human player from scoring, but it didn't know about letting a few points go by in order to score 10 or 12 more. Even Frank and I lose almost all the time against the computer when playing 12 toys."

BattleSphere

Garage
Development
Team 4Play
Primes a Rarity:
Hot Jag Software

Publisher: 4Play
Platform: Jaguar
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: 4Play
Release: Third Quarter 96

Top Five Ways Atari Can Sell More Jaguar 64s

5. Paste "Ultra" stickers over "Jaguar" on the boxes—hey, it's not like Nintendo is using it!

4. Fire most employees, alienate majority of user-base, merge with disk drive company (sorry, that one might not be realistic).

3. Five words: Super Fight For Life Turbo.

2. Explain to classic game collectors that, like most other Atari products, the hardware and software will be hard to find and deemed worth owning 20 years from now.

1. Announce tie-in promotion with Tramiel Family action figures.

In an apartment south of UCLA, pilots fight for control of the universe. This is the home of Scott LeGrand and Stephanie Wukovitz, half of the Jaguar developer team 4Play. For two years, between biochemistry studies and full-time jobs, they've been writing a game called BattleSphere, and as it nears completion, *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION* paid a visit to preview the game and talk about the developers' lives.

Before the BattleSphere

BattleSphere was started in 1993, when Scott, fresh from graduate studies, wanted to write a video game. Though 3DO wasn't interested, Atari liked his proposal for "Star Battle," a space combat simulator from his early days of developing home computer games. With friend Doug "Thunderbird" Engel, girlfriend Stephanie and associate Tom Harker of ICD, 4Play was formed.

4Play has achieved notoriety among Atarians for simultaneously praising the Jaguar and attacking Atari, often doing both frankly. "They should have pushed the networking," says Scott. "If you have a weakness, you emphasize your strengths. You don't try to overcome your weakness in a Hover Strike." He's also frustrated about Atari's lack of support for third-party vendors including ICD, noting, "we're on our own."

Still, Scott truly loves the Jaguar architecture. "I really like the display chip and the RISC processors. A few changes in the blitter and it would have been perfect, but you can't have everything." He insists that, "if I had two years and no pressure, we could get up to two-thirds the performance of the PlayStation, or at least the illusion of it."

Entering the BattleSphere

"BattleSphere" refers to a region of space where future beings of the universe settle disputes with starship duels. Strap in and fire away—it's X-Wing meets Doom. Another gamer can play gunner, and a Star Raiders-style "save the galaxy from the invaders" scenario is available, but BattleSphere's greatest strength is in networking. With Atari's JagLink, two machines can be connected, and with ICD's improved Catbox peripheral, up to eight Jaguars can be connected for multiplayer carnage.



▲ Early shots of the game reveal an atmosphere similar to that of the *Wing Commander* series minus the cats and Mark Hamill, and plus floating bodies.

and whimsical chunks of debris that zip right by. The climactic game music is reminiscent of John Williams, with a soundtrack for each ship style.

Still, Scott is braced for criticisms, especially from those who reflexively dislike everything on the Jaguar. "They're going to nail us for not texture-mapping the ships. They want rigid missions to tell them exactly what they have to do. I don't think the texture mapping is all that important. I think the gameplay is."

Beyond the BattleSphere

If all goes well, BattleSphere should be finished soon and reach stores by June. So what's next? "Sleep," Scott deadpans, and Stephanie cheers.

Though they're in negotiations to work on another project, "we're leaving the door open to do a sequel," admits Scott. "We've written into the game hooks for a CD version." A move to the PC may be more likely. "I think the PC market is screaming for a networked space battle simulator," he notes. "There's *Wing Commander: Armada*, but the networking is a gimmick." The lack of multiplayer networking dissuades them from other consoles, but they're willing to license BattleSphere "if someone else wants to do the dirty work. We're looking forward to doing some new development," he concludes.

- Robert A. Jung

King's Field

ASCII attempts to redefine the action-RPG genre with a 3-D engine

Publisher: ASCII Entertainment
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: ASCII Entertainment
Release: Available Now

- GRAPHICS:** **B-**
- + A detailed 3-D world.
 - + Full 3-D enemies, good shading.
 - Everything moves in slow motion.
 - Animation is pretty dull.
- SOUNDS:** **C-**
- + Clean, varied sound effects.
 - Totally average music.
- GAMEPLAY:** **D-**
- + Easy, simple interface.
 - Poor NPC interaction.
 - Limited interaction with the world.
 - Uninspired plot.
- LASTING POWER:** **C-**
- + It should take a while to finish...
 - But you might not get into it enough to do so...
 - And I doubt you'll want to play through it ever again.
- OVERALL:** **C**

Intelligent Gamer
"AVERAGE"



PlayStation owners have been griping for quite some time about the lack of RPGs for their machines, and finally they have one. King's Field is perhaps best described as an "action-RPG," since combat is realtime and action-based, but the exploration, experience points, items and general theme place it firmly in the role-playing category.

The introduction sequence is rather boring, slowly zooming in and rotating around an island and then showing a point-of-view shot of someone walking up some stairs as a narrator explains the background plot, which is equally uninspired. Legend speaks of an island named Melanat which was ruled by either a god or a demon, and nobody tried to go there. One day, a blue light came down from the heavens and struck the island to its core. Then came a warning to never approach the island, for a sleeping beast lies in wait for "a great awakening." You guessed it—the game starts out with you as the sole survivor of a shipwreck stranded on...where else... Melanat. As you progress through the game, you explore



deeper into the island, eventually uncovering the mystery of the aforementioned legend.

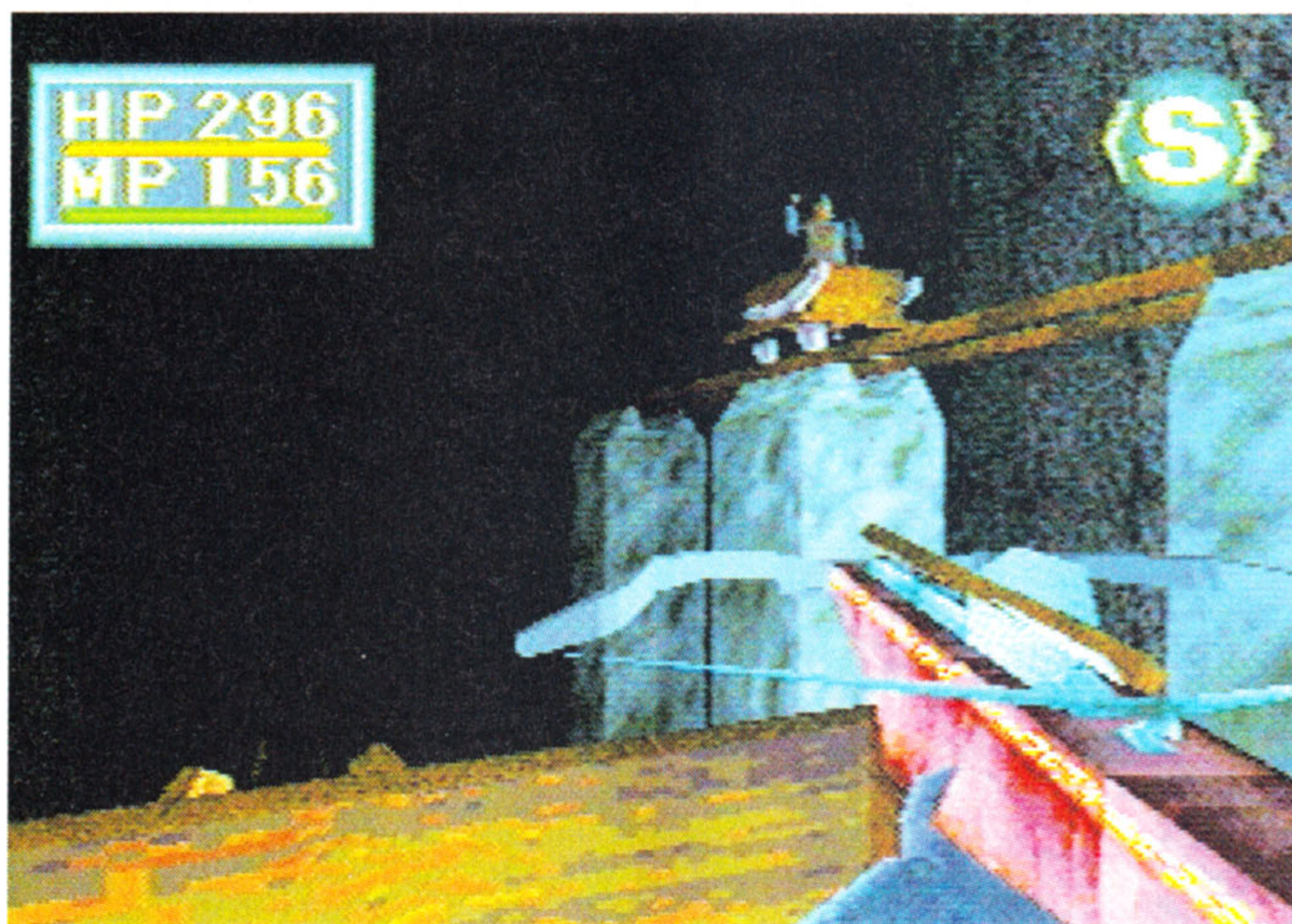
The world of King's Field is a complete 3-D construction, similar to the classic Ultima Underworld on the PC. Its interface is simple: You move forward or backward, turn left or right or sidestep fluidly through the full

▲ An RPG for the PlayStation! Yes it's true! Adding the much needed graphical "spice" to RPGs King's Field has some decent 3-D battle scenes along with textured scenery to pump things up.

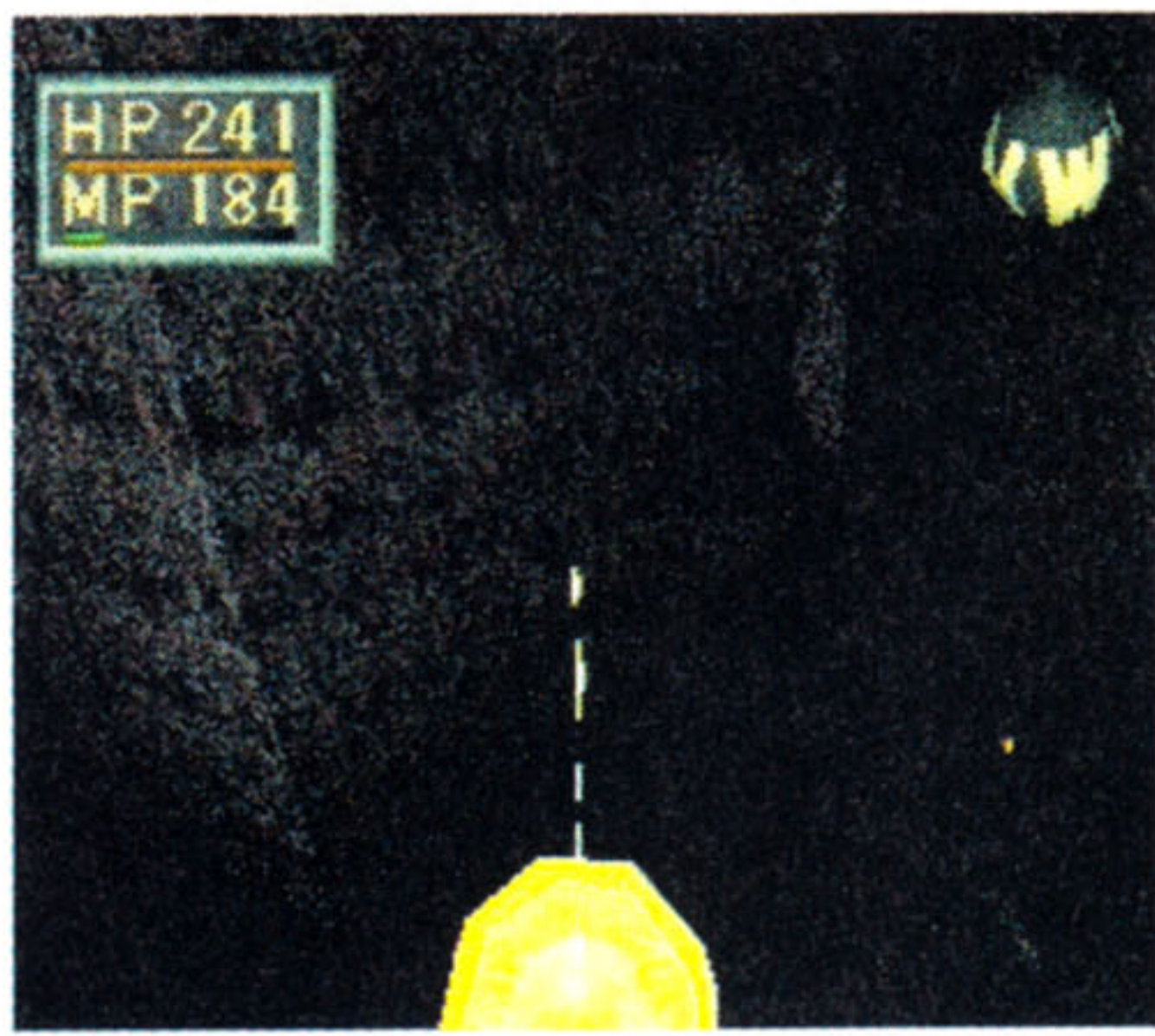
screen 3-D environment. With the L2 and R2 buttons, you can tilt your view up or down to better attack monsters or make sure you don't fall off of ledges. Pick up items you find and search through barrels and chests with the X button for your typical assortment of goodies. There are lots of items to use and plenty of weapons and armor to equip, with separate pieces for your arms, legs, chest, etc. Combat is handled in realtime and very simple; press the square button to swing your weapon, or the triangle button to cast the spell you have "readied." The trick is that almost all creatures can only be hurt by hitting them on a certain part of their body, so you have to tilt your view up or down, or maneuver around them until you can hit that spot, which isn't always easy.

The 3-D world is nice to look

<http://www.asciient.com>



at, with translucent waterfalls, slimes using animated textures to look, well, slimy and all the creatures and people are composed of texture-mapped polygons. The island is full of caves with craggy walls, suspended bridges, etc. The problem is that, despite all this, the world doesn't feel real because your movement is so limited. There is no running, no jumping and no crawling; so interaction with the objects around you is limited to opening doors, pulling levers, etc. So while there are real physics in the sense that you get hurt if you fall too far, you can't throw rocks to hit switches, jump over small gaps or climb on anything.



some of which are useful, but your character never says anything, and you don't even have the option of choosing what you want to hear about—an old Ultima play-enhancement trick. So, with the exception of the characters from whom you can buy and sell stuff, the rest might as well be signposts. This totally destroys the illusion of a living, breathing world.

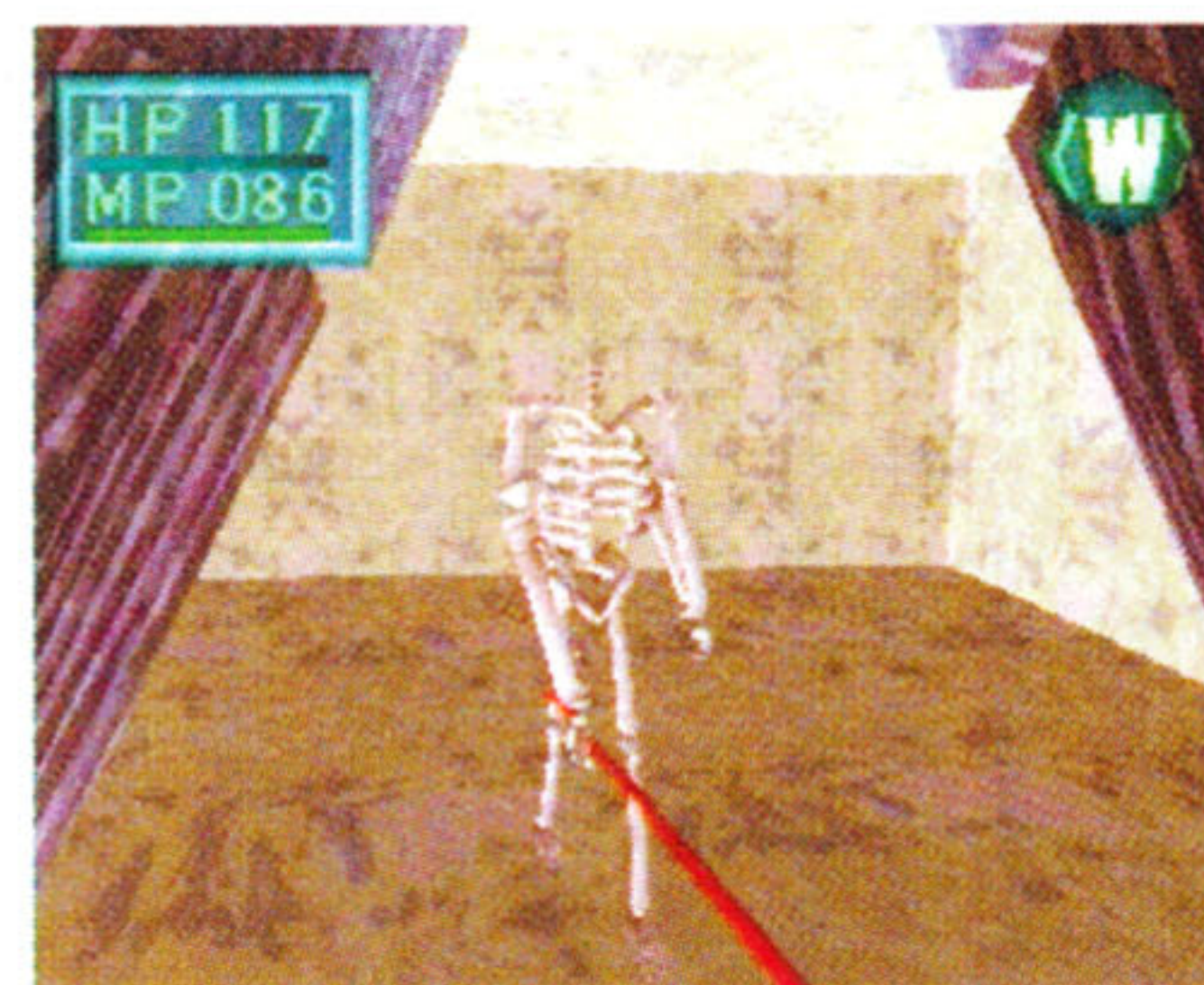
The game's overall design seems to be missing some simple, key elements as well. You can only save your game when you find a marker, which is more than a little annoying as there aren't enough of them around. The walking speed is a little too slow,

“The game would take about half as long...if the save-game and movement problems were fixed.”

This detachment from the world is extended further by the limited interaction with non-player characters. Basically, hit the “search/pickup” button near a person and a few sentences pop up on the screen—they didn't even bother to record actors, much less incorporate FMV. People don't animate as they talk to you, and usually only have one static animation (if that) when not talking to you, so they certainly don't display any real personality. There are so few NPCs that this really isn't acceptable in a world of CD-ROM gaming. You can talk to the same person several times and they'll tell you different things,



and the turning speed is about a third of what it should be—these not only make exploring a chore, but returning to the last marker to save your game is time-consuming but necessary. The game would take about half as long to complete if only the save-game and movement problems were fixed, and it would be a much more enjoyable experience to boot. The plot never really advances in an unexpected or interesting direction—nothing ever happens that experienced RPG players haven't



seen before. Perhaps if talking to people was more interactive, or if advancing through the plot was quicker (via faster movement), the game would be more interesting. As it stands, the only reason to continue on is to see the next location and the monsters it holds.

King's Field's sound is adequate, but nothing more. The sound effects are varied and clean, but none are spectacular—I would have liked the sounds that accompany spells to be a bit more dramatic. The music sounds chip-generated rather than specially CD arranged, and while the tunes aren't bad, they're not particularly catchy or moving—suffice it to

◀ “Hey, you're dead and you move faster than I do! What gives?”



Reviews

say that the Super NES has done better. If the same music was recorded in a studio with better instruments, perhaps it would have the desired effect of attaching more emotion to the game. Fortunately, the music does change when you enter new areas, usually just as it's starting to get too repetitive.

An RPG should be a game where you have intimate control over a growing and developing character and King's Field does provide this, but it should also be a game where all characters, player and non-player, have a personality with interaction between them being vitally important for more than hints on where to go next.



▲ While a 3-D texture-mapping engine would seem to be a perfect lure for anxious 32-Bit RPG lovers, that's all it is—interesting box photos that will intrigue many but satisfy few.

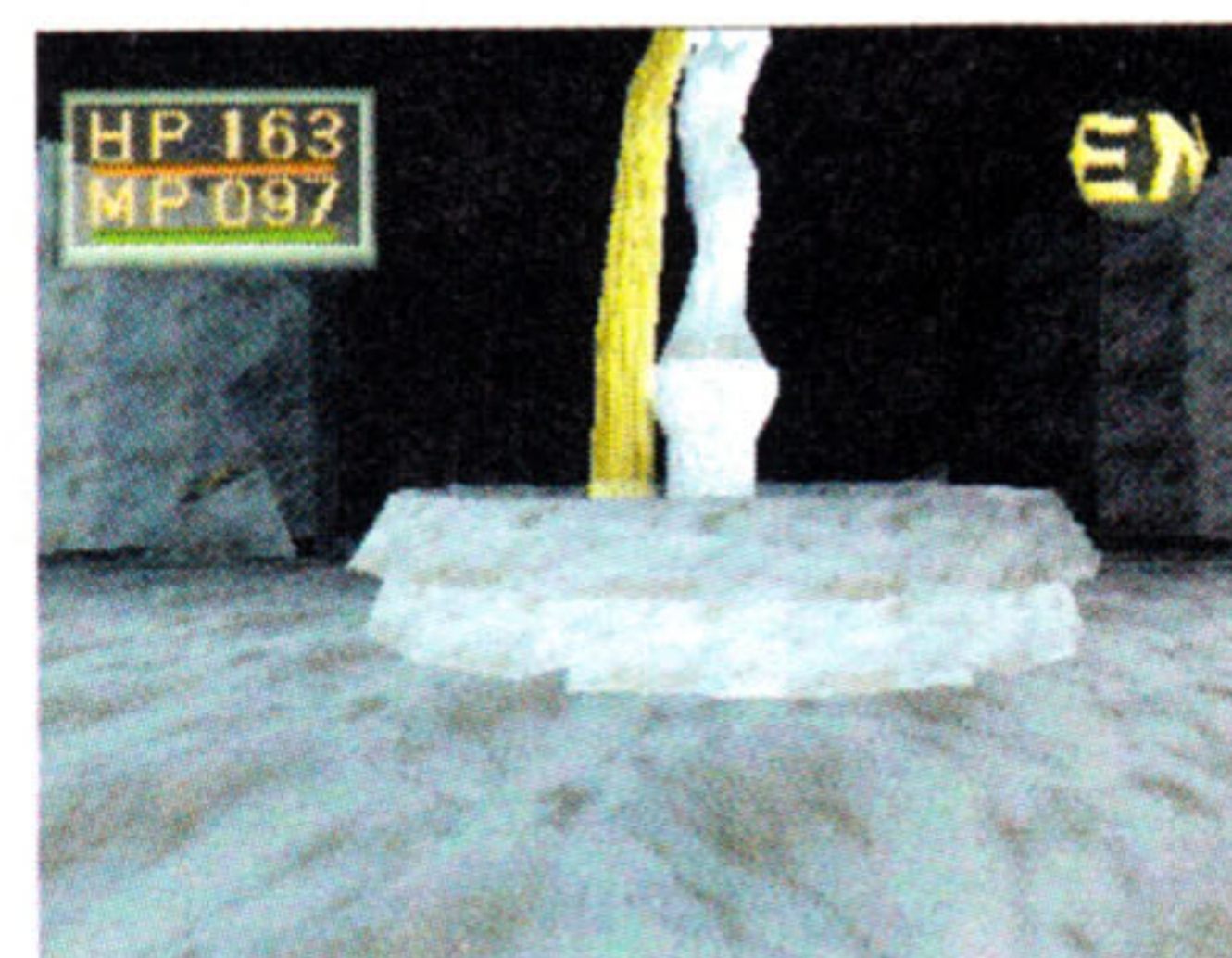
It is in this respect that the PlayStation's first American RPG simply doesn't deliver. Gamers not used to first-person, 3-D RPGs might still be impressed by King's Field for the different graphic interface, but those spoiled with PC games such as Ultima Underworld will find it hollow. Beyond the Beyond, Arc the Lad, and (undoubtedly) Final Fantasy VII will all be time far better spent.

My conclusion: King's Field is a nice example of the PlayStation's 3-D capabilities, and shows the potential of this genre of RPG, but it simply isn't deep enough to satisfy RPG fans, and some simple design problems are constant annoyances.

- Jason Cross



“Those spoiled with PC games such as Ultima Underworld will find [King's Field] hollow.”



The Bottom Line:

Die-hard RPG fans who have been waiting for a good RPG on the PlayStation will probably be disappointed by King's Field. Besides the fact that there's really nothing exciting or new here, the game suffers from poor play mechanics, a pretty but unconvincing 3-D world, and poor design. It starts off slow and takes a while to become enjoyable, and even then it's no better than average. The greatest asset King's Field has going for it is the fact that first person RPGs are relatively new to the dedicated game system market.

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BATTLEFORMATION BATTLE ARMOR: STAR MOUNT BATTLE ARMOR: FOREX MITE BATTLE TANK: MEDIC MORG		WEAPONS WEAPON: M415 WEAPON: M415 WEAPON: M415		STATS HP: 100 MP: 100 DEF: 100 ATK: 100	
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BABY NEWBORN SEX: FEMALE AGE: 18 HEIGHT: 165 WEIGHT: 55 HAIR: BLOND EYES: BLUE SKIN: FAIR BIRTHDAY: 01/01/77 BLOODTYPE: O OCCUPATION: SOLDIER SPECIAL ABILITY: +1	MODIFY SELECT
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SILVER FOX SILVER FOX SILVER FOX	SELECTED PLAYERS: 10/10 FORKUP PLAY PRESENT TIME: 12:00 BATTLE LIMITS LEFT: 10
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Minimum Requirements: O/S - DOS 5.0, Ram - 4MB, Video - VGA, CD-ROM - 2x, Hard Disk - 5MB, Sound - Sound Blaster & MIDI, Input - Mouse

Duke Nuke 'Em 3-D



Apogee's Duke Nuke 'Em 3-D takes a Doom-busting 3-D engine and adds gritty urban settings

Publisher: Apogee Software
Platform: PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: 3D Realms
Release: March

The Doom wars seemed to be over. With every company in existence scrambling to make a first-person shooting game after the success of Doom, Duke Nuke 'Em 3-D may at first appear late to the genre's party but actually juices up the formula quite a bit.

Duke Nuke 'Em 3-D, available currently as shareware from Apogee/3-D Realms, takes the level of 3D gaming up a notch. Taking place on Earth—a factor setting Duke apart from Space Colony games such as Doom and Descent—the setting is early 21st century, beginning with a demolished rendition of Los Angeles, which was overtaken by aliens during Duke Nuke 'Em II. Upon the lead character's return to the city, he finds himself up against an alien race which are in great need of annihilation, and there's little that can stand in his way. According to



▲ Who would have ever thought that Doom's lone gunman would look like a weakling?



3-D Realms' story overview, "Duke is a can-do hero who realizes that sometimes innocent people have to die in order to save Earth, so accuracy of gun fire is not a real concern to him."

Apogee's earlier effort, Rise of the Triad, was far from a true step up from Doom. Thankfully, Duke allows players to make an impressive graphical jump from standard 320x200 resolution to 800x600 in VESA Mode, though it should be noted that attempting to run Duke at any resolution higher than 640x480 will likely drive your machine insane. A Pentium 90 is generally a reasonable choice to run Duke in a 640x480 High-res Mode, which means that major Duke fans may need to upgrade



their machines to see what the game really has to offer.

Duke 3-D uses "the Build Engine," which allows for extremely impressive and complex in-game activities to take place within the game's universe. For example, an earthquake could take place as you're moving through a stage, leveling several sky scrapers around

you and creating chasms right beneath your feet. The Build Engine also gives designers greater freedom to create rounded corners—rather than using flat ceilings, you could instead have shapes more like tubes or half circles. Other features of the engine include underwater effects and the use of a Jet Pack so that you can take on monsters by sea, land or air. Finally, as has been the case in many of the Apogee 3-D shooters, the engine also allows the user to look up, down, left and right, a feature missing from Doom.

Pushing aside the fact that you are fighting monster aliens and carrying around machine guns and the like, running through the streets of L.A. unquestionably adds



▲ Duke's realtime 3-D engine puts Doom's to shame with highly interactive scenery and even more vicious armaments. Check out the movie theater...

another exciting soundtrack here. Most game music sounds best if you're using a wavetable synthesis card. Programmer Todd Replogle recommends the Gravis Ultrasound to play Duke 3-D with, as it does the best job with the music and sound included in the game. The user can also opt to change the music in the game, and use his own music during gameplay, though it's hard to imagine why one would want to use this option with such good content.

"Bitchin'!" That's just one of the things Duke says when he blows stuff up, and if anything, this game will most certainly go down in history as giving an official voice to all of those things that players have said while playing Doom. Duke has several colorful expressions to blurt out when smashing an onslaught of attackers, such as, "You are an inspiration for birth control", "It hurts to be you" and my personal favorite, "What are you, some bottom-feeding, scum-sucking algae-eater?" Many of these quotes were taken from ideas from assorted staff members, notes Todd Replogle, but a majority of them came some-

Multiplayer Games Over The Net

With the recent assault of games supporting modem play and network play, many people on the Net have taken it upon themselves to locate opponents in cities from New York to Los Angeles to Moscow. Many assorted methods of performing this task exist, but the most popular two are Internet Head to Head (IHHD) and Kali (see last month's IG Internet column for more information on Kali). Both have their own requirements, and both generally require a direct Internet service provider connection.

IHHD is designed around the concept of emulating a direct connection over the Internet, much like calling one modem to the other. One user, in essence, "calls" the other using the program and a "Direct Connection" is simulated. The user would then exit out of his/her terminal program, and enter into the game they are playing. Then, by choosing the serial link option in their game, they will link with the other person and a multiplayer game is established. IHHD is known to have a few quirks, but a connection is feasible most of the time and generally has good results.

Kali, on the other hand, works very differently. Based on PPP/SLIP connections to the Internet, Kali emulates an IPX network in order to allow multiplayer games of more than two. In quintessence, if you have four people ready to play a game talking with each other, using Kali, all four can play in the same game. Kali has definitely become the more popular of the two, due to eight-player Descent tournaments, which have been known to drive some people insane.

For more information on Kali or IHHD, be sure to visit

<http://www.teleport.com/~caustic/internet.shtml>.

To find other players interested in playing using IHHD or Kali, generally try going to the game's name in IRC. For example, if you wanted to play Doom, you would go to channel #Doom. To play Descent you'd go to channel #Descent and so on. The best time to go to these channels is between 8:00 p.m. and midnight.

- David Rubin

Duke via the World Wide Web

For more information on the game, you can contact <http://www.3dreams.com/> and get the shareware version of the game, as well as receive ordering information for the full game CD.



a "wow" factor to Duke which others simply lacked. In most games, objects such as toilets, mirrors and X-rated movie theaters just aren't included in the criteria, but Duke has them all. While there is no actual nudity, it should be noted that you can pay strip dancers to take their tops off and let you take a look. Other R-rated content includes going into peep shows and watching computer animations making out, the ability to actually go to the bathroom and some of Duke's language. There is a feature to turn most of the naughty content off for younger audiences.

Duke's music was designed by Bobby Prince, the genius behind the music for Doom, who has turned in



what from the movie *Army of Darkness*.

The other sound effects in the game are above-average; all the basic explosions are there, as well as some ambient sound you wouldn't necessarily expect to hear. For example, while you're inside a movie theater, you can hear the projector flipping through the film at different volume levels based on how close you are.

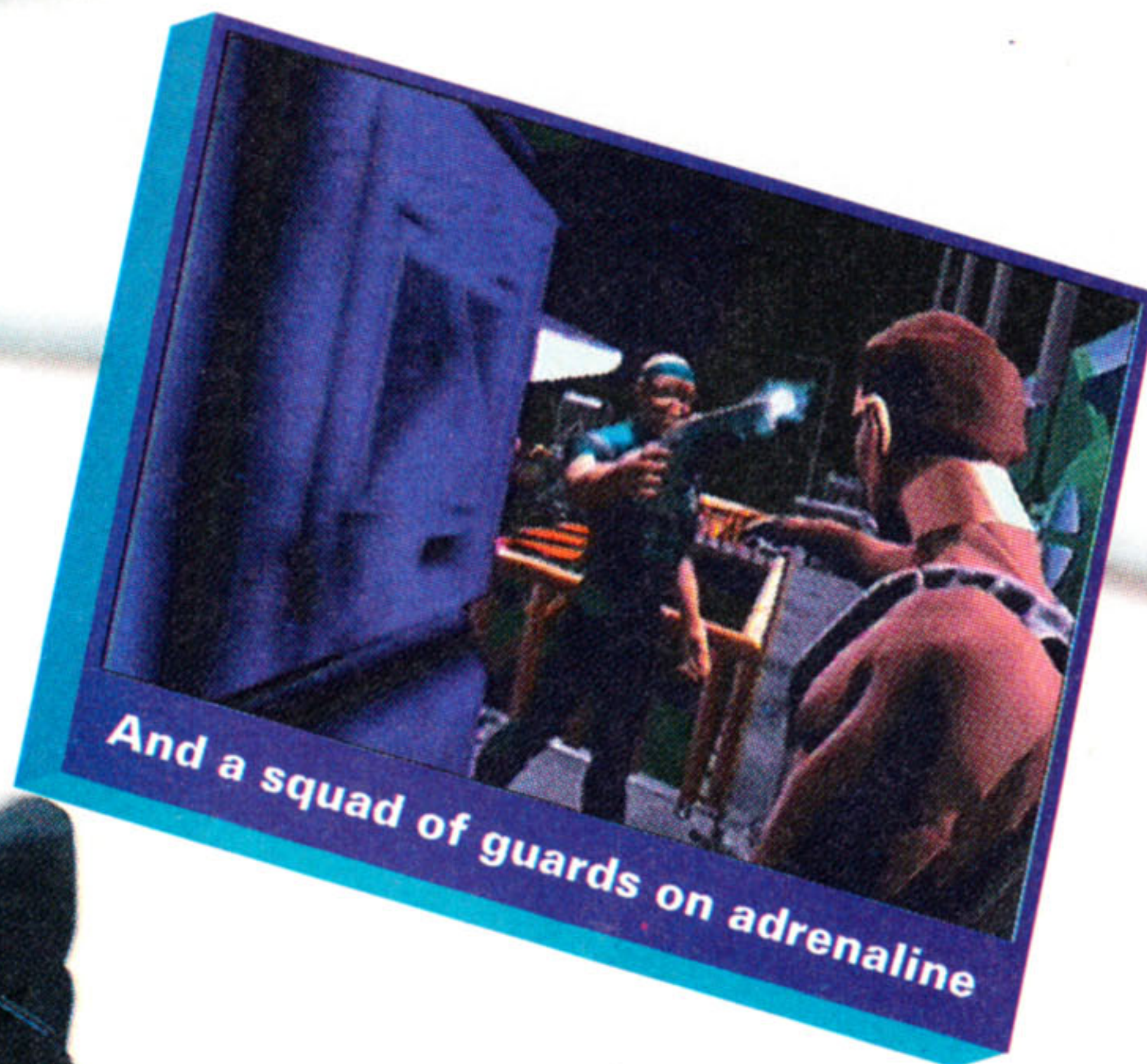
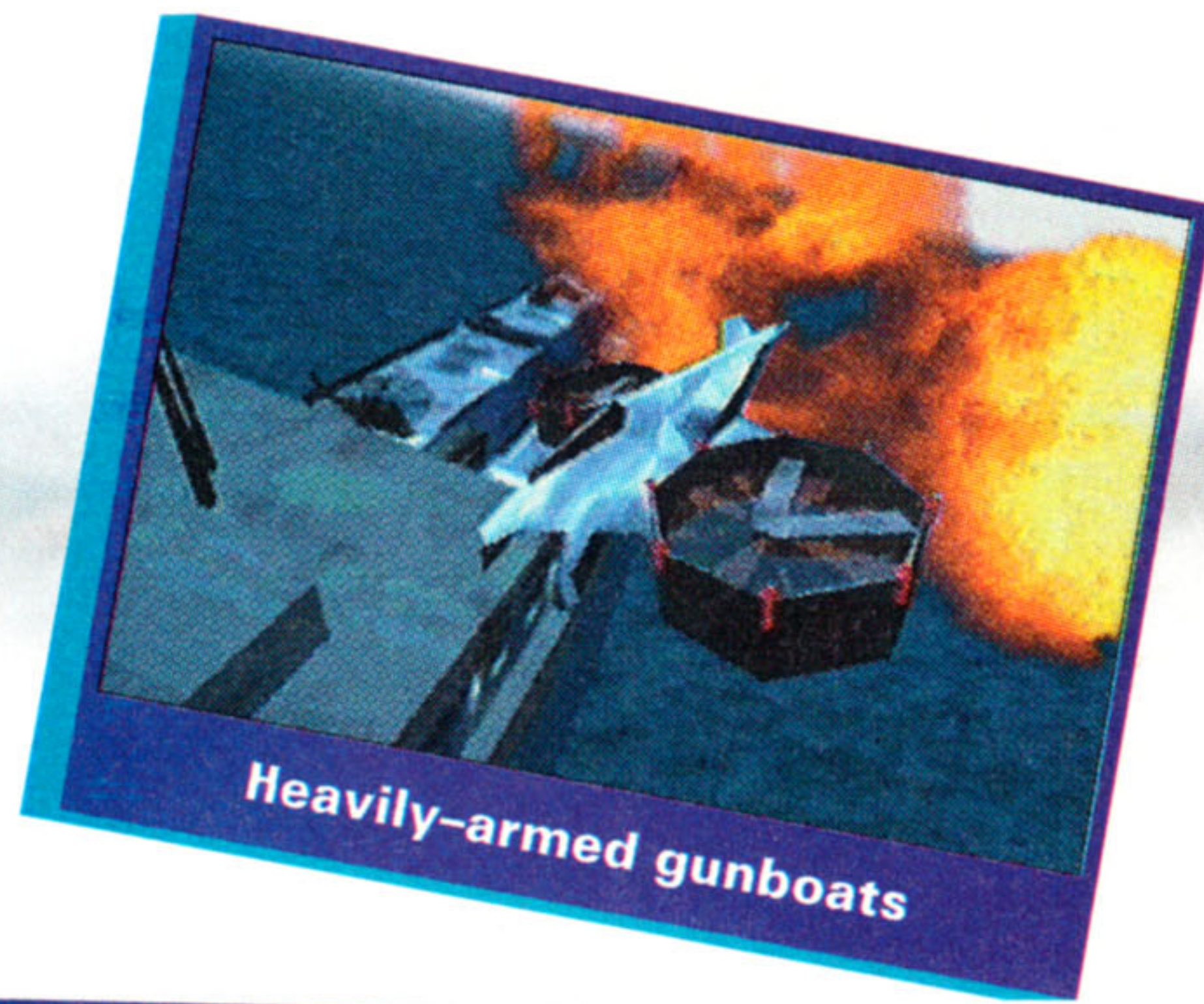
Running around from room to room will be very easy for anyone who has ever played Doom, as the interface is very "Doom Friendly." With added tilting vision abilities, finding foes becomes a much more exciting task, and the new Jet Pack and scuba gear features take the exploration to new highs and

literal lows.

Multiplayer modes also play a role in Duke 3-D, as the registered version of the game will allow up to eight simultaneous players while the shareware only allows four. The Multiplayer link can be done via a local area network, a serial link, a modem link or going over the Internet (see sidebar).

The registered version will also include a total of nine weapons. In the shareware, you can use your foot (to kick), a pistol, a shotgun, a three-barrel chain gun, rocket launcher and pipe bombs. In the registered version, the shrink ray, laser gun and a wall mounted laser trip bomb are also included. The CD adds both Duke Nuke 'Em I and Duke Nuke 'Em II in their complete glory alongside a fully interactive level editor. The level editor has always been popular among fans of the 3-D shooter genre, and the potential for impressive new player-built Duke levels is great.

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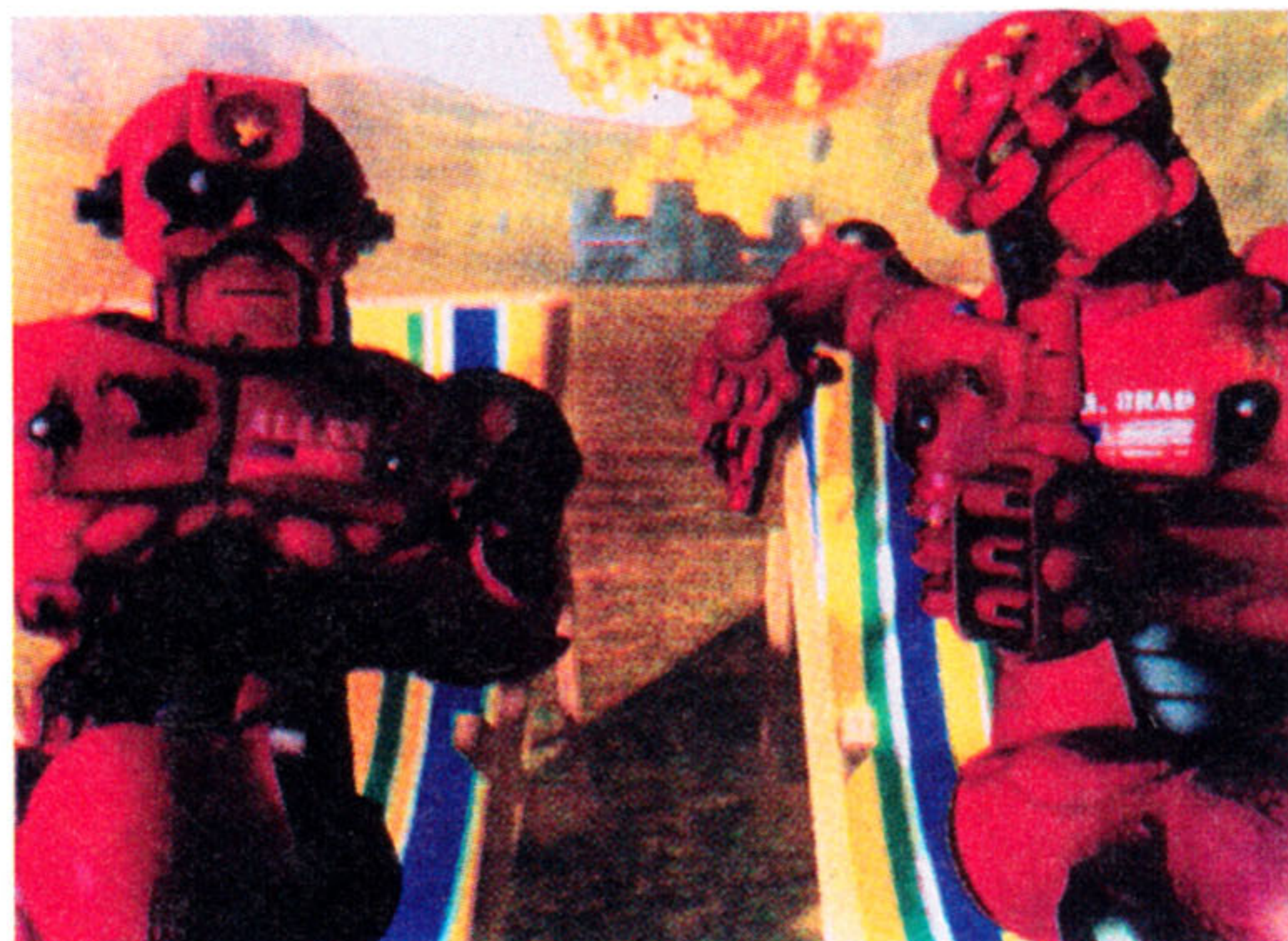
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“Z”

War is no laughing matter—unless you're playing “Z”



Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Platform: PC-CD-ROM
Format: 1 CD
Developer: BitMap Brothers
Release: May

Realtime action and tremendous explosions add greatly to the combative atmosphere.



▲ Defiant, unpredictable and morally defective, each robot has a personality all its own. You have to lay down the law with these chums.

Z may be one of the most unique arcade-style war strategy games to come along in the last year. Forget WarCraft; this game offers strategy, action and humor—with an incredible AI to back it all up. In the title, the player must command an army of free-thinking interstellar robots against an equally defiant army of opposing bots. Acquiring territories, armies, factories and radar installations across frozen arctic wastelands or burnt out hellish lava fields are some of the most basic duties in Z.

The meat of the game, however, consists of realtime combat with the self-titled Blue army. The battlefield this takes place over spans across five planets in all, with each divided up into separate zones. The goal of the title is to capture enemy forts and territories under the orders of General Zod, an *Apocalypse Now* General Killgor type. The challenge begins not only with successfully out-thinking your enemy, but with manipulating your group of wayward robots into actually doing this task. The bots can sometimes be defiant in their mannerisms, as well as their responses to your orders. It's this area of the game where most of the humor is injected, via the bots' smart-ass responses and bizarre actions. For example, if contact is not made with one of your units, they'll be more than happy to wander the countryside chasing snakes or maybe just swimming in the numerous water holes surrounding the battlefields. It's really funny to see them chasing snakes while the battle rages on around them. "We wanted to create characters that had strong personalities so players would find themselves talking, screaming and laughing with them," said Eric Matthews, lead designer at BitMap Brothers. "These may be fast-driving, beer-drinking, cursing robots with an attitude," he adds, "but there's no one you'd trust more to watch your back in the heat of battle."

With four years put into the making of the game, the BitMap Brothers have had the time to create a really stellar AI for this game. There are no giant manuals to read before gameplay in Z, players just load it up and immediately start experimenting with attack schemes. Once an order is given to a unit the AI takes over leaving the gamer to go on and take care of other pressing strategic moves. All PC games should be this easy.

The BitMap Brothers have produced a very entertaining game. Look for a full review in the near future.

- Dean Hager

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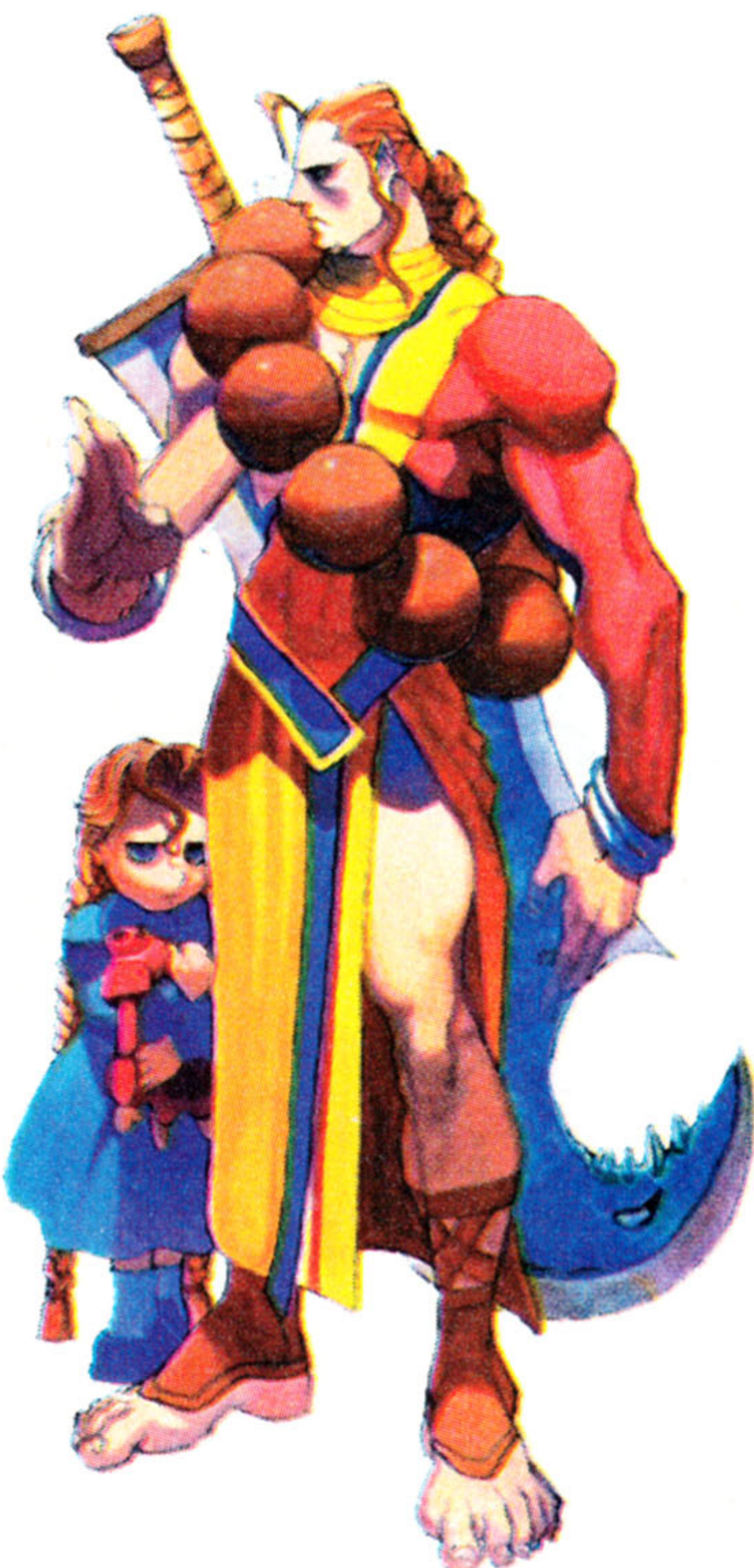
2-D graphics coupled with outstanding color animation and art thrust DarkStalkers to the forefront of its genre on the PlayStation.



DarkStalkers

Setting new standards for 2-D games on the PlayStation, DarkStalkers loses little in its home translation

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



Last month, *IG* covered Capcom's Street Fighter Alpha, one of the company's more recent and somewhat surprisingly less ambitious fighting games. Alpha is a fun game with 16-Bit graphics and mixed music; Capcom's DarkStalkers for the PlayStation and Night Warriors for the Saturn are what you would expect from 32-Bit 2-D fighters—they're decidedly more impressive games in audio-visual departments while retaining the fun action and unique character designs that have made Capcom one of the industry's leaders in 2-D fighting games.

All of Capcom's fighting games are designed around the theory that the company's innovative control schemes—six-button and one-joystick layouts with secret special moves activated by joystick and button combinations—keep the player interested in learning new moves, counter-moves and multihit attacks. As its first arcade follow-up to the Street Fighter II series, DarkStalkers retained much of the feel of preceding SF2 titles while adding more ambitious animation (Capcom's first fighting attempt at the cartoon-style art found later in SF Alpha) and an entirely new set of characters and backgrounds based largely on monster stories. DarkStalkers' colorful and incredibly detailed backgrounds are a relief to



◀ Donovan, one of the new warriors in Night Warriors, is a Dark Hunter, seeking to destroy the evil DarkStalkers.



▲ DarkStalkers is loaded with special moves, many of which can be performed in the air. Here Demitri tosses a fireball at an airborne John Talbain.

anyone familiar with the bland SF Alpha stages—they're a return to the ambient, energetic themes which gave Capcom titles from Strider to Street Fighter II a special feel. The backgrounds are full of special animation sequences and multilayered parallax, both of which should have presented technical challenges to the PlayStation hardware. As has been pointed out repeatedly over the last year, the PlayStation is not a 2-D game machine by design, but somehow the home version of DarkStalkers manages to pull off nearly everything attempted visually by its arcade counterpart. Nearly? Well, character animation has been cut back a bit because of memory constraints, but that's about it. Note that the level of animation in DS is still far ahead of anything attempted on a PlayStation 2-D fighter to date.

Let's take the werewolf Jon Talbain



GRAPHICS: **A**
 + The best 2-D graphics attempted on the PS to date. Great parallax and characters.
 +/- Lots of animation, though a bit is lost from the arcade.

SOUNDS: **B+**
 + Fun but not classic music tracks with great sonic quality.
 +/- Less announcer and character voice samples than other games.

GAMEPLAY: **B+**
 + Nearly on par with SF Alpha with a different style of play.
 +/- The weaker "special" meter design got better in Night Warriors.

LASTING POWER: **A-**
 + Multiple endings.
 +/- Only 10 standard characters to learn.

OVERALL: **A-**
Intelligent Gamer
"HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"



▲ Darkstalkers' selection of characters is a virtual menagerie of classic movie monsters.

and his stage as an example. Talbain's stage is a wonderfully illustrated city street which looks straight out of *An American Werewolf in London*; pubs and stores fill the immediate background, with a breakable barrel and restaurant's table to the left and the right of the fighting characters. In the distant background, you see a moon which has been intentionally drawn larger than life, a looming elemental theme repeated throughout the introduction and levels in Darkstalkers, and a city which has far more 3-D depth than anything seen in SF Alpha.

The furry Talbain himself—and this is true of all of the game's characters—looks both much more mystical and much more like Japanese anime artwork than any of the other fighting games released by Capcom to date, save its upgrade Night Warriors. Fiery auras, magical energy, lurking bats and unusually cutesy (but thankfully brief) animation sequences are everywhere to be seen, as electrocuted and fireballed characters get charred and dropped to earth, Victor (the Frankenstein monster) gets literally split into multiple body parts, and Anakaris (the Egyptian mummy) turns his enemies into animals. If anything, the movement in Darkstalkers is less hardcore serious fighting and more interesting to watch than the SF2 and Alpha games, which might make it a better title for much younger and older audiences.

Talbain's background is only one of many superb settings to be found in the game—Felicia's Japanese neon cityscape, Anakaris' Egyptian Tomb and Lord Raptor's cemetery are superb examples of what can be done when artists take the time to give life to their static visions, and it's



this sort of artwork that makes it difficult to be impressed by average 2-D graphics engines. Twelve separate characters and backgrounds are an average number for a Capcom fighter, but look and feel distinctive enough that there are no gripes on this end.

Audio is pleasantly enhanced from the arcade machine, which was quite good to begin with, and there's thankfully an audio option to set the sound effects and music at different volumes—the sounds are pretty harsh on the ears when put on equal footing with the music. Other fighters



▲ The backgrounds are nothing short of amazing; Bishamon's stage, pictured here, has several layers of parallax along with numerous animations for the farm animals.

have more voices, but these are reasonable.

In terms of gameplay, Darkstalkers was an arcade testing ground for several of the concepts which later became parts of SF Alpha, including air blocking, Alpha-style counters, chain combos and multilevel super special moves. Interestingly enough, Capcom's first attempts at these moves in some ways proved more successful than what wound up in SFA—

Darkstalkers' more difficult chain combos and counters demand a bit more from the players, and a single "Special" energy meter allows each character's special attacks to grow in strength. As a result of the more challenging game engine, Darkstalkers feels much more like Super SF2 with air blocking than it does SFA, but as you learn how to pull off the counters and combos reliably, it begins to feel more like SFA. My favorite new gameplay feature is something simple—tapping back or forward twice makes your character dash forwards or fly backward, something I've loved in SNK games for quite some time. Is DS a better fighter than SFA? It's a tiny bit less smooth; SFA still has a better juggling combo system, "special" meter system and multi-hit attacks which harder-core players will love, but DS's counters are less cheesy. SFA's a wee bit more playable.

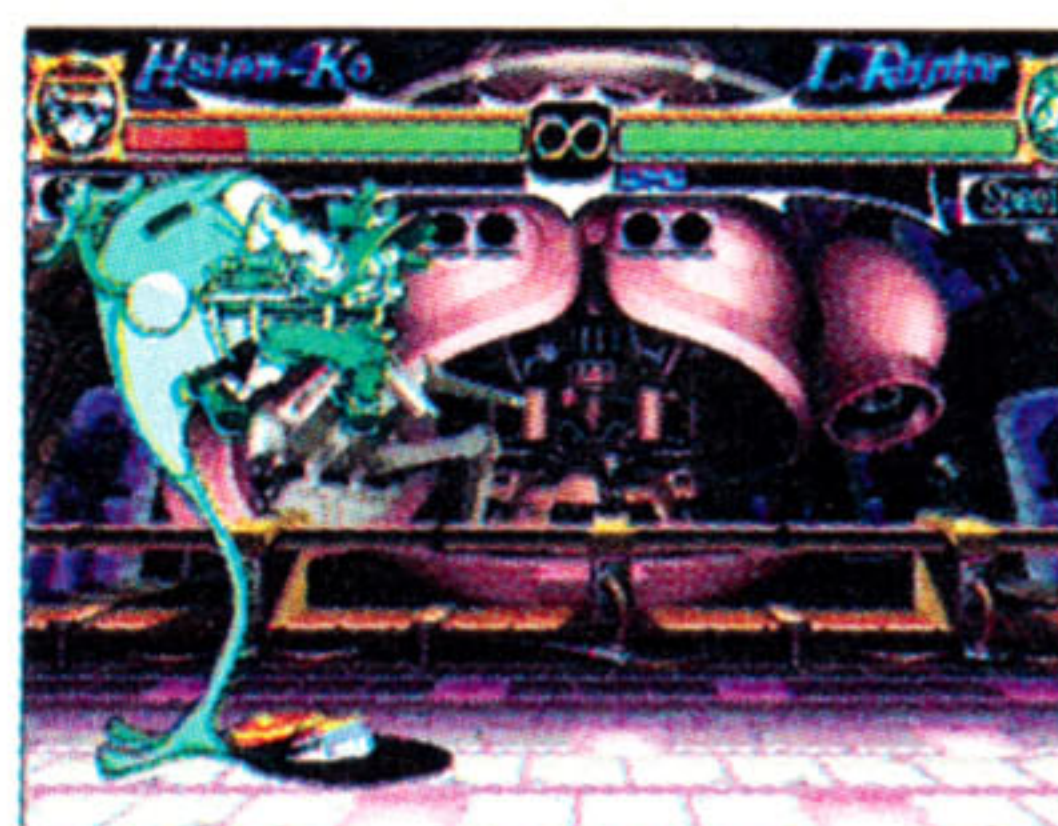
How long will Darkstalkers stay interesting? That's a good question. My initial inclination is to suggest that kids and less hard-core types will enjoy it for longer than Street

Fighter fans—it's fun to play and has the now-standard complement of eight difficulty levels and unique multiple endings, but its often comical demeanor and fantasy-inspired settings will endear it to a distinctive type of gamer. It's a beautiful-looking game that I would alternate playing with SF Alpha primarily to look at DS's superior graphics.



“In terms of gameplay, Darkstalkers was an arcade testing ground for several of the concepts that later became part of Street Fighter Alpha...”

Night Warriors features some of the wildest and most humorous special moves in any fighting game.



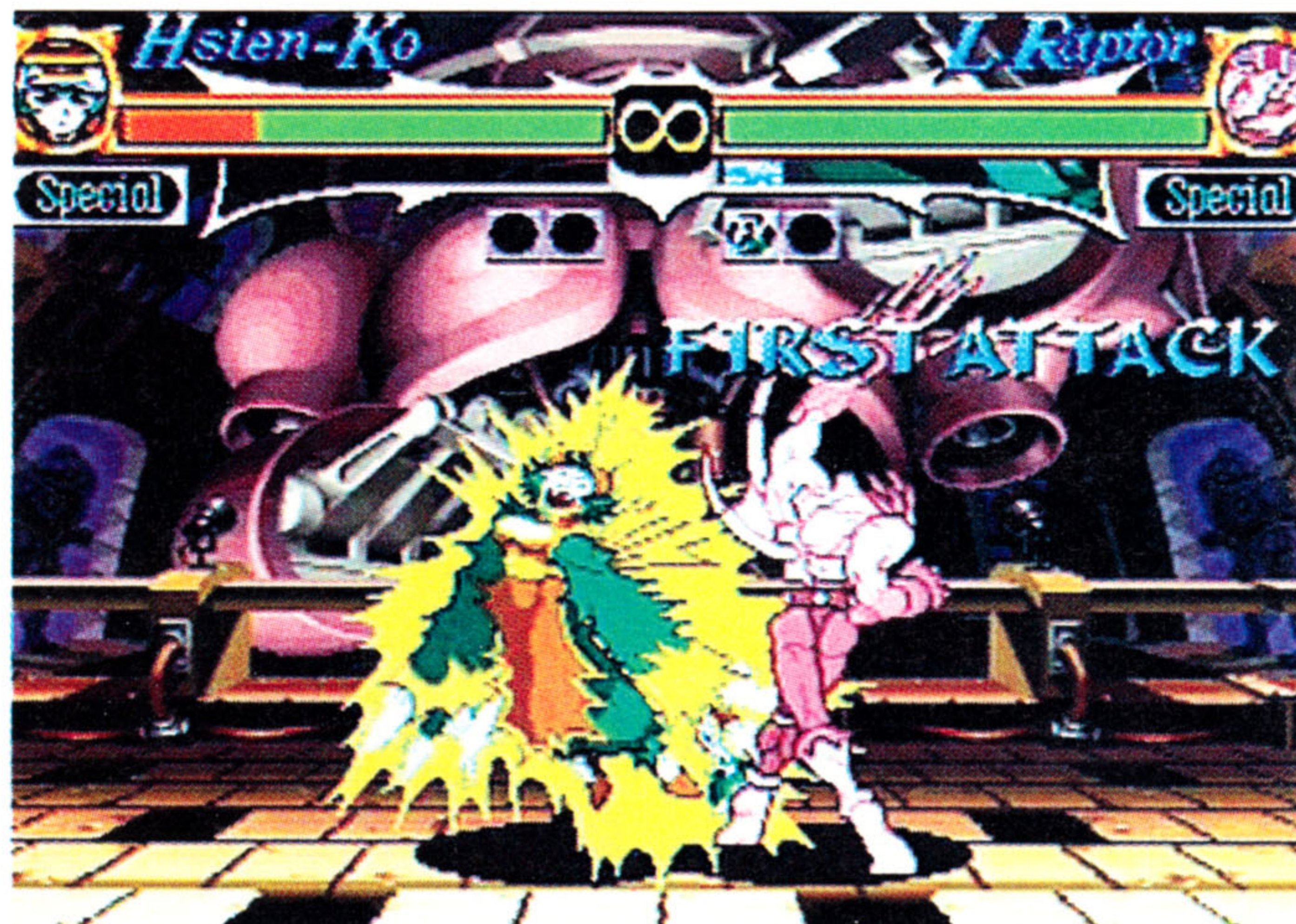
Night Warriors

Possibly the best-playing 2-D fighter, this sleeper-hit heads to the Saturn

While the PlayStation has an exclusive on DarkStalkers, the Saturn won't be left out in the cold, as Capcom has faithfully ported the little-seen incremental upgrade to DarkStalkers, Night Warriors, to Sega's flagship. While the DarkStalkers series is fairly popular in Japan, the original game did not fare well on these shores. Its sequel was purchased by relatively few arcades, meaning that the Saturn version may be the only version of Night Warriors many gamers will ever see.

Night Warriors is more to DarkStalkers than Street Fighter II Champion Edition was to the original Street Fighter II. The two Bosses, Huitzil (a robot who reminds me of the robots in the anime Laputa: Castle in the Sky) and Pyron (a fiery demon) are now playable characters, and in addition, two more characters join the fray: Hsien-Ko (a pair of ghostly Chinese sisters in one body with blades for hands) and Donovan (the vampire hunter referenced by Night Warrior's Japanese title).

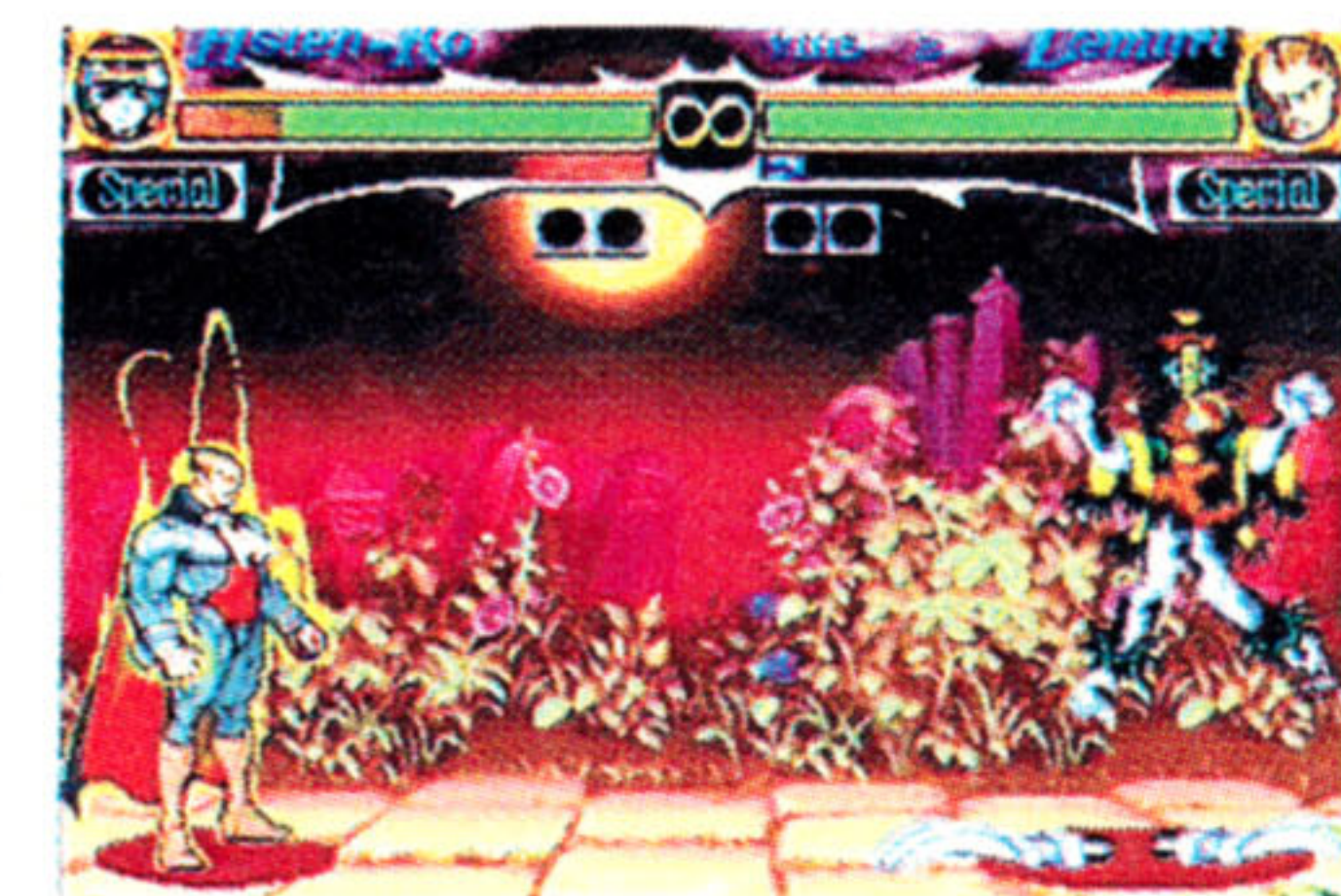
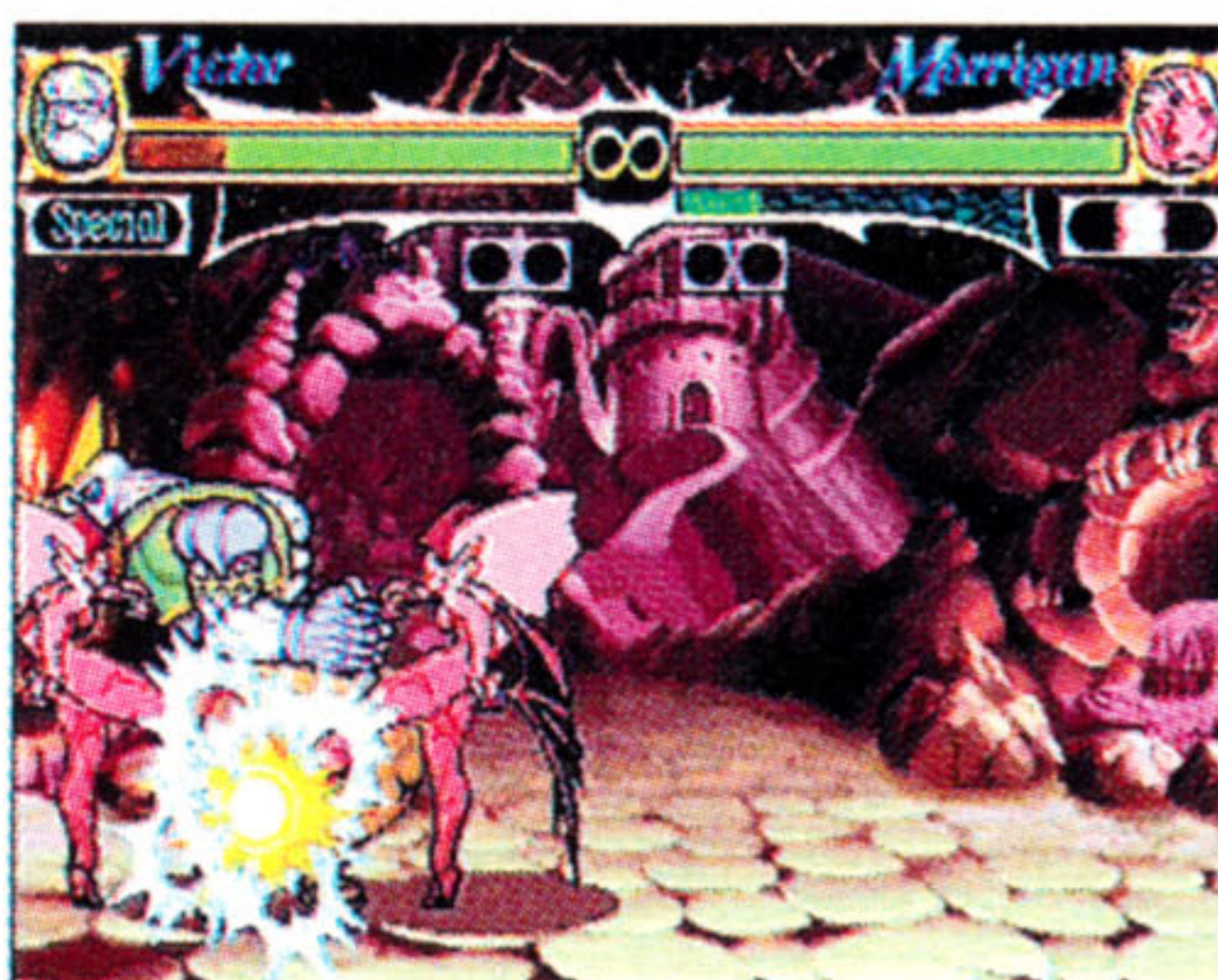
Gameplay improvements between Night Warriors and its predecessor are incremental, but definitely improve the engine. Night Warriors allows the player to store multiple super moves, while DarkStalkers would only let you charge one, and it would discharge the instant a special move was performed (enhancing it). Now the super meter can also be used to do "EX" moves, which are moves that can only be performed by using one level of the super meter (as opposed to "ES" moves, which are simply enhanced versions of special moves). The EX moves can be brutal, and often funny; Lord Raptor, for example, turns his victim into a basketball and slam-dunks him, and Hsien-Ko's huge knives spring from the floor with the word "Shoryuken" written on them in Japanese. Other gameplay enhancements are the ability to attack downed foes (obviously borrowed from Virtua Fighter), the goofy poses that characters will assume when they attempt



▲ Night Warriors is loaded with humorous animations. Check out the expression on a very unhappy Hsien-Ko's face...



◀ Morrigan the succubus returns to fight newcomer Hsien-Ko, a pair of Chinese ghosts who fight with knives, among other wacky weapons.



Music is the same great stuff from the arcade, generally, with no annoying pauses as the tracks end, and neat sound effects are in more numerous quantities than DarkStalkers—there are still more voice samples in other home fighters, though.

If you're burned out on Capcom's fighting games, you probably won't like Night Warriors, as you can still tell it's based on the aging but still solid Capcom fighting game engine. Night Warriors is a good bet, though, if you are a fighting game fan looking for a game with loads of technique—for expert players, it has more depth and move types than even SF Alpha, and there's a lot to be learned, found and seen. It's too bad that the arcade game was a sleeper hit at best; perhaps NW will finally get the success it deserves as a home game.

- Jer Horwitz and Lee Saito

Publisher: Capcom

Platform: Saturn

Format: 1 CD-ROM

Developer: Capcom

Release: March

NIGHT WARRIORS
Darkstalkers' Revenge

GRAPHICS: **A**

- + Incredible 2-D backgrounds and characters.
- + Which are what we expect from the Saturn.

SOUNDS: **A-**

- + Very good music and extra EX voices.
- Still not enough announcer voices.

GAME PLAY: **A+**

- + It's Darkstalkers plus more moves, characters...
- + ...and you can even do VF-style ground smacking!

LASTING POWER: **A**

- + Fourteen distinctive playable characters.

OVERALL: **A**

Intelligent Gamer

"HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"

It's time to cue up *Flight of the Valkyries* and open the bomb bays. This is war, baby, Saturn-style.

Iron Storm

Celebrate V-J or V-E day in the comfort of your living room...or change history.

Publisher: Working Designs

Platform: Sega Saturn

Format: 1 CD-ROM

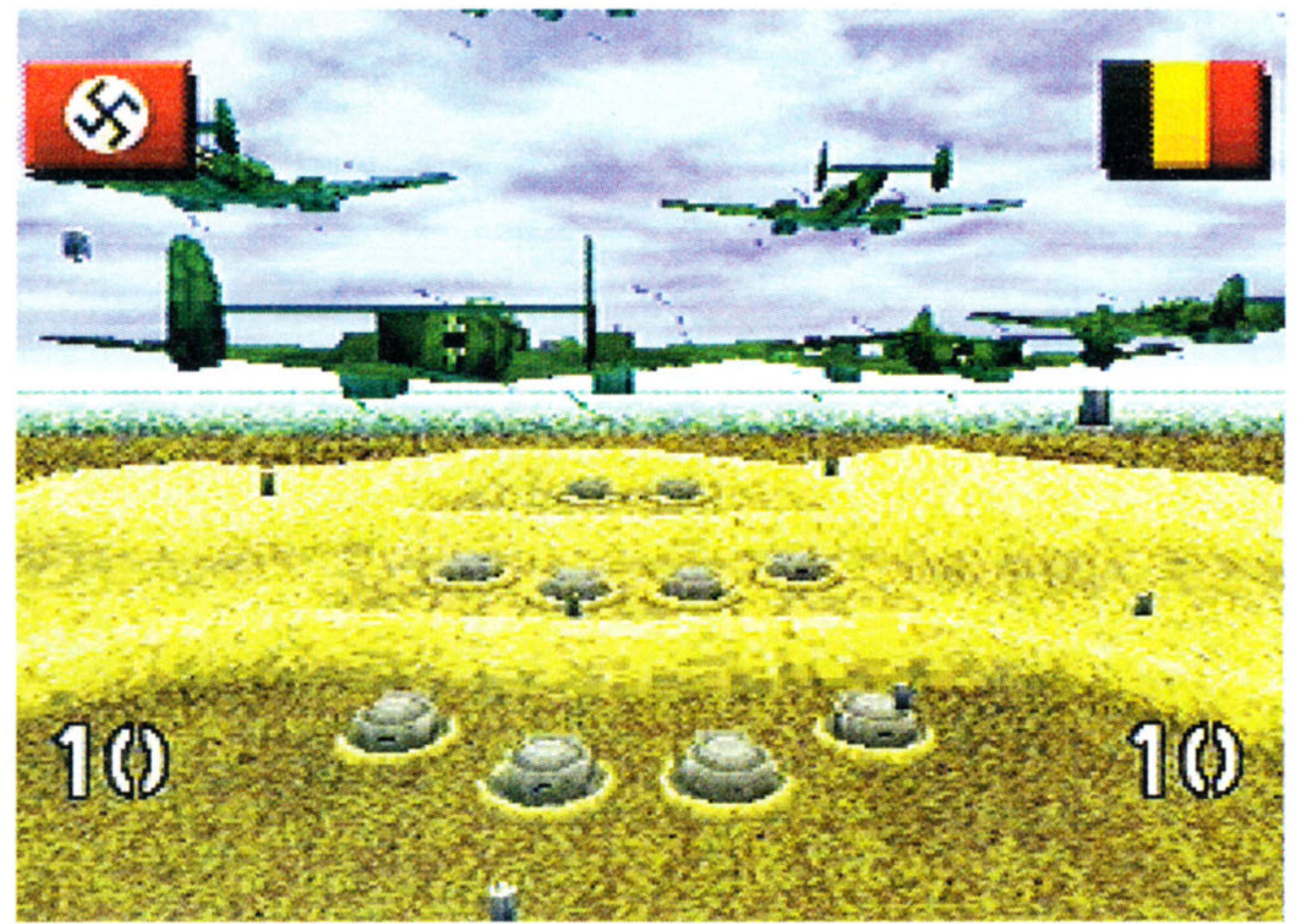
Developer: Sega of Japan

Release: March

Texture-mapped 3-D landscapes mix with realistic polygonal objects and prite-based explosions to recreate the WWII experience.

Many gamers look back at the inception of the 16-Bit era with fond memories of the ill-fated TurboGrafx-16 futuristic strategy war game, *Military Madness*. Working Designs brings back those days of strategic gaming with its translation of Sega of Japan's *World Advanced Daisenryaku*, renamed *Iron Storm* for U.S. release.

While most games see the future as the only way to go regarding technology, *Iron Storm* takes an entirely different approach. Set in World War II, players select one of the three military forces in the conflict and re-enact historical battles, and can even turn the tide of the war to their particular nation's favor. The United States, Nazi Germany and Japan together have a combined total of 54 missions, but players will not necessarily see all of them. For example, the United States campaign carries a total of 14 missions, but if players succeed well, they can reach the good U.S. ending after eight. This branching mission structure makes *Iron Storm* one of the few historical war games that not only allows players to change history, but also gives the game a much greater



▲ *Iron Storm* is a fast-moving, visually impressive Saturn rendition of System Soft's *Daisenryaku* Mega Drive games.

level of replay value. Working Designs has also put a cause behind the release of *Iron Storm* and will be donating a portion of its profits from the sale of each game to the National Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C.

Gameplay is nearly identical to that of *Military Madness*, except expanded to a much larger scale. Players move their units on large maps, generally filling many screens, comprised of hexagonal pieces. Each hexagon is endowed with a particular terrain type which eventually determines the range of movement available to ground units in that turn. Players move their units next to enemy units and are given the option to attack. Being a war strategy game, successful combat is the key to victory. While the world maps for each mission may be large, they feature little more graphic

appeal than most 8-Bit fare. Combat, however, is a different story altogether.

During an attack, a 3-D polygonal representation of the area appears, with polygonal units on either side of the battlefield. The unit detail is exceptional, with all units textured and modeled accurately. The actual battle is nothing more than a 3-D exchange of fire, with unit counts detailing the casualties. Many units have multiple weapons to choose from, each with its own effectiveness for the situation at hand and ranges, which adds yet another layer of strategy. For example, a destroyer could fight its enemy with gun turrets or torpedoes, but turrets may not be effective against all the enemies on the high seas. Each squad contains 10 units, and the elimination of the 10th unit removes the losing squad from the map. One handy feature is the appearance of a flame over units that are on the brink of extinction, making it easier for players to locate the weak points they've established in the enemy offensive. All in all, *Iron Storm* features an overwhelming number of units: more than 500. Comprised of artillery, airplanes, vehicles and troops, the units all tout historically accurate designs, names and alignments.

Iron Storm doesn't have the world's best audio, however. The sound effects are good for what they are, but the fact is, they aren't much more than generic explosion, marching and driving sounds. The game is also relatively mute as far as music goes, with music that plays in the overhead map, but stops when battle ensues.

While the version previewed still contained a great deal of Japanese, *Iron Storm* is an ideal game for someone looking to get away from all the mindless majority. Working Designs has once again done niche gamers a service by translating a solid game with little market potential in the eyes of larger publishers.

- Peter Bartholow



calling cheaters

What you Need:

- A PC or Mac
- Modem, 14.4 kps minimum speed or better
- Internet Connection, PPP/SLIP preferably but not necessarily required

- Forms-Capable Web Browser, i.e. Netscape v2.0, Microsoft Explorer

By Christopher Drost (chrisd@passport.ca)

Are you perpetually seeking the latest video-game tips and cheats to bulldoze through the hottest video games? Do you ever wonder how the video-game publications claim to be the "first" with information on secret levels, hidden levels and infinite lives? If you said "yes" to either of these two questions and haven't yet found yourself reading this text in a t.v. announcer's voice, then this article may be for you.

The answer is really quite simple. While a small percentage of codes and tips are passed out to various media outlets by game developers, magazine readers or by companies/publishers hoping to generate new interest in old games, a large percentage of them are nabbed from the Internet. In fact, some of the best codes and cheats typically reside on Usenet (the newsgroups), the Web and FTP (File Transfer Protocol) areas.

The Usenet Dig

You're most likely aware of how long it takes to plod through a multitude of video game-related Usenet newsgroups in hopes of finding the information you truly seek: the coveted game cheats. Maybe you're the type who quickly skims the message headers or subject lines to speed up your "plodding." Unfortunately, scanning the seemingly endless number of subject lines in hopes of finding how to access the cheat codes in DKC2 is like hunting for a digital needle in the virtual haystack.

There's another problem, too. Many Internet Service Providers (ISP's) can only provide a couple weeks of news items to their users. As new Usenet articles stream in, old articles disappear into digital dust—including tons of game codes, cheats and other interesting tidbits of information.

As a result, many individuals will end up pleading to the Usenet community with a newsgroup message; you don't have to look very hard to dig up a message or two requesting someone 'repost' an old game code or cheat that's been deleted. Chances are that the requests will remain unanswered—especially when you see how many others are requesting the exact same information.

Instead, how about shoveling up some of that old dirt and scooping up the news postings which were already deleted? Or how about a method of isolating all the game codes from the Usenet without all the rest of the newsgroup clutter. With a few research skills and proper software tools, you have a better chance at getting the game cheats and codes you need—quickly, easily and without having to bug anyone. More on that in a second.

Digging the Web

Many magazines and Usenet posts will indicate where to find various cheats on the Web. Some gaming-related pages may also indicate where to find the game codes. In order to dig up other game codes/cheat sites on the Web, learn to utilize the variety of search engines available to you. Sites such as Yahoo, Infoseek, Lycos, Magellan and Excite all provide a very large, comprehensive and searchable database of web sites. Most of these databases, however, are built by keywords and suggestions from their users and their employees. Some may also employ a search "spider" that crawls across the Web to capture new URLs.

However, in order to search for specific game codes and FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions—documents that pertain to specific video games and may contain video-game codes), you will need to utilize a search engine that captures and stores the full-text of a particular Web site. Two fantastic ones are Open Text and Alta Vista.

The Dig—Search Offerings: Usenet and the Web

There's no definitive answer as to which search engine is better than another. In fact, each site has its own particular feature that makes it stand out. But searching for game codes is a totally different matter.

Simply, if you're surfen' Web sites, just about any engine will do—it's your preference and choice. When you want specific information, you have to use a specific site. Preferable search engines for game codes should be ones that allow the ability to search full text, Usenet and FAQs.

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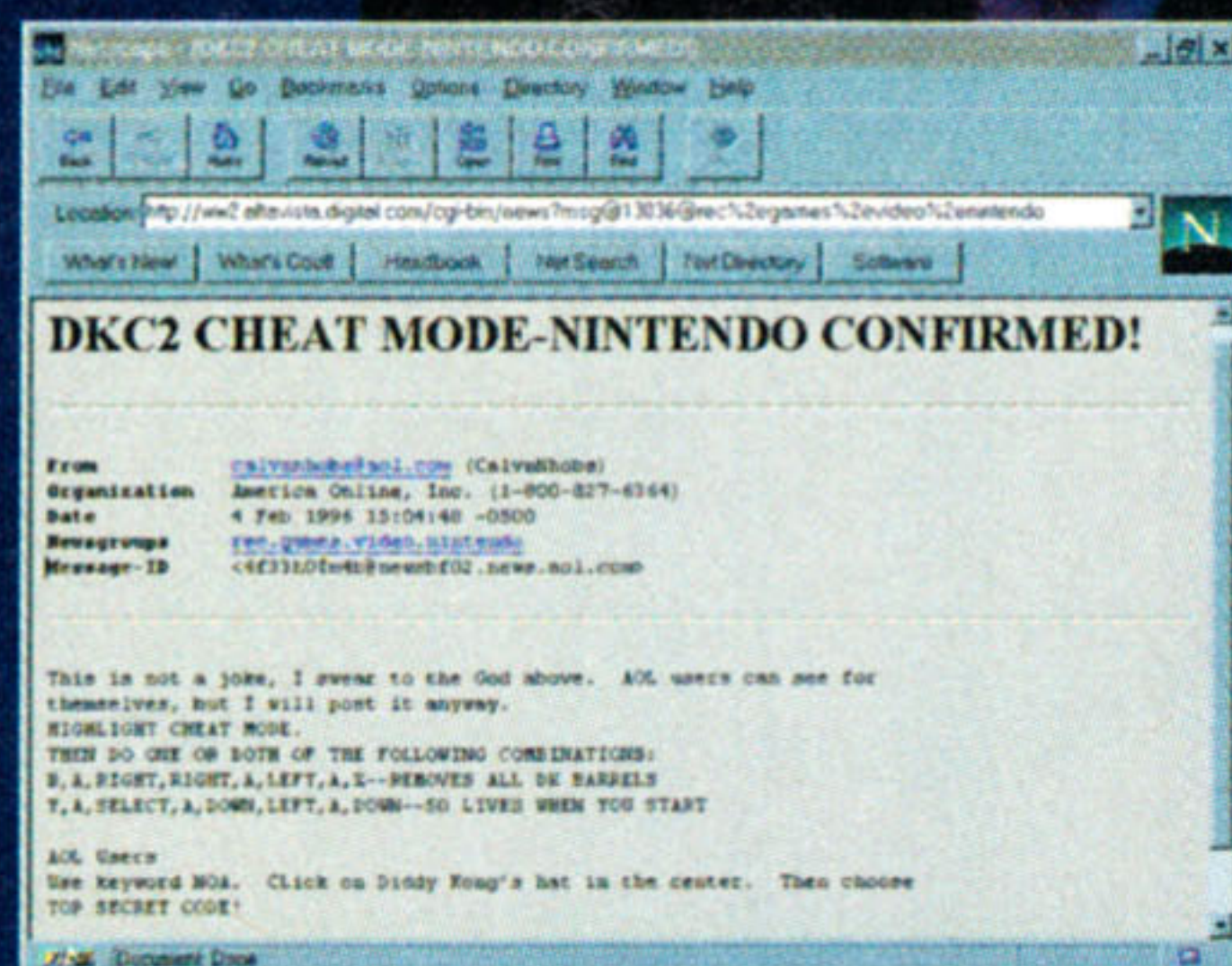
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Simple Searches :

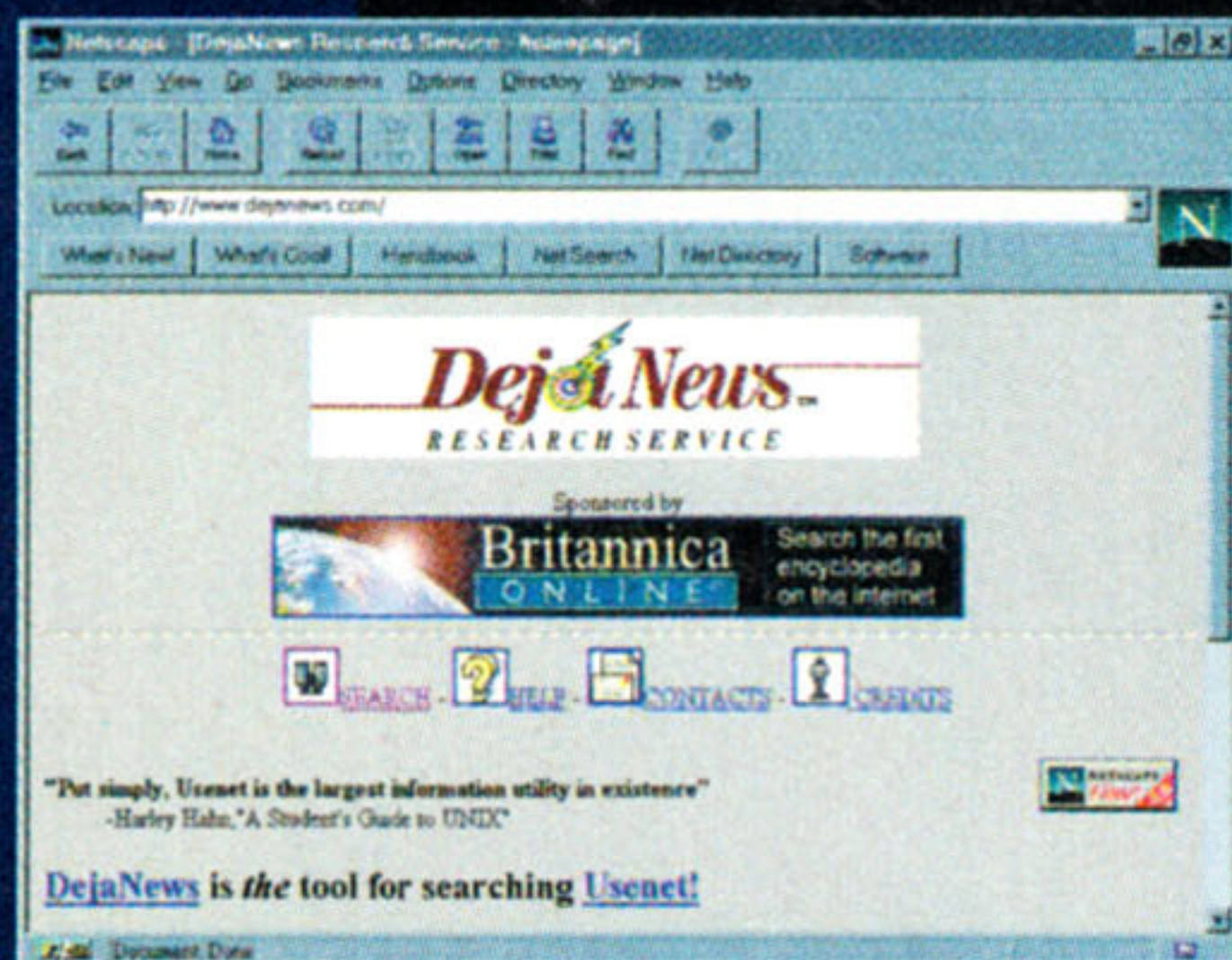
1. CHEAT CODE "DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2" DKC2 DK2

Will find Web/Usenet documents containing as many of these words and phrases as possible. The quotes indicate a phrase. Try different variations of Donkey Kong Country if you're not happy with what you get.



2. CHEAT CODE + DONKEY + KONG -HELP -QUESTION -?

Will result in finding Web/Usenet documents containing the terms cheat and code. Using the "+" sign will automatically narrow the search with the words donkey and kong as well. The "-" sign will ignore messages that contain the words help or question. By ignoring the "?", you can avoid the typical "Does anyone have a cheat for Donkey Kong Country?" question.



However, use this with caution—as someone may ask, "The following are most of the codes to DKC2... Has anyone seen any more???"

3. CHEAT CODE + NBA* -HELP

A little bit of a wider search, this will result in all the Usenet/Web pages with the words cheat and code. While ignoring the word help, the search will find every occurrence of NBA, resulting in games such as NBA Jam, NBA Live '96, etc.

Open Text Index:

A brilliant site offered by a Canadian based company. It searches every word of every page documented and indexed by the company - something like 25 billion words and phrases. Open Text is incredibly fast and allows for queries of just about any length. The site does not, however, provide Usenet search capabilities.

4. SUBJECT:"DONKEY KONG COUNTRY"

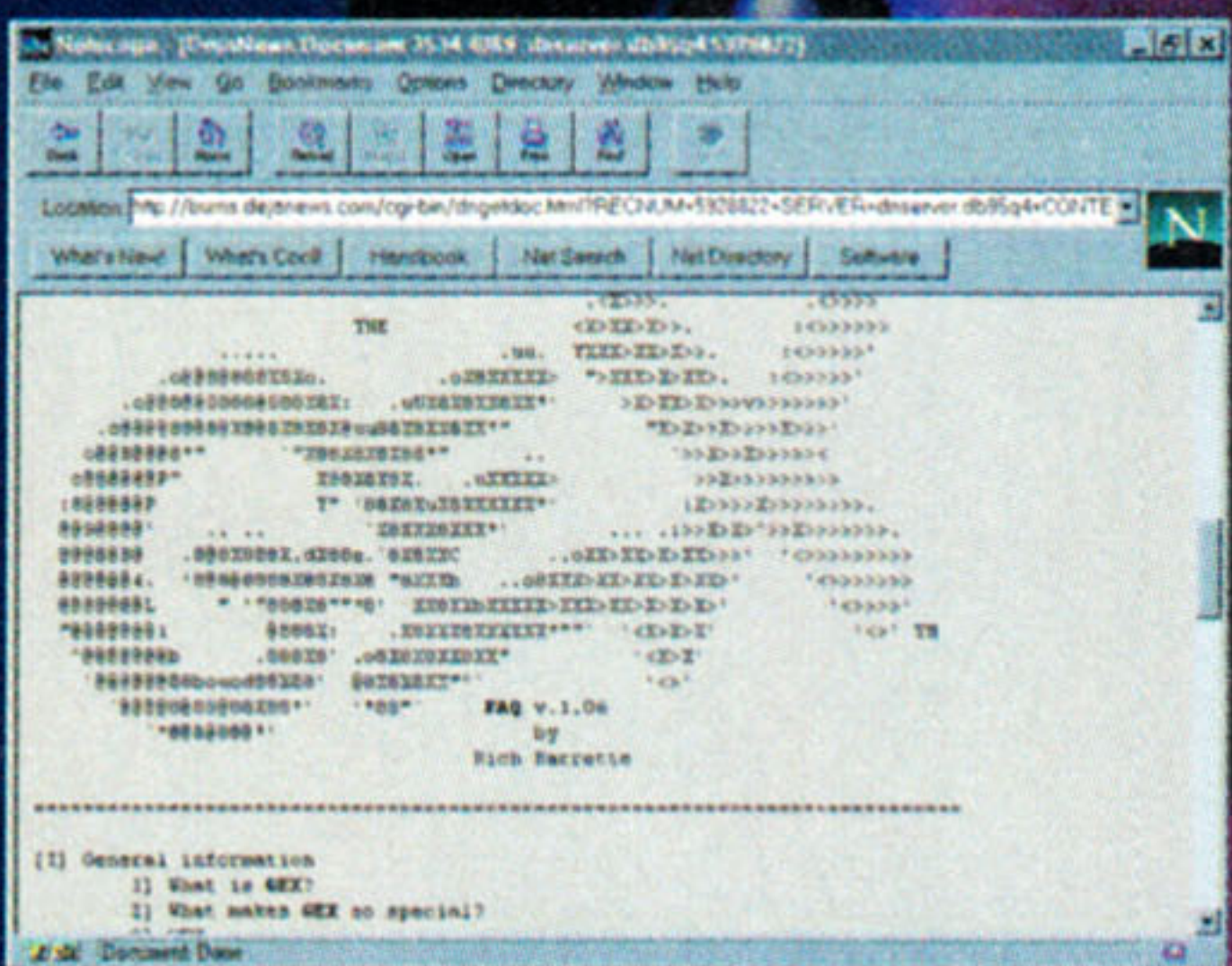
A much wider search, this will result in every news article posted with the phrase "Donkey Kong Country" in the subject of the message.

5. CODE CHEAT DONKEY-KONG-COUNTRY TWO 2

While this feature is not employed on every search engine, you can use hyphens between words to find text that must appear within one word of each other.

6. [CODE CHEAT DONKEY KONG COUNTRY]

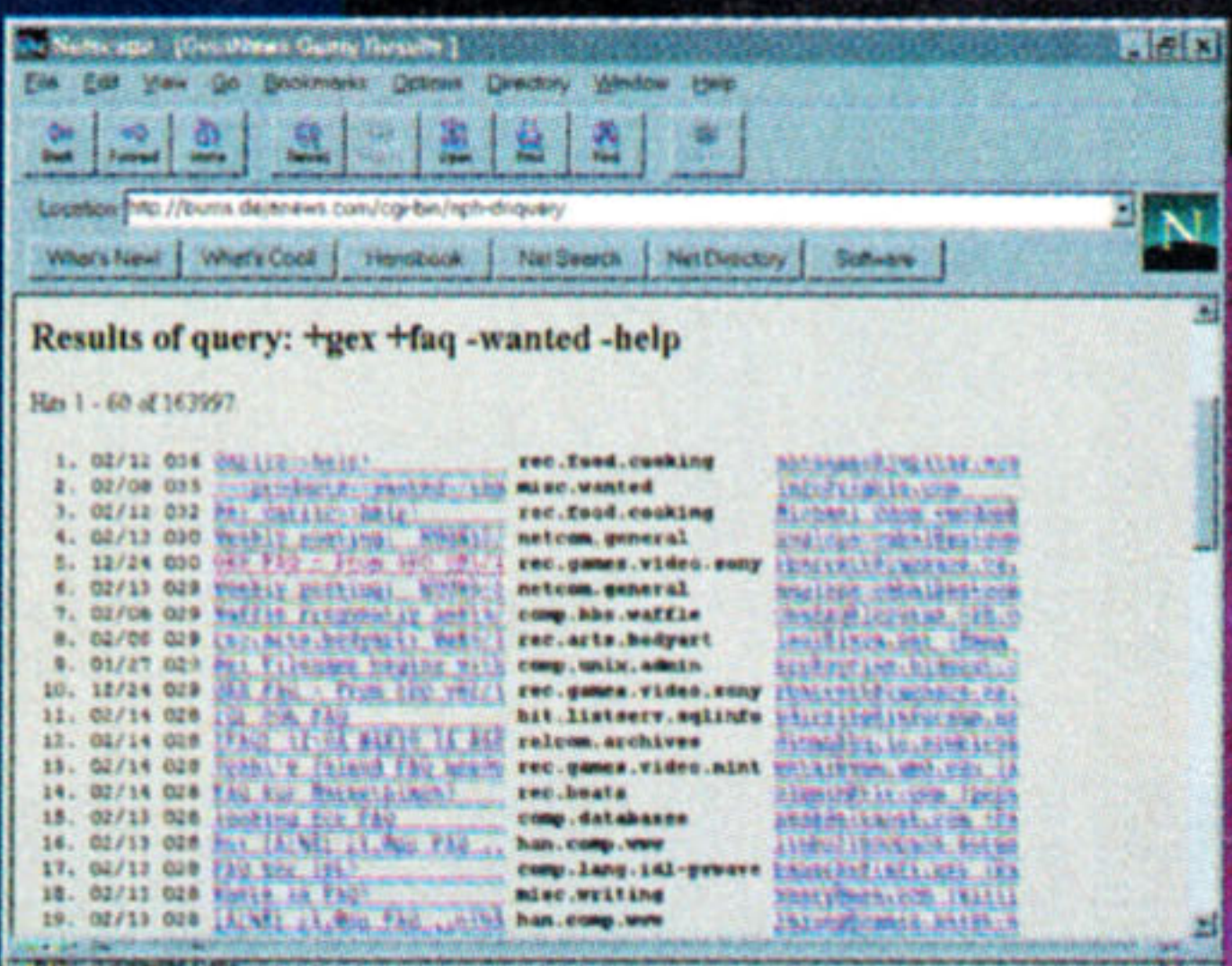
Again, this feature is not employed on every search engine, but if you use brackets, you can find words that appear within 100 words of each other.



7. +GEX +FAQ

Will dig up every occurrence of the video game "Gex" and the word "faq."

While the search will result with a FAQ for Gex, you will probably also get every person asking for a copy of the FAQ as well. "Can some one pleeeeeeaaase forward a copy of the Gex faq or any cheats my way. Thanx!!!"



Alta Vista :

This "64-Bit" search engine is offered by Digital Equipment Corporation and is by far one of the best in terms of speed and return of new/current information. Alta Vista offers a variety of searches, providing a full-text index of more than 18 million Web pages and 15,000 Usenet newsgroups. The company claims its "spider" is constantly searching for new Web and Usenet additions in real-time. This site is great for searching very current information, such as a Usenet posting from yesterday that may not have crossed over to your service provider yet. Newsgroup messages however are kept at most for two-three months.

Deja News :

When it comes to searching the Usenet, this site is on par with Alta Vista with some excellent, if not better, features. While its Usenet searches may not be as current as Alta Vista, the database holds information much longer. Some newsgroup posts are held as little as three months and others as long as a year. Some of its search options allow you to dig up articles by newsgroup, subject, author or by date. While it allows you to search and cross-reference message threads, by far its best feature allows you to see how many messages any individual posted in the past—great for tracking people who constantly post new codes to the various video-game newsgroups. However, its downside is that it doesn't allow for searches of the alt.* category of Usenet (alt.sega.genesis, alt.sony.playstation).

Sites Mentioned

- Alta Vista <http://altavista.digital.com>
- Deja News <http://www.dejanews.com>
- Open Text <http://www.opentext.com>
- Excite <http://www.excite.com>
- InfoSeek <http://guide.infoseek.com>
- Magellan <http://www.magellan.com>
- Yahoo <http://www.yahoo.com>

Excite, InfoSeek, Magellan:

Three sites that offer similar options but different results. Excite's web database is updated weekly and claims to have the last two weeks of Usenet messages. Infoseek is the site that pops up when you access Netscape's search facility. It allows you to search various Usenet groups and collects FAQs as well. Magellan is another site that provides a searchable index of Web, FTP, Gopher and Usenet newsgroups.

Digging out the Cheat Information

Disclaimer: By no means at all will the following instructions guarantee you to find a cheat code. As mentioned earlier in this article, someone must post the information before it's locatable. The intention of this article is to assist you in finding the cheats and codes.

Also, unless you learn how to narrow your search for video-game codes, you may find misleading Usenet messages or Web pages. You may also find, after playing with a Usenet search engine long enough, that the search result will end in various game codes and a bunch of questions about the game code you're looking for. For example, if you're searching for DKC2, you may find the odd code along with several postings for help on entering the code and/or a message or two asking for a copy of the cheat. And don't forget, there may be nothing at all.

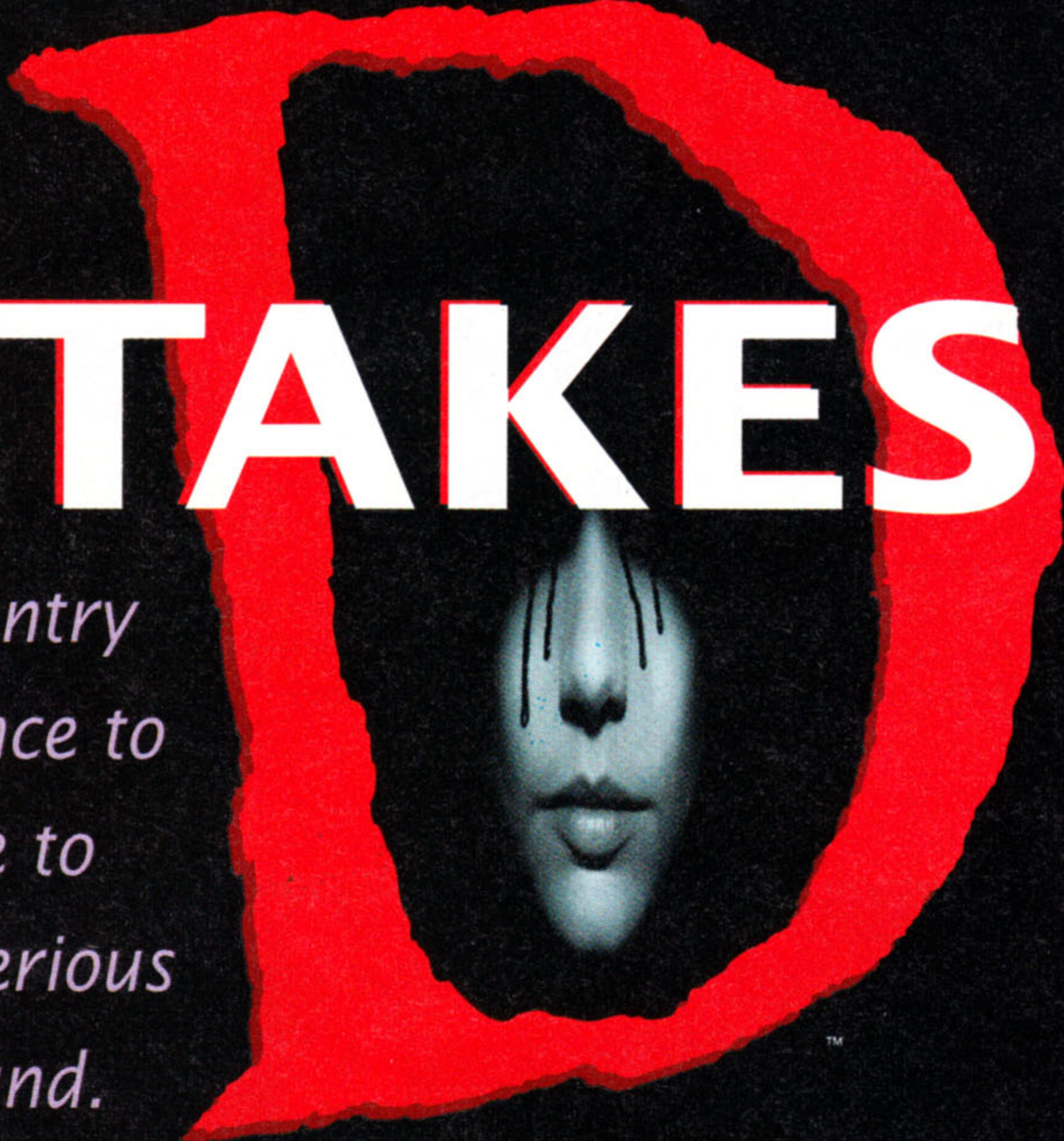
One other major thing to keep in mind: When you type a word as part of a query, it's always good to type it in lower case. Again, using Donkey Kong Country 2 as an example, most search engines will search for donkey, Donkey or DoNKeY if "donkey" is entered. But, if the capitalized word "Donkey" is entered, the search would only match "Donkey."

Also, while not all search engines employ the ability to search with the following features, it's a good bet that they will. Check out the Web page's instructions if you're not sure. Of course, the following terms are suggestions. Try mixing and matching different terms and concepts for different results.

Buried within these three rooms are secrets to unravel the mystery of D.

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1

Hint:
The Tally Of Sins And A Spider's Limbs



2

Hint:
The Surface Aquarian And A Weapon Sagittarian



3

Hint:
The Mate Of The Quill And A Vessel To Fill



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IG queries

Many gamers are confused by a company's desire to "lock-out" games from market to market—U.S./Japan/Europe etc. Could you provide a simple and concise explanation of their logic?

Q

Chris Darner
New York, NY

Why does Sega make game systems if they are going to "abandon" them soon after each release? (i.e., 32X, Sega CD, perhaps Saturn and Nomad)

Q

John Kim
Potomac, MD

I'm always fascinated by technology and the incredible speed at which it's advancing. It's amazing to compare today's technology with that of 10 or 15 years ago—what will technology hold in store for us 10 or 15 years from now?

Q

Cori Skagen
Sault Ste. Marie,
Ontario, Canada

I sometimes wonder why Nintendo does not want to use CD as its storage device: Is the company afraid of them? Did something happen in the company's past with a CD that has had a traumatic effect in its life? I guess only they know. I just hope they catch up with the times!

Q

Jason Beatty
Greentown, IN

ARTICULATE QUESTIONS FROM THE GAMES

A There are four reasons companies would want to prevent one cartridge from working in multiple territories. The first and most pleasant explanation: Lock-outs enable a company such as Sony to accurately track sales figures for given regions and coordinate advertising campaigns and software production to coincide with separate markets. Another "nice" explanation: Special codes may be necessary to run specific software on European PAL machines. The third, a less rosy and perhaps dated reason: Gray-market importers raise prices on software to astronomical levels and put \$30-50 profits into their pockets which might otherwise go to buying more games. Prevention of early gray-market imports thus increases domestic sales. Finally, the least pleasant explanation: Game cartridge piracy originates in Asian territories (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan), and North American and European lockouts prevent Asian piracy from spreading like wildfire through other markets.

A Each system mentioned in your letter has a distinct history, and to lump them all together as systems that Sega planned to abandon would be unfair. The Sega CD was undersupported by both Sega and its third-party developers when Sega's development tools—notoriously buggy—proved too much for most people to handle, and the benefits of releasing CD-based games (especially for a small installed base) were seen as tiny. Sega's 32X was quickly rushed together by Sega engineers for reasons open to speculation—many believe that Sega wanted to have new technology to counter the release of the Jaguar and 3DO, and for that purpose, the 32X seems to have succeeded somewhat. At the very least, it kept gamers buying Sega-labeled products, though the spotty release record for the peripheral damaged Sega's reputation considerably within the games media. It was abandoned for multiple reasons, including a lack of developer interest and what some perceive to be a callous recognition on Sega's part that development for such a small userbase (even those lured in by advertising promises) would ultimately be worthless. There's little for Sega to abandon with the Nomad, as it has a huge software library and requires little additional support from the company, and the jury is still out on long-term support for the Saturn. A solid slate of releases will continue to flow out of Saturn developers through the end of 1996 and likely into the near future.

A If history is any guide, two words: pre-wrapped gerbils.



No it's not pre-wrapped gerbils but many gamers hope Cruisin' USA will port over to N64.

According to Nintendo, KI for the N64 could be the best of the bunch to date. Let's hope it really hits its release date.



A Though it's tempting to just laugh at the thought of Mario consulting a shrink to get over the memories of horrid CD-ROM "edutainment" software, Nintendo has in fact had two negative experiences with CD-ROM manufacturers; namely Sony and Philips, in two separate abortive attempts to design a Super Famicom/Super NES compatible CD-ROM peripheral. While these two experiences should clearly illustrate that Nintendo has had no great historic aversion to the potential for loading times and 600-megabyte game discs, the company may have also had some negative effect on the corporation's tolerance for CD-ROM hardware limitations and manufacturers. Keep in mind that Nintendo would also lose some control over manufacturing software—a profitable part of its business—if its licensees produced CD-ROMs, which will not happen if proprietary N64 discs are used instead.

If the N64 has been delayed until September '96, does that mean that none of the U.S. "Dream Team" developers were ready with softs like *Cruisin' USA* and *Killer Instinct 2* for an April launch?

Q Frank Eva
Oak Creek, WI

Why does the Saturn version of *SF Alpha* load up so much faster than the PS version? After all, they're both double-speed CD-ROM drive systems.

Q Kwon Y. Chin
Waltham, MA

INDUSTRY'S END-USERS

A As of today, there's no question that Nintendo, at least, did not have *KI2* ready for production on the Nintendo 64 hardware: Word has it that Nintendo is again (as of late February 1996) claiming that the version of *KI* released for the N64 will be a totally unique *KI* game unlike either of the arcade titles released to date. Obvious speculation: a Nintendo-produced *Virtua Fighter* 2-style 3-D fighter.

A The Saturn version has a little extra memory for buffering *SF Alpha*'s transition screen graphics and can thus keep you occupied with intermissions as more game data loads into memory.

A Nintendo-produced *Virtua Fighter* for the N64? What could be better!



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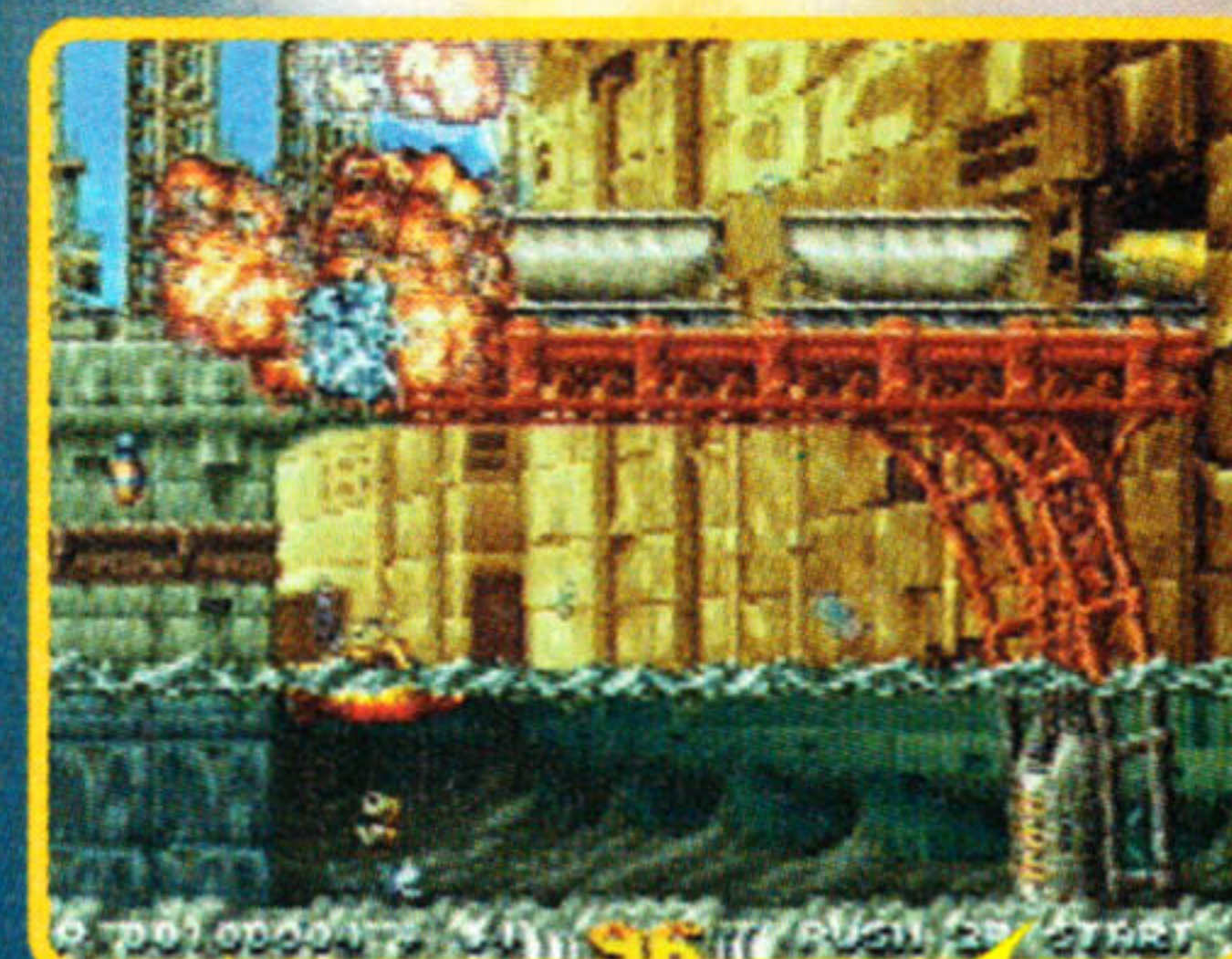
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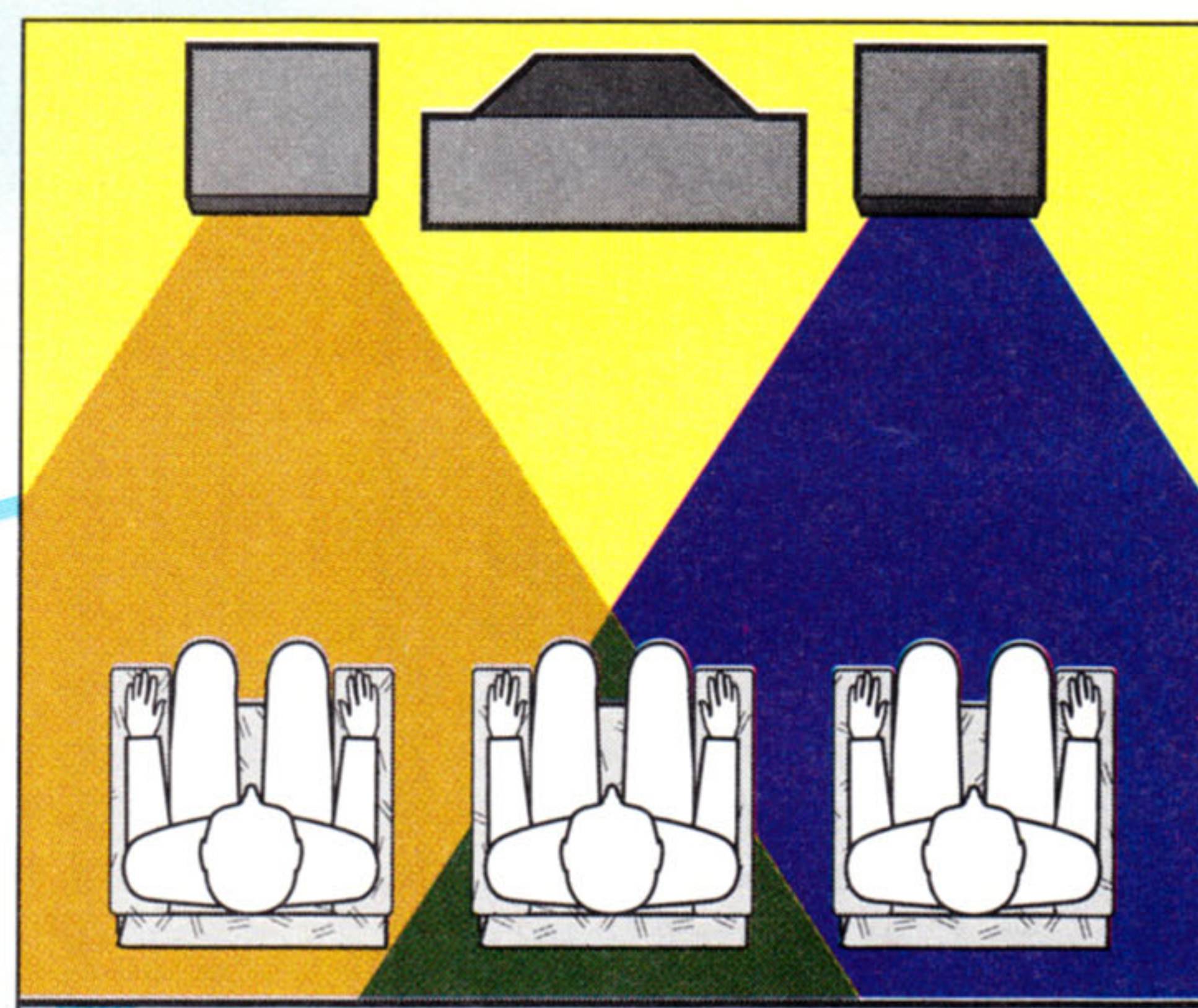
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With traditional two-speaker stereo, the listener needs to be seated in the center chair to receive the full stereo image.



What is "3-D Sound?"

The Dominance of 3-D Sound
"Three-D sound will take over the [computer game] industry," says Ken Lagace, director of sound engineering at Microprose, noting that 3-D sound is ideal for games because of the increased sense of immersion. Microprose has already published two games with SRS sound, Colonization for Windows and CivNet.

By Doug Bauer

The term "3-D sound," like almost any term featured in *IG's* Buzzword column, is largely ambiguous: It has come to mean any enhancement in the sound experience beyond simple left- and right-channel stereo. Spatial enhancers (which make sounds appear to be coming from places other than the speakers) and surround sound decoders (which require multiple speakers) expand the 2-D experience to left, right, front and back sounds but do not go into the realms of sound sourcing from above and below the listener. They do, however, greatly improve the immersiveness of video games and other entertainment experiences.

How do Spatial Enhancers Make "3-D Sounds?"

Human ears are able to detect slight variations in sound frequencies based on where the sounds are coming from in space. The brain learns to use these slight differences, along with the tiny volume differences between the two ears, to "locate" sounds in the environment. Common microphones do not accurately reproduce these minute but important audio differences.

SRS Labs' patented Sound Retrieval System takes standard audio output and approximates how the ear would hear that original source if the listener was

actually present when the source was recorded. The difference when compared to traditional stereo is quite astounding—sounds and music no longer seem to be coming only from your speakers, but rather from all around you. SRS's result is a much more marked feeling of "being there"—and isn't that what video games are all about?

There are two variants on the SRS system. The first, software driven (like Microprose's work) does

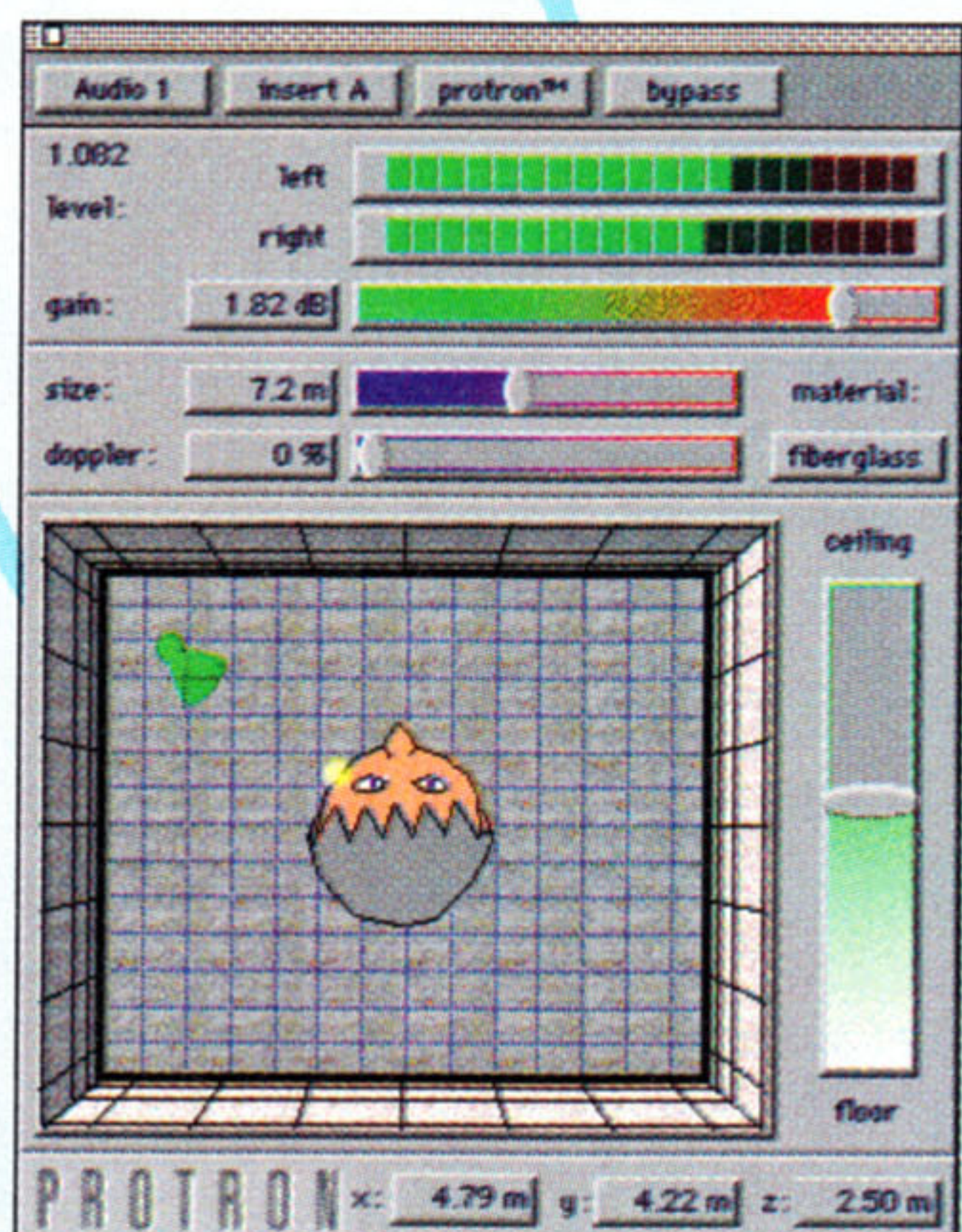
Dolby
Dolby's system works by encoding two additional channels (rear and center) into traditional two-channel audio during the recording or transmission of the original sound source(s). The intended effect requires an encoded signal, but by incorporating a slight (echo) delay on the rear speakers' signals, a simplistic approximation of a sound field can be reproduced from an unencoded signal.

"...sounds and music no longer seem to be coming only from your speakers..."

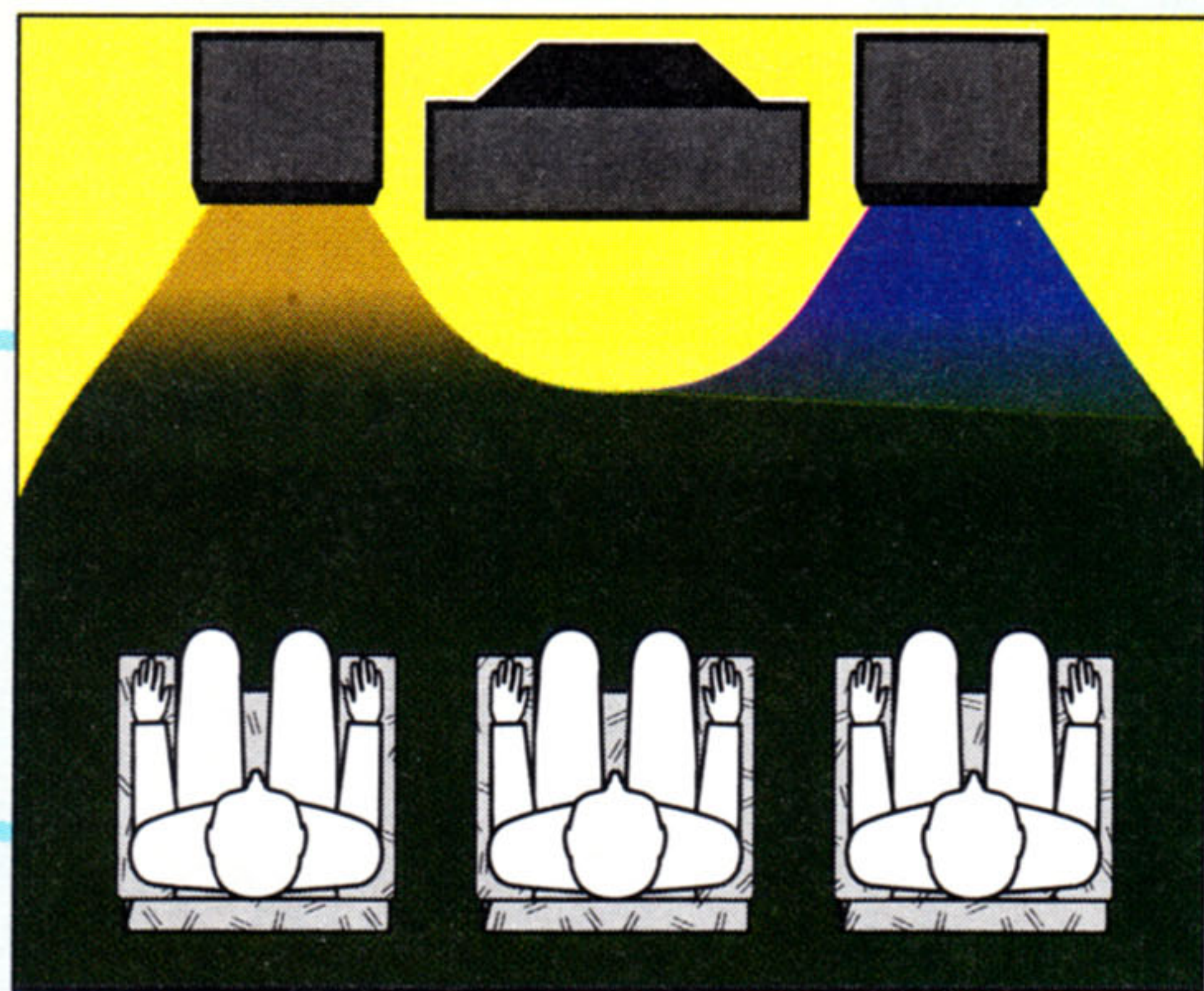
not require special hardware as long as the original source was processed with SRS, and the second takes standard stereo audio and SRS encodes it on the fly—one such device is NuReality's Vivid 3-D system. In either case, SRS requires a minimum of two speakers, and companies from Microprose and Interplay to Crystal Semiconductor (sound cards) and NEC support the format. Many audio firms such as Pioneer, Kenwood and RCA incorporate SRS sound processing into their consumer audio gear as well.

Desper Products' Spatializer, which is being used in the recording industry, has recently begun to make some waves in the game arena. Microprose's upcoming "Sid Meyer's Civilization II" will be encoded with Spatializer, which is similar to SRS in concept and execution.

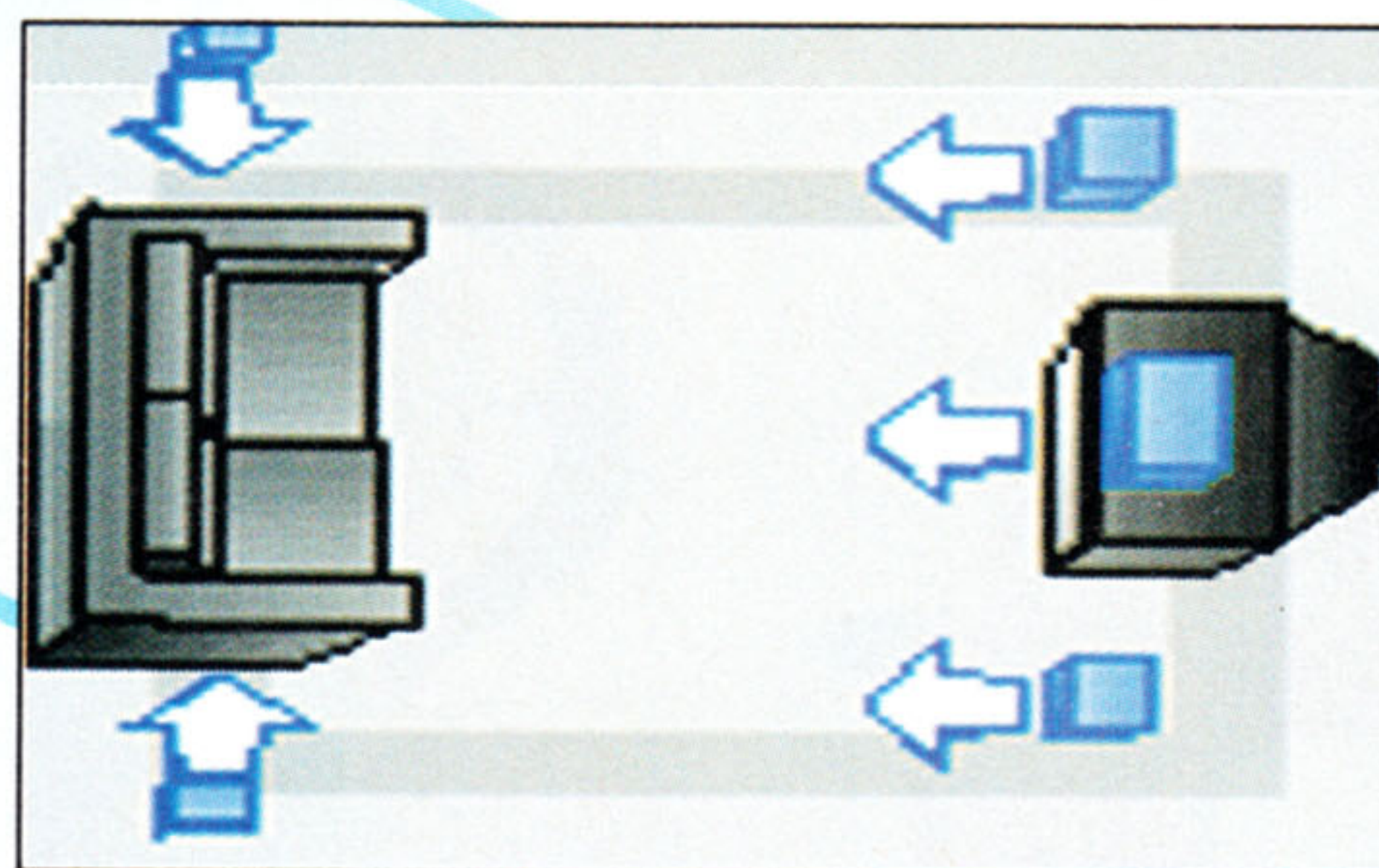
QSound Virtual Audio from QSound Labs, Inc. works in a similar fashion as SRS and Spatializer, but with a few notable differences. QSound works by the same principles to produce an apparent 180-degree sound field around the



From Crystal River/Audio-Reality, the picture to the left is an example screen from Proton—an AudioReality positional 3-D audio software plug-in for the Digidesign Protools system used in high-end recording studios around the world.



◀ With SRS, there is no stereo "sweet spot" to be found. The listener should hear the same stereo sound no matter where they are seated in front of the speakers.



◀ Dolby Laboratories' ProLogic Surround system actually surrounds the listener with speakers in an attempt to create a full audio experience. The only problem: there are no spatial audio effects.

listener through only two speaker sources; but unlike SRS, you can't buy a QSound box to make a normal CD produce 3-D music—sounds are recorded specially and played back through standard speakers. In the gaming world, QSound applications can be encoded in real time by the system's processors, though QSound is more of a drain on system processor power than the off-board SRS.

Sony Imagesoft and Psygnosis plan to use QSound on 10 new titles in the upcoming months, beginning with the PC version of Assault Rigs, a tank combat game, and the PlayStation title Chronicles of the Sword. Sega has also dipped its toe in the QSound pool by including QSound processing capability in the Saturn's audio processor.

How Does Surround Sound Make 3-D Audio?

An entirely different approach is taken by Dolby Laboratories' ProLogic Surround system, which uses two (or three) additional speakers to provide four channels of sound, surrounding the listener and providing audio cues from behind as well as from the front left, right and center. Though surrounding yourself with speakers gives you audio from several different directions, you don't get any spatial effects—the SRS system can be used in conjunction with Pro-Logic to mix the best of both worlds.

Dolby's system is much less sophisticated than QSound, so games can make use of Surround mixing more easily in realtime. Electronic Arts has a few titles out on the 3DO which utilize Dolby Surround sound including Need for

Speed, Road Rash and FIFA Soccer. The effect in the racing games is phenomenal—the player can instantly tell if that police siren is behind or ahead purely by using audio cues.

Where is 3-D Sound Going?

Crystal River Engineering of Palo Alto, Calif., may well have the answer. They have developed a system called AudioReality that recreates a full sphere of sound around the listener using only two speakers. Sounds seem to origi-

nate from above and below, as well as from the front, back and sides.

How did they achieve this? They placed microphones inside people's ears in controlled environments and came up with mathematical transformations to describe exactly what sounds "sound like" to the brain depending on the sounds' relative positions, frequencies and so on. In this way, an incredible number of situations were controlled for (including the placement of human shoulders relative to ears and the Doppler

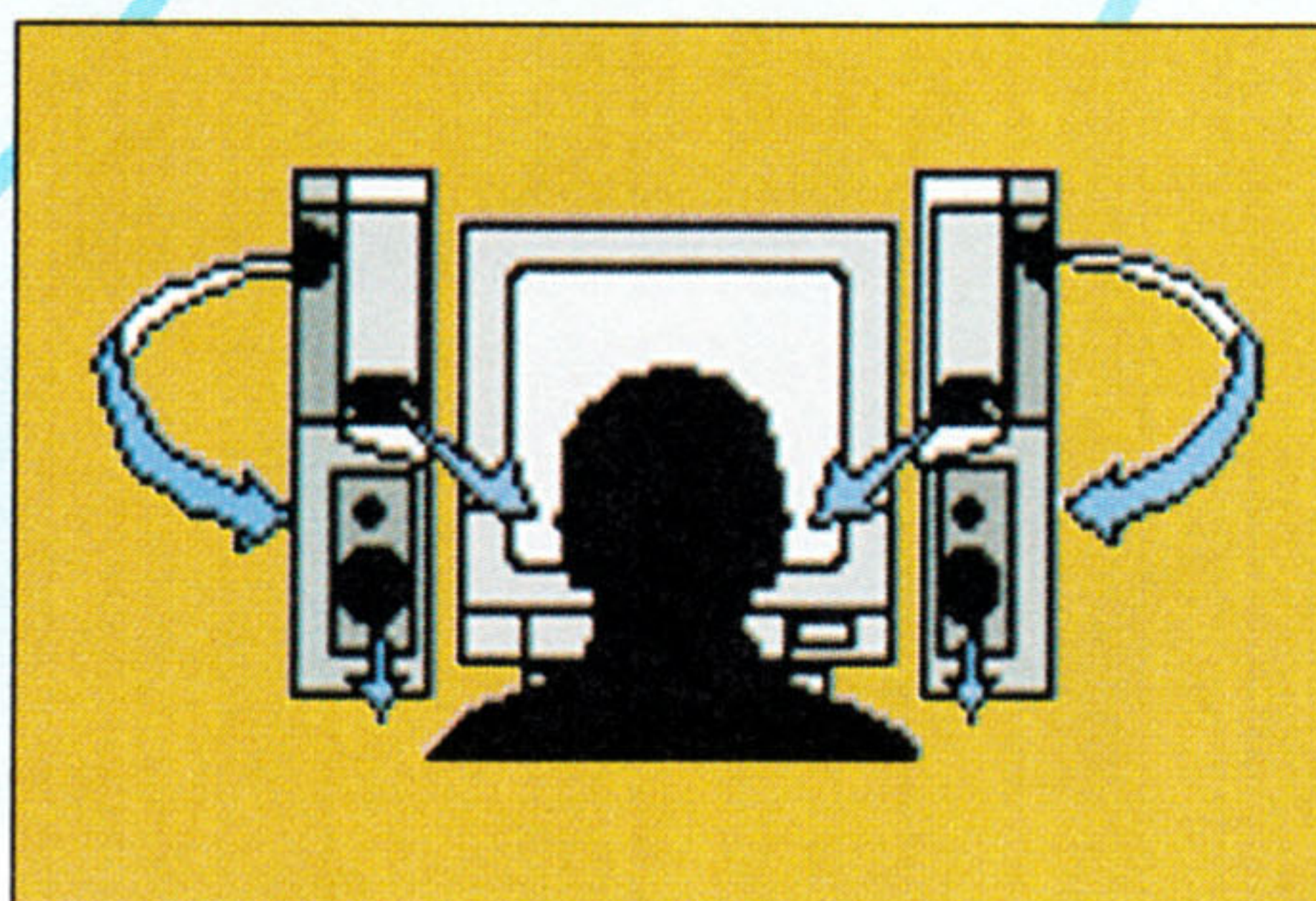
effect) in a single mathematical model. Because of the complexity of the model, the desired accuracy of sound reproduction and the necessity of a clean separation of the left and right signals, AudioReality works best with headphones. But "90-percent accuracy of the effect can be achieved with a two-speaker setup," says Crystal River's Toni Schneider. Conceptually incredible, the technology will appear in Windows '95 games (see sidebar) for home use.

Crystal River

Crystal River's first product was the NASA-commissioned Convolvotron (TM), the first realtime 3-D sound simulator. Now they are bringing their technology to the consumer PC and video game market, and you won't have long to wait to hear it yourself. Crystal River worked with Microsoft to define the 3-D audio portion of the Windows '95 Game SDK (Software Developer's Toolkit). Game programmers will be able to simply "attach" sounds to any object in the 3-D environment and the program will do the rest. Dave Taylor of id Software (the creators of Doom) helped define the AudioReality game API and at least some of the technology should make it into Quake, id's highly anticipated upcoming release.

(See picture opposite page, bottom left.)

"Dolby's system is less sophisticated than QSound, so games can make use of Surround mixing in realtime."



◀ Stereo sound can be achieved using front-mounted speakers with uni-directional settings, but the results are not as successful as those created by the SRS system.

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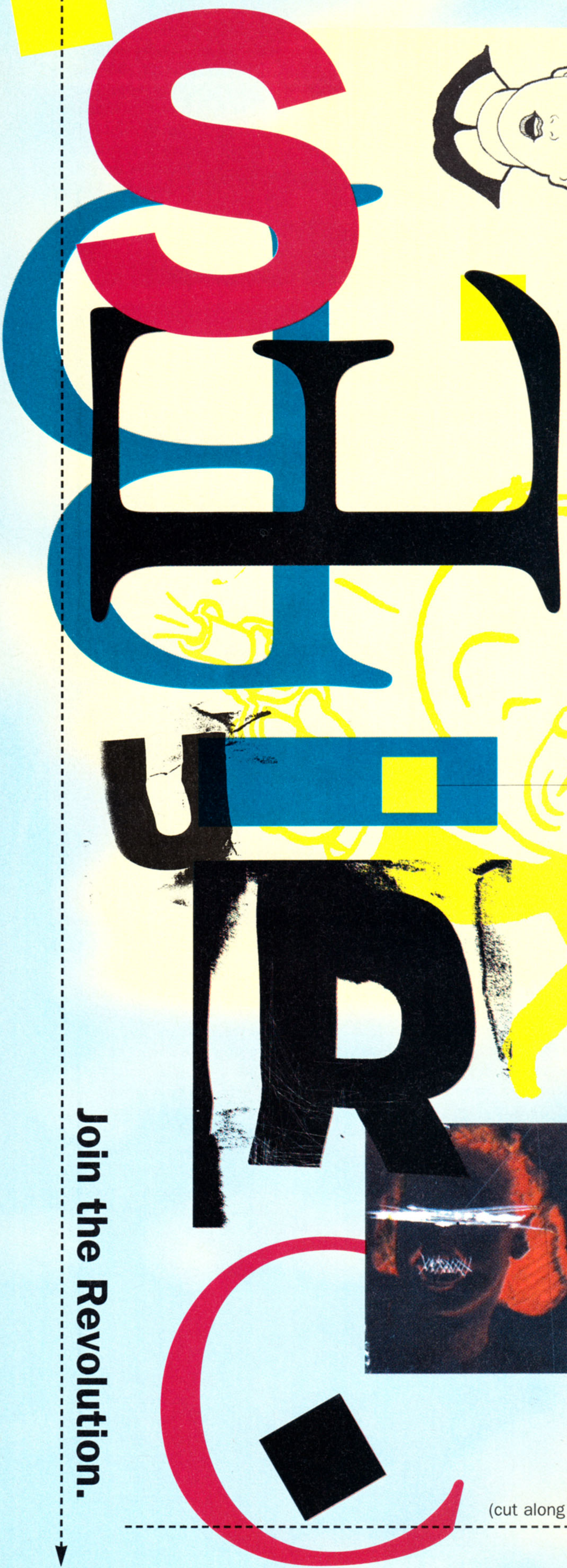
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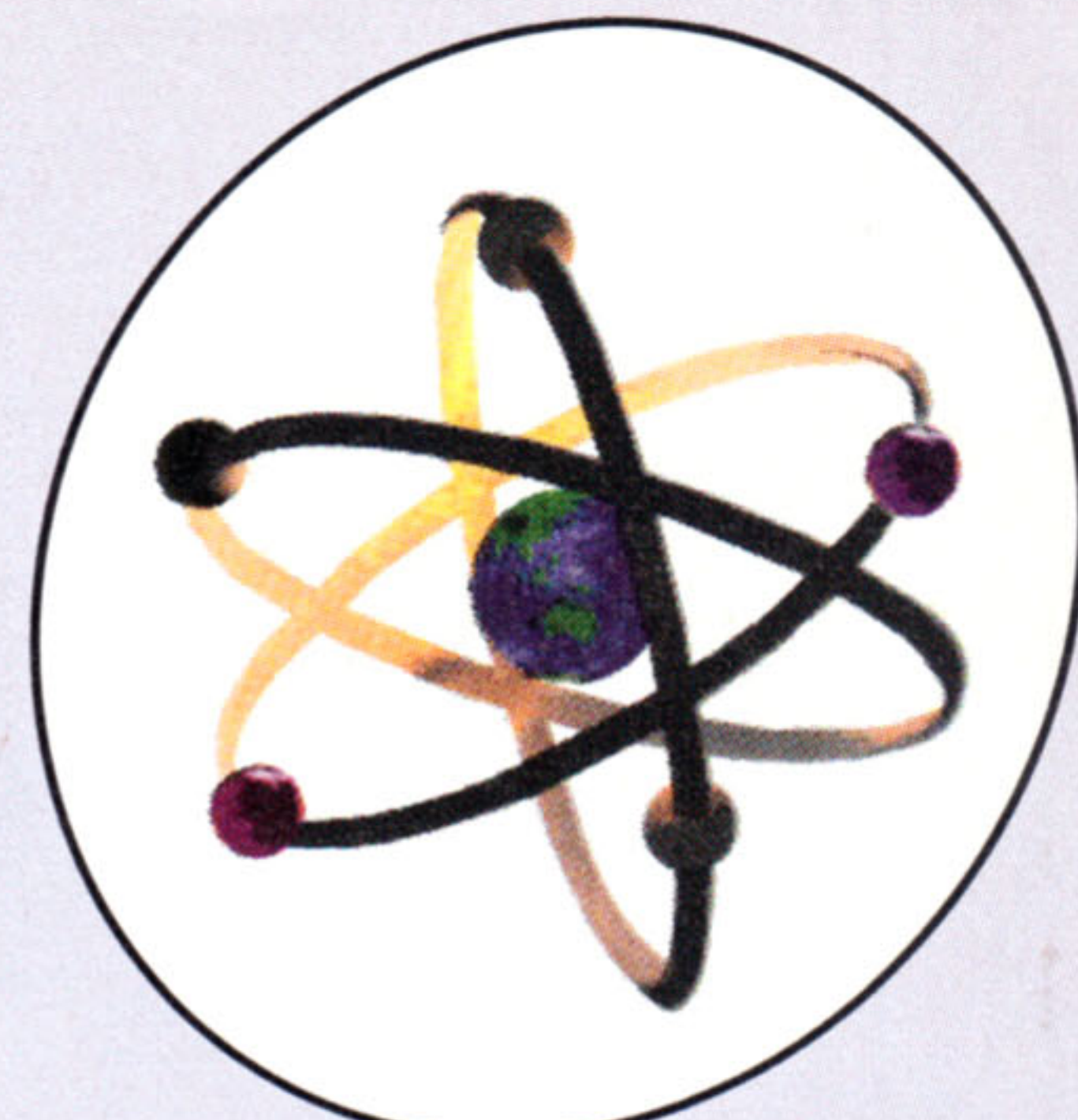
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 - Sergio Aragonés plays both DC and Marvel for April Fools (April 12th).
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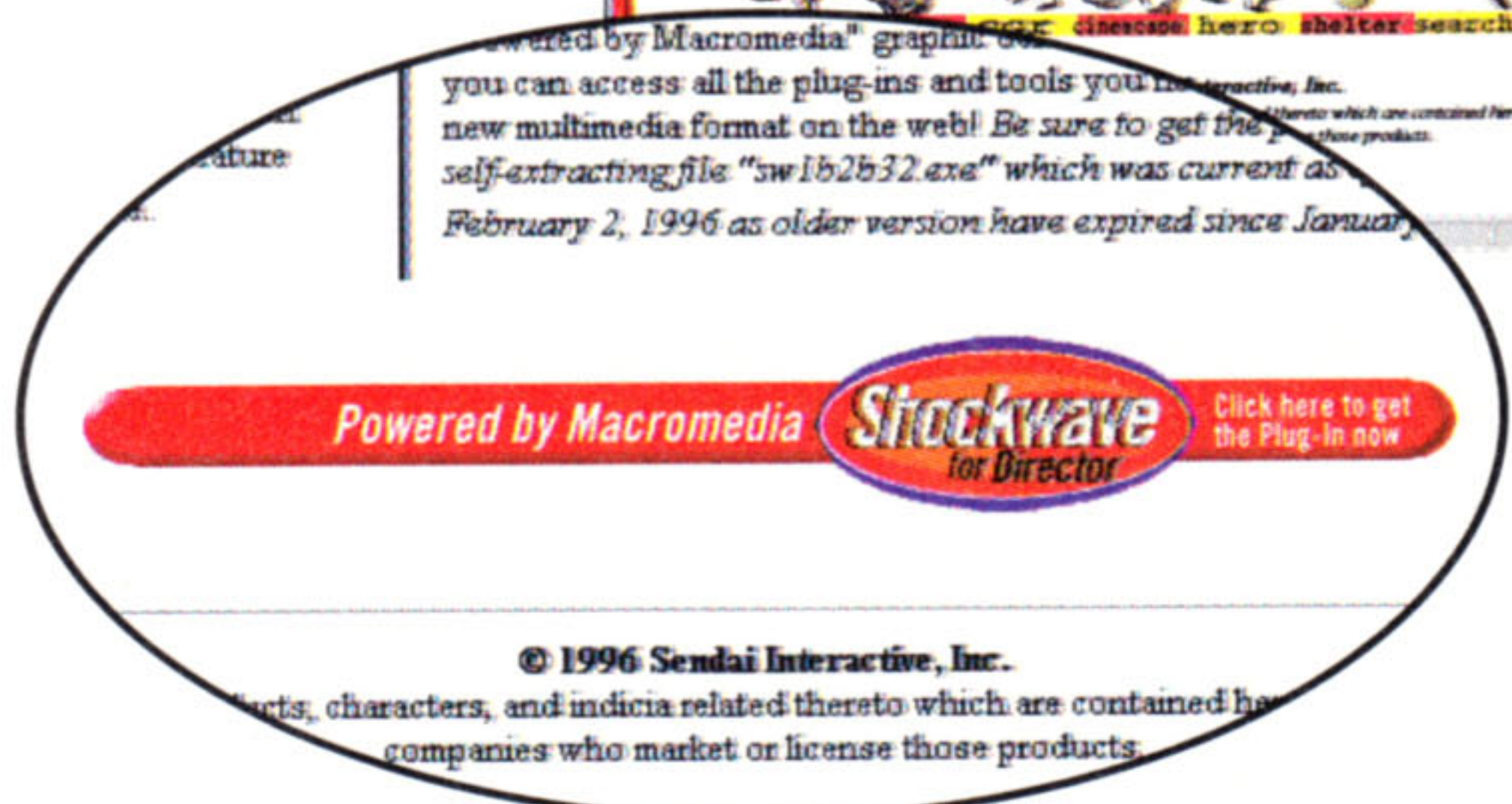
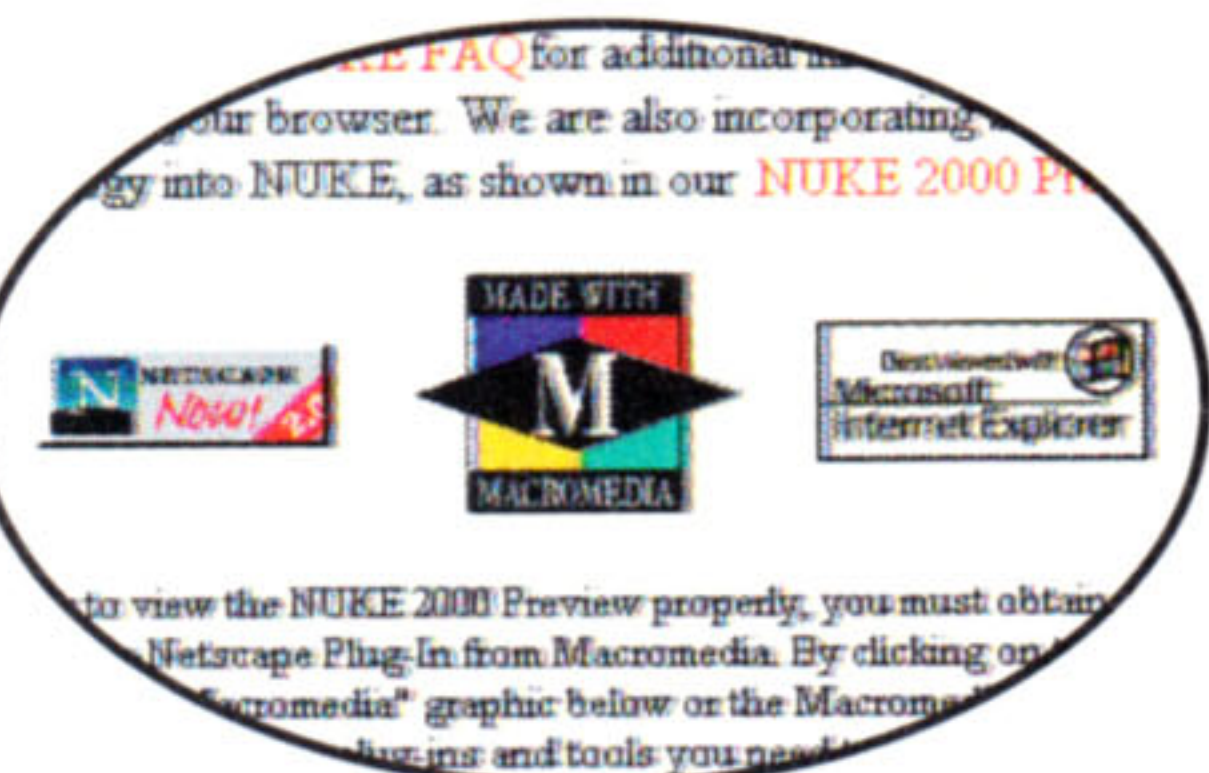
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CGR

- The Infocom team: A look back at how it all started.
- The first review of Ripper, Take 2 Interactive's start-studded adventure.

EGM

- Hands-On Coverage of the Nintendo 64 & The First N64 Games.
- The latest news on the M2 game system (April 5th).
- An in depth profile of Tekken2 (April 19th).
- Earthworm Jim creator Doug TenNapel talks about his new game through Dreamworks SKG (April 12th).



Your Gateway To Gaming News On The Internet.

The conditions are not the same today as a dozen years ago when a multibillion-dollar

business shriveled to almost nothing in less than a year.

Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it" is a comfortable phrase that gives some people a warm inner glow. They hug history to them like a security blanket, safe in the belief that knowledge of the past will armor them against future shocks.

No one ever mentions the flip side: "Those who are ruled by history are doomed to endless surprises." History runs in general cycles, but it seldom treads exactly the same ground twice.

Last year's events have made history worshippers in the console field very nervous. They detect parallels to the Great Video Game Crash of 1984, and they start to sweat. The mere threat of another deluge has

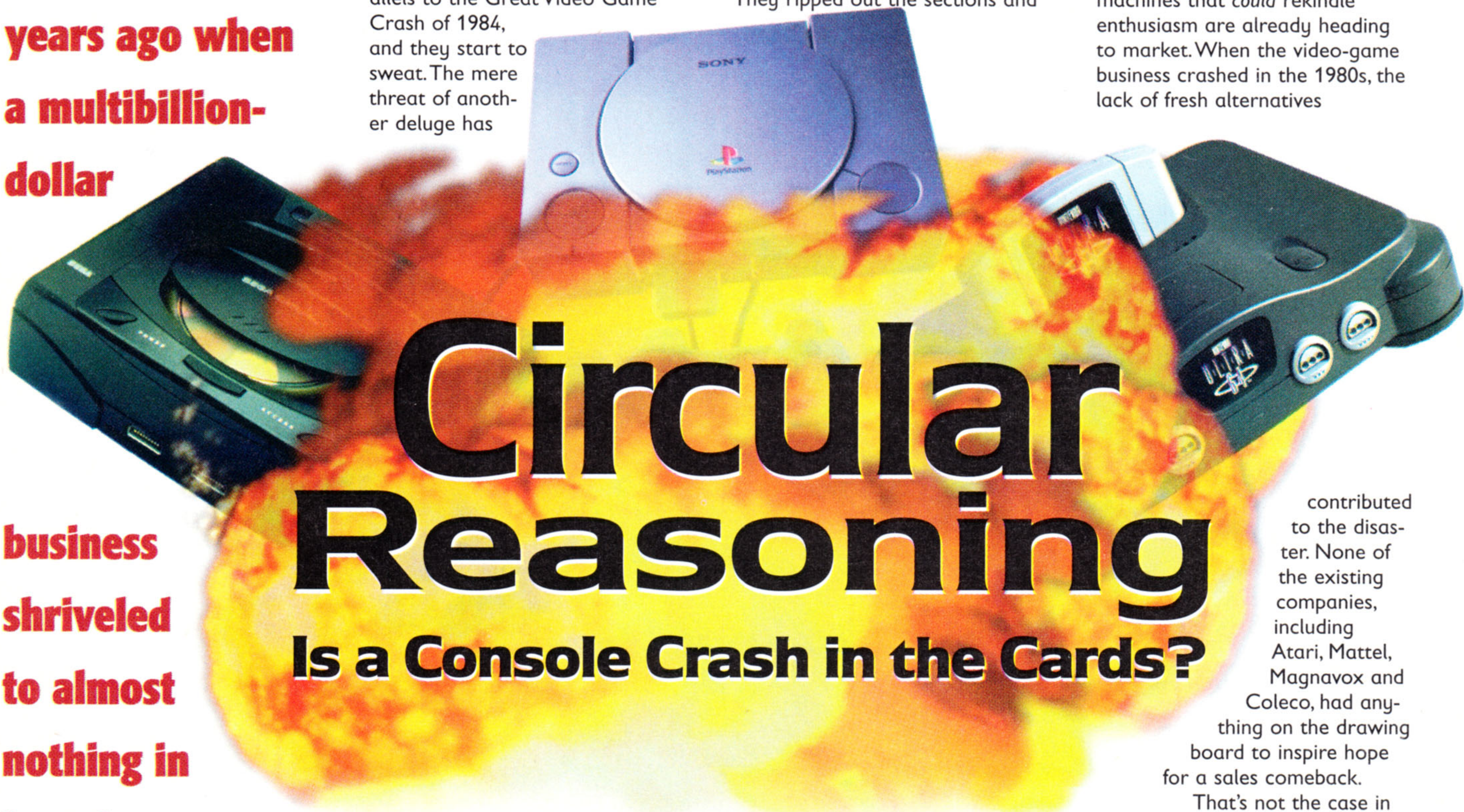
The Great Crash resulted from an over-supply of bad product in the face of a temporarily soft consumer demand. A hundred fast-buck artists simultaneously decided that making video games was the expressway to mega-millions. They flooded stores with games no one wanted, then promptly went out of business.

When cartridge companies dumped its products into the discount and odd-lot channels, the \$5 titles swamped the full-price ones. Margins crumpled and profitability disappeared. Wholesalers and retailers had no incentive to carry console games or systems. They ripped out the sections and

3DO kept a rein on the number of titles and how many of each are produced, there is no vast reservoir of rejected games to push full-price goods over the cliff.

Retailers understand console games much better than they did the first time around. The mistaken perception that console games were a fleeting fad contributed to the severity of the Great Crash. When Nintendo rebuilt the U.S. video-game audience in the late 1980s, it proved that this form of entertainment had an enduring popularity that transcends the sales roller coaster.

Another difference is that machines that *could* rekindle enthusiasm are already heading to market. When the video-game business crashed in the 1980s, the lack of fresh alternatives



Circular Reasoning

Is a Console Crash in the Cards?

many companies scurrying for the high ground of PC software, edutainment and infotainment.

It makes sense to diversify as a hedge against the unsettled console market, but the conditions are not the same today as a dozen years ago when a multibillion-dollar business shriveled to almost nothing in less than a year. A supplier stampede could push consoles over the cliff, but that's the only scenario likely to produce anything approaching a rerun of the cartridge game collapse that swept the 2600, ColecoVision, Intellivision and Odyssey from U.S. store shelves.

replaced them with products they could sell at favorable prices.

The similarities to the current situation are undeniable. The 16-Bit market is finished and gamers haven't gone nuts over 32-Bit technology. There are few compelling games, and few are moving out at full retail price.

Yet the differences between the Great Crash and today are equally incontrovertible. Many have criticized the hardware manufacturers' tight control over software support, including me, but this is the hour in which that control becomes significant, even vital. Because Sega, Nintendo and

contributed to the disaster. None of the existing companies, including Atari, Mattel, Magnavox and Coleco, had anything on the drawing board to inspire hope for a sales comeback.

That's not the case in 1996. The Nintendo 64 has sparked genuine enthusiasm, and there is a realistic possibility that the 3DO/Matsushita combined M2 will roll out in the next 12 months.

What we have here is a pause, not a debacle, unless manufacturers panic. Sales will stay spotty until at least fourth-quarter 1996 and perhaps through mid-1997, but the sky is *not* falling. This is a console recession, not the obliteration of the whole hobby. Retail departments will shrink for awhile, because current volume doesn't justify that much display space, but the next upturn is already on the horizon.

— Arnie Katz

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Address _____

City _____ State _____

Telephone () _____

YOU AND GAMING

- What level gamer do you consider yourself?
 - Hardcore
 - Intermediate
 - Novice
- How long have you been gaming?
 - 10+ yrs
 - 6-10 yrs
 - 3-5 yrs
 - 1-2 yrs
- How much time do you spend gaming each week?
 - 20+ hrs
 - 10 - 20 hrs
 - 5 - 10 hrs
 - Less than 5 hrs

YOUR COMPUTERS

- Do you use a personal computer for gaming?
 - Yes
 - No
- Where do you use a computer?
 - At home only
 - At work/school only
 - Both home and work/school
 - None of the above (go on to question 11)
- What speed PC do you use?
 - Under 66 MHZ
 - 66 to 100 MHZ
 - 100 MHZ and faster
- What CPU speed do you use?
 - 386
 - Pentium
 - 486
- Do you plan on purchasing a new PC in the next 6 months?
 - Yes
 - No

9. What accessories for your PC do you:

	Own?	Plan to buy in next 12 months?
--	------	--------------------------------

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Sound Board | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SVGA Monitor | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Modem | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speakers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Joystick | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CD-ROM drive | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Graphics Board | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Do you currently own Win95?

- yes
- no

If you do not own Win95, when do you plan to purchase it?

- Within 3 mos.
- Within 6 mos.
- Within a year
- Never

YOUR GAMES

11. What are your favorite types of games? (Mark all that apply)

- Action/Adventure
- Sports
- Simulators
- Graphic Adventure
- Puzzle/Board/Gambling
- RPGs
- Other

12. How much money do you spend on games per year?

- \$100 - \$250
- \$250 - \$399
- \$400 - \$599
- \$600 - \$999
- \$1000+

13. How many games do you own?

- 10+
- 6 - 10
- 3 - 6
- Less than 3

14. Where do you buy your games?

- Software specialty stores
- Computer super store
- Mass merchant
- Office supply store
- Online
- Mail order

15. Which video gaming system do you:

	Own?	Plan to buy in next 12 months?
Nintendo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Super Nintendo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Game Boy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PlayStation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Game Gear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neo•Geo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Atari Lynx	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sega Genesis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sega CD System	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sega Saturn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TurboGrafx	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3DO	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jaguar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nintendo 64	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
M2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. Do you play both PC and console games?

- Yes
- No

17. How many games do you plan to buy in the next 12 months.

- 1 - 5
- 6 - 9
- 10 or more

GAMING ONLINE

18. Do you use the Internet?

- Yes
- No

If you use the Internet, how do you access it?

- Direct Internet Provider
- America Online
- CompuServe
- GEnie
- MSN
- Prodigy
- MCI Mail
- Other

How often do you use the Internet?

- Daily
- Twice a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week
- Do not use

Do you visit online gaming sites?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following have you visited?

- IG Online
- Happy Puppy
- NUKE
- Other

19. Are you an online gamer?

- Yes
- No

ABOUT FUSION

20. How many times do you refer to an issue of FUSION?

- 1 or more
- 4 or more
- 7 or more
- More than 10

21. How many people other than you read your issue of FUSION?

- One
- 2 - 3
- 4 - 8
- None

22. How much time do you spend reading FUSION?

- 15 - 30 min.
- 30 - 60 min.
- 1 - 1 1/2 hrs.
- More than 2 hrs.

23. What do you do with your old issues of FUSION?

- Save for future reference
- Give to friends
- Discard

24. What other magazines do you read?

- EGM
- PC Gamer
- CGR
- Next Generation
- GamePro
- PC Entertainment
- CGW

TELL US ABOUT YOU

25. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24 yrs old
- 25-34 yrs old
- 35-49 yrs old
- Over 50

26. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

27. Are you employed, either full-time or part time?

- Yes
- No

28. What is the highest level of education you attained?

- Less than high school
- High school or equivalent
- College
- Post-graduate

29. What is your annual household income?

- Under \$20,000
- \$20 - 39,999
- \$40 - 59,999
- \$60 - 99,999
- \$100,000 +

Contest Rules: 1. **No Purchase Necessary:** To enter, complete and mail the reader survey (or write to obtain a survey and include a self address stamped envelope containing your name, address, and phone number) to "Fusion Reader Survey", 1920 Highland Avenue, 2nd Floor, Lombard, Illinois 60148. No purchase or payment of any money is necessary to enter. One entry per household. All entries must be handwritten. Mechanically reproduced entries will not be accepted. Entries must be received by May 1, 1996. All entries become exclusive property of Decker Publications, Inc. and will not be acknowledged or returned. Decker Publications, Inc. assumes no responsibility for lost, mutilated, late, illegible, incomplete, postage-due, or misdirected entries. Only one prize per family, organization, or household. 2. **Prizes:** 1 Grand Prize: Grand Prize winner will receive a collection of ten (10) PC games. Grand Prize has an approximate retail value of \$600.00. Winners will be determined by a random drawing from all valid entries by Decker Publications, Inc. whose decisions are final. Drawing to be held on or about May 15, 1996. All prize(s) will be awarded. Prize winner will be notified by mail. Prize(s) are non-transferable. No substitutions of prize(s) are allowed, except at the option of Decker Publications, Inc. should the featured prize(s) become unavailable. 3. **Odds of Winning:** The odds of winning will be determined by number of valid entries received. 4. **Eligibility:** Sweepstakes open to residents of United States and Canada only. Void in Quebec. Non-compliance with the time parameters contained herein or return of any prize/prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Winners or their legal guardians shall sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within 30 days of receipt or forfeit prize. By acceptance of prize, winner(s) agrees to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Employees of Decker Publications, Inc. and its respective affiliates are not eligible. Neither Decker Publications, Inc. nor its affiliates, subsidiaries, divisions, or related companies are responsible for any damages, taxes, or expenses that consumers might incur as a result of this contest or receipt of prize. Winner accepting prize(s) agree that all prize(s) are awarded on the condition that Decker Publications, Inc., and its agents, representatives, and employees will have no liability whatsoever for any injuries, losses, or damages of any kind resulting from acceptance, possession, or use of the prize(s). Winner further acknowledges that Decker Publications, Inc. has neither made nor are in any manner responsible or liable for any warranty, representation, or guarantee express or implied, in fact or in law, relative to any prize, including but not limited to its quality, mechanical condition or fitness. 5. **Winners List:** For a list of winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Fusion Reader Survey Contest Winners, 1920 Highland Ave. 2nd Floor, Lombard, IL 60148. Requests for winners lists must be received by June 16, 1996. Allow 4 weeks for delivery of winners list. 6. **Restrictions:** Void where prohibited or restricted by law. All federal, state and local regulations apply. 7. **Sponsors:** This contest is solely sponsored by Decker Publications, Inc. Fusion is a trademark of Decker Publications, Inc. 1996 Decker Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Printed in U.S.A.



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The Hive
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Battle obstacles, scores of viper ships & hellish Hivasects in non-stop action. Requires Windows '95.
42886 **\$41**



Top Gun: Fire at Will
by Spectrum-Holobyte
You are Maverick! All the thrills of dog fighting around the world. Easy to learn, best-looking simulation yet!
41019 **\$44**



Destruction Derby
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Smash your way to glory in a car race with no rules, no check points and no time limits. It's easy - last car moving wins!
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by Sony Interactive
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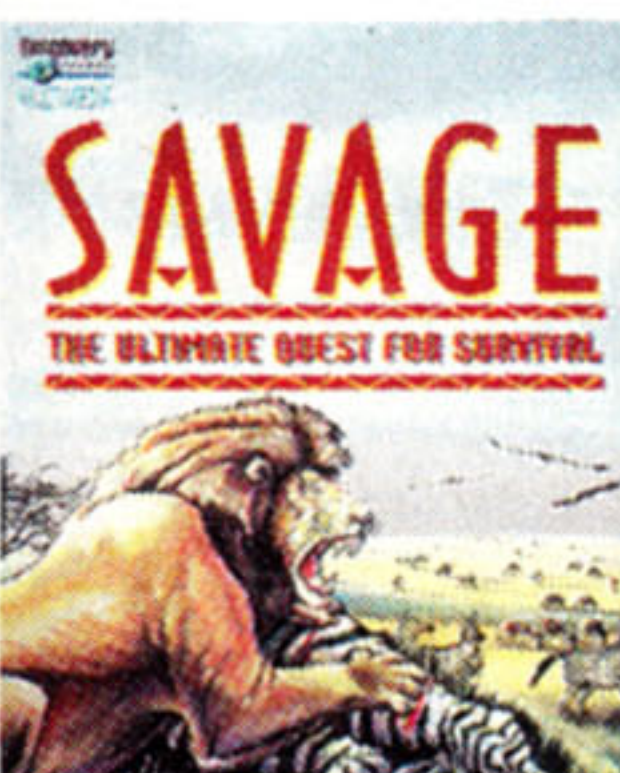
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48735 **\$10**



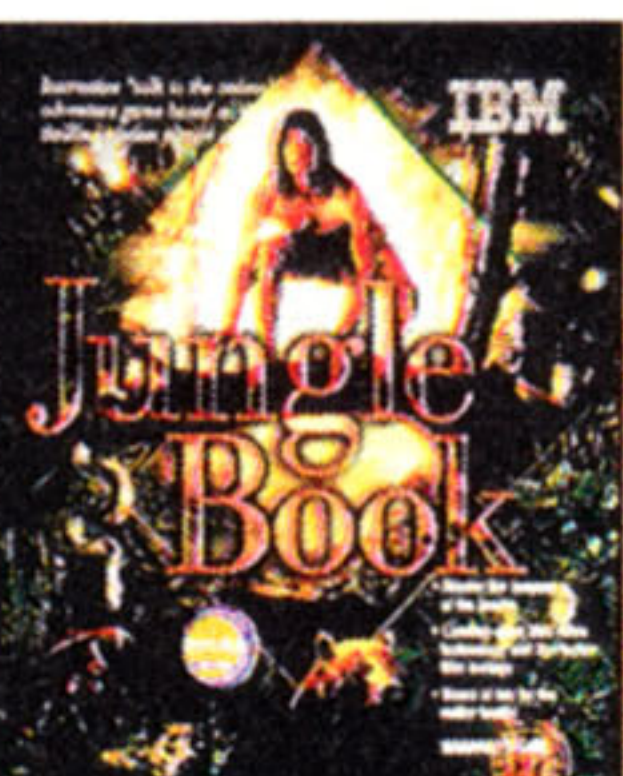
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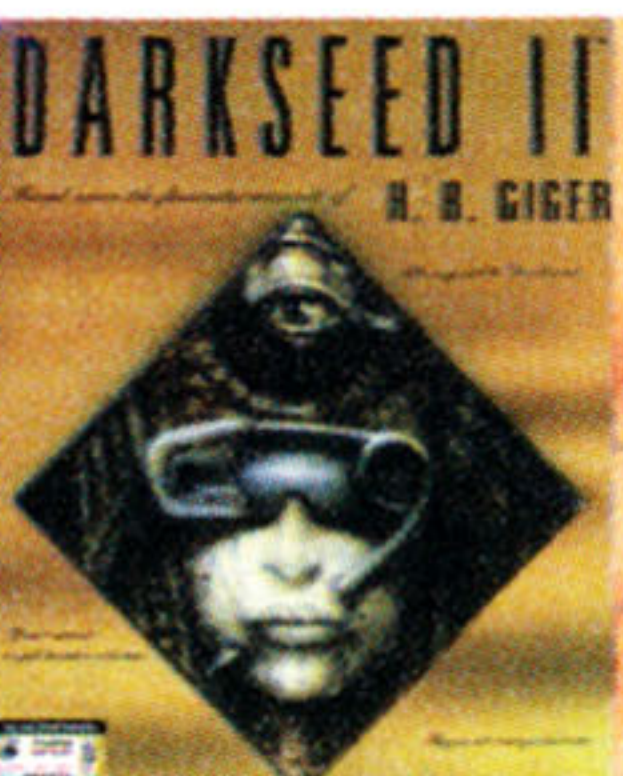
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In this month's Endnotes, IG's FUSION tries to stay one step ahead of BattleSphere co-designer and co-coder Scott Legrand, whose game and company (4Play) are featured in the Previews section of this issue.

IG: What types of games would you want to work on if you had no limitations?

SL: Games that would get me at the top of Bob Dole's list of enemies, blamed for all the ills in our society. In Goin' Postal, you get to hold two guns instead of one—they're both machine guns. It's sort of like Virtua Cop except that the voices are telling you that you have to cleanse the Earth. You gotta go to McDonalds, you've gotta go to the Post Office, then you work your way up to the unemployment office and walls. Goin' Waco would have you going after different cults to take them out.

IG: So what are you doing when you're not coding nowadays?

SL: Either sleeping, working out, playing Defender Plus or watching a lot of *Babylon 5*.

IG: How do you work out?

SL: I do about a half-hour of StairMastering then I pump iron at the UCLA gym.

IG: Do you ever feel like a weakling compared to the other people there?

SL: Not at this one. Before, I used to work out at Penn State, and people were bigger there. At UCLA, most of the people are students and they're not so big.

IG: You ever pick a fight with one of them?

SL: Nah, I had a guy try to pick a fight with me about eight or nine years ago, but that hasn't happened again. Oh wait, that was a girl. I asked if I could work in with her on a piece of equipment. She said, "What if I said no?" and I said, "I'd be very hurt." She responded, "I could hurt you." That was that.

IG: What's so great about Defender Plus?

SL: It's everything I want in a video game; it plays like something from the 1980s and it looks like something from the 1990s. It's Defender plus plasma effects plus a rapid-fire acid-piss gun that shoots something like thirty shots per second.

IG: So how's BattleSphere coming?

SL: It's coming too slowly, but I'm a perfectionist, so I can't accept anything but what I'm happy with.

IG: Any political issues holding it up?

SL: At this point, Atari is as out of the loop as they could possibly be. They don't appear to be interested in further software development and they're getting razed for it.

IG: Who's going to publish the game?

SL: Atari will probably put their seal of approval on it and then not worry about it until they need to collect their royalty checks.

IG: Are they still trying to develop titles (such as Zero-Five) that would compete with it?

SL: Your guess is as good as mine. Anybody we knew at Atari is gone.

IG: So who would you develop for now, if you could?

SL: We'd love to get working on the PC and the PS. We really liked the Jaguar, but Atari's handling of it just sucked. It's a vast disappointment because any machine like that, priced at \$99, you'd have to make an intentional effort to kill. It's the same price virtually as a Super NES and 30 times more powerful.

IG: What's the most disappointing game you've ever played?

SL: 2600 Pac-Man. That game was hyped to death, there were waiting lines at stores, and then it was crap. Absolute crap. It helped to destroy Warner Atari, in fact.

IG: So you didn't like the fact that Pac-Man never turned north or south?

SL: Yeah, that had something to do with it. And the board was reddish, ugly. Tunnels were on the top and bottom. It was probably dangerous for epileptics with all of that flicker.

IG: So you don't think you're going to disappoint the people who have been hearing BattleSphere hype for so long?

SL: If they're expecting everything to be perfect, they'll be disappointed. People on the 'net are already starting rumors about being able to fly inside of capitol ships and all that sort of stuff, so we can't do everything. But we've put a lot of work into the game, it does meet a lot of the hype, and I think it'll make a lot of people happy.



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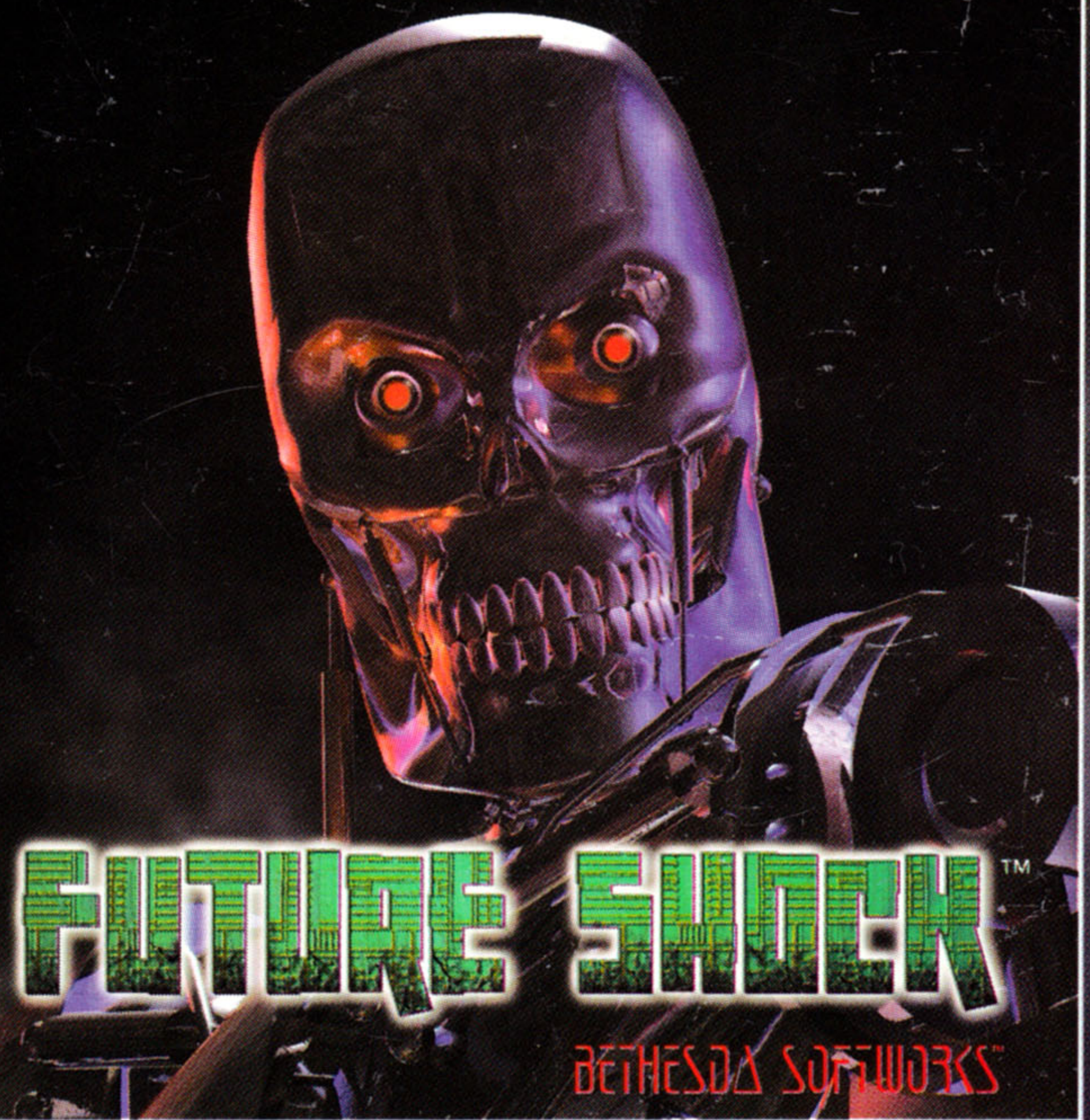


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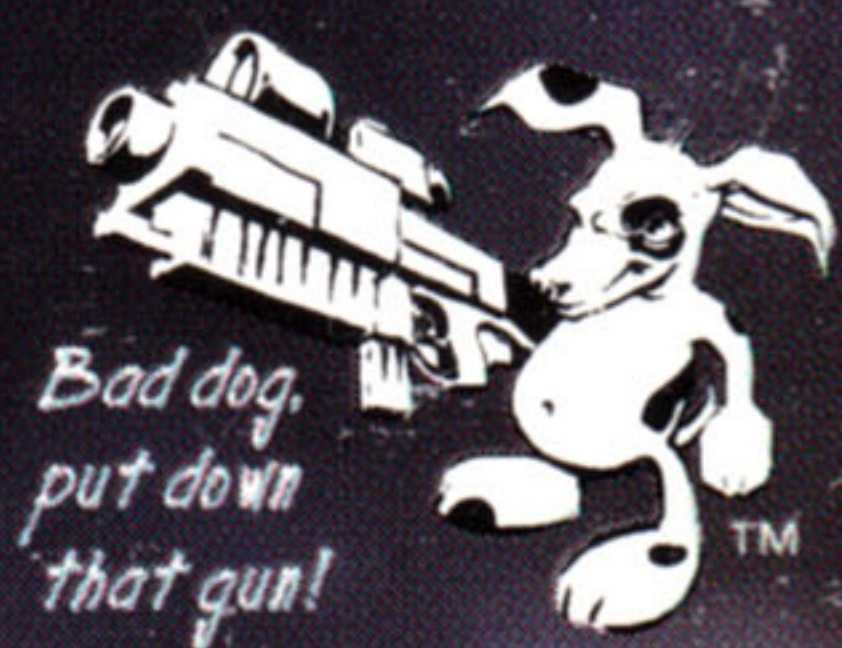


"Finally, a game that's worthy of the film license. Terminator: Future Shock will make Dark Forces seem positively lame."
 —PC-ZONE

"...the more I play Future Shock the more it continues to amaze me. It's really quite incredible. I'd expect it to run very slowly considering the amount of graphic detail and amount of on-screen polygons, but it screams!" —NEWTYP GAMES

"If you don't believe our statement, that Terminator: Future Shock heralds a new age of 3D games, surpassing all the existing ones, then try out the demo... But you were warned!" —SCORE

"Look for Bethesda Softworks to have competitors running scared in the near future..." —Computer Game Review



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