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Digital Anvil



→ NextGen

Lifecycle 2 Vol2 #3

Next Generation Magazine



→ News

In a world of constant change, the only thing you can count on is our unwavering coverage

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We gathered the four heads of the hottest new development studios and asked them, "What is the future of gaming?" 70

03/00



EDITORIAL

Bye!



So, this is my last issue at Next Generation. After nearly five years, I'm going off to do a secret project here at Imagine (you won't be completely rid of me — I'll be sticking around as editor-at-large). I've got two things to talk about in my final editorial.

First, the game industry in 1995, games were considered kids' toys at best, and a third-rate hobby for geeks at worst. But today, games are looked at as near-mainstream entertainment. Here's a prediction: inside 15 years, and really more like five, interactive entertainment is going to be the top entertainment industry. Bigger than movies, bigger than music, bigger than anything. It's just inevitable: Games are already amazingly compelling, but when you talk to designers and hear their plans for the next few years, you realize that we're just starting to see what games can, and will, be. And what's really cool is that we, the readers of Next Gen, the hardcore gamers — who are already the influencers and opinion leaders — are going to in large part determine the future of this industry. I can't wait.

Second, I want to say that working at Next Gen has been amazing. I've met hundreds of people in the game industry in the past five years, and let me tell you this: no one in the world cares more about games than the people who make this magazine. They're awesome. OK, now I better go before I get all weepy.

See you around!

Chris Charla



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As all good things must do, so must even we

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History of the GUSTAVE Empire



The story of the GUSTAVE Empire belongs to a time when the people used the magical power called "Anima" to conjure mighty spells.

The Kingdom of Finney was ruled by Gustave XII. Gustave XII was attacking the Marquis of Otto when GUSTAVE XIII was born to himself and his wife, SOPHIE DE NOHL. Gustave XIII was destined to be the heir of the throne. He would later have a brother named PHILIPPE and a sister named MARIE.



fig. 14: The Royal Family Gustave

When Gustave XIII turned seven, he participated in the FIREBRAND CEREMONY in which he was to prove his worth to become the heir of the throne. During that ceremony, Gustave XIII found that he had not the power "Anima." Because of his inability to use Anima, Gustave XIII, along with his mother Sophie, were exiled from the Kingdom by the King. Philippe and Marie would never see their mother again. Philippe was terribly saddened by the loss of his mother and blamed Gustave XIII for this. While he still had the pride of Royalty, Gustave XIII became a target of contempt resulting in his twisted personality.

When Gustave XIII turned 19, his mother Sophie passed away. Gustave XIII attacked and seized the DUKEDOM OF WIDE upon turning 20.

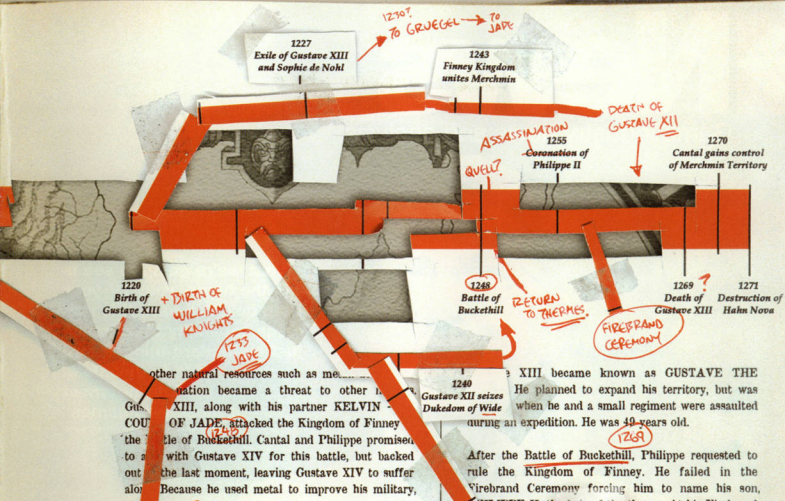


fig. 15: Gustave XIII (the younger) age 15

After he exiled his wife and child, Gustave XII remarried and had another son. He named the newborn GUSTAVE XIV who would eventually become the King of Finney after Gustave XII died.

Philippe became the Marquis of Nohl after Sophie passed away. Marie was forced to marry CANTAL, the new Marquis of Otto, for political reasons. Gustave XII seized one-half of the Otto territory in return.

Gustave XIII became the hero of those who did not have Anima. Instead of relying on the power of magic, he and his partners developed skills to use machines



1246?
ALLY WITH
COUNT OF JADE



fig. 16: GUSTAVE THE STEEL

SHAPE HISTORY
OR
BE HISTORY
SAGA FRONTIER 2



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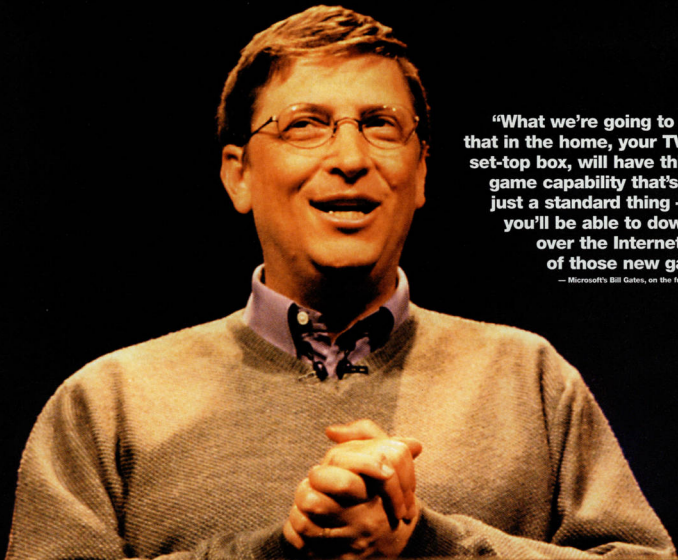
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→ News

Game industry news and analysis



“What we’re going to see is that in the home, your TV, your set-top box, will have this rich game capability that’s really just a standard thing — and you’ll be able to download over the Internet most of those new games”

— Microsoft’s Bill Gates, on the future of games

Microsoft

■ PLEASE X-PLAIN?

Gates hints at X-Box — but what he isn’t saying is more interesting

Microsoft’s founding father champions specialized entertainment appliances at CES; **Next Generation** learns a new graphic processor may be planned for X-Box

→ While it was a point he merely touched on briefly, Bill Gates came out and said that in the future, more games will be played in the living room, over the Internet, through a TV and set-top box. What he didn’t say is that the company’s X-Box project, which still hasn’t officially been

announced, may see a new, more powerful, graphic processor than previously thought.

Just days before the Microsoft chairman handed his CEO title to Steve Ballmer, Gates delivered the Millennium Keynote Address to attendees of the Consumer Electronic Show (CES), held

annually in Las Vegas in the first week of January. His address primarily spoke to what other tech industry leaders and analysts have been saying for months: that specialized information appliances, complete with Internet- and PC-compatible software, are going to become more prevalent in the next few years.

“PC games,” Gates said in his address, “have done very well this year, and they’ve been very cutting edge, things like the advanced graphics and multiplayer. What we’re going to see is that in the home, your TV, your set-top box, will have this rich game capability that’s really just a standard thing — and

Is the PC market in trouble?

→ The big question facing developers as 2000 unfolds is the future of the PC. While most companies in the US have prospered in the fertile lands of a growing user base and an open architecture, fault lines are starting to appear. Many former die-hard PC adherents are re-evaluating their approach to what is historically America's leading game platform.

Questions are being asked about the PC's role in the coming era of broadband mass entertainment, and about its defining weakness as an upgradeable machine. Perversely, the arrival of Microsoft's PC-based X-Box could be a greater threat than powerful Internet-ready consoles such as PlayStation2.

Among the leading critics is Eidos President Rob Dyer. "We've got a really, really miserable PC market, and it's not getting any better," he says. "I'm going way out on a limb, but I think the PC is going to cease to be any kind of viable platform within the next 18 to 24 months. It's going to be completely supplanted by Microsoft's X-Box or whatever else. I think Microsoft, if this X-Box is for real, is basically raising the flag and saying, 'We're seeing a huge problem on the PC side.' There are just so few games that do anything on the PC."

Microsoft is intent on competing against the current console manufacturers, the newcomer will need more than just competitive technology. Like Sony with the original PlayStation, Microsoft will need dominant technology to prove its merit in this race. According to Microsoft insiders, a new graphics chip designed by Santa Clara, Calif.-based GigaPixel may replace Nvidia's GeForce chip, which many had believed to be X-Box's decided graphics processor.

Next Generation contacted GigaPixel

Industry leaders answer with a resounding "yes"

Even Gathering of Developers, a company built at the end of the last decade almost exclusively on PC development talent, is losing faith. CEO Mike Wilson argues, "It's gotten so bad with all the various non-standard hardware out there that way too much of PC development is now focused on compatibility management, testing, and making design decisions that will make the game less than it could be for the sake of catching customers with OEM video cards or whatever. It's a nightmare."

He adds, "Doing real PC games is much riskier than it used to be. The core gamer has so many great titles to choose from now, and only so much money to spend. The result is that only a few games for the real gamer make it into the charts every year... which are filled by licensed games, marketing-driven games, and just a bunch of Barbie- or Frogger-type stuff from Hasbro and Mattel."

Phil Steinmeyer of PopTop Software, a GOD affiliate, says the arrival of PlayStation2 is showing the PC in a bad light not only in sheer sales muscle, but also in develop-

ment. "PS2 is quite a contrast to the nightmarish lack of standards on the PC, and the need to support very old systems with weak CPUs and no minimal hardware acceleration," he says, adding, "Another key advantage is market size. A mega-hit console game can do well over three million

WHO IS IT?

■ Before he descended into the world of survival horror, he worked on licensed Disney games.

NEW SONY CONSOLE!
What's up with this PlayStation-like console? Is it a Hong Kong rip-off? A design for PlayStation2 that didn't make it? Or is it the mysterious PlayStation C? Turn to page 17 for the answer.



you'll be able to download over the Internet most of those new games."

Essentially Gates is reiterating, albeit in layman's terms, what many game industry executives are saying — that powerful next-generation consoles with Internet capability will lead to a shrinking PC games market base. (See story, above.) It's something certainly worth considering, given Dreamcast's launch success as well as the impending debut of PlayStation2 and Nintendo's Dolphin.

Which brings us to back to X-Box. If

President and CEO George Haber, who openly stated (as of press time in late January) there was no existing contract between GigaPixel and Microsoft, and felt any industry-insider speculation didn't hold any weight as "nothing is confirmed until you see it in a press release."

"Yet Haber was also quick to add, "Our technology would be extremely beneficial for any console. Significantly more beneficial [than GeForce], as it delivers the highest performance and

best quality of graphics at the lowest cost."

Sources close to Nvidia have said that Nvidia still believes that it will be the final graphics processor provider. And as the X-Box tech specs are currently not finalized, it's anyone's guess as to when the system will be announced. We expect to hear something official at May's E3, but given the apparent design delays, there's no way the system will be available before 2001.

— Tom Russo

units in the US alone, versus a ceiling of perhaps one million units on PC. Average titles for a hit console will also sell two to three times as much as those developed for the PC."

Argonaut's Jez San, currently working on Dreamcast 3D shooter *Red Dog*, says developers are to blame for market atrophy. "If the only game that PC developers can muster is simply a new twist on *Doom* or *Quake*, then the platform is surely doomed. I really believe that PC developers are capable of so much more."

Like many developers, he sees X-Box as a result of PC's problems, and its savior: "X-Box will become the new PC. These PC game-boxes can act more like a console. They can make the hardware accessible to more gamers, and can give developers a little stability with which to pitch our efforts both in gameplay and technology terms. I think the PC, with all its hardware leaping capabilities, will be here to stay in some form, but the developers of PC games have to stop doing

IT IS...

■ Capcom's star producer Shinji Mikami

"I'm going way out on a limb, but I think the PC is going to cease to be any kind of viable platform within the next 18 to 24 months"

— Rob Dyes, president, Eidos

first-person shooters."

Noah Davis from GameFX says, "The classic PC faces a recession in the entertainment space while the dedicated game box will surge ahead as the entertainment gorilla of your front room. The PC's ever-incomprehensible and -changing technology message continues to collapse its entertainment sector. The real battleground for the home game-entertainment sector is the front room, and PC has constantly failed to break into this space on its own terms. Classic PCs are for office-networked games and education. Next-generation consoles are for the front room, networking, and raucous entertainment for the whole family"

David Cage, CEO of Quantic Dream, says, "PC is probably condemned to disappear or at least to become more and more a niche for hardcore gamers. The reason is simple: you need to pay about five to ten times more to have a good PC than a console. If you only want to play and have to choose between a PC and a console, you will probably

choose the console. Not only is it cheaper, but also your hardware won't be outdated the month after you buy it, as it is on PC."

Cage is currently bringing his company's *Omkron: Nomad Soul* to Dreamcast and is also working on *Nomad Soul 2* for various platforms. He adds, "PC is an open and versatile development platform, but only a few gamers will want to spend so much money to play. It is also a nightmare for developers, as you are not sure of the hardware the final customer will have to play your game. It may look and feel great on one video card, and be terrible on another. Not to mention that Korean joysticks might create conflicts with your Bulgarian mouse when a Turkish video card is detected!"

But many talented designers still see some merit in the PC's double-edged sword of expandability and flexibility. Mark Randel of Terminal Reality says, "The PC will always be the place for technological innovation because it is a very expandable

platform. However, it is not a very optimal one — there are often many layers between your program and the hardware. On a console, you're always talking directly to the metal, so you get much better performance, but it is pretty much a closed box. On a PC, you can always install a better CPU, more memory, a new graphics card, and a bigger hard drive.

3D Realms' Scott Miller points out, "The PC will always be where the most innovative development takes place. Practically anyone can develop games on the PC because 'development systems' are cheap when compared to development systems for consoles. This results in more experimentation on the PC simply because there are more developers making games for PCs than any other platform."

Unfortunately, publishers cannot afford to pay top-quality developers to spend much time experimenting, and what's likely to occur is that future design breakthrough on PC will be made by smaller garage groups, whose groundbreaking ideas or gameplay mechanics will be adopted by the bigger fish. The hard reality is that third-party publishers are becoming less interested in swimming with the bottom-feeders that manage to exist in the open sea of the PC when there are clearly more profits to be made among the big console fish sharing the quality-controlled, country-club pools of Nintendo, Sony, and Sega.

— Colin Campbell

Who sold the most hardware this holiday season?

PLAYSTATION

■ PlayStation: 3.3 million units sold in the fourth quarter

NINTENDO 64

■ Nintendo 64: 1.9 million units sold in the fourth quarter

DREAMCAST

■ Dreamcast: 1.5 million units sold since US launch on 9/9/99



Console games outsold computer games by a 2-to-1 margin in December. (Source: PC Data)

HARDCORE

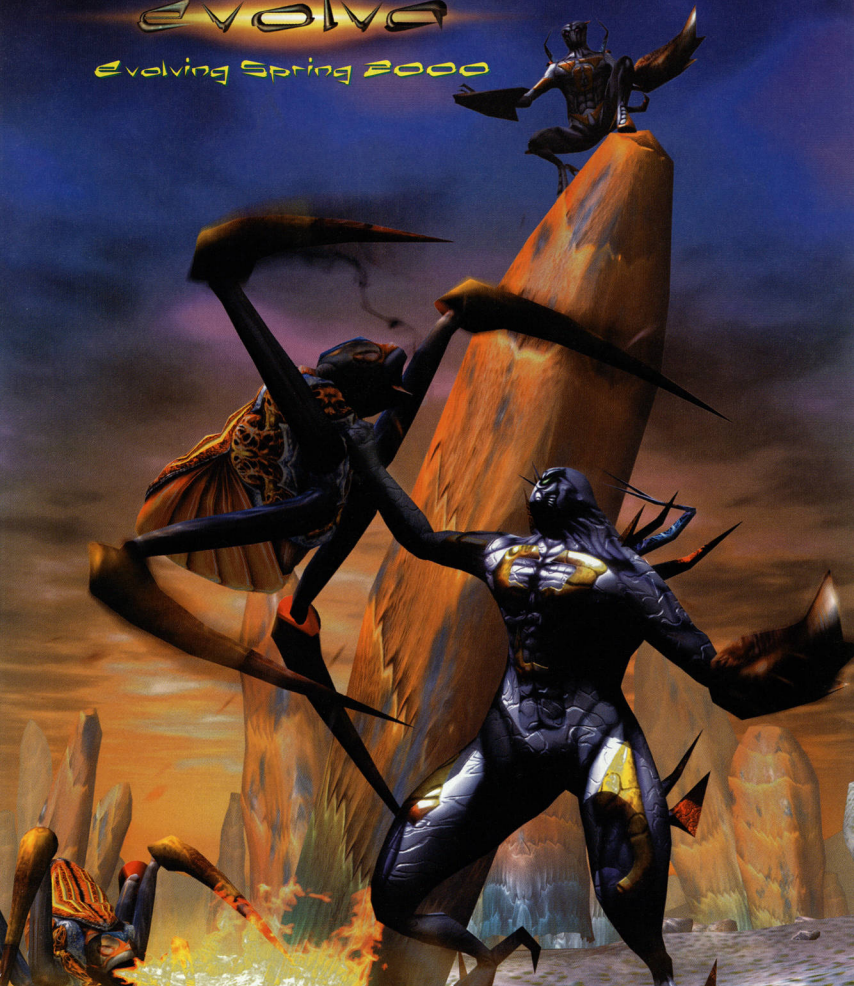
I had a device for the Commodore 64, the HearSay 1000, that was a text-to-speech and voice recognition device. My parents would get upset if I was on the computer too much, but I was also really addicted to MUDs, especially *HeroMUD* at U of M in Ann Arbor. Anyway, I used to use it to MUD so my parents wouldn't notice. It only supported about 10 words, but that was enough for a MUD. They thought I was on the phone, but I was actually MUDing. "North. South. Look." To this day, I have no idea who they thought I was talking to.

Jeremy Milka, Digital Eclipse

Have a hardcore story you want printed in the magazine? Send it to hardcore@next-generation.com.

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Computer
ARTWORKS





■ TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT?

NUON Revealed at CES

VM Labs lurches again into the light of day

→ At CES in Las Vegas, VM Labs made announcements concerning further updates on its NUON technology. Having already partnered with Samsung, Raite, and Toshiba to produce NUON-enhanced DVD players (each company sets its own release date, incidentally), NUON also forms part of Motorola's Streamcaster, a PowerPC-based set-top box designed for movies, games, and internet access.

To recap, NUON replaces the dedicated MPEG decoding hardware found in a DVD player with a more general-purpose technology capable of performing whatever it's programmed to do. This includes unlocking DVD-ROM enhancements on special-edition DVDs, expanding other interactive disc content, and, of course, playing games.

Titles officially unveiled at CES include (as one might expect from VM Labs, headed in a large part by former Atari designers) Jeff Minter's *Tempest 3000*; *Freefall 3050 AD*, "a futuristic law enforcement game"; *Merlin Karting* from Miracle Designs, a kart racing game based on Arthurian characters; *Iron Soldier*, an update of one of Jaguar's few respectable games; and, perhaps inevitably, a port of *Myst* from Cyan. To be honest, with the exception of *Tempest*, none of these looks terribly inspiring.

The interesting thing from a technological (and perhaps even social) perspective is how NUON and PlayStation2 are converging on the same place from exactly opposite directions: PlayStation2

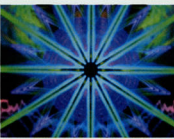
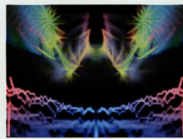


■ *Tempest 3000* (top) and *Merlin Karting* (above) — it's not *Spyro Kart*

is a game machine that can play DVDs, while NUON enables DVD machines to play games. Representatives for VM Labs were quick to point out that NUON is aimed at the mass market — consumers who want a DVD player first and would enjoy the added features (they say "families") — not the hardcore gamer (whom they label as "teenagers").

However, with 60 million units worldwide, "PlayStation" is about as mass market a name brand as you can get. Further, depending on Sony's eventual price point — around \$299, according to most sources — PlayStation2 and a NUON-enhanced DVD player could wind up costing the consumer roughly the same. At that point it becomes a matter of whether the "mass market" will accept the idea of playing their movies through what is at heart a (fantastic) dedicated game machine, or whether they prefer a dedicated movie machine that happens to play some (so far unimpressive) games.

We'd say "time will tell," but we're pretty sure we all know the answer: **NextGen**



■ As former Atari designers must — NUON's got a lightshow program for music CDs

■ TWO COMPANIES ENTER... ONE COMPANY LEAVES

Konami goes Hollywood, ASC Games goes down

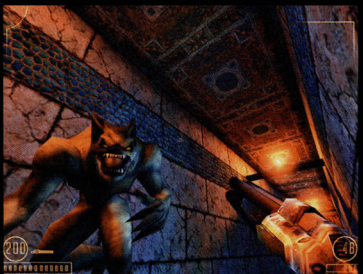
→ The new year rang in with some changes — in late December Konami announced a new partnership with Universal, and in early January, struggling ASC Games all but closed up shop.

Considering the attention *Metal Gear Solid* brought Konami, it's no surprise the game maker sought out Universal Studios, establishing a publishing deal for game content with broader appeal. Konami will publish and distribute all Universal Interactive games based on the motion picture studio's extensive list of properties, starting this year with such familiar franchises as *The Mummy*. Woody Woodpecker, and Dr. Seuss, following the first three announced properties, Universal Interactive's Jim Wilson said there will be additional new games unveiled by E3 in May. Sure enough, just before press time, Konami and Universal announced the release of *Nightmare Creatures 2* on Dreamcast and PlayStation. (See preview, page 54). Platforms in Universal's and Konami's master plan include all 128-bit consoles — PlayStation2, Dreamcast, Dolphin, and PCs. The length of the deal was not disclosed. The Konami Universal partnership follows similar partnerships, as EA has already partnered with MGM and DreamWorks Interactive, and Fox and Warner Bros. each have interactive licensing and development strategies in place.

Still, traditional Konami titles have catered strictly to the hardcore audience. Hawking Woody Woodpecker or Dr. Seuss characters is certainly a stretch for the company. "With Universal," says Konami Director of Marketing Chris Mike, "we get to grow into a much broader market. We also get to expand into the PC side of the business, which is also new to us."

While Konami continues to expand its West Coast operations, a smaller East Coast publisher has all but closed its doors. Sources close to Darien, Connecticut-based ASC have revealed that most of the staff of 35 have been laid off. ASC is most recently responsible for *Jeff Gordon X3 Racing* for PlayStation and PC and *TNIN Hardcore Heat* for Dreamcast. While company President and CEO Steve Grossman denied the company was closing, other sources have suggested the company was looking to sell off its assets to Take 2 — which would likely include the company's *Jeff Gordon* franchise and the *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* game for PC, which has been long in development at Dreamforge.

— George T. Chronis and Tom Russo



■ Oh, the horror! It's unlikely this *Werewolf* will see the light of day as an ASC product — meanwhile, Konami gets its hands on *The Mummy*, with more Universal properties to come

Dolphin Watch

Next Generation dives into industry waters and comes up with news on Nintendo's next console

→ Dreamcast has shipped, PlayStation 2 is about to launch in Japan, and well — it's Nintendo's move.

"The good news about coming last in a launch," says Nintendo Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing Peter Main, "is that you know the ducks you're shooting at." Speaking to analysts in an online presentation in January, Main stressed that Nintendo has been watching the competition's strategies and is not worried about staying in the game. But the big announcement — the one that truly reveals the hardware — isn't as far off as some may think.

Numerous software houses we've spoken with — some already in possession of very capable Dolphin development kits — say Nintendo is planning to spill PS2's launch party in March with the official kick-off of a Dolphin campaign. That campaign will likely begin with the specifics of the console's RAM and DVD capabilities, plus details on the unannounced sound chip.

While that may be, Nintendo Software Engineering Manager Jim Merrick recently explained that the company is in no rush to show off premature software demonstrations. "I don't like showing demos that are not games," said Merrick. "Not to cast aspersions on Sony's Ducky in a Bathtub, which I thought was really cute," he laughed, "but it doesn't tell you much about the system as a game machine. I'd rather wait and show you a game."

So when, exactly, will we see Dolphin software in action? Avoiding a solid date, Merrick offered, "When I've got a really cool game to show you. I would love to do it tomorrow. We'll do it just as soon as we can."

But just because Nintendo isn't showing Dolphin software doesn't mean it isn't well underway. Announced supporters of the next-generation console include NCL, Rare, Retro Studios, NST, and Left Field Studios — all of which, working with advanced kits, are planning Dolphin's first wave of games. Additionally, Acclaim Entertainment has signed on to have at least one offering ready at system launch.

■ These early prototype Dolphin screens of a third-person action game from Saffire should give you an idea what that company thinks the system is capable of



"I don't like showing demos that are not games. Not to cast aspersions on Sony's Ducky in a Bathtub... but it doesn't tell you much about the system as a game machine"

— Jim Merrick, Nintendo Software Engineer

Midway has upwards of five titles in the works for the platform. And LucasArts, always a big Nintendo backer, recently confirmed that it is evaluating the hardware.

Unfortunately, smaller software houses don't have the luxury of experimenting with Dolphin kits, as only Nintendo's elite second-party developers and big-name publishers have them. This leaves companies like Saffire Corp., currently creating multiple Dolphin games that range from a 3D, third-person, action-fighter (tentatively titled, not very creatively, *Saffire*) to a rumored original *Rainbow Six*-branded shooter, with

very few options. With finalized kits not expected to be made available to third parties for at least another two months, Saffire is left to develop its software at a level it *thinks* the console can handle based on released system specifications. Traditionally, this method of game creation usually leads to problems when complete kits arrive and teams discover what they really can and can't do in their games.

Next Generation has obtained exclusive prototype screen grabs of the game *Saffire*, which utilizes the developer's "middleware" SAGE architecture (to be demonstrated in

full at the upcoming Game Developers Conference in San Jose, Calif.) and is simultaneously underway for PS2 and Dolphin. Note that the provided screenshots are of an early work in progress and that the title, based around Greek mythology and employing advanced AI and an inverse kinetics system, is likely to look significantly more pleasing to the eye when it debuts in 2001. Bearing that in mind, this is a first look at what third parties foresee possible on Nintendo's next-generation console. — **Matt Casamassina**

Matt Casamassina is the editor-in-chief of IGN64.com



■ It's all there; stunning textures, elaborate architecture with curved surfaces, realtime shadow effects from multiple light sources, and highly-detailed character models

Sega Dreamcast
IT'S THINKING



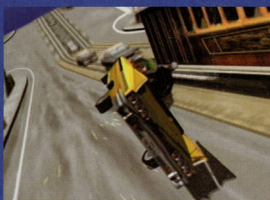
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I
am
sure
we did
get a bit
of air at the
top. Could be
that I punched
it a little too hard.
But my passenger,
Holy Joe the preacher
wiggled out, man. Starts
shouting and cussing like
a teamster with Tourette's.
Anyway, we land, and there's
this damn cable car coming, so
I jump that, and then we're in the
other lane with oncoming traffic, so
trying to be responsible, I go up on the
sidewalk. But only for three or four blocks, and everyone got out
of my way, even that bag lady. Next thing I know we're sitting in
the frickin' bay. Maybe it's my brakes... crazytaxi.com

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Crazy Taxi
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*If you're too lazy to go online and see this awesome game for real, here are some motionless, four color dots on 20lb, 30% recycled paper that do this game no justice whatsoever. For example frame 2 doesn't show how you peel out in malls, hop rooftops, and plow through sidewalk cafes while you pump fares and make bank on two huge, fully interactive courses (one Dreamcast exclusive), or the nasty words your passengers spew when you park your ride in the tide, Captain Nemo. So stop farting around and see it for real at crazytaxi.com



■ TOM RUSSO'S
03/00 **In the Studio**
Development news as it develops

FINAL FANTASY ONLINE?

→ Hironobu Sakaguchi, producer of the *Final Fantasy* series in Japan, has spoken out concerning his plans for an online universe: "Square has already started research on a server-based online game." He also remarked that within six months, he expected the technology to rival that of games such as *Ultima Online* and *EverQuest*. Cool.



UFO SIGHTING

→ While videogame publishers continue to gobble each other up, a new fish is about to enter the pond. UFO Interactive is about to bust onto the scene with Dreamcast and N64 titles. This privately-held publisher, based in Irvine, California, is being backed by Tommo, a Japan-based videogame distributor. The company's catalog will largely be made up of Japan-developed console games, specifically some of the NEC titles developed for Dreamcast. The first title is a Dreamcast game entitled *Industrial Spy Operation Espionage*, a Dreamcast roleplaying adventure due in April. You read about it here first.



LICENSED FELON

→ As Electronic Arts has locked-up all the respectable heavyweights, UK-based publisher Codemasters has licensed convicted felon former Heavyweight Boxing Champion Mike Tyson to release *Mike Tyson Boxing* due in March for PlayStation and



PC. Tyson makes his first appearance in a game since his 8-bit showing in Nintendo's *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!* (Maybe they didn't get the news in England, but Tyson's not exactly a role model here in the US.) Considering how poor a job EA has done with the PlayStation versions of *Knockout Kings*, it would be ironic if Codemasters made "the good game with the bad boxer." No word on whether the disgraced former champ will bring his patented biting move to the game.

CRUMBLING CAVE

→ Rumor had it that Cavedog Entertainment was on the brink of closure, but it may just end up to be a major restructuring. The company has just canceled its long-delayed first-person shooter, *Amen*. Last year the company canceled *Elysium*, and *Good & Evil* is also behind schedule, lending credence to the rumors that the company is hemorrhaging funds on lengthy development periods with no marketable results. Considering that Cavedog's parent company, GT Interactive, is now under new ownership by Infogrames, it's likely the division is under intense scrutiny, and Cavedog has to be seriously overhauled or closed. Still, representatives for Cavedog insisted the developer would continue its plans to support its *Beyonds* online community and that the developer plans to release the *TA: Kingdoms* expansion pack, *The Iron Plague*, in March.

PLAYSTATION2 DOWN UNDER

→ With 37 game developers in Australia, someone has to be doing PlayStation2 development. As insiders have it, Ratbag Software, developers of the Powerslide Racing for PC, has moved onto two big PlayStation2 projects, one racing and another third-person action title. The titles are being produced through Sony Europe, and as they are scheduled for worldwide release, they are also likely to appear in the US from Sony first-party.

GIANT ROBOTS FOR SALE

→ It looks like *Virtual On: Oratorio* Yamgam will launch without netplay if it comes to US shores. We recently learned that Sega is offering YOOT to third parties because Sega's US networking code is not ready. If the game is picked up, it will have the DC link option, but no netplay. We're wondering why Sega just doesn't implement a direct dial option.

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JOYTECH™ USA

Arcadia

Hard news from the frontline of coin-op videogames

PLAY AN ARCADE GAME — AND CHARGE IT TO YOUR CELL PHONE!

→ Sega is quietly considering changing its arcade play-pricing structure, at least in Japan, to a per-minute or per-hour charge once the Net-wiring plan kicks in. Add this to some experiments now taking place in Europe that allow consumers to activate vending machines via pager and/or cell phone (and charge the soda purchases to those mobile accounts) and you have the makings of a mini-revolution in the entire arcade experience. Sega of America's Director of Marketing & Communication, Charles Bellfield, tells *Next Generation*: "You will see us develop and adapt new models such as the Internet to existing models such as arcades... We see our future in using new technologies like the Internet, whether delivered with fiber optic or other means, to build upon our foundation and heritage as a leading provider of content into the arcade market."

As reported in last month's "Arcadia," Sega plans to network its arcades (possibly via fiber optics), enabling head-to-head or team competition. Sega will begin by linking two centers in Tokyo and Osaka later this year.

WILL SEGA CUT LOOSE ITS ARCADE DIVISION?

→ Despite big US sales for Dreamcast, Sega's global year-end losses are expected to weigh in at \$100 million, and Sega is reportedly planning drastic measures. Word from Japan is they'll break up their various divisions into as many as 10 independent subsidiaries, some of which would be spun off as public companies. Could Sega's arcade videogame manufacturing arm survive without its link to Sega consumer platforms? Or, to put it another way, how would Dreamcast fare without up-close-and-personal input from Sega's top arcade designers — the people whose egos demand seeing their cutting-edge simulators in deluxe sit-down cabinets?

At press time, Sega sources are resolutely tight-lipped about specific plans for the business status of their arcade division. Nevertheless, arcade gamers can rest assured the company remains committed to producing arcade product. Sega needs arcade games, both for its own arcades worldwide, and as a strong source of consumer titles and hype. Sega Ltd. President Shoichiro Irimajiri affirms that Sega wants to remain active in arcades, even as it shifts to an Internet-centered strategy.

"We are now aiming to provide our services on the Net," he says. "We aim to become a network entertainment kingdom... In the past, we sold hardware, then after that, game software, and that was it. From now on, we'll also provide network services and collect revenue from those services."

SEGA AND NAMCO PLAN NEW TECHNOLOGY

→ While pursuing plans to release some 30 Naomi-based games over a one-year period, Sega is also going ahead with a new, more powerful coin-op platform which some traders have dubbed "Model 4." According to Sega Enterprises USA representative AI Stone: "It's no secret that we are working on a more powerful hardware system and we'll have a couple of coin-op titles on this system this fiscal year. I.e., by March 30. But it will not officially be called Model 4."

Sega previewed a truck-driving simulator called *18 Wheeler*, featuring this new platform, among other new games at a private November showing in Japan. Meanwhile, Namco is on track to release some coin-op games using the Sony PS2 platform this year, although how many remains unclear. The new *Tekken* game on PS2 is expected out this summer. At the same time, Namco is also putting out at least one game on Sega's Naomi system. This soccer game, titled *World Kicks*, will release in March.



KEEP ON CRUISIN'

→ It's been three years since Midway Games unveiled its last entry in the *Cruisin'* series of sit-down driving simulators — that is, until *Cruisin' Exotica* received its world debut at the recent London arcade game expo. Famed *Defender* designer Eugene Jarvis once again headed the team that created *Cruisin' USA* in 1994 and *Cruisin' World* in 1996. *Exotica* is the first to use Midway's new proprietary hardware platform, Zeus 2, which moves millions of polygons per second. The game also offers a dozen new tracks, including two hidden courses, and 12 cars that each have distinctive handling characteristics. You can even burn rubber in mythical sites such as Atlantis, or on the extraterrestrial course of Mars. These settings bring a whole new feeling to the driving stunts and secret shortcuts that are the series' trademarks — and keep a sharp eye on those onscreen digital readouts!

→ After a relative dearth of new video arcade games last fall, Japan's big publishers are moving ahead with a solid lineup of new titles for this spring. Konami is gearing up sequels to *Silent Scope* (see Alphas, page 56) and its *GTI Club* sit-down driver. *Strider 2* is reportedly on the way from Capcom, while Taito, which hasn't released an arcade title to the US market in some time, may find an audience for three new titles including a flight simulator, a power shovel simulator, and a shooting game. Finally, Sega will expand beyond its sports and driving games with a touchscreen-based logic game called *Touch*.

NEW ARCADE TITLES ROLL IN FROM JAPAN

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McVANS VIDEO GAMES

Peripheral Round-up



Alloy Arcade Stick

Outshining the Dreamcast competition

Company: **Interact Accessories**
Price: **\$59.99**

It's not often that we get excited about joysticks (did we say that?), but the new Alloy Arcade Stick from Interact with its shiny die-cast metal design and impressive feature set is the cream of the Dreamcast crop.

First and foremost, the sturdy-as-hell joystick features arcade-quality buttons and directional switching. While arcade sticks have traditionally been of the no-frills variety, this alloy wonder provides plenty of options. Rather than the Dreamcast's standard six-button layout, there are actually eight programmable buttons on the unit, making it possible to assign complex combo moves to each button and save them for later use. Throw in an auto-fire feature (which is even selectable from a button atop the joystick), a VMU slot, a padded hand rest, and you've got the best of what's out there.



We've rounded up some of the recent releases in videogame peripherals to give you a candid look at some gaming gadgetry that you may or may not find useful. We know you'd rather spend money on actual games, of course, so we only recommend the best

DreamStation

Don't mourn the passing of your Dual Shock controller yet

Company: **Ultimate Video Games Accessories**

Price: **\$29.95**

→ The Dreamcast controller is about as graceful as an elephant ballet. If you've longed to play *Soul Calibur* with a Dual Shock controller, long no more. The DreamStation adapts the PlayStation Dual Shock controller and PlayStation-compatible analog steering wheels for use on Dreamcast.

Straight outta Hong Kong, the DreamStation plugs into the Dreamcast controller port; its six-foot-long cable ends in a connector into which the Sony controller is plugged. On the Station's left face rests a DC 9-volt plug and a switch that toggles the controller and steering wheel option. The device supports all of Dreamcast's buttons, even enabling analog control and force feedback.

Trading Sega's controller for the Dual Shock is like swapping a dead mule for a Lamborghini, evident when test driven with *NFL 2K*, *Ready 2 Rumble*, and *Soul Calibur*. As a Dreamcast controller, though, the Dual Shock is not perfect. Players will need to have a Dreamcast controller with a VMU plugged into the second controller port if they wish to save games. More problematic is the lack of analog trigger support with the Dual Shock, which makes games such as *NBA 2K* and *Hydro Thunder* all but unplayable. Currently the DreamStation can be found at most import stores, or ordered at www.dreamcaststuff.com.



The Interactive Battle Chair

The chair with ass-kicking bass — literally

Company: **Hunsaker**
Price: **\$99-\$499**

→ Everyone knows the peripheral market is crowded with numerous abnormalities created by hucksters, who, had they lived in the 1870s, would have sold cure-all elixirs from the back of a horse-drawn cart. Certainly, some "videogame chairs" fall into the realm of con-man gadgetry, but the garage-based Hunsaker company (a wholesome mom-and-pop operation) has finally done the speaker chair justice. Looking not unlike the one in George Jetson's office, the Battle Chair features two high-quality 5 1/4" speakers with three-way drivers sealed into the head rest, one for each side of your head. There's also the 8" subwoofer placed directly behind your lower back. The result: crystal-clear sound on par with some of the best-sounding speakers around, and bass like you've never felt it before.

For the quality of immersion this speaker chair will bring to your gaming, the price does not seem terribly overblown. (It is a thrill simply listening to CDs.) It connects to your existing stereo system, but should you opt for the \$499 package, you get a 60-watt Yamaha surround-sound processing amplifier, which is quite spectacular in its own right. For \$80 each, you can add action trays that attach to your arm rests — perfect for a mouse or a soda. For another \$80, you can pick up a seat, which comes highly recommended as the chair is made out of hard plastic. Check out www.battlechair.com or call (800) 650-9956 for more info. Like the man says, not available in stores.

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

→ **The New Year began with a bang** — mostly the sound of game companies and projects exploding in the post-millennial fervor:

American Softworks Corporation began a regular Wednesday workday after New Year's with a party, we hear. The entire staff was gathered together in the conference room for a fete featuring hard liquor, wine, cheese, and pink slips. The embattled Connecticut publisher, which has never published a top seller, called it quits, telling employees they could come back in the next day to pack up their

things. What's your sources (every ASC employee we've spoken to, including the receptionist) tell us, anyway: The company's president insists that none of it is true and that the company is still "actively publishing." **In the annual ledger of "games that should have shipped for the holidays and still aren't out after January 1,"** few were as glaring as Bungle Software's *Oni*. The kung fu action/adventure title was "a lock" for the holiday season 1999, company spokespeople insisted at E3 last year. Now the game is "shipped at its ready" and has lost its project lead. Will

Bungle spring back on this one? Time will tell... **And in what has become an ugly annual tradition in the games industry, developers have started the New Year's downsizing.** After bulking up to ship titles for the holiday season, developers have to give all those new staffers their walking papers. One of the hardest hit this year is Random Games, maker of multiple mass-market PC games like Hasbro's *em@ll Football*. Laying off 23 people, a company employee characterized it as simply "a tough time of year." **But it's not all unemployment lines, water,**

and stale bread for the fair people of the game industry. Some are actually getting jobs — including everyone's favorite unemployment-insurance beneficiary: Bernie Stolar. The former Sony and Sega exec is now President of Mattel Interactive, which includes Mattel's embattled Learning Company subsidiary. The Learning Company lost \$105 million in just the third quarter of last year. If anyone's up to the task of turning it all around, though, Stolar seems a fine candidate fresh off the most successful launch in the history of videogames. (That would be the



Rally 2 Racing Wheel

Clear steering on Dreamcast

Company: Pelican Accessories
Price: \$39.99

➔ Pelican Accessories' Rally 2 Racing Wheel offers a rather smooth ride on the road of Dreamcast, offering a wealth of adjustable features to ensure that would-be racecar champions don't get left sucking dust at the starting line.

This wheel packs a built-in rumble feature, rubberized hand grips, four bottom-mounted suction cups, two analog paddles for acceleration and braking, a D-pad, four gameplay buttons, one VMU slot, an LED display, a start button, and two buttons to adjust the wheel's handling. Beyond being able to modify the wheel's sensitivity, players can also opt for increased vehicle resistance with the Rally 2's unique "Traction Control System." This feature decreases wheel response, simulating increased traction and handling, making it easier for drivers to handle tough turns.

Save for oddly placed gameplay buttons (which are too close to the handgrip for maximum comfort), and a weak rumble effect, the wheel is well designed, its strongest point — the flexible tuning options — makes driving games such as Sega Rally 2, Test Drive 4, and Re-Volt a rather (pardon the pun) moving experience.



Razer Boomslang

Looking for a sensitive mouse? This one roars

Company: Karna
Price: \$69.99 (for the 1,000 dpi model)
\$99.99 (for the 2,000 dpi model)

➔ Sick of seeing your brainpan smeared across the corridors in Quake III? You might want to try Karna's new Razer Boomslang mouse. Designed explicitly for hardcore types, the PS/2 and USB-compatible mouse uses a focused light-beam technology to track the movement of the ball. The result is a device with amazing sensitivity and accuracy. While most normal mice have a sensitivity around 400 dpi, the Boomslang has a 1,000 dpi and even a 2,000 dpi model for gamers who want performance levels that theoretically would enable them to plug a keyhole with a railroad from a mile away. It has four programmable buttons (two on the top, one on either side) and does 6 million instructions per second. In the heat of battle, players can adjust mouse sensitivity on the fly. However, the mouse is rather large, and with the ambidextrous nature of the design comes an awkward sloping front, making it functional but not very comfortable. But the sensitivity is fantastic, and perfect for those of us whose idea of a bull's eye is extracting an opponent's left retina. For more info, check out: www.razerzone.com.

Dreamcast launch, for those keeping score at home.) **Speaking of brands everyone thought were dead but just keep coming back, the Amiga is back in town.** Gateway has sold the brand to Bill McEwan's Amio Development. McEwan is a former Gateway executive and pledges that his Amio Development, soon to be renamed Amiga Corporation, will "finish the job that was started 15 years ago." **And in the "rich get richer" column, Origin Systems is planning to write several large checks to the already flush Todd McFarlane.** The *Spawn* cre-

ator will join the development of *Ultima Online 2* as a "creative consultant." The new *UCO* will be fully 3D and is now likely to feature lots of unrealistic muscles, plenty of chains, and its share of spiky bits. **PlayStation2 will have gotten its first real test by the public in February.** The system was on display to the world in the Chiba Prefecture on February 19 with 500 systems on hand. It won't just be the system, either; we are hearing at press time, according to Japanese news sources, about 200 new titles to be on display, lending credence to claims by Sony at Comdex that the

system will launch with 250 titles in development. **While Sony prepares to show off its latest and greatest, Nintendo still isn't talking about Dolphin, but it has announced a name for the new Zelda.** Code-named *Zelda Gaiden*, the real title will be *The Legend of Zelda: The Mask of Mujula*. The company's shining star, Shigeru Miyamoto, is also hinting at a new *Pokémon Stadium* coming to N64. **Sega's got nothing to fear from either company, though, if its Shenmue sales serve as an indication of the future.** In its first week, the

3D BLASTER ANNIHILATOR PRO

Screaming fast — just the way we like it

Company: Creative Labs
Price: \$249



➔ Based on Nvidia's outstanding GeForce 256 and offering 4x AGP performance, Creative's Annihilator Pro (previously in NG 12.99) is just about everything you could hope for in a top-of-the-line, cutting-edge 3D card. With 32MB of memory, the Annihilator benchmarked impressively, beating both the Voodoo3 3000 and the TNT2-based 32MB Viper V770, thanks mostly to its vastly superior 32-bit color performance — as much as 75% faster in some tests. That's fast. It's also worth pointing out that its 2D performance resulted in some very satisfactory high-resolution desktops (as high as 1920x1440x32, although 1600x1200x32 is a practical limit).

In real-world applications, the results were less dramatic, but notable, with a decent boost in Quake III frame rates under OpenGL. The most dramatic gains, however, were under D3D, where pushing for higher and higher resolutions at ever deeper color depths hardly seemed to phase it.

The package also comes with 3Deep and Colorific's color and gamma calibration tools (handy), MPEG decoding for DVD playback, Test Drive 4, and an Evolve demo. All in all, it's worth the \$249 MSRP! Well, heck yeah.

CONSOLE BATTLE STATION!

➔ It's not a PlayStation all but the latest transforming Microsoft battle station. The \$99 toy is available only in Japan, and no, it doesn't play games.



Yu Suzuki epic sold 260,000 copies in Japan — a new record for Sega's system in its home country. Reports indicate it is still slated for an early July release here in the US. **And finally, ending years (and we do mean years) of speculation, Eidos has announced a firm release date for John Romero's *Dalkatona*.** In an email to its consumers, the company revealed that the long-awaited title is coming "this millennium." Time will tell...

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

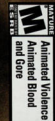
"To really understand how decomposed these zombies are you have to be in close personal contact," Stick thought as he smashed his fist through the braindead

ghoul. But this was no time for theory. Three new bonebags were moving in fast, and Stick had lost his gun. They charged. He wrecked the first one with a series of quick uppers, clocked the other one with an elbow pop, and dropped the third guy with a reverse rocket crotch kick. Then he spotted his gun. Unfortunately, it was stuck in his face with a zombie behind it. "Yo, voodoo child," said Stick "Your trigger finger's missing..." sega.com/games

ZOMBIE REVENGE

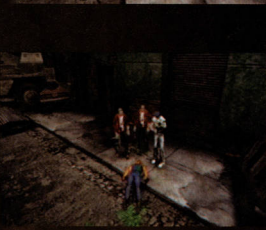
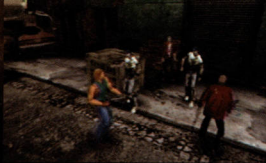
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Sega Dreamcast
IT'S THINKING

"If you're too lazy to go online and see this awesome game for real, here are some motionless, four color dots on 20lb, 30% recycled paper that do this game no justice whatsoever. For example, in frame 2 you can't see that you can punch, kick, landmine, bazooka, and powerdrill your way through seven levels of bloodthirsty fiends or go two-player while you try to survive death rays, drowning in green slime, and zombies who steal your gun and smoke your ass like a Virginia ham. So stop farting around and see it for real at sega.com/games



■ THE TAO OF PING

Here comes PowerPlay

Valve leads developers in full frontal assault on Internet latency

→ The shortcomings of the Internet with regard to online multiplayer games are being actively addressed by a Valve-headed industry initiative. The Half-Life developer has teamed up with a number of Internet companies — including Cisco Systems and an unnamed ISP — and more than 14 top-level PC developers such as BioWare, Epic, and Red Storm. The initiative, branded PowerPlay, intends to make playing games on a 56k modem as impressive an experience as playing on a LAN.

The initiative will be a multi-stage process, requiring software and firmware changes from everyone involved. The eventual plan is to roll out the PowerPlay brand as a stamp of quality similar in some respects to Lucasfilm's THX — indicating that a game or ISP is compliant with the PowerPlay measures — ideally supplying a superior online gameplay experience.

Citing fundamental flaws with the basic structure of ISPs, routers, and the Internet itself, Valve's managing director Gabe Newell wants to change the state of play, explaining, "The Internet was designed for HTML and linear downloads, not for massively multiplayer games. Latency isn't a consideration for email, but a 500 microsecond delay can make a game virtually unplayable."

Valve's demo simulated PowerPlay in a game of *Team Fortress Classic* played over a 56k modem. When the game was shown with PowerPlay's enhancements, there was noticeably improved framerate and control as

"Latency isn't a consideration for email, but a 500 microsecond delay can make a game virtually unplayable."

— Gabe Newell, Valve Software

packet loss had been minimized.

The developer is providing technological advice and solutions, as well as seeking the same from its partners. The PowerPlay roll-out will be a two-stage process, with straightforward PC games being enhanced first, while live voice, console, and other advanced features will be supported later. Importantly, the PowerPlay initiative will be completely open source, and Newell claims that Valve will only make money from the sales of better online games, saying, "We worried that if we didn't start rolling the ball downhill, we'd run into problems," and added, "If we didn't do something, who would?"

— Frank O'Connor



POWERPLAY

■ The consortium of developers involved in PowerPlay will likely be using this logo discreetly in their packaging, ensuring that consumers are aware that their games are PowerPlay compatible

HARDCORE

I went to an arcade in LA a lot, and there were some gang-type people who played there. I was beating them really badly at *Street Fighter II* and also taunting them (which, in retrospect, wasn't that smart). Finally they actually picked me up and carried me out of the arcade to beat me up. Luckily, the arcade owner called over a cop, and they set me down and walked away. I immediately proceeded back inside to the *Street Fighter II* machine. I have a kind of a weird weakness for that game.

Blake Fischer, previews editor, *Next Generation*

Have a hardcore story you want printed in the magazine? Send it to hardcore@next-generation.com.

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CHEMICALS HAVE THEIR SIDE EFFECTS.

"The game that breaks the survival horror mold..."

-NextGen

"Looks like the insanely popular Resident Evil series will finally have some competition..."

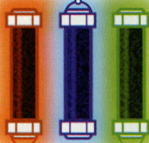
-GameFan.com

"Hope your PlayStation has a nightlight on it..."

-GameProWorld.com



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Master a totally unique arsenal of psychic abilities! They are your only defense against the sinister Galerians.



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CARION
JDS:MX-I4
Nalaeon=Psychokinesis
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The Galerians are an artificially created techno-species whose prime directive is the total annihilation of the human race.

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We know what you
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ENTERTAINMENT



■ **PLAYSTATION2, PC**

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH

■ Publisher: **EA** ■ Developer: **EA** ■ Release Date: **Fall 2000** ■ Origin: **US**

**The first major US-developed
PlayStation2 game is revealed**



Despite PlayStation2's awesome potential, most games announced so far have just been updates:

Gran Turismo with shinier cars, *Tekken* with more characters. EA is planning to change all that by creating an amazingly detailed world for James Bond to play in — one that's unprecedented in computer or video games. To the game's creators, though, that's no big deal. "At this point, for this style of game, making pretty worlds is such a given — everybody expects it," says Producer Ric Neil. "It's time to concentrate on the things that are in the world. Our attention is on making something new." The team's goal is to create the ultimate first-person Bond experience: beyond *GoldenEye*, beyond *Tomorrow Never Dies*, and beyond, in some ways, the films themselves.

The game's single-player goal will be based on the movie — saving the world's access to cheap oil — but Creative Director Randy Breen is quick to point out that while they "share the plot of the movie, we aren't trying to convey all the narrative. We're taking the action scenes mainly — they're the natural setting for interactivity to begin

with, and the thing we can most closely represent in the game world."

Just as in his books and movies, Bond will need to improvise to achieve his goals — particularly when his plans collapse halfway through a mission. Gadgets will help, but the real goal is to have players use the environment. "We can't tell a player what to do," says Breen, "but we can put him in a position to use things to his advantage. So the smart player is going to find those things and take out the bad guys, or find another solution to a problem. Which I think is really in the spirit of Bond — you know, he grabs the letter opener off the desk behind him and stabs the guy's hand."

Neil concurs. "How many games have you played where you've said, 'If this was real life, I could shoot that, and that would make this happen?' We're trying make that happen. It doesn't mean the player has to do it, but if the player thinks 'Gee, I wish I could do that,' and then tries something and it actually happens, there's a big payoff."

The bottom line in game design, says Lead Level Designer Alex Mayberry, is this: "Our focus is on what is James Bond, and



■ Contrast these two PlayStation 1 screens (above and below) with a the composited PlayStation2 screen (bottom) and you get a good idea of the power of Sony's new system



"Pretty worlds are such a given — everyone expects it. Our attention is on making something new"

— Ric Neil

■ This screen is made up of all in-game elements, but only the level itself is actually running in realtime right now: the helicopter and goon were added





■ Cut scenes will be handled with in-game assets, and should re-create some of the marquee action scenes from the movie

how does that happen? If the gameplay is true to what James Bond is, he sneaks in, blows stuff up, runs out, doesn't get hurt, and gets the girl."

In a first for EA, the company has licensed a game engine — Quake III — to realize its vision. This enables the artists, animators, and level designers to work with established tools, while a small team works on the port of the engine and data to PlayStation2. As the screens from the PC, although the two versions will share the exact same data and models) show, the environments are far more detailed than those of Quake III.

So, how is it working with PlayStation2? Is the need to do a PC version as well holding the PlayStation2 version back? Not at all, says Breen. In fact, "I think that there's an expectation that you're able to display more polys in the PlayStation2. In reality, I doubt that's going to be true by the time the game ships. The PC is becoming more capable every day. The biggest difference between the machines is that the PlayStation's going to be lower resolution or have a capacity of lower resolution at its highest setting than the equivalent highest configuration for the PC. And so, assuming the poly count is similar or, you know, marginally different, the PC's probably going to look better in some ways. We're trying to make both of them as best we can, and they'll certainly be competitive. But I think right now people are still kind of riding the

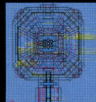
excitement of the new platform, and expectations are relatively high. It's a fantastic machine, but you know, I think it's been blown out of proportion somewhat. I think the games are going to be very impressive, but it's not going to blow the PC out of the water in terms of graphic performance." An interesting opinion, and considering how detailed and large the completed levels already are, it goes a long way toward demonstrating just how ambitious and advanced this project is.

As might be expected, gameplay will be closer to GoldenEye than Quake III. One thing that PlayStation2 will enable is far more character animation, which, combined with a proprietary AI scheme, should help the game be more realistic than any first-person game before it. This has been a major focus for the team, which has scrapped *Id's* AI and scripting routines in favor of a new system. "What we're working on is a system that's going to allow the level designers and game scripters control through various levels, from simple generic behaviors down to being able to change everything a character can do, so it's not just the same events unfolding every time," says Neil. "Bots work great in a multiplayer type of fight, but when you want to create a world that seems more alive, you have to have them doing something other than circle strafing you."

Adds Breen: "There's a lot of focus [here] on trying to make the characters behave naturally. And that's a pretty



■ The game isn't all corridors; the room (above) gives a good approximation of what the levels will look like. Corridors (top) show off curved surfaces on pipes and rails



■ These models and level diagram give an idea of the complexity of objects in the game: this is no empty world

"If the gameplay is true to Bond, he sneaks in, blows stuff up, runs out, doesn't get hurt, and gets the girl!"

— Alex Mayberry



■ These guns are actual in-game models

sophisticated problem: *Quake*, for instance, doesn't offer the opportunity for that because everybody you see, you assume you need to kill them as quickly as possible. There's not really any room for subtlety in our case, with Bond, if you have a situation where you need to achieve something without killing someone, but you run the risk of being killed, then watching their behavior becomes relevant! And if that behavior is interesting and suspenseful, there's really something exciting about that."

Still, the team is interested in results, not processes. "AI — the wrong parts of it — has been overemphasized," says Neil. "A lot of games claim to have super-sophisticated AI and all these algorithms and routines that the characters can run through. But, you know, from a gameplay standpoint, if it still looks stupid, it's still stupid. You get a guy running around bumping into walls. So I think we're really more about what the final perception is."

And AI isn't the only thing that creates natural-seeming behavior. Animation is a key as well, Breen believes. "Look at *Rogue Spear*. Not so much for what the characters are doing, but, you turn around when you're crouched down and look at the guy behind

you, and you can see his eyes looking around, you can see his chest moving as he breathes. It's not so much the activity he's doing, it's just his animations making him look real. That's what we're emphasizing."

Multiplayer will be a big component of the game — possibly as much as a third of the data on CD will be devoted to multiplayer — but the team members are unwilling to discuss their plans specifically right now, though they hint that gameplay will be beyond traditional player-vs-player or capture-the-flag style games. Some things are known, though: PC/PS2 online play won't be possible. Although the team feels the DualShock controller is adequate, it pales next to mouse-look as a control scheme, so PlayStation2 players would be at a distinct disadvantage. PlayStation2 players can look forward to four-player split-screen play, but console online play is a major question mark, since Sony is waiting for broadband.

While the team says it's concentrating on refining the genre, rather than trying to evolve it, it's worth noting that they consider *Quake* a mere refinement of *Wolfenstein*. (Breen: "In terms of what you're actually doing, they're not so different.") Semantics aside, EA looks as though it's onto something big with *TWINE*: the massive detailed levels alone are astounding. If them team can populate them with characters even half as believable as what they're striving for, they will have made a major step forward in the "refinement" of the genre. — Chris Charla



■ These three different shots give an idea of the kind of variety in the levels that gamers can expect

■ The gritty industrial feel of an oil refinery is the first level the team has completed. Although still preliminary, this screen shows what final gameplay will look like





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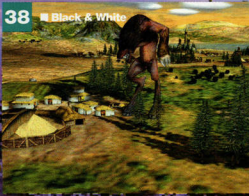


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Alphas

Big, bad, and beautiful. **Next Generation** gives you the first look at tomorrow's most exciting games



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The founding concept behind

Oddworld Inhabitants was to design a game world with a huge arcing storyline that would encapsulate many generations of games. While the first product may not have been to everyone's taste (it was a 2D platformer that was anything but revolutionary), it still featured high production values, tight gameplay, and the most unique game world seen on PlayStation. With *Munch's Oddysee*, the second part of the story arc (*Abe's Exoddus* served as more of a side story), Oddworld Inhabitants looks to not only redefine its own series concept from the 32-bit age, but create an engaging and unique experience unlike any other.

"The future is in virtual worlds," declares Oddworld Inhabitant's President and Co-Founder Lorne Lanning, "just watching the world should make you laugh — like you're watching living characters do

■ PLAYSTATION2

MUNCH'S ODDYSEE

A little bit odder,
and a whole lot
deeper

- Publisher: Infogrames
- Developer: Oddworld Inhabitants
- Release Date: US PlayStation launch
- Origin: US



■ You will be able to play as either Abe or Munch. Here, Abe sneaks up on a Slig and prepares to throw him into the recycler



SWEET SOUND

Munch's Oddspace is the first game we've previewed that fully supports the Dolby 5.1 (Dolby Digital) output capabilities of PlayStation2. This means that, for readers with the proper sound hookups, you'll not only get crisp digital sound, but also six distinct sound channels (right, left, center, rear right, rear left, and subwoofer). Wow, and we thought surround sound was cool...

the funny things that living characters really do." Of course, Lanning points out that the future of interactive entertainment also lies in tight, innovative gameplay and sharp, witty storytelling. To combine the three, the 60-person team at Oddworld Inhabitants has gone through the Herculean effort of creating a digital version of a fully realized world for their game to take place in. Day turns to night, ecosystems change according to how game inhabitants (either PCs or

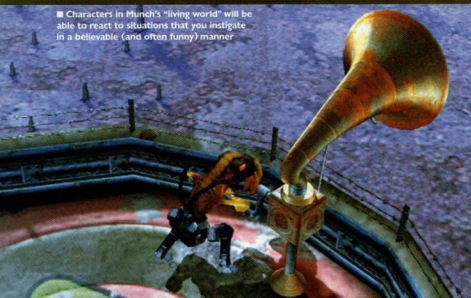
NPCs) treat them, and, most importantly, there is a set of "real-world" rules that players can intuitively figure out and exploit to their own purposes. Smack-dab in the middle of this technological feat stands the player, interacting with the world within the confines of an epic story.

This time around, you play as Munch, a one-legged curiosity who has been captured by the scientist race, the Vykkers, for the purpose of

experimentation. Of course, Munch escapes from his captors and falls out of their UFO-like base only to be discovered by the Mudokons (the primary race of the first game), who don't believe his strange tale of abduction. Abe (the first game's hero) does, however, and he joins up with Munch to discover the ultimate purpose behind the Vykkers and rescue the beings trapped by them (which, players find out, includes Abe's mom).

Gameplay, as you might imagine from playing the earlier games, is primarily action/puzzle-based but now in a fully 3D world. "If you look at the world from a native point of view [like the Mudokons and Munch], everything is worth something alive," explains Lanning. "But if you look at it from the industrial point of view, everything is worth something dead. Everything on the playing field can be

■ Characters in Munch's "living world" will be able to react to situations that you instigate in a believable (and often funny) manner



played with either ideology." This gives players many different means to get through each dilemma, either by persuading the natural residents to help them, or by destroying things and selling them, earning "Moolah" (the game's money) and purchasing solutions from such outlets as Oddworld's answer to Sears, the Maggog catalog.

In fact, one of the major goals in the game is to get an incompetent Glutkon named Lulu promoted to a position of power. "While your native interest is in preserving the land," says Lanning, "in order to fulfill your need, you need to get him promoted and fulfill his interests, which tend to be based on destroying the land." This delicate balance forces players to face the interesting dilemma: do you take the quick and destructive path or the more difficult path of good karma? This is a universal problem that will haunt players in situations throughout the game. However, Lanning and team are emphatic in their belief that there is always more than one way to solve each puzzle — and how good you are at finding the environmentally sound



■ *Munch's Oddysee* features all of the old characters from the *Abe* series, as well as several new races

path will definitely be reflected in how the game ends.

Still, even with all of the new technology and design work that has gone into this new game, Lanning and the rest of his team are sticking to the mantra presented on the case of their very first game. "No menus. No inventory bars. No scorekeeping. Just infinite lives, victims to rescue, and inexplicably challenging gameplay." In today's "me too" market, this battle cry sounds as fresh and promising as ever. With some great humor, strong drama, and challenging gameplay, this could be just what the US PlayStation2 launch really needs.

— Blake Fischer



■ These strange blimps are actually creatures called Meeties. Meeties are interesting because they can evolve into all sorts of intriguing things depending on what you feed them





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■ PLAYSTATION2

KESSEN

■ Publisher: **Koei** ■ Developer: **Koei**

■ Release Date: **March 4 (Japan), PS2 Launch (US)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Get medieval on PS2 — Japanese style



■ As you win more battles, you will be treated to better troop types, such as these mounted soldiers



For those who have been tracking PlayStation2 since it was first announced in March 1999, few games have been as shrouded in mystery as Koei's launch title Kessen. While several movies have been shown in which huge Japanese armies confront each other on the battlefield, no one has been sure of how the game is actually played, or even if the startling graphics that have been shown are gameplay or just CG movies. "Almost all of it has been realtime action," confirms Funito Kodutsumi, the team director: "It's funny, actually, most of our colleagues in the company often stop in and ask, 'Is that realtime or CG?'"

"Still, drawing the most beautiful

■ A unique AI system enables every soldier on the field to assess his surroundings at any given time and act appropriately. In this case, the AI says "stab"



graphics isn't one of our main concerns," stresses Kodutsumi. "The concept, which is essentially a 'Sengoku Kassen' (Japanese medieval war), is the center of the game. The music and the graphics are merely being used to reinforce the concept." This dedication to the concept is hardly surprising, considering the company's legacy of such classic wargaming series as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and

→ Alphas



■ Keep your generals alive and they will earn new weapons and tactics for their units

Nobunaga's Ambition on everything from the 8-bit NES all the way up to today's systems. "It's not an extension of our war series, but a completely original concept," he explains. "There is a historically accurate story that you can follow. However, there are also different stories you follow, depending on the outcomes of your battles."

Players start the game as the commander-in-chief of an army in the Warring States period of Japan's history. "This is a period where many generals struggled for supremacy," says Kodutsumi. As the commander-in-chief, your primary task is to analyze each battleground

beforehand and then issue orders to your generals, who will then go in and execute your battle plan. It's not as easy as it sounds, though; the task is made much more complex because all of the 64 generals in the game have their own personalities and abilities that you must take into account. "It becomes very important that you give directions to each general that match his characteristics and abilities," advises Kodutsumi. "If not, they may not follow you." As you progress in the game, generals will earn new tactics and weapon types for their troops as they survive battles and grow in experience. Throughout the game you'll get to control



■ Plan your strategy with your generals before the battle even starts

■ From far away, it looks decidedly impressive — that's when you zoom in on the battle and see what a melee of this size really looks like



SHOGUN WARRIORS



Most Americans' experience with Shogun warriors comes from Mattel's action figures of the same name: these late 1970s action figures were billed by Mattel as "Invincible Guardians of Justice," and, like many US toy trends, they actually have roots in the Japanese anime and manga genres. In the US, they also were featured in a Marvel comic book, but unfortunately, they have faded into the mists of obscurity.



■ The unique "agent" technology means that every battle will be different — creating much in the way of replayability

10 different units and utilize seven different types of weaponry.

Once each battle starts, gameplay shifts to a mode where you can witness the action from many different viewpoints. You don't micromanage the battle as in a typical realtime strategy game, but instead issue orders down to your generals at crucial junctures. The foot soldiers themselves actually remain quite independent of your control, but will follow your general's orders. This not only keeps control functions orderly and organized enough for a PS2 pad to



■ Armor and weapon types will make a huge difference in how a battle's outcome will be decided

"It's funny, actually, most of our colleagues in the company often stop in and ask, 'Is that realtime or CG?'"

— Fumito Kodutsumi

handle, but adds an entirely new level of psychological strategy that must be utilized in addition to the normal battle tactics.

At the heart of each soldier in your army is the innovative "agent" system.

"It's basically a development technique in Kessen that allows each unit to examine a situation and make its own judgments and decisions," Kodutsumi excitedly explains. "It means that each unit can move and attack independently, changing upon the situations at hand." This level of artificial intelligence is used in everything from the soldiers to their horses. In fact, if you look closely, you'll notice that all of the horses are all moving differently — even though they may be in the same formation. "If possible on the original PlayStation at all," says Kodutsumi, "the number of units would be very, very small." This kind of individual unit decision-making allows for a battle to evolve more naturally — and unpredictably — than ever before.

While Kodutsumi says that "the PS2 hardware doesn't have the memory yet to describe the scenes with startling reality," he also admits, "I don't think that we're aware of the true power of PlayStation2." Still, the team has done an amazing job of making the most lifelike re-creation of a

Japanese battlefield to date; it has an attention to detail so meticulous that you can actually see the dust kicked up by the horses as they run. While, traditionally, gamers don't pick up consoles for strategy games, Kessen shows that the dividing line between console and PC games is becoming thinner than ever. After seeing some of the dramatic battles in action, we're willing to bet that Koel turns armchair generals around the world into true believers.

— Blake Fischer



■ Even though there is a lot going on, the game is set up so that you'll never get caught trying to use the PS2 controller for micromanagement

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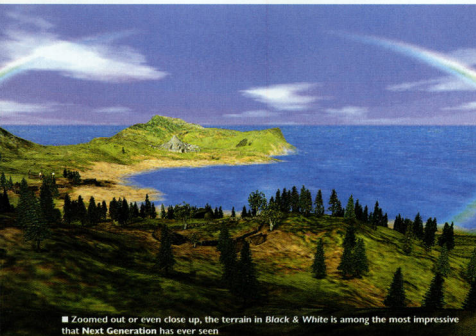
■ Lead your creatures down the path of evil and they will develop claws as well as a penchant for chaos and destruction

■ PC, PLAYSTATION2

BLACK & WHITE

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **Lionhead Studios** ■ Release Date: **Spring (PC)** ■ Origin: **UK**

Raise them with love. Train them to kill



■ Zoomed out or even close up, the terrain in *Black & White* is among the most impressive that Next Generation has ever seen.



As a child, while the other kids tangled with rabbits and kittens, Peter Molyneux — managing director at Lionhead Studios — already had bigger plans. "I once kidnapped a baby kangaroo from Windsor Safari Park,"

■ We shudder to think of the person who evolved their creature into this goofy monkey



THE ONLINE ALTERNATIVE

Black & White: The Gathering is something of an experiment. This online component of *Black & White* will allow players to upload their creatures along with other players and then use them to... chat! Besides the normal areas for combat, Molyneux and team are actually going to be using some ICQ-like features (to the extent that they will actually import your buddy lists), which allow players to converse with each other across the net. "The incredibly cool thing is that if you and I are chatting, and another creature arrives but we really don't want anyone else to intrude, we can slap that creature away and continue our private chat," says Molyneux.



■ As the game progresses, you eventually discover that there is another god with whom you must do war for control of the planet

he confesses. "It was a long time ago, but my sister and I picked it up and bundled it into the back of the car." They got halfway home before a loud banging in the trunk alerted their parents to the extra cargo.

It's exactly this feeling that drives *Black & White*. Wouldn't it be great to have a cool-looking 200-foot-tall creature that would unconditionally love you? Key to the game are the creatures' abilities to mimic their god's behavior. While you can teach a creature to do things, the surprise is it will learn independently by watching what you do, just like a child, it will try to

"Black & White is an RPG where you are a god: you play as a god and the choices that you have are of a god"

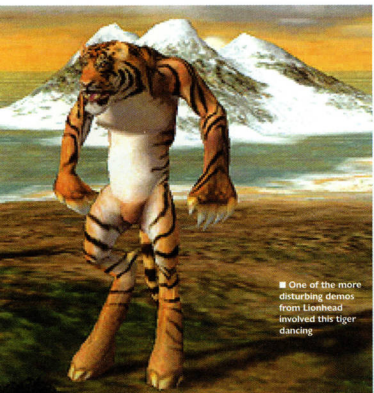
— Peter Molyneux

do the things its parent does. And as suggested in the game's title, if you are a good god, your creature will also be good. Its physical appearance will morph, its color taking on a holy golden hue. Conversely, evil deeds will turn a creature into a terrifying monster, complete with spikes and claws.

"The creatures reflect people's



■ Use your magic for divine intervention or retribution. The humans don't stand a chance



■ One of the more disturbing demos from Lionhead involved this tiger dancing



→ Alphas



■ To change your view, you actually use the hand icon to drag yourself across the landscape

personalities," says Molyneux. Lionhead is now testing its creatures. Programmers push the limits of the AI code, while the artists work out the extremes of body morphing. "Andy [Robson, head of testing] is a vicious bastard," Molyneux claims. "When he's on the soccer field, he taunts people, and sure enough his creature is a little bit vicious and can't be trusted. Jean-Claude [Cottier, 3D programmer] is the nicest person, and his creature is lovely to deal with."

Black & White is more than a glorified, 3D Tamagotchi-style personality test, though. It takes the

best bits from resource-management games, RPGs, and god sims, and mashes them together. Molyneux is now calling the game the world's first god RPG. He states: "Black & White is an RPG where you are a god; you play as a god and the choices that you have are of a god."

"It always aggrieved me in god games that there was this beautiful world but there was always distance between you and the world — you weren't a physical presence," he continues. "The creature is your physical representation in the world. He's the star of the show."

Indeed, one of the striking aspects of the game is the bond that develops between



■ The people will pray to you for help with their problems

players and their creatures.

For all its technology, however, the most common criticism leveled at *Black & White* is a perceived general lack of a specific plot. "At the start you go through a very simple sequence where you get dragged into this land through the prayers of its people," says Molyneux. "The land is called Eden, and before you arrive, it is a beautiful world, full of natural beauty and wonder. The little people who live there lead an idyllic life without war and discord. It soon becomes clear that there are also some animals with powers that allow them to grow to enormous sizes. The first creatures you come across are three that walk out of the forest: a tiger, a cow, and an ape. They all leap up trying to grab your hand icon, and you get to choose one of them," says Molyneux. These represent the three classes of animal in the game — aggressive, passive, and neutral. Later in the game, you have the chance to change your creature.

"At one point you will discover a turtle farm," explains Molyneux. "Inside are two farmers with a problem. Their son has run off and they need him back. They pray to you and ask you for your help. Whatever way you choose to react, eventually you get one of the turtles in the farm, which is a special creature that



■ Players can vent their evil frustrations by smashing through town



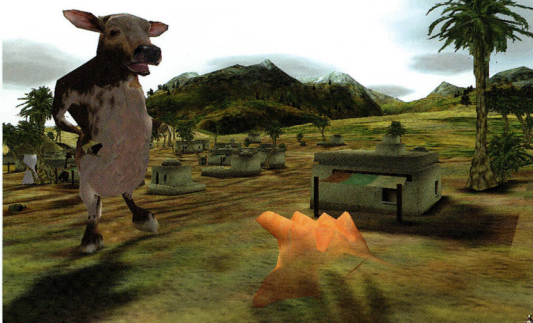
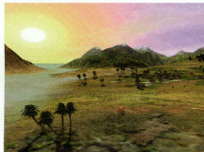
Before Next Generation has a chance to answer, he has capriciously picked up the woman in his hand and tossed her into the sea to drown

■ If you choose to be good, your people will worship out of love. If you're evil, they worship due to fear





■ The hand is your on-screen avatar; it controls everything from movement to magic



leaps up at your hand. You can click on this creature and transfer the mind of the creature you currently have into the mind of the turtle. So you have the baby turtle and a 100-foot ape. When you transfer the mind, the ape shrinks down and the turtle grows up. And you see all these cuts appear on the turtle — where all the scars were on the original ape."

These challenges, as they are called, drive the plot, pushing the player to make moral choices. "The little people in Eden pray to you," Molyneux says. "The way you react to these prayers dictates what you're like in the world." The first challenge demonstrates this. A woman comes out of her house, falls to her knees and starts to pray. Her brother is lost in the forest and she is asking for your help to save him. "What would you do?" Molyneux asks. Before **Next**

Generation has a chance to answer; he has capriciously picked up the woman in his hand and tossed her into the sea to drown.

These challenges can give rewards, but there is no correct way to complete them. Playing as a good god and answering the woman's prayer may result in the village worshipping with more fervor and unlocking a new spell. Dropping some villagers off a mountain could similarly increase the amount of worship received by literally putting the fear of god in the remainder.

What players won't realize as they play is that *Black & White* is broken down into three different books. The first is simply about discovering the world, getting a creature, and solving initial challenges. The second is triggered as the sea level drops,

revealing more of Eden. It becomes apparent, then, that there are other gods and an overall god who wants to dominate the world. "The third book is about the fight between your way of thinking and that of the other god," Molyneux reveals. "If you decide to be truly evil, he will be truly good and vice versa."

Beyond all issues of plot, gameplay, and the challenges, the creature is *Black & White's* killer app. The question is simple: wouldn't it be great to have a cool-looking 200-foot-tall creature who would unconditionally love you? Or put it another way: wouldn't it be great to steal a baby tiger or turtle from a zoo and take it home?

And who knows, Lionhead might include a kangaroo, just for old time's sake.

— Nigel Edge



■ You must always balance your broad world view with the needs of the people



ACE
3



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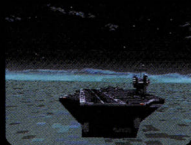
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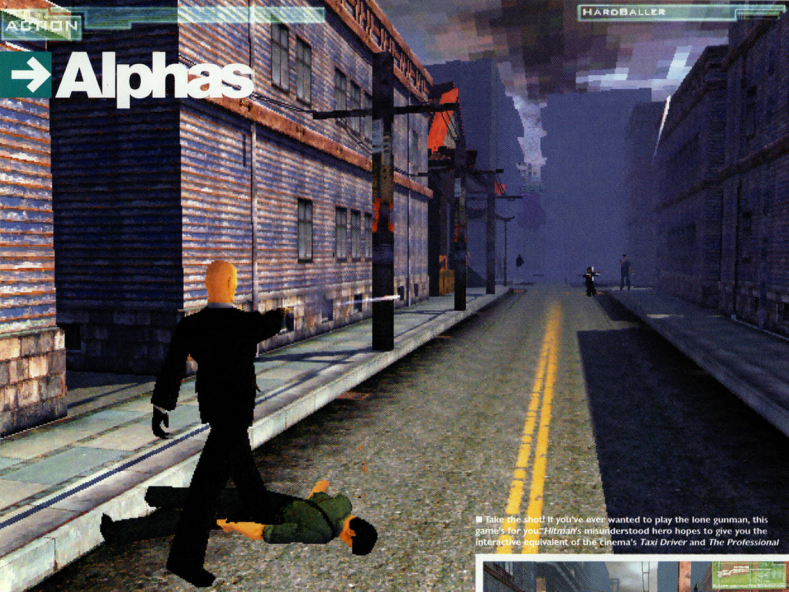
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ACTUAL IN-GAME SCREENSHOTS



→ Alphas



Take the shot! If you've ever wanted to play the lone gunman, this game's for you: *Hitman's* misunderstood hero hopes to give you the interactive equivalent of the *Cinema Taxi Driver* and *The Professional*

PC

HITMAN: PROJECT 47

■ Publisher: Eidos

■ Developer: Io Interactive ■ Release Date: Summer 2000 ■ Origin: Denmark

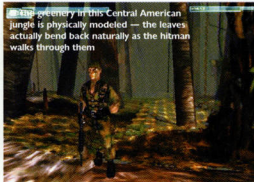
Remember the movie *The Professional*?
Now you play the killer for hire

→ If you're of the opinion that the smug fashion-slave James Bond (see cover story, page 22) would last about 10 seconds against modern underworld criminals, chances are you'll find *Hitman* more to your liking. Taking all its cues from stylized assassin films, *Hitman* brings you deep into the heart of an international criminal world, where you'll be rubbing elbows with real scum — and rubbing them out as well.

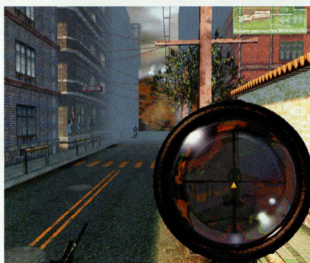
"*Hitman* is getting compared a lot to our thinking man's shooter, *Thief*," says Eidos Producer Eric Adams. "It's set in modern day as opposed to medieval times, but you still have to use stealth to get into locations [where you kill your

assigned target] and find a way out before whole bunch of angry people catch up with you."

The game hatches into a 25- to 30-



■ The scenery in the Central American jungle is physically modeled — the leaves actually bend back naturally as the hitman walks through them



mission story, and players will alternately switch between first- and third-person perspectives. Powered by a proprietary engine called Glacier, *Hitman* features



large and detailed cityscapes, complete with rooftops from which players will snipe their targets. Conversely, Glacier's hi-res textures have also yielded some ornate interiors as well, including restaurants filled with NPCs. Certainly these elements of realism help provide the perfect setting for the blatant dramatics of an assassination attempt.

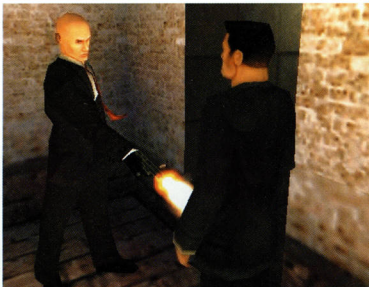
Still in its early stages, the gameplay bears some resemblance to *GoldenEye*, with perfunctory weapons and equipment including sniper rifles, hand grenades, bulletproof vests, and plastic explosives. However, you'll be using portions of your payments to buy items you'll deem necessary for your next mission.

And when it comes to the gunplay, the action is startlingly realistic, due to a fantastic physics engine complete with very realistic gravity, inverse kinematics, and location-based damage. Shoot an enemy in the lower leg, and it will go flying out from under him, toppling him

to the floor. The gritty realism of the violence parallels the mature nature of the title. Locations include a strip joint with nude dancers, and as Adams tell us, the colorful dialogue and adult themes will certainly land this game an M rating.

Hitman is certainly an ambitious project in both design and technology — according to Adams, cloth deformation in the character modeling will enable players to see weapons hidden in the clothing of enemies. Also, the team plans to include NPCs from which players can buy information, like maps; in some cases, players may actually need to recruit them to assist with the set-up of a hit. Some elements of the game are planned to be randomized, in the hopes of adding replay value to this single-player-only experience.

While much of the 3D audio wasn't in, it is being designed to take advantage of surround systems, and the game will also feature interactive music. For example, if



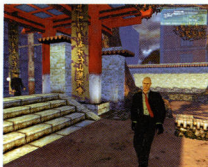
■ The majority of the action will come via projectile weapons, however, several melee weapons will also be at the player's disposal. (Note: you play the bald, suit-wearing killing machine)

you're spotted by the wrong people, the music will change to reflect the new element of danger.

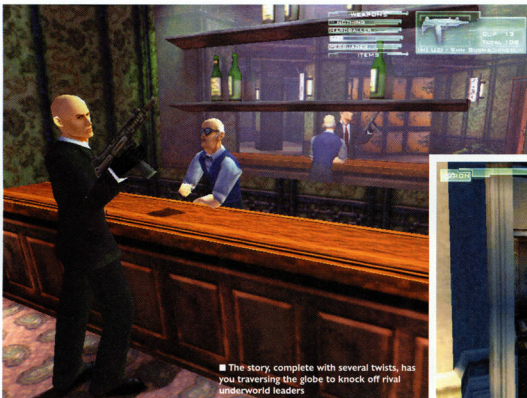
As it stands now, *Hitman* has a lot of potential, but given the still-early stages the game is in, and the ambitious plans for the level design and technology, it can't possibly be the game Eidos promises it will be if the game is released this summer possibly even this year. It is interesting that Adams compares *Hitman* to *Thief*, as *Thief* managed to deliver on its design promises, but only did so more than a year after it was scheduled to be released, and with outdated technology. Still, *Thief* was a good ride, and if Eidos delivers what's planned, this title will be too.

— Tom Russo

Hitman features large and detailed cityscapes, complete with rooftops from which players will snipe their targets



■ Danish architecture firms helped design some of these elaborate areas



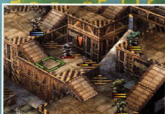
■ The story, complete with several twists, has you traversing the globe to knock off rival underworld leaders







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→ Alphas

■ The lighting effects are dramatic, but what should be even more striking are subtle things, like the way characters' heads turn toward the action.

■ PC, MAC, LINUX

RUNE

■ Publisher: G.O.D. ■ Developer: Human Head Studios ■ Release Date: Q3 2000 ■ Origin: US

The *Unreal* engine goes to hell. Sort of



Ever wanted to explore the Viking underworld? Human Head Studios is about to give you the chance. *Rune*, based on the *Unreal* engine, is a third-person action title set almost entirely in the Viking underworld.

You play Ragnar, a young Viking who's been sent to Niflheim by the bloodthirsty Conrack, leader of the dark Vikings. Of course, as a Viking yourself, you're pretty bloodthirsty too, but at least you're not evil, and it's up to you to fight your way

out of the underworld and into Conrack's mountain retreat. What happens next? "We don't want to say too much more at this point," says Timothy Gerritsen, Human Head's business director. "The whole storyline is very much embedded in the rich traditions of the Viking peoples. *Rune* is a fantasy epic, though, so we've added a lot of our own creative ideas and interpretations of the mythology."

What the team isn't shy about talking about are the many advances they've made to the *Unreal* engine. "We've completely replaced the original character-modeling system with a skeletal-based

"People can't camp in a corner and snipe away. They have to wade in and get their hands bloody!"

—Chris Rhinehart



■ Most of the monsters in the game come straight from Norse mythology, but some have been created by the Human Head team — straight out of their human heads

system," says Senior Programmer Chris Rhinehart. The new system enables several advances, including rotational interpolation; continuous, dynamic level-of-detail management (the engine drops and adds polygons to the characters on the fly to maintain a smooth framerate); true projected shadows; and, most importantly, real joint groups. The joint groups mean that characters can play different animations in different joint groups (like the legs, or torso) simultaneously in addition to radically increasing the number of perceived animations in the game, it means Ragnar — and all the NPCs in the game — can actually look at objects and characters without having to turn their entire bodies. It's subtle, but it makes an enormous difference in the immersion level of the game.

The other big advance should be the combat. While the game control itself should be familiar to anyone who's played *Tomb Raider* — although, remember, this is an action game, not an adventure — combat is melee-based: you need to get close, and you need to get bloody, to have any hope of winning the game. So, will the combat be more *Tekken* or more *Final Fight*? Rhinehart says the team is aiming somewhere in between: "We want to keep the number of buttons to a minimum so that beginners aren't overwhelmed by the controls and can have a lot of fun just using the simple attacks. However, more experienced players will be able to find cool and useful



■ Although the melee combat system is designed to be simple, advanced players will be able to have greater control over their weapons, an advantage in multiplayer

attacks by experimenting with the controls and the weapons." As for weapons, there won't be any shortage. Rhinehart says there will be at least 20 in the game, each with unique attacks and abilities. Certain weapons, of course, will be needed in certain situations.

The melee-style combat will also radically change the multiplayer component. "Players can't camp in a corner and snipe away at enemies. They'll have to wade in and get their hands bloody," says Rhinehart. Plus, he says, "different players will have different weapons and fighting style preferences," in

much the same way as you have favorite characters in fighting games.

So, what about other systems? Gerritsen is forthcoming: "We will definitely be on one of the next-generation console systems, [hopefully] before next Christmas," he says. Which one? Things get more complicated there: "We hope to announce something soon, but you can bet that this game will be available for either the PlayStation2 or Dreamcast, and if X-Box happens, we hope to be on that too." Discussions are also underway for Mac and Linux versions of the game.

— Chris Charla

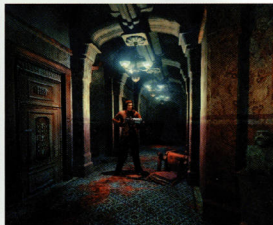
■ It may look like a mere monkey, but this beastie is actually a pretty terrifying enemy



ISOLATION WARD?

Human Head is located in Wisconsin, far from the game centers of the West Coast and Texas, but even though a landlord recently refused to rent to them because he didn't believe making games was a "real business," Gerritsen is philosophical about the isolation: "It's as much an advantage as a disadvantage. It's definitely disappointing that we aren't part of a wider game community that gets together to talk shop outside the office . . . but we're also able to better focus on the game we're making, rather than keeping up with the latest car that so-and-so just bought."





■ Fans of the *Resident Evil* series should instantly feel at home in *Alone in the Dark IV*

■ DREAMCAST, PLAYSTATION, PC

ALONE IN THE DARK IV

■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Darkworks Studio** ■ Release Date: **Fall 2000 (PC, PSX), 2001 (DC)** ■ Origin: **France**

Be afraid of the dark — it will keep you alive longer

→ If there's one game franchise that deserves a sequel, it must be *Alone in the Dark*. Back in 1992, the game forged new territory in gaming with a fresh and innovative mix of action, adventure, and Lovecraftian-like horror elements, all rendered in a truly

cinematic style and fleshed out with state-of-the-art polygon technology. The game has spawned several sequels over the next few years, even despite the fact that the series creator moved on to other waters after the first game. It's a testament to the strength of the original

design that years later, Capcom could use almost the same formula to create one of the most successful properties of all time, *Resident Evil*. Now, the tide shifts again with Paris-based developer Darkworks working on the fourth installment of the classic *Alone In The*



■ Carnby will explore a huge mansion, but Shadow Island's outdoors will also provide many places to prowl. Darkworks is aiming for 20 hours of gameplay





■ While *Alone in the Dark* isn't nearly as action-oriented as *Resident Evil*, there will still be times when you'll need the big guns to keep alive

"While *Resident Evil* was inspired by Romero and Carpenter, *Alone IV* should be closer to Cronenberg and Wes Craven"

— Antoine Villette, Darkworks Studio

Dark series, which promises to take gamers into a darker and more horrifying world than ever before.

Darkworks' founders, Antoine Villette and Guillaume Gouraud, are definitely intent upon living up to everybody's expectations. The company, which hasn't yet released a game under its name — and gave up development of its Jules-Verne-inspired action/adventure, *1906*, to make *Alone in the Dark IV* — will have to please both fans and a trusting publisher: "Infogrames told us shortly after seeing a demo of *1906*, that we were the perfect team to develop a sequel to *Alone in the Dark*. We saw continuing this legendary series as a great opportunity for our first game as a full-fledged game studio," Villette says. "We took Infogrames' offer under the condition that we get full freedom, which they courageously accepted."

In his fourth adventure, Edward Carnby will try to unravel why his best friend, Charles Fiske, died during a previous investigation. Carnby, hoping to get some clues, decides to finish the work Fiske never could — the recovery of ancient Indian artifacts from Shadow Island, just off the coast of Maine, for a mysterious art collector. And that is where Carnby, armed with only a gun

and flashlight, will have to face the horrors and fears of being alone in the dark... again.

While Darkworks is working on PC, PlayStation, and Dreamcast versions simultaneously, Infogrames showed **NG** an early Dreamcast build that also happens to be the best looking of the three in the making. Having seen *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* and its graphics fully rendered in realtime,

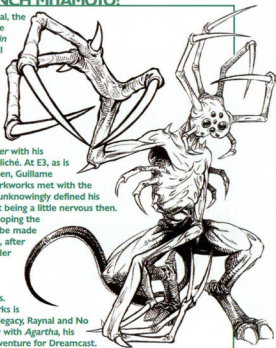
THE FRENCH MIYAMOTO?

Frederick Raynal, the man behind the original *Alone in the Dark*, is still one of the more active game developers around, having just completed the innovative

Toy Commander with his company No Cliché. At E3, as is bound to happen, Guillaume Gouraud of Darkworks met with the man who had unknowingly defined his future. "I admit being a little nervous then.

We were developing the third *Alone* to be made without Raynal, after all, and I consider the man to be equal to Miyamoto," Gouraud recalls. While Darkworks is continuing his legacy, Raynal and No Cliché are busy with *Agartha*, his new horror adventure for Dreamcast.

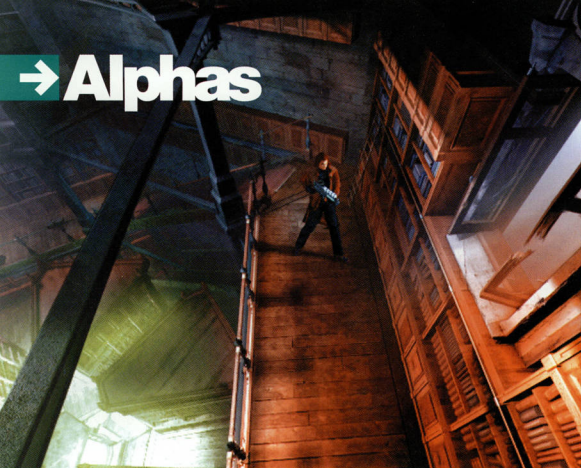
■ Frederick Raynal gave **NG** an exclusive first glimpse of *Agartha*'s upcoming horror. Sleep tight...



■ The torch should make for a unique atmosphere and some interesting gameplay strategies

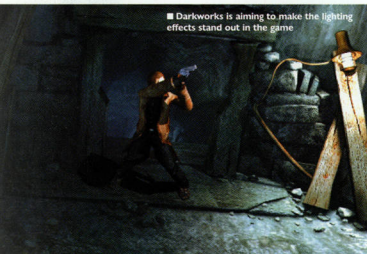


→ Alphas



■ The high-res graphics and richness of color should make up for the lack of true realtime 3D

Darkworks' use of fixed camera angles and prerendered backgrounds sounded somewhat disappointing at first. While



■ Darkworks is aiming to make the lighting effects stand out in the game

the main character consists of 3,000 polygons (which is also the maximum count for enemy models), Shadow Island's mansion and outdoors are rendered with an exacting attention to detail — to the point where paintings on the wall were scanned in from full-size oil paintings created specifically for the game.

Carmby's flashlight plays an integral part in the game; the light it casts on all objects is crucial to the game and atmosphere. "Its use transcends the game's adventure aspect as looking for clues and exploring the decorum will occur at a unique pace. Nothing is scarier than not knowing what's hiding in the dark," Gouraud says.

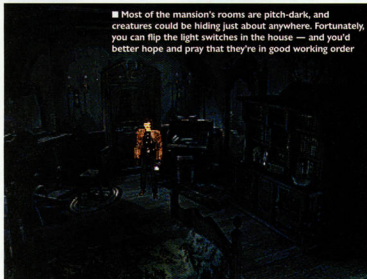
Even though the backgrounds are

prerendered, they will be lit in realtime, thanks to Darkworks' graphics trickery. "The lightbeam will look for information regarding every object's shape directly in the prerendered scene's database," Gouraud explains. "This means that the light wraps around each object perfectly, however complex, so technically we can reach a polygon count of up to two million." In addition to this novel form of dynamic lighting, the Dreamcast version will also use the same technique to calculate realtime shadows on all objects. "The Dreamcast version will make the most out of the *Alone* universe," Gouraud says. "We recalculated all the backgrounds in high-res, all the characters and monsters have been re-modeled and re-mapped, and the special effects enhanced."

The fact that Darkworks developed a DC-specific engine means that the three versions will share only the story and gameplay, which should be a lesson to developers how multi-platform games should be done. The Dreamcast version will also benefit from full VMU support. The LCD screen will show Carmby's health status, ammo count, and even an in-game map! We should also be getting mini-games of some sort to accompany Carmby's adventure.

The biggest challenge, though, should be beating the current champion of horror games, *Resident Evil*. "Our games will, of course, have things in common, but the differences will be bigger: I can't reveal too much, but while *Resident Evil* was inspired by Romero and Carpenter, *Alone IV* should be closer to Cronenberg's and Wes Craven's movies," Villette tells **NG**. "I am speaking in terms of gameplay and atmosphere, though. As far as the story is concerned, ours is entirely original." — *Jorg Tittel*

■ Most of the mansion's rooms are pitch-dark, and creatures could be hiding just about anywhere. Fortunately, you can flip the light switches in the house — and you'd better hope and pray that they're in good working order





■ Looming nightmare critters are bad enough, but when they come at you with a chainsaw, man, it's really time to wake up

■ DREAMCAST

NIGHTMARE CREATURES 2

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Kalisto ■ Release Date: April 2000 ■ Origin: France

Will the nightmare end?

CREATURES OF NIGHTMARES

Two of the most famous monsters in history can be traced to a fateful period between May and August of 1816. An odd group of folks — Percy Bysshe Shelley, his mistress Mary Wollstonecraft, and her half-sister Claire Clairmont (who had also been sleeping with Shelly) visited Lord Byron (who was also sleeping with Claire) and his physician, Dr. John Polidori — convened in Geneva. Things got weird. One night they decided on a contest to see who could write the scariest story. Mary, then age 19, took inspiration from a recurring nightmare and wrote *Frankenstein*, while Polidori turned to his own bad dreams for *The Vampyre*, a seminal vampire novel and heavy influence on Bram Stoker.



Set in Gothic 17th-century London, the original *Nightmare Creatures* was a graphically beautiful game that never quite lived up to its visual promises. Gameplay quickly devolved into a repetitive beat-'em-up formula, with less than optimal control in close quarters, and camera AI that really only worked about 80% of the time.

If nothing else, however, the sequel promises to be even more gorgeous and atmospheric than the original — as it should be, having been developed for Dreamcast. (At the very least, it'll be as "gorgeous" as a game with such deliberately dark, brooding, twisted environments and characters can be.)

Taking place a hundred years after the ending of the original, the game follows Herbert Wallace, hot in pursuit of the evil

(and still somehow alive) Dr. Albert Crowley through 18th-century Europe. Crowley has unleashed some 20 different monsters, including huge bats, zombies, and various and sundry other lab-created horrors. Once again, players combat these creatures through a combination of magic spells and good old fashioned blunt trauma.

The game contains 30 areas, spread among the seedy underbellies of London and Paris. To keep the atmosphere alive, the soundtrack is being composed by former *White Zombie* frontman Rob Zombie. Aware of the criticisms leveled at the original game, the developers at Kalisto have promised improved gameplay mechanics and a better sense of pace, as well as a more useful camera system and the ability to freely look around.

There's little doubt that *Nightmare Creatures 2* is going to be visually impressive (if, perhaps, somewhat oppressive). With nearly three years having passed to work out the kinks, we're hoping the only horrors this time around will be the story-driven ones.

— Jeff Lundrigan



■ The game screens released so far show a grim, ugly world, with even nastier enemies than the original



■ When in doubt, just bash 'em on the head — hey, it's worth a try



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■ Don't let the beautiful scenery fool you — there are enemy gunmen hidden everywhere. It's up to you — the sniper expert — to clear the way

CREDIT 0

■ ARCADE

DARK SILHOUETTE: SILENT SCOPE 2

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Konami ■ Release Date: Spring 2000 ■ Origin: Japan

Aim to be the best while hiding a half a mile away

telescopic sight, bringing an extra dimension to your hunt for terrorists as you track them down and pick them off one at a time — even in the dark, or if they're hiding inside a building or behind a packing crate.

SS2's storyline: a shadowy group of terrorists has occupied an abandoned British chemical lab and possibly stolen a VX gas missile. The UK's original anti-terror team, Alpha Squad, was sent after them — and disappeared. Were they killed, captured, or recruited to the forces of evil? You have to find out, taking the part of a government-hired sharpshooter. Your partner is a former Alpha Squad member gone bad; he's released from prison to help you since he knows their methods and his sister Laura is part of the squad.

From there, you're off and shooting



■ You get points on how clean your shot is on each terrorist as well as how many you've made in a row

→ Head shot, anyone? Konami is still enjoying the success of its smash hit *Silent Scope* (released into arcades in 1999), and now comes its sequel — *Dark Silhouette: Silent Scope 2*. And guess what? It's badder than ever, with more high-tech sharpshooting, more fiendish enemies, and no apologies for either: Two cabinets can now be linked for cooperative play, and this teamwork is imaginatively integrated into the story. The rifle itself now features night vision and X-ray vision through that awesome

Along the way you'll be targeted by everything from assault rifles to flamethrowers to tanks

THE SCOPE

As with *SSI*, the scope itself contains a second, smaller monitor (LCD) that provides close-up views of any tiny portion of the main monitor where you aim your rifle. The weapon is mounted on a gimbal, and both monitors receive simultaneous video feeds from the game's PCB. While a majority of gameplay is viewed through the scope for a zoomed-in view, players can also take a glance at the monitor to get a broad idea of where everything is. There's nothing else out in the arcades quite like this.



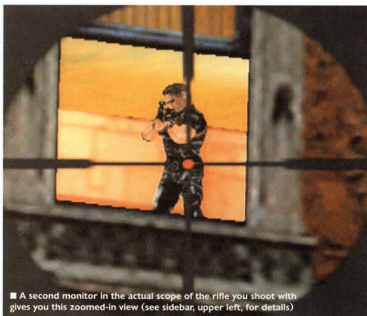
■ You might recognize many of the sites this time as they are taken from famous English locales.

at terrorists on London's Tower Bridge, at the Royal Opera House, along the banks of the Thames, in that remote chemical lab, in snowy mountain passes (thermal vision really comes in handy in a blizzard), at a military airport, and

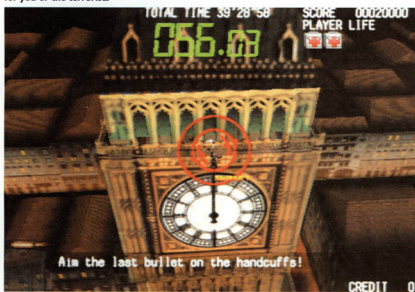


■ Night vision means that nowhere is safe — for you or the terrorists

other scenic spots. Watch the big screen for a flash of movement or reflection of light, then use the scope to zoom in on enemies and take them out with the fewest possible shots before they get you. If you take too long to spot the baddies, indicator signals will give hints. Along the way, you'll be targeted by everything from assault rifles to flamethrowers to tanks. Enemies move speedily via skis, boats, armored personnel carriers, and even a hijacked C130 cargo plane (in this scene, you're chasing a low-flying C130 and shooting at a terrorist in the cargo bay door while he hides behind an innocent bystander). Watch for a major plot twist



■ A second monitor in the actual scope of the rifle you shoot with gives you this zoomed-in view (see sidebar, upper left, for details)



■ At the handcuffs! Man, being a sniper sure is stressful. Don't jitter or you'll take out the hostage!

in the penultimate scene that forces players to attempt a new level of teamwork. "Your personality and that of your partner really has a major effect on the outcome at this stage," Konami hints, "because you have to make a difficult decision how to most effectively tackle the final boss."

A shooting gallery mode allows you to hone your skills, while Duel mode pits players against the computer in a non-cooperative scenario. If it's not outlawed in your state by do-good lawmakers, *Dark Silhouette* should provide full-metal-jacket arcade thrills all summer long.

— Marcus Webb

→ Alphas



■ Thought the Naomi board was just for 3D? Think again: Will this 2D triumph make it to Dreamcast? Count on it.

■ ARCADE

GUILTY GEAR 2

■ Publisher: **Sammy** ■ Developer: **Arc System Works** ■ Release Date: **March 2000 (Japan)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

The guilty pleasure of 2D fighters gets even better

→ After solid success with 2D fighter *Guilty Gear* in Japan (550,000 units), Sammy is bringing its sequel to the arcade on Sega's Naomi hardware. In fact, with Sammy working on Naomi, it appears that the system has practically become a universal standard in arcade development since many 2D games are set to be launched on it this year.

Guilty Gear 2 greatly benefits from Naomi's power, enough to compete technologically with the best that Capcom and SNK have to offer. The graphics are very fine and detailed, and the scenery is emphasized by some 3D renderings and transparency effects. Character sizes have been enlarged, making them sometimes look gigantic on the screen. Without the PlayStation RAM limitations, Arc has done 7500 frames of animation per character, and the game should run at 60fps.

While the game's actions are the same (punch, kick, sword, and sword super attack), some characters don't have edged weapons and instead have special powers. And in addition to the normal fighters in the center of the screen, other characters and even animals may react according to the

course of events in the game.

As in some other games, a tension gauge goes up when you take hits. Although its exact functioning hasn't been detailed yet, once filled, it enables the use of special powers. The guard gauge, on the other hand, empties as your character gets hit while in defensive position.

While the game probably won't be coming to arcades in the US, chances are that Atlus or another savvy publisher will pick it up for Dreamcast. We can't wait.

— Christophe Kagotani



■ The anime feel of the art, as well as the special attacks, are more akin to *Darkstalkers* than *Street Fighter*, but the game has a style all its own





■ DREAMCAST

■ The game features both range attacks (like the bow seen here) and magic. Note the subtle transparency on the wings.

INNOCENT TEARS

■ Publisher: Global A Entertainment ■ Developer: GAE ■ Release Date: April 2000 (Japan) ■ Origin: Japan

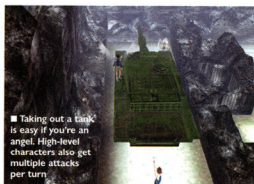
Post-apocalyptic angel management, anyone?

➔ Judgment day is here. Earth is in ruins. While survivors try to rebuild, strange events occur: angels suddenly appear starving for human flesh! Luckily, a handful of angels want to

help, rather than feast on, humans. Haruaki, who became an angel after Tokyo's ruin, decides to join the human guardians, but his dead girlfriend Kagari has joined the evil angels. His mission: protect the humans and save Kagari's soul.

Innocent Tears is a 3D strategy title that takes place in a devastated Tokyo, not unlike the one from *Akira*. There are about 35 levels and the 3D structure of the game will have a strategic importance — you can interact with the environment, blowing up cars or making a wall break down on your enemies.

Gameplay is vaguely reminiscent of *Heroes of Might and Magic*: each level is approximately 50 square meters (divided into 2-meter squares), and the game is



■ Taking out a tank is easy if you're an angel. High-level characters also get multiple attacks per turn.

turn based. Angels receive a certain amount of action points per turn depending on experience, and each action (walking, flying, magic, and weapon attacks) costs points. If he has enough points left, a hero may be able to perform several attacks in the same turn. There are around 15 major enemies, and you start with two characters. Up to 10 others will join your team, although only five fighters can take part in any confrontation.

While it's not clear if North American console gamers will take to the turn-based strategy nature of the game (or even if the game will make it over here), it's good to see the Dreamcast library getting deeper. More creative titles like this are essential if Dreamcast is to survive the PlayStation2 onslaught later this year.

— Christophe Kagotani



■ Characters have a nice, hand-drawn look (left). The special effects look good so far (below), but the team is planning to enhance them further.



■ What these screens don't show is the smooth wing-flapping and flying animations.

→ Alphas

Conflict in *Fortress*



PERSISTENCE OF VISION?

While the premium version of *Allegiance* available on The Zone (for a nominal monthly fee) will have plenty of extras, what it won't have is a persistent world. Players can have their stats tracked as an individual or a squad, but every time a new game begins, the race for resources and technology begins anew. Although this doesn't seem to be a problem for other team-based multiplayer games, once gamers have acquired a taste for persistent worlds, we wonder if they will want to go back.

■ Each of the three factions employs its own unique arsenal of ships and weapons

■ PC

ALLEGIANCE

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Microsoft Research ■ Release Date: Spring 2000 ■ Origin: US

Imagine *Team Fortress* in space. That's this

→ While there will always be a devoted core of gamers who just want to launch and frag, popular mods like "Capture the Flag," "jailbreak," and "Freeze Tag" bring an element of strategy and camaraderie to FPSs that just can't be duplicated in deathmatch. Gamers who can't wait until the end of the year for *Team Fortress 2* should think about looking to the stars for some team-based fragging.

A massively-multiplayer first-person space-combat shooter by design, *Allegiance's* main hook is that it allows players to choose from a large variety of different piloting roles. Naturally, standard

fighter deathmating is supported, but the game is ultimately designed for squad-based combat in which players take on different classes to meet level goals. The battle-hungry can simply pilot a fighter or hop into the turret of a capital ship and leave the driving up to someone else. The sneaky types can lurk around as a scout or stealth fighter. And the schemers can take charge of the game's strategy and investing elements or oversee the action as the chief commander of all the forces.

None of these roles, however, are life callings; players can jump between classes however they see fit. In current tests, epic four- to five-hour battles have already taken place involving fleets reminiscent of those in the final battle over Endor (and if you can't place that reference, what are you doing reading this magazine?).

While users can set up their own servers right away, Microsoft is hoping that players will opt to pay a little extra cash for the premium version. Subscribers will get a load of perks such as massively multiplayer servers and special story-driven events as well as squad and individual rankings. — Jim Preston

■ *Allegiance* is station-based. Players can hop between stations seamlessly, as well as make all of the command and investment decisions from within friendly confines



■ The customizable HUD is a welcome feature for any space shooter

■ The command screen is available at a keystroke, instantly giving you an ingenious overview of the theater of operation



■ Crave is upgrading all of the models and textures so this will be the best-looking version of this game by far

OH NO! NOT AGAIN!



Technically, we don't cover Game Boy Color here at Next Generation, but since this month is a Tony Hawk fest including the N64 build (see page 67) and the Dreamcast version (this page), it would be a shame to leave out the pint-sized port. Featuring most of the skaters and tracks from the big versions, this might prove to be yet another formidable distraction for the hard working editors at Next Gen.



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater was one of the best PlayStation games of 1999 — if not the best. When the title was announced for Dreamcast, there was obviously reason to be excited, but we expected nothing more than a hi-res 60fps version of the PlayStation game.

We were so wrong.

"Just imagine what [the PlayStation game models] would look like if you doubled or even tripled the amount of polys used," says Game Producer Jeff Barnhart. "Then put high-resolution textures on everything with more colors. You're going to be able to read a little Crave Entertainment Logo right on a skater's hat!" Whoah! So, saints be praised, this isn't your ordinary port. Crave, eager for a breakthrough Dreamcast hit, is going all-out and re-working all of the art and models from the ground up to be the best that Dreamcast can handle. A huge art staff has been hired to accomplish this feat in the limited time available, but one glance at the screenshots shows that this effort will pay off well.

Graphics are great, but what about the guts of the game? Never fear: the all-important gameplay mechanics are being ported to the version intact so it will still feature the same kick-ass gameplay that earned the original one of the easiest five-star ratings we've ever given. Unfortunately, due to the short dev cycle of this port, no new features are being added other than

■ DREAMCAST

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

■ Publisher: Crave ■ Developer: Treyarch ■ Release Date: Spring 2000 ■ Origin: US

Live the Hawk. Be the Hawk

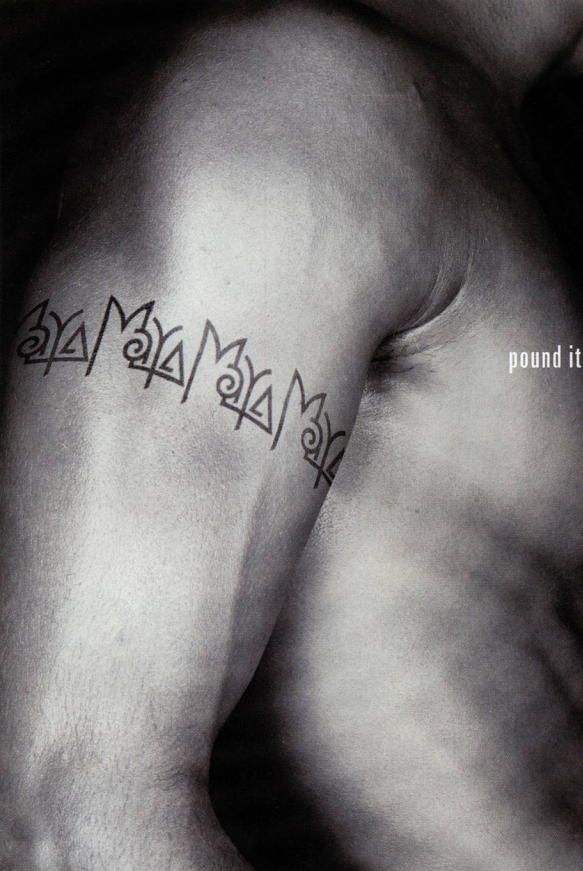
improved graphics and sound. Still, with the awesome possibility that this'll be the best-looking and -playing Dreamcast game in quite some time, we'll be more than happy to keep this in play until Neversoft gets around to Tony Hawk 2.

— Blake Fischer

■ As anybody who played the original can tell you, the control is what makes Tony Hawk shine. Even an amateur can start pulling off great tricks almost immediately



■ On Dreamcast, the team at Treyarch is able to add all-new lighting effects



having an idea is one thing.

it is quite another

to have the **muscle**

to **pull at it** and **yank it**

from its hiding place.

pound it into shape.

and have both the power and

the stamina to hold on to it **tight,**

throughout the process.

so that it doesn't slip away.

the product of the imagination

can be pretty **damn heavy.**

make sure you have what it takes

to pick it up and

run with it.

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→ Milestones

Next Generation's monthly update on tomorrow's games

■ PLAYSTATION2

ARMORED CORE 2

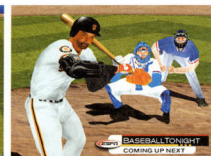
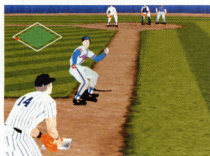


■ While PlayStation2 screens always look great, in this case they don't do the silky smooth animation of the game any justice. Simply the incredible amount of moving parts on each mech is staggering, and when they start fighting each other, the light show is spectacular to behold. Expect this title from From Software to hit Japan at the PlayStation2 launch and hopefully make it to the US for the launch here



■ DREAMCAST

ESPN BASEBALL TONIGHT



■ Konami looks to beat Sega to the punch with the first baseball title out on Dreamcast. The graphics look great and hopefully the ESPN-infused gameplay will make this one to remember

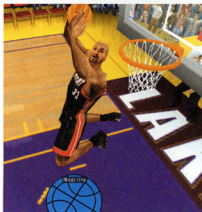


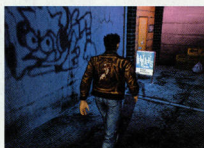
March is almost upon us — and with it, PlayStation2. Check out the new screens of *Armored Core 2* this month (they are actual gameplay screens, rest assured) and you can see why we're so excited for Sony's new supersystem. In the meantime, however, things are far from slow at the **Next Gen** offices since the first episode of *Shenmue* was just released in Japan. While far too Japanese-intensive for the average gamer, it is still spectacular to look at — check out our visual walkthrough (next spread) for a detailed look at Dreamcast's finest visuals yet. We've also got some new shots from some other Dreamcast games, as well as the best reason to dust off your N64 in some time — *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. On PC, we've also got some new gameplay shots of Ion Storm's impressive *Anachronox* (still no *Daikatana* as of this writing, however) and Microsoft's answer to *Wing Commander*, *Starlancer*. Enjoy!

■ DREAMCAST

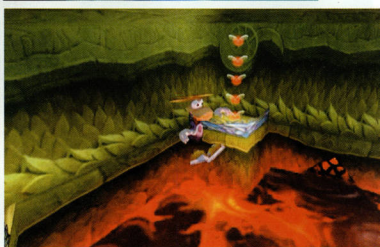
ESPN BASKETBALL 2NIGHT

■ Konami and ESPN team up for this basketball title with "NBA Attitude" (which explains the spelling of the title, we think). The game looks nice and should be a welcome addition on Dreamcast come April





→ Milestones



■ While the game was released on N64 a while back, it really shines on Dreamcast with some sharp high-res graphics and a rock-solid framerate — not to mention some of the best 3D platform gameplay we've ever seen. Ubi Soft will have this one on shelves in March

■ DREAMCAST

RAYMAN 2



■ Microsoft reps have promised us that this Wing Commander-type game will blow us away when it is released in April. From what we've seen, we figure they could be right. Trust us, the graphics are simply awesome

■ PC

STARLANCER

■ DREAMCAST

STREET FIGHTER 3 DOUBLE IMPACT



■ It looks as if Dreamcast has become Capcom's 2D platform of choice, and this release shows us why. Characters look as if they are missing none of the animation from the arcade, and the control is spot on. The best feature is the fact that both Street Fighter III and Street Fighter III Second Impact are on the same disc. This title should hit the shelves in April



■ Take the *Quake II* engine and add a healthy dose of RPG, and you get this up-and-coming masterpiece. Adding to the value of the package is a robust level editor, which will enable ambitious players to add on to the game or even create their own scenarios. Ion Storm should make an impact with this title when it ships in March.



■ PC

ANACHRONOX

■ N64

TONY HAWK



■ The N64 gets what looks to be a near-flawless port of this PlayStation classic. The graphics look a little different due to the anti-aliasing, and the control is a little awkward if you're used to the PS pad, but for N64 owners who don't own a PlayStation, this is a godsend. Come March, anyone with an N64 should be praising Activision's name for bringing this game over.



■ PLAYSTATION

WWF SMACKDOWN



■ This latest installment in THQ's wrestling legacy looks to be the best ever (even surpassing *WWF Wrestlemania 2000*). Graphically insane, an intuitive yet surprisingly deep grappling system and tons of new modes (Guest Referee mode allows a third player to come in and ref the fight — how cool is that?) make this the wrestling game to end all wrestling games. Look for this one to hit in March.



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→ Profile

You're looking at the men (from left to right) behind *Homeworld*, *Command & Conquer*, *Drakan*, and *Spyro the Dragon*. They represent the next generation of game developers, who, in this rapidly changing industry, are the first generation of developers to have grown up playing games



RAISING THE BAR

When four of the hottest young development entrepreneurs in the video game industry sit down at the well to talk shop, Next Generation buys the drinks



It's a cool Friday afternoon at Mars Cafe in downtown San Francisco. Several tables down, a herd of about 15 Sega game testers slowly rises from lunch to walk back to the Sega office a block away. Just up the street, Eidos executives are locked away studying blueprints of Lara Croft merchandise. With so much industry activity nearby, it seemed the perfect place to sit down with Alex Garden, CEO of Relic, who just completed *Homeworld*; Alan Patmore, president of Surreal Software, creator of *Drakan*; Ted Price, president of Insomniac Games, the team responsible for the *Spyro the Dragon* franchise; and Erik Yeo, who designed *Command & Conquer* for Westwood, and is now design director for the newly-formed Seven Studios.

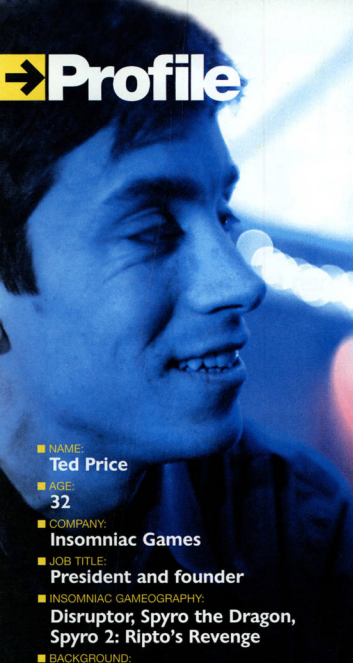
Getting Started

NG: Starting your own game development company is something you all have in common, but each of you did it differently.

Erik Yeo: For myself, there was always a desire to succeed or fail on your own merits — and, you know, we wanted to do something new. It was pretty obvious that as long as we were at Westwood, the only thing we were going to be doing was *Command and Conquer*, which was a fine game, but I was ready for something else. So that was the big motivating factor.

Alex Garden: I always knew that this was what I wanted to do, and I was given some really good advice from somebody I respect in the industry who I won't name. Basically, they said, "When the opportunity to do your own thing comes across your desk, just take it. Don't second-guess

Photography by Stephen Austin Welch



NAME:
Ted Price

AGE:
32

COMPANY:
Insomniac Games

JOB TITLE:
President and founder

INSOMNIAC GAMEOGRAPHY:
Disruptor, Spyro the Dragon, Spyro 2: Ripto's Revenge

BACKGROUND:
Began playing games around age 7, used to hang out with a girl in his neighborhood to play her parents' Pong game. Educated at Princeton. Started Insomniac in 1994 with Alex Hastings, and began developing *Disruptor* on 3DO (it was the only dev system he could afford) before bringing it to Universal Interactive where it became a PlayStation game. Insomniac has gone on to develop *Spyro the Dragon* and *Spyro 2: Ripto's Revenge*, has grown to two teams, and is now working on a PlayStation and PlayStation2 title.



Insomniac breathed more character into the PlayStation library with *Spyro the Dragon*. Will the company try something new for PS2?

"The barriers to entry are a little bit higher now — but anybody with a good business plan, with a good demo, and the ability to go and sell a pitch to a publisher can do just what all of us did"

— Ted Price, Insomniac Games

yourself, don't worry about whether or not you can find the money, just take the opportunity." So when it did, I was already psyched up to do it, and I just went.

Alan Patmore: I'm constantly amazed that Surreal is still in business. [Laughs]. Seriously, I got out of college in '93 or '94, and I didn't really have a job. I was living at Nick's [Surreal's chief operating officer] parents' house and playing *Doom* literally eight to ten hours a day, and then I started building maps. I had always wanted to be in the game industry, so I asked a friend of our family, Stan McKee, who is actually the CFO at Electronic Arts, how you get in the industry. He basically said you have to start out testing and make your way up. You know, you have to be realistic.

Alex: Classic EA.

Alan: Yeah, classic EA. And I really didn't want to do that. So I got a "real" job at Nextel, and after six months it hit me — I really didn't want to do this for the rest of my life. I cannot work in the corporate environment. I was secretly playing games during work, you know, probably six hours a day. So one day I was getting Thai food with a friend, and we're all talking about what we want to do. I said, "I just want to start a game company." He's like, "Well, do it." So I said, "Oh, OK." And then he goes, "Yeah, call it Surreal Software." That was it. And the rest is history.

Ted Price: I was in the medical industry and had been actually doing house calls with physicians as a technician. But my real motivation was to get enough money to buy a Silicon Graphics workstation. Because I loved 3D modeling, and I figured games are a good excuse to do some 3D modeling. And, thank God, I met Alex Hastings, who had just graduated from Princeton and was looking for a job. I'd just barely started Insomniac, and he came out, and we put together the demo for *Disruptor*, because we were both *Doom* fans and we wanted to do a first-person shooter. The day our money ran out, he was sleeping on the couch of my house, and basically everything was about to come crashing down. That was the day we signed a deal with Universal Interactive Studios — that was our first deal — for *Disruptor*. After that, we hired Alex's brother, Brian Hastings, and the three of us worked in San Diego for a year and a half before we ended up moving up to L.A. So we really got very lucky, I think. Again, like Alan, I think when I talked to these guys who are veterans, I'm pretty

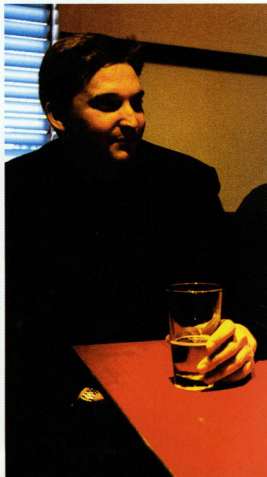
amazed that three of us who had never done games before could actually get as far as we've gotten. But we've been fortunate to meet the right people and hook up with the right publishers.

Alan: Yeah, we had a big stroke of luck after we had sort of started Surreal. Stuart Denman, who's our lead technology guy, had a web page at the University of Washington. Ron Gilbert [founder of Cavedog Entertainment] was perusing the web pages looking to hire programmers. So he saw Stu's web page, called him up, and said, "We want to hire you." Stu says, "No, we've just started a company." And Ron says, "You know, we're thinking about starting an outside division, and we're looking for outside developers." And so it was really Ron Gilbert who gave us our first start. It was just total blind luck.

Erik: I was fortunate enough to get in when you could — the only prerequisite was to know somebody on the inside.

NG: So is it too late now for two guys in garage to start something?

Ted: It's never too late. If you're asking whether or not two guys could go and do Dreamcast development or PlayStation2 development, your barrier to entry would be that dev station, which is going to cost you a lot more than a 3DO



dev station cost. But it's still not astronomical.

Alex: Although, look at N64 emulators for the PC. You can develop for the N64 on your PC now, for free.

Ted: The barriers to entry are higher now, but anybody with a good business plan, with a good demo, and the ability to go and sell a pitch to a publisher can do just what all of us did.

Alan: The key, I think — and what a lot of small teams are missing — is the pitch to the publisher.

NG: The core of the success of your game is how good of a game you can make. But how important is it that your company interface well with the publisher?

Alan: That's what I think will make or break companies, literally. You can have all the talent, you can make the best games, but if you can't deal with publishers, you'll eventually go out of business. It's a matter of time.

Alex: Unfortunately, it's easy to misinterpret that as keeping your publisher happy, which isn't the case at all. Dealing with publishers is understanding the developer/publisher relationship and being able to make it work in your favor as opposed to against you. At the end of the day your publisher is in a business, just like you, and their mandate is to maximize profits, just like yours is. If they need to do that at the expense of your

company, they will. And that doesn't make them bad; it just means they're being good businesspeople. But as a developer, no one wants you to know that. This is never explained to you, and you're not encouraged to pursue that train of thought, so sometimes you risk pissing off your publisher by doing it. But the key is to understand how the publisher is a resource that can help you succeed, and not "keeping your publisher happy." Hopefully, though, those statements are harmonious.

Erik: No, that's perfectly said. The only other thing we've tried to do is make sure we have somebody as that buffer zone between the creative team and the publisher. The filter is so important, so the team doesn't just get that "us and them" attitude.

Ted: Yeah — the moment you start developing an adversarial relationship with your publisher, it's all over. I mean, you have to look at it as a symbiotic relationship.

Going Forward

NG: Insomniac and Seven Studios have already announced support for PlayStation2. And we're hearing publishers explain that the PC market is going decline in 2000. What do you guys think?

Alan: PC will never die.

Alex: PC is changing.

Alan: It's just evolving.

"Nintendo is not a successful game developer, okay? Nintendo is a successful phenomenon creator"

— Alex Garden, Relic Entertainment



■ NAME:

Alex Garden

■ AGE:

24

■ COMPANY:

Relic Entertainment

■ JOB TITLE:

CEO/Director of Homeworld

■ RELIC GAMEOGRAPHY:

Homeworld

■ BACKGROUND:

Started playing games at age 5 — and started working in the videogame industry at the ripe age of 16 after a chance meeting with Don Matrick (currently head of EA Studios) at a frozen yogurt shop. Worked for several Vancouver-area developers, including Radical Entertainment, as a programmer/designer before founding Relic Entertainment in May of 1997. Released first title, *Homeworld*, in fall of '99. Currently planning to continue to develop PC titles.



■ Relic's first title out of the gate, *Homeworld*, proved to be not only beautiful, but a brave step forward for the realtime strategy genre

→ Profile



■ **NAME:**
Alan Patmore

■ **AGE:**
29

■ **COMPANY:**
Surreal Software

■ **JOB TITLE:**
President/Lead Designer on *Drakan*

■ **SURREAL GAMEOGRAPHY:**
Drakan: Order of the Flame

■ **BACKGROUND:**
Started playing games at age 5. Graduated from college and spent days playing *Doom*. Formed Surreal Software with Stuart Denman, Nick Radovich, and Mike Nichols in 1996. Borrowed \$10,000 from his father to buy four computers. Paid the loan back a year later. Completed *Drakan: Order of the Flame* in the fall of '99. Currently in development on a PlayStation2 title.



■ Patmore's inspiration for *Drakan* came directly from the fantasy games he played in his youth, specifically *Ultima* and *Wizardry*

Alex: You know, I'm not a hardware evangelist. I don't believe in any one platform over the other. Our choice to develop for platforms is purely a business decision. When we started with the PC, we made the decision not to sell the highest number of units but to minimize our development risk. We wanted to be able to make the best game that we could with the least amount of risk to establish our brand name and a franchise. And so the PC was the logical choice — it was the cheapest development system with the best development tools and the largest support community. But I still think the PC is a viable business interest.

NG: Why aren't any of you supporting Dreamcast?

Ted: We have a relationship with Sony from the first place. And when you've seen what they did with PlayStation 1, and they tell you that they're going to do it again with PlayStation2, it's hard not to believe them.

Erik: And when you've only got one chance at success, we needed to get in on the ground floor of something that we could be competitive with. People on Dreamcast have had a year, maybe two, looking at it, before we've even got started.

Alex: You'd be going in with your first-generation Dreamcast title against other potentially third-gen titles — there's no way you can compete on the technology

side, it's impossible.

Erik: That's right. One of the big reasons we chose PlayStation2, in addition to hardware, was Sony. They're a pretty good bet.

Alan: I think a lot of people missed the boat with Dreamcast. If you'd started developing about a year ago...

Alex: Because none of us believed. We were all wrong...

Alan: Well, I really have to say this, I thought Dreamcast was going to be a good system for a year. But our contracts precluded us from working with Sega, so we couldn't do it.

Ted: So it was timing for everybody.

Alan: Oh, yeah. I would have loved to have ported *Drakan* to Dreamcast, but we couldn't do it.

NG: So what's going to happen to Dreamcast?

Alan: It'll stick around until PlayStation2 really makes its mark. I think it'll be the interim system. It's pretty hot right now. A lot of casual sorta gamers don't necessarily want to get a PC or they don't have a PC, they think their PlayStation's dated, and they see *NFL 2K* and go, "Wow! That looks great, I'm going to buy that!" The price point's there, so they get it. It sold very well this Christmas.

Alex: I think it depends on how committed Sega is, you know? Right now Sega has just followed a standard console business model. And they're selling,

"You hook up with the wrong publisher or you make the wrong game for the wrong market at the wrong time, you're screwed — you're gone"

— Alan Patmore, Surreal Software



“Good products are a mix of old and new, you borrow from all that’s successful, but you try and break out in certain other areas” — Erik Yeo, Seven Studios

everyone’s happy, and everything’s good. But their retail support is crap, their point of sale is crap. They’re just following whatever model they’re following. I don’t think they know what they want to do. But if they decide to actually get serious and get really focused, I think they could give PlayStation2 a strong run for their money. But they need to whack the price down now, take a huge loss, ship a ton of units, and really establish themselves within the mass market and create a market for the long term.

NG: What about Sony? Do you really think PlayStation2 is a guaranteed hit?
Ted: Anybody can misstep when bringing out a new system, and we’ve seen that over and over again. But Sony has proved they’re going to stick to what they say. If you look at the momentum that they’ve built up, the number of developers they’ve been recruiting for PlayStation2, and at the types of titles that are going to come out with the launch, it’s hard to believe this won’t be a huge success and that Dreamcast will have a chance against it.

NG: Sega is going to have online games for Dreamcast later this year. Sony is talking about broadband communities, too. But if Sony and Sega build it, will gamers come?

Erik: They’ve tried this before, and it’s so hard to have a community without a

really good interface, like a keyboard.
Alex: Amen. And if you’re in the living room, where do you put the goddamn keyboard? That’s the biggest problem. Where do you put it? It doesn’t sit on your coffee table.

Ted: And then you’ve got the bandwidth problems. I mean, God, if everybody had broadband access, that would be great.

Alex: I think it’s a start of something that’s going to be big.

Ted: Yeah, in a couple years.

Alex: Actually, I think it’s going to be a very niche-y thing.

Erik: Yeah, I think you’ve still got a lot of years before console games have to have a multiplayer component to be successful. Even PC games still don’t have to have it.

Ted: Actually I think it will be sooner than we think, because broadband has been making such inroads, such quiet inroads in America.

PlayStation2 Issues

NG: Those of you with PS2 development kits, you could only have gotten them recently. Certainly not with 18 months lead time on the US release. Has that been a problem?

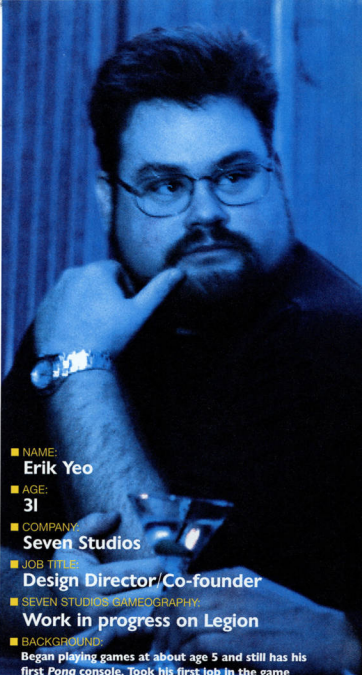
Ted: With our development cycle, it wouldn’t have mattered anyway. We were trying to finish up *Spyro 2*, and if we’d gotten a PlayStation2 development system in January or February last year, we probably wouldn’t have finished *Spyro 2*. We didn’t need that distraction.

Erik: If we wanted to release a PlayStation2 title in 2000, we wouldn’t have been able to do it. But because we’re kind of starting from scratch, we wouldn’t have been able to put out the type of game that we want to do, with the kind of quality that consumers are going to expect in 2000, unless we had a lot more lead time than just this year.

NG: Do you think that gives Dreamcast an edge, when PlayStation2 is launched? If top-tier US developers are not going to have games out?

Ted: No, I don’t think so. Dreamcast will have a fairly impressive library at that point. But my guess is that Sony’s marketing campaign is going to address that issue and show consumers that there’s this avalanche of titles coming for the PlayStation2.

Alex: With backwards compatibility, there are already like six thousand products available for the PlayStation2 the day it ships. None of us even talk about it because it’s just too depressing to consider — if you put that into the mix, it’s almost impossible for anyone



NAME:
Erik Yeo

AGE:
31

COMPANY:
Seven Studios

JOB TITLE:
Design Director/Co-founder

SEVEN STUDIOS’ GAMEOGRAPHY:
Work in progress on *Legion*

BACKGROUND:
Began playing games at about age 5 and still has his first Pong console. Took his first job in the game industry 10 years ago at Virgin, designing “some sports titles which weren’t so great.” Worked at Westwood “on loan” to design *The Lion King*. Joined Westwood Studios as an employee to design one of the hottest PC properties ever, *Command & Conquer*. Left in early ’99 with Louis Peterson to form Seven Studios. He is currently designing *Legion* for PlayStation2, a realtime action-strategy game based on the legend of King Arthur. Expect to see *Legion* in 2001.



■ Erik Yeo designed *Command & Conquer* before leaving Westwood to form Seven Studios. Will *Legion* be the PS2 hit C&C was for PC?

"You can have all the talent, you can make the best games, but if you cannot deal with publishers, you will eventually go out of business. It's a matter of time" — Alan Patmore, Surreal Software

to beat Sony.

Ted: But it's important for Sega and important for Nintendo to survive. I mean, there have to be competitive players in this industry because it continues to push the different systems to the next level.

Alex: The PlayStation3 would be a piece of crap otherwise.

NG: We haven't talked about Dolphin or X-Box.

Alan: [Grinning] Yeah, we can't...

Alex: [Sarcastically] I don't even know what Dolphin and X-Box are!

Alan: [Still grinning] I don't know what you're talking about.

NG: Nintendo 64 is rapidly slowing down it seems, and Dolphin development doesn't seem like it's ramping up very fast. Is Nintendo finished in the console business?

Ted: Nol

Alan: Never count Nintendo out.

Erik: No. Not when you have that much money in the bank.

Alex: When you have Shigeru Miyamoto and a library of intellectual properties to rival any film studio, there's nothing you can't do. But Nintendo is not a successful game developer, OK? Nintendo is a successful phenomenon creator. That's where they make their money. If you look at what Nintendo has done, what they really understand and what makes them powerful, is that they don't create games and they don't create franchises, they create phenomena. It's something that goes beyond the franchise. No one else can do that.

NG: Given what's publicly known about Dolphin — that it's going to have a 400Mhz processor, that Art X is designing the chip, that it's a DVD-driven machine but probably won't play movies here in the US to keep the price point down — is it going to be viable?

Alan: I'm sure it will be a good system.

Alex: Well, they'd be wasting money otherwise, damaging their name, which is above all else important to them. So yeah, it'll be viable. I won't relegate it to Amiga status, but it may become the "Macintosh" of gaming. I'm not trying to be rude. [Laughs] Because I actually have more respect for Nintendo as a content company than I probably do for any other company in the industry, just because they were such an influence on me growing up. But I don't think they're in

business to be number one, honestly. I think they're in business to deploy their phenomena, that's it. That's my impression.

The Next Generation

NG: You guys really represent the second generation of game developers. You grew up playing games your whole lives and you've had the benefit of seeing everything that's gone on in the last twenty-five years. How does that change the kind of games that you make?

Erik: Well, you know, in some ways it's a tremendous benefit. You get the benefit of seeing what's gone on, but at the same time, a lot of things have already been done. So it's a boon and a bane. You want to try and do something new, so you look a little harder for something new and



something old. And you borrow from all that's successful, but you try and break out in certain other areas. Good products are a mix of old and new.

Alan: Yeah, I think the benefit of having grown up with games is that it gives you a real big pool to sort of pull ideas from. The games that I grew up with had a tremendous impact on my life and my imagination. And that has definitely gone into my design. So I see what I liked when I was young, and there's almost a nostalgic feel. I want to create the wonder of those worlds with the new technology that we have, because games have radically changed in the last several years with the advent of 3D.

Ted: I'm a little bit uncomfortable with that question, especially because I'm not the lead designer at Insomniac. In fact, we don't have lead designers. Everybody participates together. Everybody at the company has pretty much grown up with games. We take games for granted, and we also take it for granted that we try to create new experiences, no matter what the platform is, no matter how many successes or failures we've had.

Everybody at Insomniac builds on their past experiences, playing Pong or Atari 2600 or whatever, and wants to tell a better story, wants to create better gameplay every time. When you're kind of referring to us as visionaries or whatever, I know from Insomniac's perspective it's never really been that way. It's really been about a group of people, though that may sound kind of corny.

Alex: No, it's true.

Ted: As business leaders, our job is to make sure that our people have everything they need to do their jobs. And if we're good at doing that, then we are going to create great games because it takes the pressure off of everybody else — not worrying about whether or not they're going to get paid next week.

Alex: The bottom line, I think, is this. The

previous generation, if you want to call it that — Peter Molyneux, Shigeru Miyamoto, and Sid Meier — they created the industry. They were the pioneers. Our generation was born into the industry. And I think that it's more a part of who we are than it is a vision of what we want, because we're children of the industry. We all look at ourselves as creative people devoted to the creative process, making the best games in the world and the most convincing experiences, having as much fun as we can doing it. But in the same breath we're also businessmen, and we can appreciate the importance of being profitable and running an equitable business and, you know, being a viable corporation. So, you know, I guess the difference is that the industry isn't what we made it, but really, culturally, games are a part of who we are.

NextGen

“When the opportunity to do your own thing comes across your desk, just take it. Don't second-guess yourself, don't worry about whether or not you can find the money, just take the opportunity.”

— Alex Gardens, Relic Entertainment



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→ Gallery The Art of the Videogame



■ Character modeling and animation continue to improve and grow more realistic in detail by the month. The fine work done for SNK's upcoming RPG *Koudelka* shows an almost startling depth





■ *I-War* never quite captured the mainstream's imagination, but in spite of that, it remains popular enough to warrant a special edition bundle offering the complete game with 18 new levels, more detailed information about the *I-War* universe, and the option to fight through the whole lot as one of the Indies, the enemy from the original game. The package is on the shelves now as *Independence War: Defiance*. This update takes full advantage of the prodigious increase in graphical power offered by today's PCs, adding 3D card support to complement the already impressive visuals.

■ Images rendered by Matt Clark, Michael Todd and Andy Turner using Newtek's Lightwave 5.0 and Particle Systems' own Renderfarm software.

→ Gallery

■ When you start with such well-established science fiction archetypes, it's important to maintain the intensity all the fans have come to expect from the series. The artwork for Fox Interactive's *Aliens vs. Predator* certainly lives up to the standard.

■ Image by Jeff Jensen and the Moore Design Group, using *Blender* 2.49.02.



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→ Finals

Some months, the high-profile games fail, while the strange and unknown ones soar ... and then there's *Planescape* ...



→ Dreamcast

FI World Grand Prix	86
Fighting Force 2	86
Virtual On Oratorio Tangram	86
Plasma Sword	87
Re-Volt	87
Seventh Cross Evolution	87
Soul Fighter	87
Vigilante 8: Second Offense	88



■ The graphics (especially during the replays, as pictured here) are as realistic and wonderful as it's possible to get on PlayStation

■ PlayStation

Gran Turismo 2

■ Publisher: Sony ■ Developer: Polyphony

They couldn't mess up a classic — could they?

➔ Few collaborations in the videogame industry are as tense or tenuous as the developer/publisher relationship. The developer typically plays the role of the artist, striving to create a groundbreaking game, while the publisher plays the part of the "suit" who wants to use the product to make large amounts of money. Occasionally the two clash, and the results are always problematic.

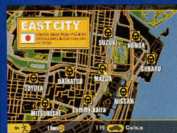
Just look at *Gran Turismo 2* for an example of the breakdown in this relationship.

Until around two weeks before this game shipped, nobody outside (and possibly no one inside) Sony knew if it was delayed, on schedule, or even ready for release. It's unheard of for a blockbuster sequel as hyped and anticipated as this to sneak into stores, but *GT2* did exactly that. The result is a game that undoubtedly was rushed into production by the publisher before the developer was finished. Whether this is the result of a developer who took too long or a publisher who traded quality for market timing

is unknown, but what is known is this: the rush to production

turned a potentially classic racer into something less than it should

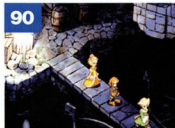
The rush to production turned a potentially classic racer into something less



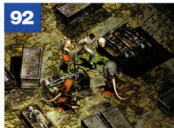
■ As with the original, there are lots of extras and goodies



89
 Test Drive 6.....88
 Quarterback Club 2000.....88
 Zombie Revenge.....88



90
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 Gran Turismo 2.....84
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 SaGa Frontier 2.....90
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 The Misadventures of Tron Bonne.....91
 Jojo's Bizarre Adventure.....91
 Jackie Chan's Stunt Master.....91



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 Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey.....94
 Star Trek: Hidden Evil.....94
 Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine.....94
 Crusaders of Might and Magic.....95
 Battlezone II: Combat Commander.....95
 Urban Chaos.....95
 Mortyr: 2093-1944.....95

The Rating System

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

- ★★★★★ **Revolutionary**
 - ★★★★ **Excellent**
 - ★★★☆☆ **Good**
 - ★★☆☆☆ **Fair**
 - ★☆☆☆☆ **Bad**
- Denotes a review of a Japanese product

Nintendo 64

Hydro Thunder 64.....89
 Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness.....89
 ECW: Hardcore Revolution.....89
 South Park Rally.....89

BUG LIST

Here are just a few of the bugs reported in the first week of *Gran Turismo 2's* release:

- 1) Car wash - Not translated from yen to dollars.
- 2) Lap times/records - Somehow disabled. The game doesn't record best lap times and records.
- 3) Rally racing - At least one race will add a 600hp car into a 300hp maximum race.
- 4) Listing of opposing lineup in racing - It's listed in the manual, but it's not in the game.
- 5) No drag racing - This is also listed in the manual, but is nowhere to be found in the game.
- 6) Test drive crash - When a player tests cars on the test track, the game will only record eight best scores. If the player tries to add a ninth, they will sometimes lose their entire collection of cars.
- 7) Memory bugs - Cars sometimes change statistics between the dealer and the garage.
- 8) Loss of cars - Occasional and unexplained loss of cars in a player's garage.

have been.

It's not that the core of *Gran Turismo 2* is in any way flawed. Like the original, *GT2* has more depth than any other console racing game on the market. In fact, this sequel is much deeper than *Gran Turismo* thanks to a second arcade disc, more than twice the number of cars (well over 500), many more tracks (27 real tracks or 49 if you count mirrored and night tracks), and a full rally racing mode. Without a doubt, no racing game offers more benefit for the dollar than this one.

Admittedly, the graphics are not as spectacular this time around because they are essentially the same as those in *Gran Turismo*. However, the simple fact that the game renders more than 500 real cars so well is impressive enough.

The sound, as well, is the best

ever heard in a racing game. The developer recorded the actual driving sounds of the cars in the game, and it pays off. The effect of a muscle car passing on the left is significantly different than the effect of an economy hatchback trying the same maneuver. Add to this the sounds of tires on gravel, cheering crowds, and an uneven but occasionally thrilling soundtrack and you have a racing game that deserves to be broadcast over a home theater sound system.

While the graphics, sound, and presentation of *Gran Turismo 2* are of the highest quality, the real strength of this title is its gameplay. Driving a car in this game is the closest that a player can get to driving the real thing. The handling, power, and overall feel of the cars have been almost perfectly modeled. Unlike



■ Still, you have to admit that 98.2% of *GT2* is still better than 100% of most others

other racing games with licensed vehicles, each car in *GT2* feels different than all the others. It's this realism that makes the game so much fun to play.

If there was any knock against the original *Gran Turismo*, it was that the game was too difficult for the average gamer to enjoy. That problem has been fixed with that second arcade disc and generally easier gameplay. The arcade disc enables anyone to jump right in and play with a variety of cars. The generally easier play in the simulation mode flattens the learning curve so that even novice racing fans

will be able to build their skills and enjoy the more challenging gameplay that follows.

So what could keep a game with this many positives from getting five stars? For starters, a ton of bugs (see sidebar, above left, for more details) would justify the drop in score. As if that wasn't enough, *Gran Turismo 2* clearly wasn't finished when it shipped. Sony even stated that "players cannot finish *GT2* more than 98.2% due to production problems." In other words, the game is not complete and it shouldn't have shipped. — Dan Egger



■ The racing action is pulse pounding — too bad about all the bugs

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: The rushed production of this game botched what could have been a near perfect sequel. As it stands, *Gran Turismo 2* is still the best racer ever made. Imagine what it could have been if Sony hadn't bungled the release.

F1 World Grand Prix

Platform: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Video System** Developer: **Video System**



■ **F1 World Grand Prix is one of the best racing games for the system, but it's not to everyone's taste**

Amid a sea of mediocre Dreamcast racing games, *F1 World Grand Prix* cruises like the Love Boat. Sporting the popular Formula One license, this game goes into overdrive with the options, and dishes out some top-notch graphics.

Sixteen tracks (from Australia to Japan) are available, as are a host of cars from automotive giants such as Ferrari, McLaren, and Bentley. Before gearing up to the starting line, you tweak your cars, modifying everything from wing angles to gear ratios

NextGen ★★★★★☆

Bottom Line: *F1 World Grand Prix's* finely tuned engine purrs to great effect on Dreamcast, but might be too demanding for the casual gamer.

for maximum effect. To make sure everything is ultra-realistic, Video System even recorded the actual race-day conditions for the entire 1998 Grand Prix season, so Grand Prix mode features the correct weather for each day.

On the tracks, everything looks simply delicious, with convincing skid marks, cheering crowds, and streaming dirt trails (when a car strays from the track). Real-life car physics rule the day, affording racers a challenging and, unfortunately, slightly unforgiving ride — though the Dreamcast controller will suffice, the game cries out to be played with a driving wheel. Still, the lure of the Formula One license, realistic tracks, true-to-life weather systems, powerful cars, and a mesmerizing number of options sprint this little racer well beyond the rest of the pack. — Greg Ordano

■ Dreamcast (import)

Virtual On Oratorio Tangram

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

Further proof of why Sega is king of the arcade conversion



■ Several of the virtuaroids from the first game return in *VOOT*, but they are much more balanced — not to mention more heavily armed

→ As was to be expected, Dreamcast has become home to many of Sega's greatest arcade conversions. *Virtual On Oratorio Tangram* continues in that tradition by providing both an amazing amount of eye candy and extremely deep gameplay to match. From a graphics perspective, this *Virtual On* sequel is simply amazing. High-resolution textures, beautiful lighting, and explosion effects combined with a rock-solid 60fps help to make *VOOT* one of the most visually impressive Dreamcast titles yet.

The premise behind *VOOT* may seem simple — choose one of the 11 available Virtuaroid robots (one is hidden) and then blast away at an opponent inside one of the various futuristic-looking arenas — but, as in *Virtua Fighter 3tb*, the challenge and depth is in discovering the strengths and weaknesses of each character. *VOOT* is definitely a game made for experienced gamers, requiring patience and persistence to master.

In fact, the initial difficulty of the controls and the extremely steep learning

curve alone will probably push most people away. Adding to these challenges, ironically, is the Dreamcast controller. Even with the most optimum control settings, you'll still have to munge with the D-pad while turning with the analog pad, a setup that is not only non-intuitive, but almost impossible to do.

Granted, Sega tried to remedy this situation by releasing a brilliant twin-stick controller, but it's both expensive and in short supply. However, if you can manage to find one, by all means grab it, as the sheer experience of *VOOT* is immensely improved and the enjoyment factor skyrockets. — Stephen Frost

Fighting Force 2

Platform: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Core**



■ **If you like your games dark, murky, and slow, you'll love Fighting Force 2. The rest of us will steer clear**

We reviewed the PlayStation version of this slow-moving train wreck last month, and hoped the Dreamcast version would have a little more pep. Alas, no. Although *Fighting Force 2* is in some ways an improvement over the original, it still leaves much to be desired. The level designs and environments are much better than before, and the Dreamcast version offers

even smoother 3D models and crisper textures (although it's worth pointing out that it seems even darker than the PlayStation version, sometimes to the point where it's nearly impossible to tell what's going on).

The problem is that those environments contain some pretty uninviting gameplay. Although the character control is decent enough, enemy AI is rudimentary at best. Often they just stand around waiting to be attacked, and backing up through a door is enough to confuse them into thinking you're not there. For long stretches enemies are few and far between, so there's a lot of just walking around, yet since there's no real story to speak of, there's very little motivation to keep moving. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★★★★☆

Bottom Line: The very definition of a two-star game: "Perhaps competent; certainly uninspired."



■ Even in its multiplayer modes, *VOOT's* framerate is exceptionally fast and doesn't fall much below 60fps

NextGen ★★★★★☆

Bottom Line: *VOOT* truly is an impressive game, and practically a perfect conversion, marred by difficult controls and a lack of "compatibility" with the standard Dreamcast controller. However, if you're willing to invest the necessary time, you'll eventually discover that the game provides one of the most addictive and deep gaming experiences currently available on Dreamcast.

■ Dreamcast

Plasma Sword

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom

Shouldn't plasma be more exciting than a lot of hot gas?

→ This is the sequel to Capcom's first 3D fighting game, 1996's *Star Gladiator*, but you'd think that given the nearly four years since and the switch to a much more powerful platform, it would turn out better than this. *Plasma Sword* (a.k.a. *Star Gladiator 2: Nightmare of Bilsten*) isn't the absolute worst fighting game for the system, but it ain't far from the bottom of the pile either.

To start with, although the game offers an impressive 22 fighters, very few stand out at all. Most of them seem to have been designed purely with the idea of making them not look like characters from anything else, with the result that many of them (Ganof

and Prince, for example) just look really odd while spectacularly failing to look even remotely cool. Likewise, the actual 3D models and textures are pretty bland and distinctly, well, indistinct.

The control is as responsive as any Capcom brawl; but again, the resulting moves are a far cry from awe-inspiring. The characters are also not very well balanced, with some being far and away more powerful than others, especially when it comes to powered-up super moves (some characters, like Rain, have moves that are practically useless), and aside from the required Training mode, there are no extras to speak of. — Jeff Lundrigan



■ Uninspired and bland, *Plasma Sword* would not be our first choice for a Dreamcast fighting game. Or our third. Or our fifth. Or...

ENextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: If you're working your way down the list of Dreamcast brawlers, this is the one to buy next to last (just ahead of *Mortal Kombat Gold*).

Re-Volt

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Developer: Acclaim Studios London

A hip little racer, *Re-Volt* tosses away realism in search of a good time, and finds it. The Dreamcast version of this great PC game rivals its sibling in graphic beauty, and outdoes it with an extra track and 14 additional cars.

You race your tiny, gorgeously rendered, remote-controlled toy car through a series of human-sized tracks (a suburban paradise, a super-market, etc.). Each car has its own peculiarities, and some may be better suited for certain tracks than others, but all are well balanced. The tiny cars have a tendency to handle a bit jerky, but this seems to parallel the

twitzy movement of a toy car. Instead of being problematic, it's oddly charming, and you'll have little trouble compensating.

Lightning power-ups litter the tracks, enabling you to build up a crescendo of whup-ass and then drop it on an enemy. Razor-sharp AI makes the computer-controlled cars smart enough to use bowling balls to impede your progress, and keeps the single-player mode from getting stale. Still, the solitary experience pales against the shared one.

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: An excellent, albeit lighthearted, racing game, *Re-Volt* is best experienced with a group



■ *Re-Volt* is every bit as good on Dreamcast as it was on PC — even the multiplayer options

and *Re-Volt* shines brightest when friends let friends drive toy cars. — Greg Orlando

Seventh Cross Evolution

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: NEC ■ Developer: UFO Interactive

Seventh Cross was one of the first games for Dreamcast in Japan, and it definitely shows. Interestingly, behind the horrible, worse-than-first-generation look and feel of the game, there are some fresh ideas.

Gameplay centers around killing creatures and then using experience and stored energy to evolve your creature in ways that will better allow it to conquer its surroundings. As a concept, it's surprisingly compelling, with hundreds of combinations of body parts. Adding new parts also adds the ability to progress to harder and harder areas of the game: legs, for example,

allow you to crawl out of the sea and fight tougher, more evolved, land-bound enemies.

Unfortunately, the pace is lethargic, and discovering new body parts takes long periods of frustrating experimentation. Add to this an engine that slows to a crawl even though the sparse environments and monsters whose main scary characteristic is their frightening lack of polygons, and you have a game that's as far behind the times as

ENextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: The very, very patient may consider this a diamond in the rough (very rough), but most won't be able to stomach the first-generation PlayStation look and feel.



■ Despite some nifty gameplay ideas, poor graphics and poorer implementation doom *Seventh Cross Evolution*

its innovative idea is ahead of them. — Blake Fischer

Soul Fighter

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Red Orb ■ Developer: Toka

The beat-'em-up is a genre that's here to stay. *Soul Fighter* is the latest entry, and much like Sega's classic *Golden Axe*, you must kick, punch, and jump your way through countless orcs, goblins, and other nasties with one of three assorted fighters.

Unlike *Golden Axe*, however, *Soul Fighter* is in 3D and viewed through the eyes of what must be a wildly drunken madman. Red Orb should've included a coupon for Dramamine with the game: During the fights, the camera insanely careens around the fray as if seeking some safe vantage point from the action. Of course, this means that not

only will you get motion sick, but you never really know what side the enemy is attacking from. In the meantime, an off-screen announcer keeps saying "Oh no" or "good shot" (which fits in with the drunken spectator theory).

The kick-punch action itself is as shallow as it gets, with little in the way of gameplay variety to keep you interested. But the final nail in the coffin is the fact that the game doesn't even support more than one player. Dust off

ENextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: This is perhaps the first spinning-world simulator to run at a dizzying 60fps. Now, excuse us, we have to find the toilet and vomit.



■ The only fun is finding out which will get to you first: the motion sickness or the tedium

the *Genesis* and *Golden Axe* if you're looking for this type of game. — Blake Fischer

Vigilante 8: Second Offense

Platform: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Luxoflux**



■ You know, being able to actually control the vehicle you're driving ought to be the least you expect from a car combat game

Vigilante 8: Second Offense's first offense pretty much damns the game. A furious car-combat sim, VB sports some shaly controls that make managing any vehicle, be it bus or motorcycle, garbage

truck or stretch limo, a strain on the old platform. Whether you choose to use the Dreamcast's D-pad or its analog stick, the slightest movement sends you careening wildly. Turning without use of the hand-brake invariably causes spins and, while a car is doing a very passable 720 degree spin, it's open season.

Get past the game's one major flaw and there are still a dozen little ones. From sun-kissed Arizona deserts to dank Louisiana bayous, the environments and everything in

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: We take offense.

them seem muted and washed-out. Computer-controlled opponents chirp the same annoying little quips over and over; and the shoddy collision detection sometimes allows for two cars to co-exist in the same space at the same time. What's left stands as a mildly competent but rather uninspired vehicle shooter with 18 neat '70s style cars; a bunch of cool, metal-crunching weapons, a pretty decent split-screen multiplayer mode; and plenty of scenery to blow up. — Greg Orlando

Test Drive 6

Platform: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Infragames** Developer: **Accolade**



■ In the glut of Dreamcast racing titles, Test Drive 6 barely hits the scale

Like some digitized Jason Voorhees, Test Drive seems to come lurching back again and again, just when you thought it was dead. The latest in the series gives up trying to simulate the feel of driving fine European sports cars, veering instead into

Cruisin' USA territory. In Test Drive 6, you'll take shortcuts under the Eiffel Tower, barrel through traffic and recover from crashes faster than you can say "Autobahn." Is it fun? Sort of, but not often enough.

Races are typically carried out over long meandering courses that take you through locales like Rome, London, and Hong Kong. There are dozens of cars to choose from, from Jaguar to Audi to Ford. Overall, the courses and car models look a

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: This strange mix of bumper cars and sports cars is stunningly mediocre. Test before driving.

bit blocky, and although the framerate remains consistently high, we doubt that Dreamcast is being used to its fullest potential, even for a first-generation title.

Test Drive 6's real meat is its Tournament mode, which enables you to buy a car, a Gran Turismo, and compete in a variety of events to gain money for upgrades and/or new cars. This entertains for a while, but even the "Cop Chase" mode ends up feeling too loose and wacky. — Matt Sammons

Quarterback Club 2000

Platform: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Acclaim**



■ The players look nice, but that's not all a football game needs to succeed these days

Oh please, do not let this be what Dreamcast development comes down to in the near future. While Quarterback Club boasts some pretty graphics at times, it is perhaps the most trying sports game we've had to tackle in recent memory.

Ultimately, while there are dozens of little points that can be picked out and ridiculed, the overall gameplay is generally about as non-fun as can be. At the core of this is a horribly broken passing game centered on the ludicrous idea of a "catch" button. It's so poorly implemented that in the heat of a game completing a reception is as much an act of random chance as skill. Routine passes to open receivers will be missed entirely, and you can forget

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: A half-hearted effort with too many flaws to be considered worthy of play against the NFL 2K football juggernaut.

about seeing any of those spectacular receptions you see in NFL 2K. Luckily, the computer even seems to have a problem catching the ball, so you don't look like the only inept team on the field. What fun is football without the ability to pass?

Add in the dropped frames, mediocre sound, and sloppy controls, and there's no reason at all to make you want to pick QBC 2000 over Sega's pigskin powerhouse. Leave this one on the shelves. — Blake Fischer

■ Dreamcast

Zombie Revenge

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

Proof that some corpses should just stay dead



■ Ooo, fighting zombies... really scary, eh kids? Not all that much of a challenge though...



→ There are some neat things about this zombie-fighting arcade port: the graphics are pretty nice, the cooperative multiplayer is a great thing to have, the motion-capture is done well, and the cut scenes are as compelling as we've seen in any arcade game since

Altered Beast — you want to get to the next cinematic break just to see what happens in the story next. Unfortunately, what happens between the cut scenes is pretty mediocre.

The fact is, if you're the kind of gamer who reads this magazine, you will beat this game the first time you put it in your Dreamcast. It's that simple. Choose hard, choose medium, choose easy — it doesn't matter. It takes a little more patience on hard, but

the simplistic Final Fight in 3D (with guns) gameplay just isn't that tough a nut to crack. It's telling that the default controller set-up doesn't even let you do all the moves — you don't need the extra ones.

Unfortunately, additions (like a VMU game that lets you beef up your character), or the ability in Original mode to save items to your VMU don't help a great deal when you don't need them to beat the game in the first place. There's also a Versus fighting mode that is about as fun as you'd expect a Versus mode with Final Fight moves to be. (That is to say, not much).

Overall, we liked Zombie Revenge, but then, we got it for free. Would it be worth paying \$50 for? Unfortunately, not at all. — Chris Charla

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: It looks great, it plays OK, but you'll be done with it forever in four hours. Find a video store and rent it.

South Park Rally

■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Developer: Tantalus Interactive

Like, major weak, dude



■ Look familiar? It's not even that good



→ God bless Matt Stone and Trey Parker for trying to squeeze every single cent they can from their lucrative *South Park* television show. You deserve it. However for the rest of us, this single-minded quest for greenbacks has birthed yet another mediocre videogame title, *South Park Rally*.

This time, Stan, Kyle, Eric, etc. are put into teeny tiny cars for rally races in and around the fabled town of South Park, Colorado. The kids get to compete against a wacky band of citizens and bit players, chief among them the portly soul-singing Chief, emaciated youth Starvin' Marvin, farmmasters Terrance and Phillip, Death, Jesus, and Satan. Wackiness ensues when, during the races, players collect powerups that trigger fart sound samples, or smite their fellow racers with weapons, eliciting curse words from the stricken

driver. Had we not graduated from second grade already, we would think this tremendously amusing. Each vehicle handles pretty well with the Nintendo's analog stick, and the game's hand-brake feature allows you to corner with ease. While the game's graphics are certainly not up to par with either *Diddy Kong Racing* or *Mario Kart 64*, they crudely capture *South Park*'s crudely drawn, blocky animation. As with most of its kart-racing ilk, *Rally* should be savored only by players in groups of four. Despite multiple paths, mildly challenging tracks, and some interesting weapons (*Rally* is the first game we've ever seen that lets you shoot hookers at the opposition), anyone who foolishly tries to get through single-player mode won't be able to shake the feeling of *been there, done that*. — Greg Oriando

■ NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Someone shoehorned the *South Park* license onto a hottest (pardon the pun) middle-of-the-road cart-racing game. Rent it if you must, but buy it only if you feel Messrs. Stone and Parker really need to put down payments on solid-gold houses.

Hydro Thunder 64

■ Platform: N64 ■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Eurocom



■ Once again, *Hydro Thunder* makes an impressive port to a home system

The original *Hydro Thunder* took the arcade by storm with its blistering speed and unparalleled physics engine. Now, Midway has brought the

arcade home. It's not as pretty as the Dreamcast version, but if you own an N64, you need this game.

You choose one of 13 boats and race along one of 13 over-the-top courses, which range from a flooded New York City devastated by a volcanic eruption to an insane network of aqueducts and waterways in the Greek Isles. The courses deserve special mention for their intricacy and detail, as the abundant shortcuts and power-ups will

keep you coming back for more. Arcade veterans will revel in added tracks and boats that are just as inspired as the originals.

Up to four players can race at once (although the three- and four-player modes default to first-person view), so it makes a great party game. The framerate is smooth and speedy, and there simply isn't any other racer like it. The only thing lacking is a Career mode, but given its arcade roots, that's no biggie. — Eric Bratcher

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Looking for the next *Waverace 64*?

Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness

■ Platform: N64 ■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Konami



■ It plays OK, but from the *Castlevania* series, you expect a lot more than just "OK"

Face it: as awesome as *Castlevania* was in 2D, its 3D outings have been less than spectacular so far. With this latest sequel, Konami has added more content than ever, but the game is still plagued by the same problems as the first 3D installment, *Castlevania 64*.

The worst problem is that the graphics are pretty sparse.

While some of the characters look OK, a decidedly low-poly look pervades the entire game. Even the new hi-res mode does little to alleviate this, since it drags the framerate down to a crawl (talk about useless features).

Adding to the overall confusion is the same warty camera as in the last game as well as (near as we can tell) several of the same bosses and levels. Even the new main character, a werewolf, is the least compelling the series has come up with. Everybody knows that it's all about the whip, and while you can play the original

characters (they are unlockable), it's just not the same.

Still, the game does offer some nice areas, and the action is extremely well paced (if you can accept occasionally jumping off blind ledges to your death). The sound in particular is much better than the N64 norm, and it makes us wonder why the same meticulous attention wasn't spent making the game look great, too. In the dry opening months of 2000, this game might be worth a look, but it falls far short of its own legacy: one of the all-time great series. — Blake Fischer

■ NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: *Legacy of Mediocrity* is more like it, at least in 3D. We hope the next installment on Dreamcast will be better, but until then, this is satisfactory.

ECW: Hardcore Revolution

■ Platform: N64 ■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Developer: Acclaim



■ *ECW: Hardcore Revolution* is neither "hardcore" nor "revolutionary" and it spectacularly fails to capture the spirit of the ECW — three strikes in anyone's book

to technical skill over flash earned it a massive cult, then mainstream following. To see this amazing group of psychopaths (responsible for all of those table-breaking, inferno match, Hell in a Cell gimmicks) reduced to this jobber of a wrestling game is truly sad.

Hardcore Revolution shamelessly uses the WWF Attitude engine with only a palette swap and lame excuse for a barbed wire match thrown

in to distinguish it. The controls, interface, and even the Create-a-Wrestler and Career modes are nearly identical. This pathetic engine didn't do the WWF justice, but it's a true travesty applied to ECW. Shouldn't a game based on these lunatics at least get an M rating because of people being attacked with flaming chairs and thrown through stacked tables, and not just because the announcers say "bitch"? — Daniel Erickson

■ NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: One of the few games to inspire active anger and hate. Just having to handle the cart with our bare fingers made us feel dirty.

ECW (Extreme Championship Wrestling) is the hottest thing in the "sports entertainment" field in over a decade, whose over-the-top violence and dedication

Silent Bomber

Platform: **PlayStation**
 Publisher: **Bandai** Developer: **Cyber Connect**



When the goal of a game is to create the biggest, most destructive explosion possible, it's already got something good going for it.

Silent Bomber was obviously intended as a *Metal Gear Solid* clone, but thanks to a solid 3D engine and unique gameplay dynamics, it ultimately stands on its own merits.

As Jutah, it's your job to infiltrate a huge enemy space craft and blow stuff up. The catch is that this isn't done by shooting things, but by planting bombs and detonating them (not unlike *Crackdown*). It's also

possible to use a long-range lock-on to attach bombs from a distance, but in any case, you have to put a certain distance between yourself and the target before you set them off.

This could have been a fairly passive experience, but the game's pace is surprisingly fast and furious as you avoid enemy fire, then quickly throw the bombs and zip away before detonation. The level and enemy designs show a lot of variation and attention to detail, and the level layouts definitely reward careful exploration.

The story keeps your interest up, and even lets you forgive the odd howler of a line or laughably bad voice talent (most of which is actually quite good). There are some minor camera and control quibbles, but nothing especially damning. Fun. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: An engrossing, challenging game with a very different approach than most. Recommended.

International Track and Field 2000

Platform: **PlayStation**
 Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **Konami**



It looks different, but it plays the same — *Track & Field 2000* is simply disappointing.

About fifteen years ago, a company named *Epyx* released *Summer Games Konami* soon picked up on the idea, and the result was the classic *Track & Field*, an arcade and home mainstay of the '80s. When this latest incarnation arrived, we anticipated a similar experience.

The problem is, we got it. Whereas other sports games have evolved (just compare *NFL 2K* to *Madden*) track-and-field simulations are still dressing the

same mechanics in 3D clothes. Once you discover the control scheme for each event (a more difficult task than one would imagine, since the on-screen instructions often contradict the button assignments outlined in the manual), you'll realize that each event falls into one of two basic categories: those that require continual button mashing to maintain speed (which you will quickly tire of), and those that require judicious button mashing through a timed sequence (most of which you will likely decide aren't worth the bother due to their awkward complexity).

International Track & Field 2000 is a perfectly adequate rehashing of a classic concept. However, chances are good you've seen this before, many many times, and it won't hold your attention. — Eric Bratcher

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: If you want *Track & Field*, this is it. That's a pretty big if, though.

PlayStation
SaGa Frontier 2

Publisher: **Squaresoft** Developer: **Squaresoft**

Beauty done by hand



A better argument for hand-drawn art does not exist

→ Square (creator of the *Final Fantasy* series) returns to its "other" RPG franchise with the release of *SaGa Frontier 2*, and the result is one of the deepest, most unique RPGs that PlayStation has ever seen.

The first thing you will notice is the art design, which is unlike that of any other game on the market. The isometric environments are completely hand-painted in exquisite detail with watercolors. The resulting images are utterly unique and breathtakingly beautiful. This alone sets *SaGa Frontier 2* apart and makes it worthy of attention. Luckily, there's much, much more.

Perhaps the single most praised aspect of the first *SaGa Frontier* game was its multiple main characters and interwoven storylines. Characters each had their own main quest, but they co-existed with one another, shared the same friends and resources, and occasionally crossed paths. The sequel continues in this tradition, offering two parallel storylines right from the start. There's Wil, an orphan determined to find out what cruel fate befell his parents, and Gustave, a troubled young prince whose inability



The requisite fire attack. Who's got marshmallows!

to channel anime (and thus perform magic) caused his own father to exile him from his home. More characters and quests become available as the game progresses, and interesting personalities and stories abound.

Combat is some of the deepest we've ever seen, offering a mind-bending number of options and adjustments. First off, there are twelve different skills (i.e., Fire, Tree, Sword, Beast) that determine what special attacks and spells you can learn. You can also adjust the order in which your people

attack, as well as their basic fighting style. Furthermore, most battles give you the option to fight as a team or one-on-one.

There are a few weak points: you have to save the game to see the in-game date (an important thing to keep track of with parallel storylines), too many randomly occurring battles (a Square tradition, it seems), and during battle your health stats are a bit difficult to keep an eye on. But overall, these are minor blemishes in an otherwise beautiful product. — Eric Bratcher

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you thought *FFVIII* was unoriginal, this is the game for you. If you liked *FFVIII*, this is still the game for you.

■ PlayStation

Tomba! 2

■ Publisher: SCEA ■ Developer: Whoopee Camp

Hail to the pigs baby



■ Tomba's new array of tricks include a variety of costumes that enable him to fly, resist harsh climates, and climb slippery surfaces

➔ Coming from the same brains at Japanese developer Whoopee Camp (which was founded by the creator of *Strider*) as the original *Tomba*, *Tomba! 2* truly is everything its predecessor was and a whole lot more.

Like any good sequel, there's the requisite visual upgrade. In this case, it's quite a dramatic one — gone are the dated 2D sprites of the original, swapped in their entirety for shiny new 3D environments and characters. Retaining the same attention to detail, they convey a world that is infinitely more "alive" and presents a greater sense of scale than the original.

Numerous mini-quests, the main drive of the original, are, as expected, featured in spades, cropping up at nearly every character encounter. Their inventiveness is furthered by greater freedom of movement (created by multiple 3D branches in the environment) and include mine cart races, animal round-ups, and a host of other challenging mini-games.

Overall play mechanics get a boost from a variety of costumes (which, for instance, enable Tomba to fly for short distances), pig robes (which bestow magic powers upon him), and new weapons (such as the grapple, which introduces *Bionic Commando*-like gameplay). Thankfully, there's also a better sense of pacing this time around — major quests are better differentiated, and you don't have to complete every single objective to continue. Navigating the countless planes in each area can be a little tricky at first (even with the floating arrows) but is mastered soon enough.

Overall, the game remains every bit as engrossing (and even more playable) than its forerunner, though you can't help but imagine what could've been had its creators taken the plunge and afforded Tomba full 3D movement. Chalk that idea up for the inevitable (and, after this outing, much anticipated) sequel. — Randy Nelson

ENextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Classic-style platforming adventures don't get much better — or deeper, or quirkier — on 32-bit. Not a dramatic progression for the genre overall, but eminently playable (and lovable) nevertheless.

The Misadventures of Tron Bonne

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom



■ There's never been a game quite like *The Misadventures of Tron Bonne*, so don't you dare miss the chance to try it

Bless their collective hearts at Capcom for giving this off-the-wall quirk of a game the royal treatment — it certainly deserves it. As the title implies, the game follows Tron Bonne, oldest daughter, prolific inventor, and

above all the feistiest member of a family of adventures.

What's cool here is that Tron Bonne offers so many types of gameplay, from third-person action, to first-person adventure, to puzzle games and contests of pure reflex, then pulls them all off with panache. The graphics are splendid, and if the control is a little clunky, it's rarely frustrating.

But what really brings this title together is the game's oddball sense of fun. Tron is the creator

of a small army of "servbots," little robots with round yellow heads who speak in squeaky, irredeemably cute voices, and are taken along on missions as backup. Much of the game is spent training the 'bots, but this syrupy sweetness is undercut by the subversive mission goals, which include robbing a bank while battling police, and later torturing the servbots with fire and spikes (while they scream pitifully) if they get lazy. — Jeff Lundrigan

ENextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: This is not a game that's neatly pigeonholed as anything, whether by game genre, or by approach, which as far as we're concerned is reason enough to like it. The bonus is that it also happens to be terrific.

Jojo's Bizarre Adventure

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom

To say this thing is a mess is an understatement. It's mostly a 2D fighting game, with numerous mini-games scattered through the main action, all hung on a storyline that makes little to no sense, based on the Japanese manga of the same name.

Maybe if you're already familiar with the comic, the story would be clear as day — but we aren't, and it's clear as mud.

On the up side, the graphics are as clean as you'd expect from a 2D Capcom title, and many of the fighting moves show a certain cleverness and sense of the absurd. However, the game's main premise is that

each character is bonded to his or her own supernatural spirit called a "Stand," which is responsible for their powers. Since for anything other than a standard punch or kick, you call up the Stand and it does the attacking, it leaves you feeling oddly disconnected from the action. During Super Story mode, the battles are broken up by odd, often frustrating mini-games.

There's a fair amount of replay value, since additional characters are unlocked as you beat the Arcade mode, and



■ Jojo's Bizarre Adventure certainly is bizarre, but is it any good? Well...

fighting well during the Story mode can earn various bonuses, but mostly, it's just too esoteric and unfocused to be all that entertaining. — Jeff Lundrigan

ENextGen★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: An oddity for Capcom completists only.

Jackie Chan's Stunt Master

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Radical Entertainment

How did it happen that Jackie Chan, the most inventive action star of the last 15 years, wound up in game that's one of the least inventive beat-'em-ups in years?

While the graphics are OK, the pace is painfully slow and the control falls squarely into the "you must wait until this motion-captured action is completed before you can move" category. The number of fighting moves is woefully small (basically punch, kick, and the least interesting throw we've seen in ages), and the load times are waay long.

Some attempt was made to incorporate Jackie's habit of using items in his environment as

weapons, but picking up stuff and thrashing enemies with it has been a beat-'em-up staple since *Double Dragon*. The other nod to Jackie's wild athleticism is in the "stunts" end of things, but this simply devolves into a series of fairly standard (if frustrating) platform challenges. You also have to wonder just how well it was playtested — occasionally you get trapped somewhere by either an enemy or swinging chunk of scenery and can't get away or even move while getting pummeled until you die.



■ Ah Jackie, we hardly knew ya. Rent *Rumble in the Bronx* again. You'll enjoy it a lot more

Some of the levels show a smattering of inventiveness, and reward a certain amount of exploration, but mostly, nothing stands out. — Jeff Lundrigan

ENextGen★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Jackie Chan deserves better.

Damage: 3

Damage: 2



■ Modifications to the engine enable you to see new messages on the screen rather than in a dialog box

■ PC

Planescape: Torment

■ Publisher: **Interplay Productions** ■ Developer: **Black Isle Studios**

Scarred and dead but still kickin' butt



Spell Cast: Shroud of Shadows

■ Spell effects are impressive and usually quite deadly



If you've ever woken up after a night of overindulgence with a staggering headache and little or no memory of how you got that way — not to mention not recognizing where you've woken up or having any idea how you got there — then you're sure to feel a twinge of sympathy for the main protagonist of *Planescape: Torment* during the bleak opening CG sequence. After that brilliant opening, however, things just keep getting better and better, until *Planescape* establishes itself as one of the best RPGs of the year.

Based on TSR's *Planescape AD&D* universe, the game chronicles the adventures of the Nameless One, a walking mess of

scars and tattoos, in his search for his true identity and the reason why he woke up one day in a decaying, flesh-encrusted mortuary with no memories of his past or identity. The game uses the *Baldur's Gate* engine, but anyone familiar with Bioware's RPG will only find slight similarities in *Torment*. You can still pause the game at any moment, assign tasks, and resume play. The same autopause features exist, as well as party formations, stats (all true to TSR's *AD&D* rules), and combat. However, the overhauled engine contains larger player characters, more background animation, and mind-blowing spell effects that will remind you of a two-dimensional *Final Fantasy* game.



■ Portals exist everywhere, but they require a key to activate

A LOT MORE THAN WE THOUGHT

While early previews of *Torment* reported that the game would be relatively short (Black Isle estimated 20 hours or so), the game has grown substantially since then, and now offers more depth and many more hours of play. And since players can play a good or evil character, the game contains plenty of replay value even without the multiplayer options that were in *Baldur's Gate*.



■ The automap automatically puts notes on certain locations, and lets you add your own custom notes if you want or need to



■ Your inventory can get out of hand if you pick up anything and everything



■ As in *Baldur's Gate*, the sheer volume of background graphics is stunning



However, the story is also far more important in *Torment*, rivaling the intensity of even the best console RPGs. Even better is the non-linear feel of the game — you can tackle quests in any order, and the game caters to both the goody-goody player who wants to be nice and lawful, and the evil bastards who just want to kill everything and take no guff from anyone. Even the characteristics of the Nameless One can be manipulated and changed throughout the game as you meet various characters who can teach you to be a mage, fighter, and thief, just to name a few.

— Michael Wolf

Even your critical strikes rain down destruction, resulting in beautiful explosions and earth-shattering sound. Unfortunately, that means the game also carries some of *Baldur's Gate's* flaws — pathfinding AI is less than impressive, managing your inventory can quickly become a major aspect of gameplay all by itself, and you have to read a novel's worth of dialogue to get the full story.

E!NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: With quality writing that draws you into a world filled with dreams that have substance, characters that have more personality than anything Square has offered, and some of the most inventive environments and quests we've ever seen, *Torment* offers the best RPG gameplay anyone can find on store shelves, hands down.



■ One interesting feature is that you develop your character over the course of the game, rather than choosing a profession from the start

Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **Empire Interactive** Developer: **Cunning Developers**



■ A brilliantly designed pinball table, lovingly rendered in 3D — this could only belong to the *Pro Pinball* series

Once again, the *Pro Pinball* series delivers on the goods — which is nice, considering that real pinball tables aren't being made by anyone anymore.

Empire releases one new *Pro Pinball* game every year, and as usual, the developers have done a stunning job.

The game may only contain one table, but man, what a table. The pre-rendered machine is modeled in exacting detail, with every bumper, ramp, and colored light standing out as a small miracle of 3D design. The ball physics are perfect (you can even simulate wear and tear on

the machine), and the play dynamic — a series of "journeys" aboard various steam-powered vehicles, accomplished by hitting targets in random order — is suitably complicated enough to keep a player at home going back again and again.

Pinball design is practically a lost art these days — and it's good to see someone keeping it alive, even if it's only in a virtual sense. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A pinball lover's dream. By all means, don't miss this one.

Star Trek: Hidden Evil

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Presto Studios**



■ It looks like *Trek* and it sounds like *Trek*, but couldn't it have lasted a little longer?

Star Trek fans have endured some pretty miserable titles for PC, but not everything in the franchise has been as annoying as a trible. *Star Trek: Hidden Evil* is a solid adventure title that will keep Trekkers pretty entertained, but not for a long enough time. There are some absolutely beautiful pre-rendered backgrounds, but

unfortunately, they only come in 640x480 resolution, and the controls are a tad stiff, to say the least.

The story takes place nine months after the events in the film *Star Trek: Insurrection*, as you guide young ensign Sovok through a series of phaser battles and alien riddle-solving. The puzzles are all pretty straightforward and nicely integrated into the *Star Trek* universe; some have to be solved using the tricorder, and others need the patented Vulcan Nerve Pinch.

The production values are outstanding, as *Hidden Evil* features original voice work by

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom line: It's prettier than *Tasha Yar* — sadly, it's shorter, too.

Patrick Stewart and Brent Spiner. The sound and the look of the game are as authentic as anything seen in the television show, and the plot is a believable extension of the movie. The game's two main problems are its pacing and brevity. The first seven levels are fun and challenging, but the final two levels can be maddeningly difficult with an over-emphasis on combat. And at only nine levels, the veteran adventurer could conceivably win the game in nine or ten hours. For Trekkers looking for a quick fix, it's a nice hypo spray to the arm, but for others, the effects wear off too soon. — Jim Preston

Wild Wild West

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **Southpeak Interactive** Developer: **Southpeak Interactive**



■ Somehow, we thought puzzle solving involved more than just a process of elimination

One thing we don't need more of from Hollywood is another loud, over-budgeted cartoon like *Wild Wild West*. One thing we need even less is a game based on a loud, over-budgeted cartoon. The game version of

Wild Wild West puts you in control of both Jim West and Artemus Gordon, once again saving the life of President Grant. Movie tie-ins traditionally make lousy games, and to no one's surprise, they still don't.

This is a basic adventure title sprinkled with some "action." Unfortunately, the poor puzzle-solving sequences are only eclipsed by the dreadful action scenes. Your basic goal is to gather bizarre items and put them together to solve even more bizarre problems. And the

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Well, it is better than a rattlesnake in your boot.

action scenes involve equipping a gun, pointing the mouse at an enemy, and right-clicking. It's about that exciting.

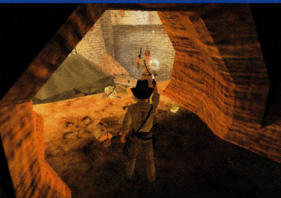
The graphics are polygonal models that vaguely hover over pre-rendered 3D backgrounds. If some of the backgrounds actually look OK, there are still plenty of problems with texture-ripping, and the animation is awful. While the cut scenes aren't too bad, the pathetic voice acting, non sequitur puzzles, and laughable combat soon have Jim and Artie pushing up the daisies. — Jim Preston

■ PC

Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine

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

Whip it — whip it good?



■ As you progress, treasures become increasingly booby-trapped and the Russians increasingly try to stop you. Very Indy, indeed

Despite obvious similarities, *Lara Croft* isn't a "female Indiana Jones." Behind every great Indiana Jones adventure (with the exception of *Temple of Doom*) lies a great story. *Infernal Machine* compares to *Tomb Raider* in many respects — too many, in fact. But the one thing *The Infernal Machine* does better is draw you into a wonderful story.

WWII is over, the Cold War is on, and now the Russians have begun tampering with forces they do not understand — this time, at the ancient site of Babylon. Once again, Indy must travel the world (through 15 levels) searching for relics that form part of a mysterious machine housed inside the Tower of Babel. It's a rich quest with plenty of puzzles, many involving the repair of elaborate machines. In fact, the puzzles play such a strong part of the game that it's not unlike a classic adventure game, played out in real-time environments.

But as a real-time adventure, the game has some problems. Control is limited on keyboard, wonky with the mouse, and discouragingly offers no "mouselook" option. Combat is atrocious, the targeting system is weak,

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Despite a fantastic storyline, the execution just doesn't merit a higher rating.



■ Nope, that's not Lara

and the enemy AI is lacking at best. There are some collision location detection problems, too: unless Indy's standing exactly on the edge of the lake, he can't inflate the rubber raft, for example. Also, you can't shoot the damn wolves, which, after they've pestered you countless times, really deserve to die.

However, it's worth noting these only crop up as a minor part of the game, which is otherwise an involving adventure. Producer Hal Barwood's story and presentation of Indiana Jones is almost flawless, but the physical gameplay and actual design work together as well as a convertible top on a minivan. — Tom Russo

■ PC

Crusaders of Might and Magic

■ Publisher: 3DO ■ Developer: 3DO

No adventure worth having



■ Interestingly, the dungeons are pristine — no dust, no dirt, no grime. Undead, animated skeletons make good housekeepers, we guess



■ Get used to long tunnels

→ The *Might and Magic* franchise is one of the oldest and most respected in the realm of PC RPGs, and has even spawned a critically acclaimed series of turn-based strategy games, *Heroes of Might and Magic*. Why, then, wouldn't it make sense to keep expanding the franchise into new and more experimental genres? We could have *Might and Magic Golf*, *Cart Racers of Might and Magic*, and a *Might and Magic* adventure game, too!

Unfortunately, the latter idea did sound good to someone at 3DO and they set about creating the most clichéd, boring adventure game to grace PC in years (and yes, we played *Indiana Jones*). Jumping puzzles, repetitive enemies, and voice acting that would make a *Resident Evil* fan wince are just some of the problems that plague this title. The most prominent gripe from fans of either adventure games or *Might*

and *Magic* titles, though, will be the complete lack of imagination that went into every aspect of the game.

Played from the standard third-person perspective, you're forced to run around and kill everything in sight while attempting to complete pointless "go fetch this, go kill that" quests and gain levels. Along the way, you gain new spells, new attacks, and magic items. The level design ranges from pathetically predictable (the dungeons) to absolutely awful (the outside regions). Running across the land is like being stuck in an endless tube from which there is no escape. Every wall looks the same, there are almost never any branches or turns and each zone has one type of enemy in various colors, as well as one distinctive detail (like say, a tree) that repeats every few feet.

The only thing *Crusaders of Might and Magic* has going for it is mindless action and a visually appealing, if dated, engine. Hardcore adventure fans that really need a medieval fix may find some enjoyment in killing their millionth skeleton, but everyone else can steer clear. — Daniel Erickson

ENextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: All things *Might and Magic* no longer shine. Keep clear of this failed experiment.

Battlezone II: Combat Commander

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Pandemic



■ The graphics are spectacular, but they require a study computer to show them off

The first *Battlezone* was a frustrating experience, not because of the game but because of public indifference to an outstanding title. In an effort to reach a larger

audience, Pandemic has tried to make *Battlezone II* prettier, simpler, and more accessible.

The "accessible" part of that fails thanks to the steep system requirements, but for those with sufficient horsepower this is a beautiful game that will have you speeding over eerie landscapes and gorgeous alien vistas.

Unfortunately that beautiful chassis covers a game engine

that is a bit clunky. The controls are too sensitive; there's no way to target the closest enemy, and the weapon sounds are wimpy. The single-player missions feature a compelling story with fine voice acting, but the multiplayer mode is, well, less compelling.

Battlezone II is not a bad game, in fact it's pretty good, but not nearly the sequel that the original deserves. — Jim Preston

ENextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A fun and beautiful single-player experience for users with a high-end machine, but the multiplayer elements are still quite iffy.

Urban Chaos

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Eldos Interactive ■ Developer: Mucky Foot



■ Bustin' caps can be so romantic under an autumn moon

Often it's the games from which you expect the least that surprise you the most. While *Urban Chaos* is hardly a revolutionary game, it gets so many little things right and is filled with such palpable atmosphere that it comes a lot closer to being fun than many big-budget titles. *Urban Chaos* is reminiscent of classic 16-bit

beat-'em-ups like *Streets of Rage* or *Final Fight* — you take on the role of cops and must clean up the city through good of fashioned head-cracking.

The story involves rookie cop D'Arci Stern and a mysterious stranger named Roper, who uncover layer upon layer of corruption. You must guide the heroes through cities that are surprisingly lively. Dead leaves swirl on the ground as you run past, puddles reflect the night sky, and when you wander too long into traffic, irate citizens lean on their horns. The fighting is as simple as any beat-'em-up, but

there are a variety of weapons and items to use in enforcing your own brand of "due process."

There is a small attempt at RPG-style stats. D'Arci and Roper can boost their attributes by finding power-ups, but running around looking for icons is not as fun as stomping perps, and it doesn't take 18/00 strength to pull the trigger of a shotgun. *Urban Chaos* plays a little too much like a console title, and more variety in the fighting would've been great. But for players who just want to bust punks, *Urban Chaos* will have you shirring your knuckles. — Jim Preston

ENextGen★★★★☆

Bottom line: Just like those fisticuffs scrollers from the 16-bit days, *Urban Chaos* is a fun no-brainer.

Mortyr: 2093-1944

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Interplay Productions ■ Developer: Mirage



■ Sure, they may be evil, but those Nazis certainly keep a clean house — although the architecture looks fantastic, the enemy AI is butt ugly

Mortyr is one of those strange games that does some things very well and other things very poorly. The game's proprietary 3D engine does a fantastic job with textures, reflections, and

lighting, all of which create some beautiful scenery. Unfortunately, the Nazis running around inside those cathedrals and train stations are so intensely stupid that you almost pity them while you gun them down.

That's not to say that *Mortyr* isn't a challenge in the single-player mode. Even without respectable AI, programmers can always cheat by making enemies crack shots, or having empty rooms sprout machine-gun-toting sentries the moment you turn

your back. To its credit, there's a lot of action in *Mortyr*, but in a post-*Half-Life* world, the lack of any scripting, real storytelling, or unique touches makes this game seem all the more routine.

The multiplayer mode allows for deathmatch or co-op play but none of the maps are that interesting, and the player skins are just awful. If this game came out two years ago, it would've been a solid FPS. But in 2000, it's little more than a Wolfenstein True 3D. — Jim Preston

ENextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Boring, derivative single-player and uninspired multiplayer action consign *Mortyr* to the bargain heap.

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The NextGen chain mail massacre

GREMLINS!

Wow, last month had a bevy of errors. We ran a shot of Rogue Spear in place of one of SWAT 3 in our review of SWAT 3. Then we ran the review of the N64 version of Knockout Kings in the PlayStation section. Then we reviewed a preview version of Hydro Thunder. Then we called Four Wheel Thunder "Off Road Thunder." Then we mislabeled Interplay as the developer of Baldur's Gate II instead of Bioware. Then we said Age of Wonders' publisher was GT Interactive, not Gathering Of Developers. So: we'd like to apologize to everyone. Hydro Thunder has been re-reviewed (page 89), and a correct shot of SWAT 3 is to the right. In penance, the entire editorial and art team was tightly wrapped in rusty barbed wire and loaded aboard a short bus filled with plague-carrying rabid rats. The bus was driven into the Mojave Desert and sunk in a rancid spring just outside Tecopa. The staff was then replaced by a new staff — which, coincidentally, has the same names.



➔ Okay, you're the only ones I trust to get the real answer on this. Why do all the PS2 screenshots I've seen anywhere look so pixelated? Just look at those Tekken Tag Tournament shots in **NG 02/00** — beautiful detailed models, wonderful backgrounds, clothing hangs great, fields of vegetation... and big honkin' ugly blocky pixels. Games on my PC look far, far better than that. Games on my Dreamcast look better than that (compare the screenshots in the same issue). After being told for a year now how the PS2 has enough power that running TTT should be no more of an effort than picking its nose, I'm going to be mighty upset when I buy one (and I will) and the developers haven't even bothered to do sub-pixel anti-aliasing and blending at the edges of their models. What's going on? Are they relying on us running it on a crappy NTSC TV, so that everything's blurred anyhow? Is this just alpha version oversight? I know the PS2's resolution can't be that pathetically low. Can it?

rulfin@san.r.com

It's a good question, with a complicated, multi-faceted answer. Here goes: First, the screens are 640x480. When they're blown up, they get pixelly. To us, that's not really a problem, as long as the edges of the pixels are sharp and not blurry (we don't mean not

anti-aliased, we're talking about the individual pixels, which has more to do with the video capture system than how the game is drawn onscreen). Second, as for the lack of anti-aliasing in the characters themselves, it seems to be a conscious decision on Namco's part to ensure that the characters look sharp onscreen, not blurry (the lighting effects are well blended with the background). Obviously some "free" anti-aliasing will come from using the relatively fuzzy and non-precise NTSC or PAL display, and Namco may add anti-aliasing to the characters later — the characters in Soul Calibur have anti-aliased edges, for instance. Is general screen anti-aliasing or filtering a good idea? That seems to really be a personal aesthetic decision. The consensus of the staff is that we'd rather see sharp graphics than a blurry N64-style mess, but your opinion may differ. The ideal would be, of course, subtle anti-aliasing. Finally, while PCs have higher resolution, they often have lower polygon models. Again, this is an aesthetic distinction to us: would you rather see a 500-poly monster displayed at 1024x768, so it had really smooth edges and textures, but wasn't very detailed — or

would you rather see a 2,000-polygon model at 640x480, which would be much more detailed, but much less smooth? To us, we'd rather have the more detailed model, although this hasn't been the trend on PC in the past few years — new games seem to take advantage of new cards by displaying low-poly models at higher resolutions, not higher-poly models at moderate resolutions.

➔ I need to complain about how Namco makes fighting games. (This excludes Soul Calibur, which is awesome.) I have been getting into Tekken Tag Tournament, and I can't believe the cheap stuff people can do! I keep losing to the same cheesy kids and one fat adult I call "The Evil One." They can take King and do a 60% throw! A little brat took Eddy, stayed on handstand, and kept hitting me from a distance till time ran out! If this continues, the future will have arcade games that consist just of flipping a coin (and some pig will probably bring in a code to that, too).

VNUS@PRODIGY.NET

Maybe you just suck. No, no, we're just kidding! Seriously, sometimes the first edition of an arcade fighter is a little unbalanced, but that's usually fixed in the second edition and in home versions. In fact, Soul Calibur was a bit unbalanced in the arcades, but look how good it is on Dreamcast.

➔ A friend and I both find King's Field and King's Field II especially compelling games. I just beat KFI again, leaving Lara to languish buxom but unnoticed on my TV top. I was overjoyed to read your alpha in **NG 02/00** about Eternal Ring, but what REALLY got my attention was your offhand reference on page 37 to "the three first episodes!" I assume you were referring to PlayStation, not PlayStation2. Please, please, please — what is the third episode? You may have my firstborn if you provide me with information leading to my acquisition of another King's Field game.

jkuusalavagern@pol.net

Please wait until your firstborn is old enough to fetch us sodas and send him or her to the address on the masthead. There were three King's Fields released in Japan, and it isn't the third one that never came here, it's the first one. So, the Japanese KF II was the US KF I and so on.

➔ In your **02/00** issue, Alexj33106@aol.com wrote you a letter asking why you aren't supporting the Dreamcast as much as the anticipated PS2, and basically you blew him off and had a pretty snotty remark. I think you didn't quite understand what he was saying, so I'll put it to you the way I see it. I think you need to concentrate more on the current systems being praised than the ones that are a year or more away. I feel you support the next system coming

Did you guys have the guts to tell Kelly Flock that GameDay is trash compared to NFL 2K?

out more than the currently available ones that everyone else in the US gets to play. You guys did the same thing with the Dreamcast and Nintendo 64, so I am not just dodging you for the PS2. I don't know if you realize that you are the only ones that get to play the "new systems" coming out and all your faithful readers just play the ones that are already out.

borowkaj24@aol.com

People read Next Generation for two reasons: to find out what's good now, and what's coming that they should look forward to. That's why we do previews, and that's why we cover new hardware. Getting the perfect balance is always something we work on, but we always strive to cover the best of what's here now, and the best of what's coming in the future.

→ Did you guys have the guts to tell Kelly Flock at 989 Studios that *NFL GameDay 2000* is complete trash compared to *NFL 2K*?

Jobb167@aol.com

Look, in terms of graphics there's obviously no comparison, and that makes *NFL 2K* a lot more immersive, but in terms of gameplay, both games are pretty close.

→ I just read the review of *Quake III Arena* in the February issue of **NG**, and I can't believe what I read. You gave *QIII* five stars after giving *Turok Rage Wars* only two in the January issue. What gives? These two games are very similar in that they aim primarily at the multiplayer experience. By your own admission, you gave *Quake III* one star for the upgrades that are sure to follow. I don't think that *TRW* is the greatest game on N64, but it is revolutionary that Acclaim had the guts to release a deathmatch-only-style game. I think your review totally missed the point of *TRW*. Yes, someone can spend thousands of dollars to play *Quake* online — or they can pick up an N64 and a copy of *Turok Rage Wars* for under 200 bucks. *TRW* is a great multiplayer game for the masses and in my opinion outshines *GoldenEye* and *QIII*. Next time try playing a game the way it was intended to be

played before reviewing it.
GRIZZBEAR3@aol.com

You clearly haven't played *Quake III*, if you think *TRW* even approaches its quality. Just because two games are going for similar goals doesn't mean they should get the same score: *Bubsy 3D* and *Mario 64* are the same kind of game, but which would you rather play? Bottom line: *Quake* is a far more compelling experience than *TRW*.

→ First off, the magazine is great. I just want to say that in your **02.00** issue about *Tekken Tag Tournament*, I noticed on page 30 on the first picture the word **KORN** is written on the building behind them. It's spelled with the R backwards. What's this all about? I have to tell you, I am a KORN freak, and I would like to know why it is on the building.

vaportrai18@hotmail.com

Well, it's part of a sign that says "KORN flakes," but it seems like it may indeed be a small tribute to one of America's cutest and most lovable bands.

→ On page 7 of issue **02.00**, you postulated, "In true *Dafy* Duck shirt-but-no pants style, Sonic wears big red sneakers but is otherwise naked." In fact, it is *Donald Duck* that wears a shirt, and sometimes a hat, with no pants.

playstationeer@yahoo.com

Oops. To show the offending editor the difference between *Donald* and *Dafy*, we threw him off the top of the *TransAmerica* tower in *San Francisco*. Then we yelled "duck!" just as he reached street level.

→ I'm a bit perplexed by the PC game reviews in **NG 02.00**. *Quake III* and *Ultima: Ascension* both received fifth stars for components that haven't arrived yet (mods for *Q3A*, patches for *U:A*), while *Pharaoh* received just four stars even though its only noted shortcoming is "the lack of customizable scenarios." Impressions Games made a scenario editor (and other goodies) for *Caesar III* available for download a few months after that game was released, and I have faith that they'll do the same for *Pharaoh*, since they have a history

PS2 Pad

In your articles on PlayStation2, you have stated that all accessories that worked on PlayStation would work on PS2. I just purchased a Dex Drive for PS and was wondering if I would be able to use it for PS2 game saves.

ace82@pocketmail.com



Probably not: Sony is only going to support licensed peripherals, and the Dex Drive isn't one of them.

I know your editors would rather be locked in a closet with Gilbert Gottfried than change a review...

of paying attention to the user community and taking care of their customers. I know your editors would rather be locked in a closet with Gilbert Gottfried until *DuKaTana* ships than change a review, but I just had to write in to make a case for what's probably the most polished and enjoyable single-player PC game of the past few months.

spiller@uiuc.edu

Thanks for the letter: While *Pharaoh* is certainly an excellent game, even with a scenario editor it probably wouldn't have gotten five stars. It's a step forward for an existing genre, but it doesn't quite meet the "revolutionary" standard that five-star games need to hit. Still, four stars is nothing to sneeze at, and it's worth noting that *Pharaoh* has actually taken up more of our time than either of the other two.

→ I am just innocently inquiring about the format of the PlayStation2 gaming system. Now, I got a glimpse of what it will look like, and from what I saw, it will be vertical. Now as a PlayStation and Saturn (yes, Saturn) user, I find this a bit complex to understand. If it is vertical, then how is the laser supposed to read the disk? Wouldn't the disk fall out of place?

FlySmooov@aol.com

There's no reason a laser can't read a vertical disc, in the same way a hard drive can be read equally well when mounted either vertically or horizontally. As for the disc falling out, trust us, the minds at Sony were on top of this early in the development process. If you look at the above picture, you can see that the disc holder doesn't extend all the way, so the disc doesn't slip out. Also, there seems to be a lip that holds the disc in, plus the usual clips on the spindle.

→ In your newest issue, you said that Amy was a squirrel and that she was Sonic's girlfriend. You are wrong on both things. Amy is a pink hedgehog like Sonic, and is not Sonic's girlfriend. She has a crush on Sonic, but it all ends there. About the squirrel part... you might be thinking about Sally, from the *Archie Sonic* comics and the Saturday morning cartoon.

CyberKruX@aol.com

Of course Archie comics isn't going to admit that Sonic and Amy are having a raging, out-of-wedlock affair. Nor are they going to admit that Amy had a species changing operation. But trust us. The world of Sonic and his pals is far more twisted than you could possibly imagine.



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→ Retroview

March 1986

Return to the thrilling days before Nintendo was king

→ While many people today don't even remember the Sega Master System or Atari 7800, in early 1986 the future of the second generation of consoles wasn't so clear. The game industry, from most retailers' standpoints, was dead in 1986: a fad that had come and gone.

But the few who had sold Nintendo's home system during the 1985 holidays had an inkling that games might be back, and by the spring CES in early 1986 it was clear that the next generation of the game industry was shaping up as a three-horse race: Nintendo's NES fighting against Atari's out-of-the-mothballs 7800 and Sega's Master System (marketed by Tonka). While bad distribution hurt the Master System, the 7800 was



■ **Super Mario Bros.** It introduced the work of Shigeru Miyamoto to millions of Americans, and became a legend

hampered by its own age (it had been ready for release two years previously) and Atari's horrible relations with retailers, vendors, third parties, and well, practically everyone. Nintendo, on the other hand, built a solid distribution system and had software that was, even then, the stuff of legend. The war would be over by 1987.

FOOBLITZKY: HAS INFOCOM GONE CRAZY?

NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

IT'S WAR!

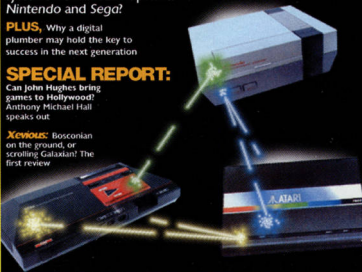
Can Atari's 7800 hold off the home systems from arcade upstarts Nintendo and Sega?

PLUS: Why a digital plumber may hold the key to success in the next generation

SPECIAL REPORT:

Can John Hughes bring games to Hollywood? Anthony Michael Hall speaks out

XENIOUS: Bosconian on the grounds, or scrolling Galaxian? The first review



Apple ■ Atari ■ Coleco ■ IBM PC ■ Nintendo ■ Sega

What we were playing

Atari was king in arcades, but Nintendo ruled at home

■ SUPER MARIO BROS.



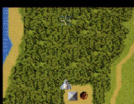
■ System: NES
■ Publisher: Nintendo

■ OUT RUN



■ System: Arcade
■ Publisher: Sega

■ XEVIOUS



■ System: Arcade
■ Publisher: Atari/Namco

■ GHOSTS & GOBLINS



■ System: NES
■ Publisher: Capcom

■ GAUNTLET II



■ System: Arcade
■ Publisher: Atari

Top Pop Albums of 1986

- 1 Whitney Houston, Whitney Houston
- 2 Heart, Heart
- 3 Scarecrow, John Cougar Mellencamp
- 4 Afterburner, ZZ Top
- 5 Brothers in Arms, Dire Straits
- 6 Control, Janet Jackson
- 7 Welcome to the Real World, Mr. Mister
- 8 Promise, Sade
- 9 No Jacket Required, Phil Collins
- 10 Primitive Love, Miami Sound Machine



■ HURT SO GOOD...

...and in the real world

- The space shuttle Challenger explodes just after launch, due to flawed O-rings in the solid fuel booster rockets.
- Compaq beats IBM and introduces the first desktop computer powered by Intel's super-fast 386 chip.
- The frightening new disease AIDS reaches epidemic status in the US.
- Daniel Hillis' Thinking Machines Corp. introduces the Connection Machine, a massively parallel 16,000-processor machine. Each processor was represented by an LED on the side of the machine; within a few years, a version of Tetris was made that played on the computer using the LEDs to create the game pieces, turning the multimillion-dollar computer into the most expensive dedicated game machine in history.

ARK Came!



CARRIER

If You Can Hear It... You're Already Dead!

ARK Saw!



ARK Got Its Ass Kicked!

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Sega Dreamcast



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In the 21st Century terrorism reigns supreme in an ever eroding environment. Aboard the Heimdal Aircraft Carrier, survival is all that matters! It's a new world now – a savage, deadly, wasteland where you save whoever is still alive and to hell with the dead.

Vying for control of Earth, the Southern Cross bombs the Heimdal, setting free ARK – a prehistoric organism. When ARK attacks, it implants itself in humans making them hideous, monstrous drones that carry ARK seeds and infect others determined to eliminate ALL of humanity. ARK breeds, mutates, and insanely lusts for the end of human life.

Even if it looks human, you could be screwed 'cause it may be an ARK drone. Who is friend, who is foe?

You are part of an elite unit chosen to isolate and destroy ARK on the Heimdal Aircraft Carrier before it reaches land. You must fearlessly blast your way through a gloomy labyrinth of hallways, flooded control rooms and security levels, battling sinister mutants, while gaining clues and power as you advance. You never know what's lurking in the murky water or around the next corner. Meanwhile, ARK is gaining power after attaching itself to the nuclear core of the Heimdal. Sheer wit and brute force are all that can save you now.



SCANNING



"Carrier is light years ahead of the competition in both game play and graphics."

- Silicon Magazine, July, 1999, Issue 12



Some secrets come back to haunt you.

Just days after surviving the grisly disaster at the mansion lab, Jill Valentine resigns from S.T.A.R.S. and attempts to escape a nightmarish city in ruins. Trapped in a town crawling with hordes of flesh-eating zombies, hideous mutants, and a relentless new nemesis, she must rely on cunning and brute force to stay alive. What she soon discovers is that the evil created by Umbrella Corporation's bio-tech terror is even more horrifying than she ever imagined...



It's in your blood.



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