GameWEEK

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT • DECEMBER 11, 2000

HOLIDAY RETAIL GAMES GUIDE

By the time you read these words, the holiday shopping season will be at cruising altitude. And if the season comes out the way we'd all like it to, the familiar sound of jingle bells will be drowned out only by the ringing of cash registers.

Just when we thought things couldn't get any crazier, they have. There are now no less than a half dozen platform choices for consumers to mull over and hundreds of titles to confuse the senses. In order to help make sense of it all, *GameWEEK* has assembled a "Holiday Top 5" roundup of software titles we think have the greatest sales potential for each of the six main platforms. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the sleigh ride!

GameWEEK's Holiday Top 5

SONY PLAYSTATION 2

$299.95 MSRP

By Bryan Intihar

Sales Pitch:

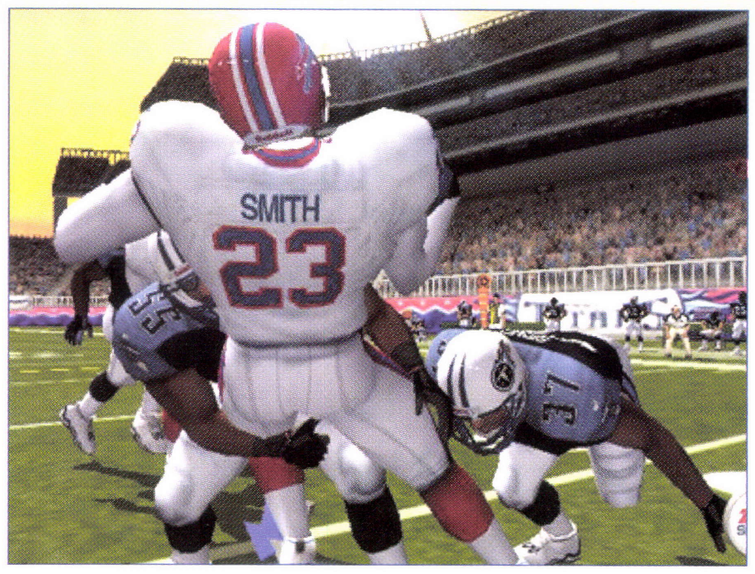
"I would sell you a PS2 if I had one, but you can put your name on the waiting list and hopefully we'll get you a PS2 by the spring."

Horizontal stand sold seperately

Unless you've been sleeping in a cave for the last few months, you already know by now that the PlayStation 2 is *the* hot item this holiday season. The 128-bit, next-generation system features two controller ports, two memory card slots and more importantly, a DVD-ROM drive. This means along with playing some of the best-looking videogames ever made, consumers can watch their favorite movies on the PS2. The PS2 can also play PS One games. The North American unit also has an expansion bay located at its backside for a hard-drive/modem, both of which are expected to become available sometime in 2001. Consumers should not be reluctant to pick up a PS2 as it is expected to have a long shelf life. The console will continue to be at the top of the console market along with Xbox and GameCube (both are being released in 2001.)

1. Madden NFL 2001
Electronic Arts • $49.95 MSRP

Week after week this continues to be the best-selling PS2 title and for good reason. EA Sports includes all the extras found in past Madden games and this time it sports the best visuals ever for a football game. No other title in this category can compete with the *Madden NFL 2001* package. A must-have for any PS2 owner.



Continued on page 3

GAME BOY **14** | NINTENDO 64 **10** | DREAMCAST **6** | PLAYSTATION **6** | PLAYSTATION 2 **3** | PC **24**

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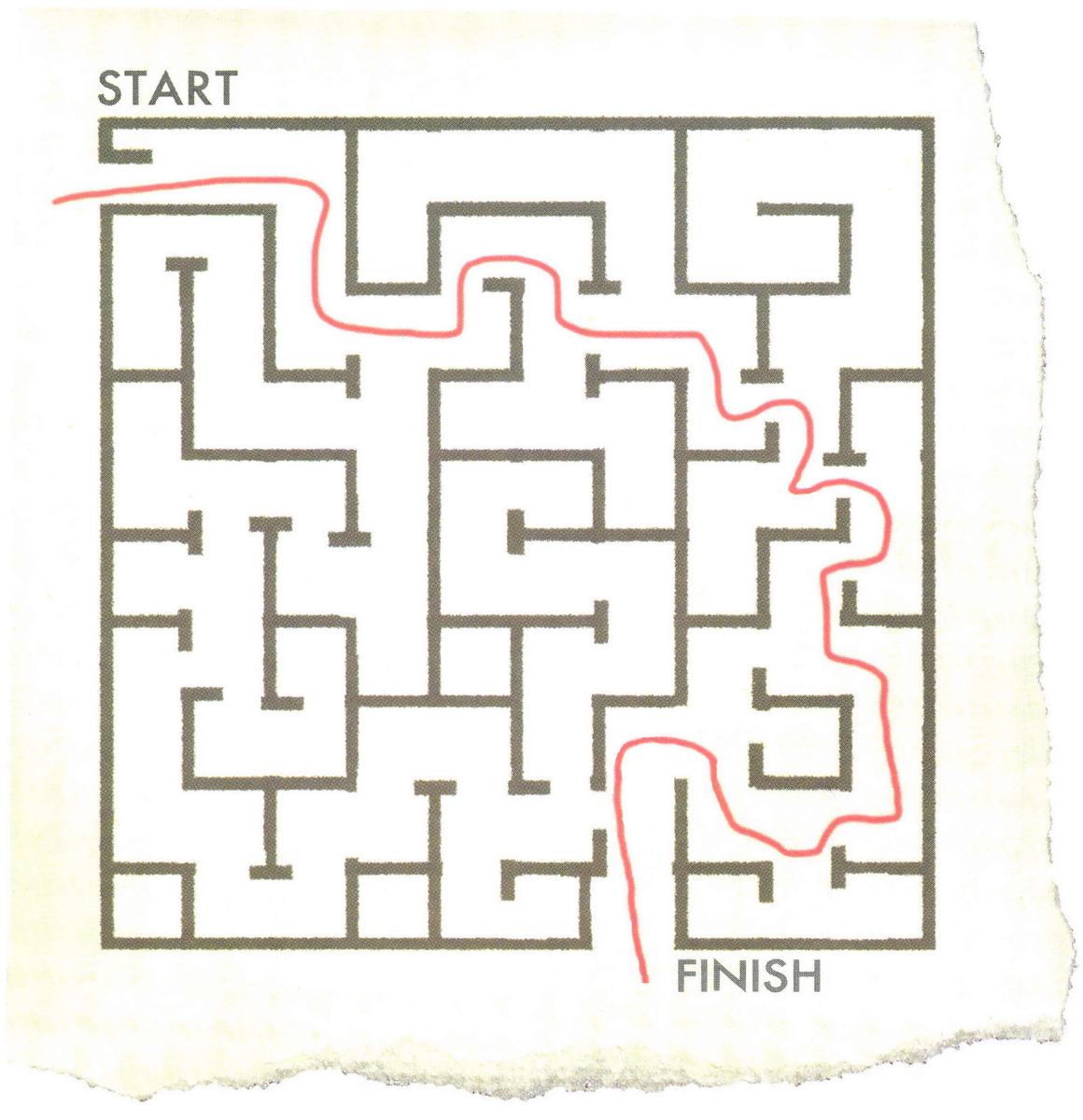

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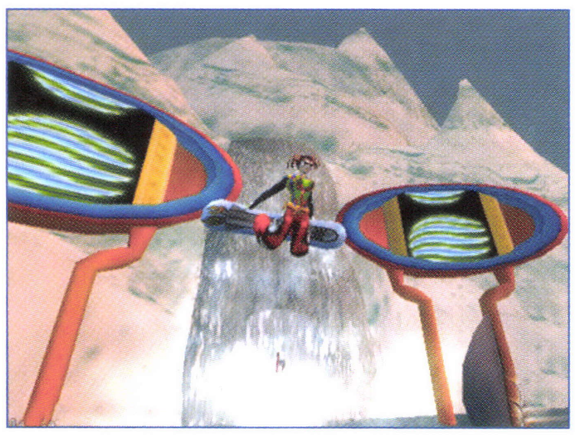
SONY PLAYSTATION 2

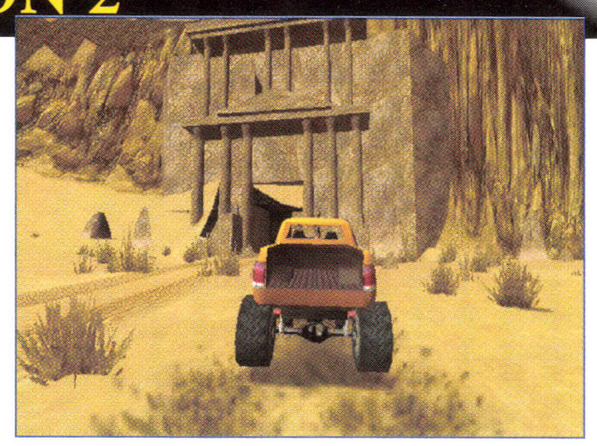
2. Tekken Tag Tournament
Namco • $49.95 MSRP

Namco's world famous fighting series still reigns supreme with its latest installment for the PS2. *Tekken Tag* includes a multitude of fighters from the previous games as well as the new Tag mode. While it may get some pressure from Tecmo's *DOA 2: Hardcore*, the sales numbers demonstrate that Tekken still garners more consumer dollars.



3. SSX
Electronic Arts • $49.95 MSRP

This is probably the surprise title for the console. *SSX* has received tons of kudos from consumer publications and industry insiders, and even thought by many to be the best PS2 launch title. Unbelievable track designs, tons of game bonuses, precise controls and stunning graphics even make the non-extreme sports fan give *SSX* a chance.



4. Smuggler's Run
Rockstar Games • $49.95 MSRP

With the PS2 launch being full of sequels, Rockstar Games gives consumers something new in the form of *Smuggler's Run*. Players control a wide range of vehicles where they travel over expansive environments trying to deliver contraband and avoid the law. Each mission is set over beautiful terrains that help demonstrate what the PS2 can do.

5. NHL 2001
Electronic Arts • $49.95 MSRP

Once again EA Sports shows its early domination of the PS2 software market with the addition of *NHL 2001*. This popular hockey franchise continues to improve as it moves to the new platform with true-to-life player models, bone-crushing hits and fast-paced gameplay. The strong fan base and lack of competition make *NHL 2001* one game to continuously stock this holiday.

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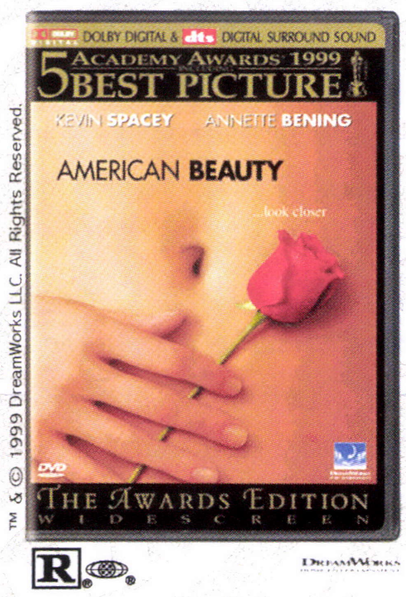

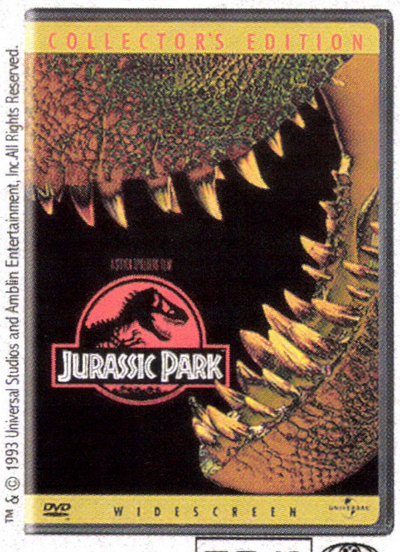

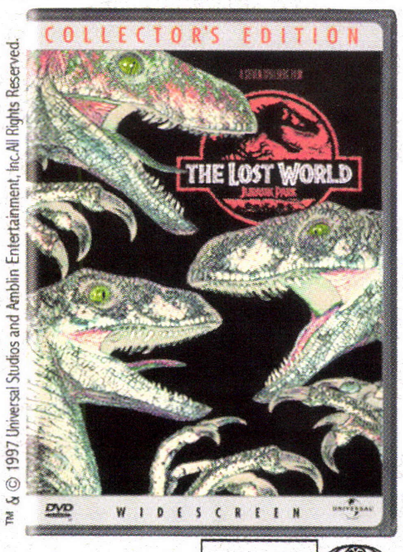

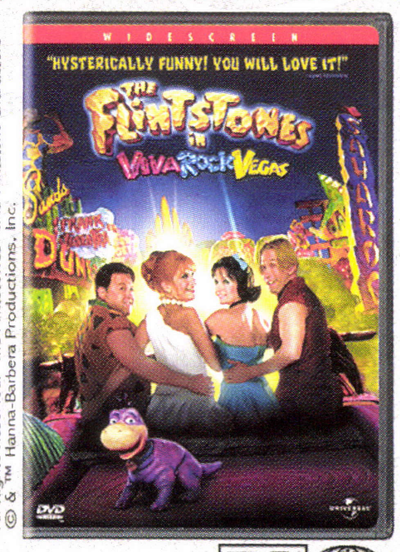

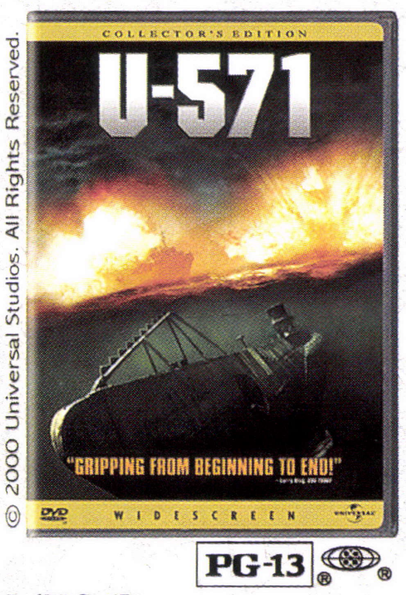

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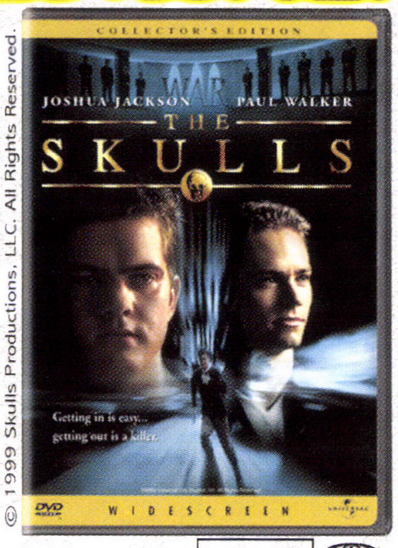

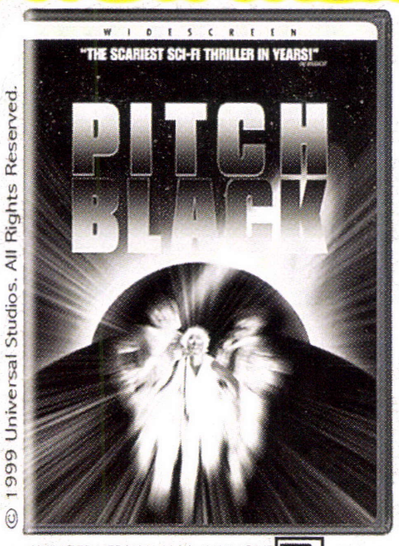

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After Decent Nine Months, Retailers Look to Holidays

Dreamcast, Game Boy, N64, PC & accessories will help fill PS2 shortage

By Steve Traiman

After upbeat unit sales but flat dollars for the first nine months of console and computer game and accessory sales compared to last year, retailers are looking to the big holiday season to cap what is shaping up as another record year.

While Sony's PlayStation 2 (PS2) had a monster launch October 26, the allocation of only 500,000 of an expected million consoles to all retail accounts due to a critical chip shortage is seen as a key factor for a broader holiday season. Sony has promised weekly shipments up to Christmas-and three million through next March, but most retailers see some good product from Dreamcast, N64 and Game Boy/Color filling the gap nicely. The initial PS2 sales at $299 each will add $150 million to the year-end hardware total.

According to NPD TRSTS figures, overall videogame hardware, software and accessory sales at retail were up 14% in units in dollars and only 1% in dollars, vs. the same January-September period in 1999, NPD analyst Kristin Barnett reports. PC/Mac entertainment software was up 12% in units and 8% in dollars, but edutainment titles dipped 19% in units and 23% in dollars.

On the videogame side, portable software, mostly Game Boy/Color, was up 22% in units and 18% in dollars, while next generation software—PSX, N64 and Dreamcast—was ahead 30% in units and 17% in dollars.

Here's a sampling of comments from representatives of brick-and-mortar, click-and-mortar and online game retailers, including Babbage's Etc., Electronic Boutique/Ebworld.com, Ditan Distribution, ShopKo Stores, the Musicland Group, Blockbuster Entertainment and Wal-Mart.

The Babbage's Etc. chain will have almost 1,000 outlets open for the holidays, notes president and CEO Dan DeMatteo. "Overall, the first nine months has been good on the games side," he says. "Dreamcast filled a hole for us in spring and summer, as we were disappointed by N64 *Pokémon* sales and the decline in PlayStation price points. It's a difficult year to predict but our prognosis is that original PlayStation sales are holding up, we've seen a resurgence in Color Game Boy since *Pokémon Gold and Silver* came out, and now *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* has spiked N64. We're encouraged by the SegaNet online game launch and the Dreamcast console price drop and believe this will help fill the gap until PS2 shipments catch up with our 200,000 preorders, which may not be until after the holidays." He notes that GBC sales are inordinately high over the holidays and is very bullish on this niche category that he calls "grandma bait." On the PC side, he doesn't see any really big holiday titles, and notes that the computer game market usually suffers from a new platform introduction due to the early adopter crossover.

> ***"Clearly consumers have shown that they like the choice of being able to rent a game before buying... from the stores' perspective, games are contributing steadily to the growth of our video division..."***
>
> *Steve Lundeen, vice president, interactive merchandising, Blockbuster Entertainment*

Both Electronics Boutique and its Ebworld.com online store share similar, guardedly optimistic forecasts for the holidays. Jeff Griffiths, senior vice president, merchandising and distribution for the stores, observes that, "Like the TRSTS figures, our first nine months unit sales were up but dollars were flat." He notes that PSX was a little better than expected, Dreamcast and N64 had good first half sales, Game Boy got busy with *Gold and Silver*, and PC business was pretty good up through early fall. Noting that the online store launched in July 1997, president Seth Levy reports "business the first nine months up dramatically in all categories. With a major revamp for the last holiday quarter, we've seen continuing benefits with traffic doubled so far this year." About 100,000 PS2 preorders were noted for both the traditional and online stores, with about 90% in the brick-and-mortar outlets, with that total allocation gone by the weekend. For the holidays, Levy notes that the Web store follows the chain stores, but shares with Griffiths the upside potential of PS2 as a hardware contributor to overall sales. The latter also sees Dreamcast fulfilling the typical second year platform sales increase.

Nintendo's releases of* The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask *and* Pokémon Gold and Silver *has helped spike sales for their respective systems.

He was disappointed not only with the drastic PS2 allocation, but also with the lack of Sony's own accessories, although innovative third-party products filled this gap.

For Ditan Distribution in Eatontown, NJ, the first three quarters "were about even with last year," says president Ron Novotny. The company handles distribution for Babbage's Etc. and about 14,000 other retail outlets, for Sega and a dozen other publishers including Activision, Eidos, Infogrames and Interplay. He observes that GBC was the strongest platform, PSX was still strong, N64 sales were down, Dreamcast was a bit better and PC about even with last year. For the holidays, he observes that, "We had plenty of allocation for our publishers' initial PS2 titles, and with reports of a positive SegaNet launch, the PS2 shortage will help Dreamcast demand. It's just a great market for Game Boy Color all the way."

"Clearly consumers have shown that they like the choice of being able to rent a game before buying," says Steve Lundeen, vice president, interactive merchandising, for Blockbuster Entertainment, the largest games "rentailer." All 3,800 U.S. stores have GBC hardware and a variety of titles available for rental for families traveling this holiday season, about 500 have had Dreamcast con-

Continued on page 28

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GameWEEK's Holiday Top 5

SONY PS ONE

$99.95 MSRP

By Bryan Intihar

flip-top display/sound panel not included

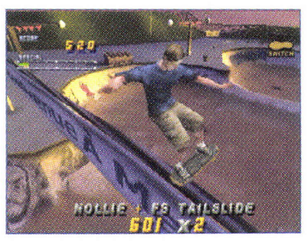
Sales Pitch:

"Cheer up, little Billy/Mary/whoever is whining.... I know you wanted the PS2 this Christmas, but I got something that should put a smile on your face. It's called the PS One and it has a ton of great games with many of them being really cheap. I bet you could even get some without the help of Mommy and Daddy from saving your lunch money."

PlayStation 2 may be getting all the hype, the PS One is still a superb gift idea. For only $99, consumers get a console that currently has the largest software library covering every genre from sports to fighting to action/adventure and role-playing. Another added bonus of the PS2 release is that the price of the PS One software has decreased as most titles range from $30-40. There is even an impressive "Greatest Hits" lineup that retails for only $20. Some consumers may be worried that with the PS2 now on the market, the PS One library would dissipate. However, publishers and developers recognize that North America has a large PS One installed base and consequently have announced more projects for 2001. With the short PS2 supply, the PS One remains a strong selling holiday item.

1. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2
Activision • $39.95 MSRP

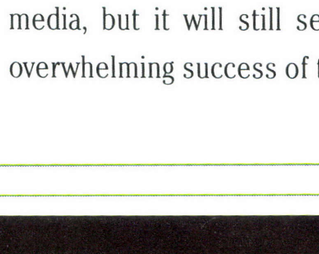
It's hard to imagine that a skateboarding game could outsell the likes of a *Madden* or a *Final Fantasy*, but that is exactly what



Activision has done. The sequel released this fall is dominating the PS sales charts and there are no indications that it will slow down. Simply put: the best gets even better.

2. Final Fantasy IX
Squaresoft • $39.95 MSRP

This marks the last in the series for the PS One as it goes to the more powerful PS2 next year. Square has gone back to the roots of the



series to create a more medieval setting. That being said, *Final Fantasy IX* has the potential to be best yet. Retailers should stock up on numerous copies as well as the strategy guide by Brady Games.

3. Driver 2
Infogrames • $44.95 MSRP

Infogrames' chaotic mission-based driving series returns in time for the holiday. The sequel delivers even more action than the

original with on-foot gameplay, more vehicles and driving locations all over the world. *Driver 2* has disappointed some in the media, but it will still sell because of the overwhelming success of the original.

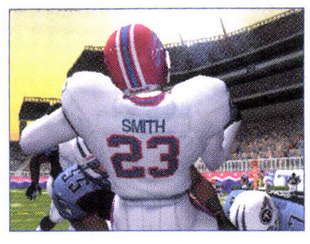
4. WWF Smackdown 2!: Know Your Role
THQ • $39.95 MSRP

The early part of 2000 for PS One software was dominated by THQ's *Smackdown!*, and the company hopes history repeats itself this

winter. Developer Yukes has added new features to the sequel like ladder and table matches, and an improved Create-A-Wrestler Mode. As wrestling's popularity grows, the sales of its related products continue to bring in more revenue.

5. Madden NFL 2001
Electronic Arts • $39.95 MSRP

What would the holidays be without another *Madden*? Even though it doesn't have the



graphical presentation of its PS2 counterpart, its in-game options cannot be matched by any other PS One football title. When it comes to finding a gift for that manly gamer, you can never go wrong with a little *Madden*.

GameWEEK's Holiday Top 5

SEGA DREAMCAST

$149.95 MSRP

By Jim Loftus

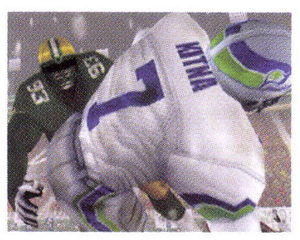
Special black "Sega Sports' Collector's Edition" Dreamcast pictured, $169.95 MSRP

Sales Pitch:

"Psst...hey, buddy. I know you might've heard people talking about how the Dreamcast is dead, or how there aren't very many good games available for it–well forget it, nothing could be further from the truth! There's a heap of awesome Dreamcast games out right now; stuff like Crazy Taxi, Sonic Adventure, Tony Hawk, Shenmue*–the list goes on and on. Plus, you can go online with games like* NBA *and* NFL 2K1, Quake III, *and soon,* Phantasy Star Online. *Oh, and the system's only a hundred and fifty bucks, with a modem built-in!î*

With Dreamcast, Sega seems to be doing a lot of things right. It's also doing a few things very wrong, if the general response from Joe Public is anything to go by. At a time when the company seems to be firing on nearly every cylinder under the hood; powerful hardware, killer software, and a history making dive into online console gaming, it is misfiring in a big way when it comes to spreading the DC gospel. Whether it's a lack of funding or merely a lack of good judgment, there seems to be an awful lot of people who just don't know what the hell a Dreamcast is. That's a shame because this little white box is capable of some amazing things. Many in the industry (myself included) have seen jaws hit the carpet when people get their first look at *Shenmue*. We've paid witness to grown men dancing like fools under the hypnotic spell of *Samba de Amigo*. And we've seen people fall out of their chairs during crazed competition in *NFL 2K1*. No one can truly predict what state the Dreamcast will be in this time next year, but as of today, one thing is certain: at a mere $150, the Dreamcast is worth every penny based on the content offered and should not fail to impress those game players who decide to purchase it, hardcore or otherwise.

1. Sega Sports' NFL 2K1
Sega • $49.95 MSRP



With its slick visuals and improved gameplay, Sega's latest pigskin title will likely be the most sought-after Dreamcast game this holiday. To make itself even more attractive, *NFL 2K1* offers real, honest to goodness online play against others from around the country. If you're dealing with customers who've typically shied away from playing network games in the past due to the complex nature of PCs, it's vital that you explain to them just how easy it is to get online with a Dreamcast. Lord knows Sega's not doing it.

2. Shenmue • Sega • $49.95 MSRP

The most expensive videogame ever produced isn't your typical game, but that hasn't stopped it from receiving widespread

Continued on page 10

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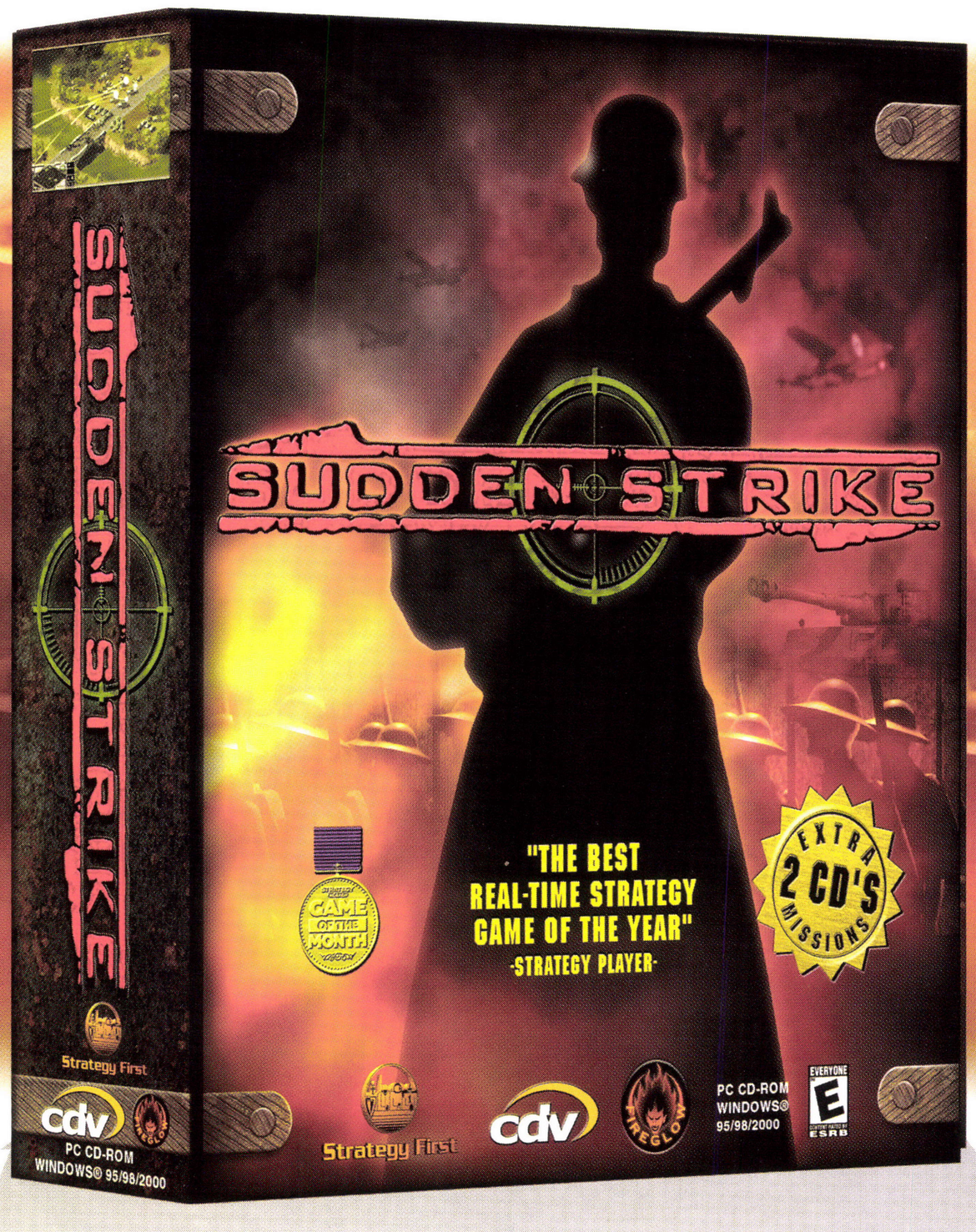

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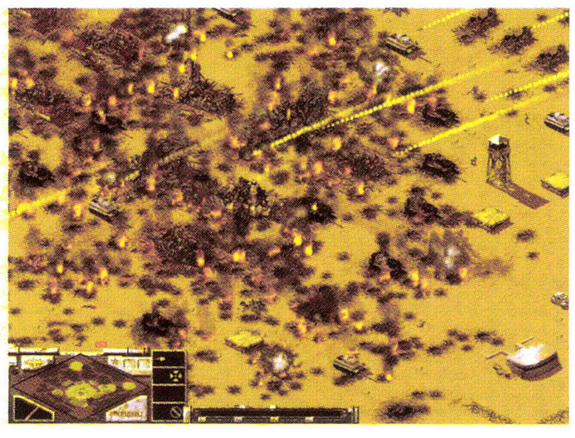

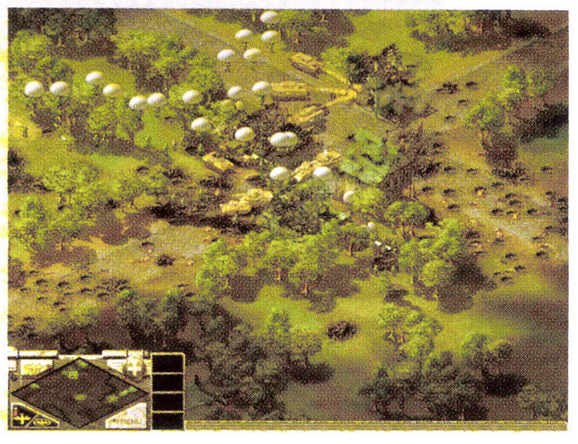

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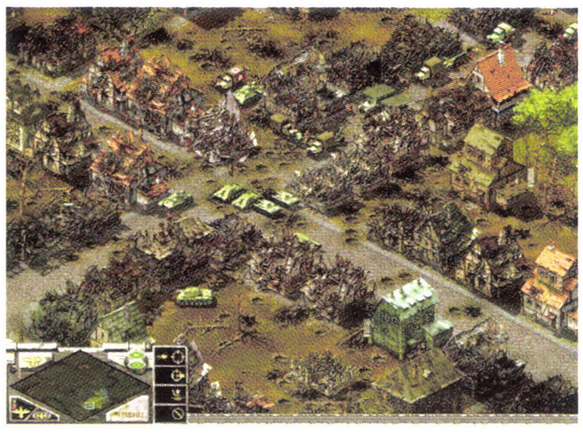

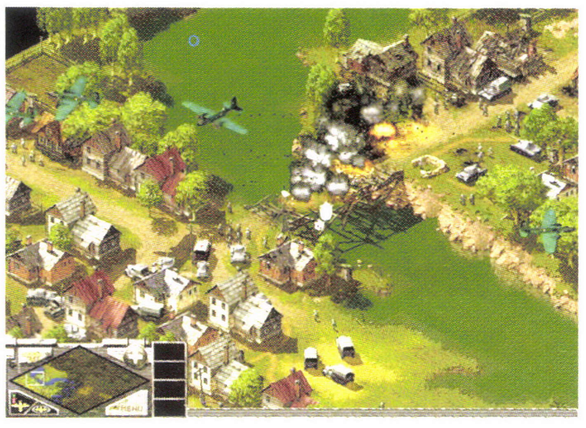

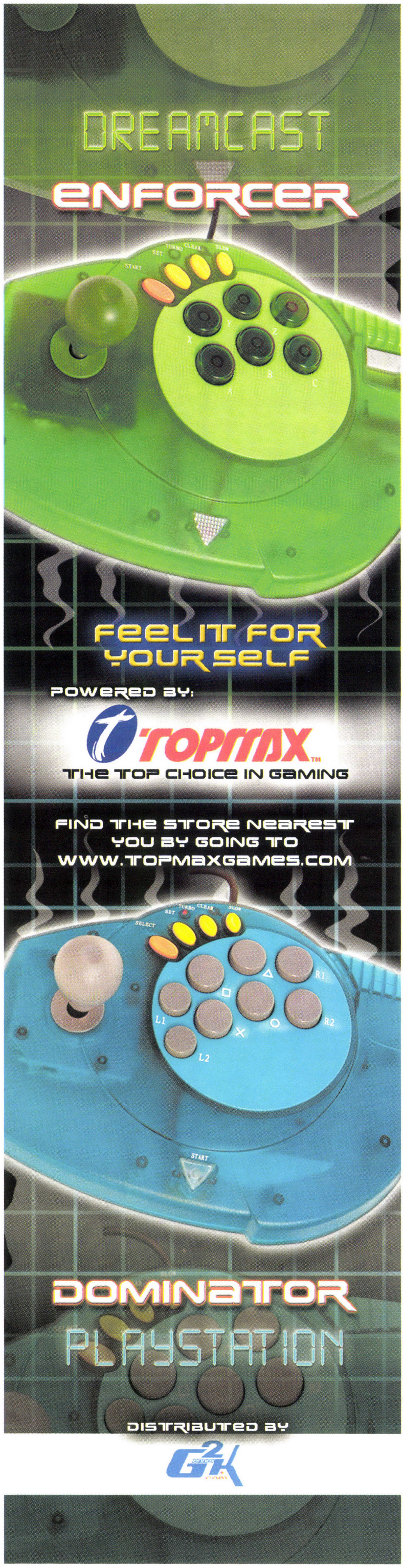

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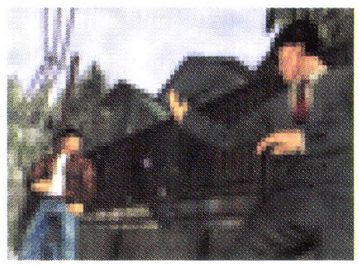
SEGA DREAMCAST



critical acclaim and a fast start at retail. *Shenmue* links together multiple genres—exploring, fighting, racing, and a few miscellaneous sub games thrown in—and the result is a full-flavored, albeit slow paced, experience. The hype surrounding *Shenmue* (many regard it as "better looking than any PS2 game") should draw consumers in for a closer look. Action seekers may be let down, but for those looking for a new reality-based gaming experience (set in Japan in the mid 80s... go figure), this could be the escape they're looking for.

3. Sonic Adventure
Sega • $19.95 MSRP

The blue hedgehog has had no trouble hanging out in the Dreamcast top ten, pulling in consistent sales revenue since its release at the system's launch. *Sonic Adventure* showcases what Sega's machine is capable of when put into the right hands; in this case, the hands of Yuji Naka and Sonic Team. There's a reason this action-based 3D game keeps selling. It's called "fun." When it comes to graphics and gameplay, *Sonic Adventure* takes the best of both worlds and crams them into a solid, enjoyable 3D action game that should keep players immersed for weeks on end. The value-priced sticker should also make it an impulse buy for many new Dreamcast consumers.

4. Sega Sports' NBA 2K1
Sega • $49.95 MSRP

This year's game brings with it new moves, up-to-date NBA player data, and new outdoor venues ripe for trash talk. Most notably though, like *NFL 2K1*, Sega's second-generation Dreamcast b-ball title is geared up and ready to offer network gaming to players all over the country. With American sports fanatics smack dab in the middle of the 2000 basketball season, we expect *NBA 2K1* to maintain strong sales through the busy shopping season and make it into the top five once the smoke clears.

5. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2
Activision • $44.95 MSRP

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 ups the ante by offering players new tricks, new skate parks, new pro skaters, and an innovative new Create-a-Park option that lets players custom build their own courses, then jump in for the action. For this DC version, the polygon models and environments have been redesigned, giving everything a more refined, polished look. Even with several other similar options sitting on the shelf, such as *Jet Grind Radio* and the original *Tony Hawk*, for instance, *Pro Skater 2* will very likely be one of the top selling Dreamcast games during the holidays.

GameWEEK's Holiday Top 5 NINTENDO 64

By Ben Rinaldi

$99.95 MSRP

Special Edition "Pikachu Nintendo 64" pictured, $149.95 MSRP

Sales Pitch:

"The N64's low price and terrific library of games (particularly on the multi-player side) make it the perfect starter system for newbies."

Alas, the end is near for Nintendo's 64-bit "Fun Machine." The Nintendo 64 is a dinosaur compared to today's sleek new systems like Dreamcast and PlayStation 2, however the last of the cart-based home consoles has endured and continues to sell at a steady pace (surprisingly, it is outselling Dreamcast year-to-date according to NPD TRSTS sales data). Nintendo continues to do everything in its power to keep the N64 on life-support until its new baby, GameCube, is delivered in fall 2001. This year alone, Nintendo has enticed buyers with special *Donkey Kong 64* and *Pokémon Stadium* hardware bundles and a new line of colorful N64 systems called "Funtastic." Hoping to cash in (again) on the popularity of Pokémon, Nintendo has saved perhaps its best trick for last, introducing a newly redesigned N64 adorned with a large, colorful Pikachu image. Not too many kiddies will be able to resist this cute n' cuddly package.

Things have dried up immeasurably on the software side as third-party support has all but vanished. Next year looks to be a bleak one for N64 owners however, there are still a few notable gems to choose from this holiday shopping season.

1. The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask
Nintendo • $59.95 MSRP

Barring any unforeseen surprises, *Majora's Mask* will most likely be the last great N64 game. Gamers will have a hard time resisting the charms of Nintendo's latest RPG masterpiece as it takes them on an epic journey to save the world from an impending

Continued on page 14

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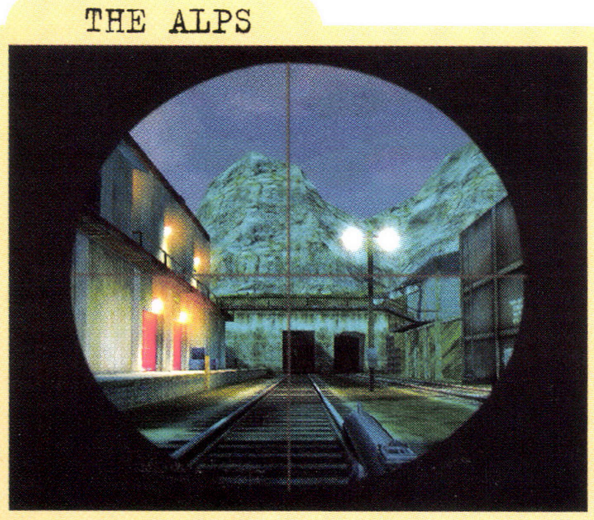

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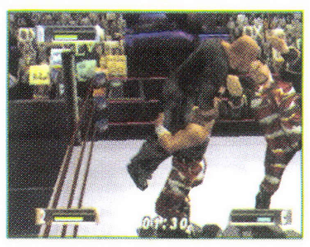
From the Page 10

NINTENDO 64

catastrophe. Following the exploits of our hero Link, *Majora's Mask* takes place in a dark parallel universe where reality and illusion mingle. As the game's name suggests, masks play a major role in Link's adventure as different masks give him different abilities.

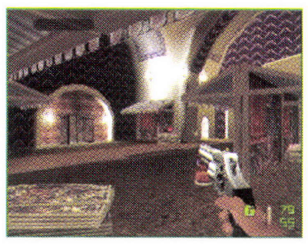
2. WWF No Mercy
THQ • $59.95 MSRP

The massive appeal of WWF professional wrestling is mind-boggling and nowhere is that more evident than in the videogame arena where wrestling-based titles have become an overnight sensation. THQ has been smart (some might even say lucky) to capitalize on wrestlingís mass-market appeal by releasing one hit game after another over the years. *No Mercy* is N64's latest brawler featuring more than 60 wrestlers and 10 arenas to fight in. THQ has done another fine job of delivering a top-notch wrestling title that excels in the two categories that matter most: play control and fun factor.



3. The World Is Not Enough
Electronic Arts • $59.95 MSRP

James Bond returns to N64 in grand fashion, thanks to the combined efforts of publisher Electronic Arts and developer Eurocom. *The World Is Not Enough* follows the movie of the same name very closely, pitting Bond in an international conspiracy involving terrorists and bombs. As far as first-person shooters go, there's not much this game does wrong. Fans of *GoldenEye* will be thrilled with the lush graphics, tried-and-true play mechanics, and high-tech weapons that this title serves up. *GoldenEye* loyalists would be wise to pick this one up.

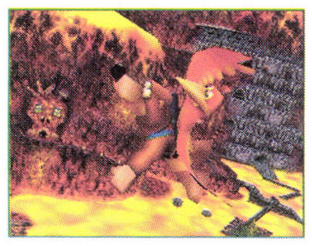


4. Spider-Man
Activision • $59.95 MSRP

The Daily Bugle is reporting that Spider-Man's newest adventure on the N64 has the potential to be the sleeper hit of the year, and who are we to argue with the opinions of J. Jonah Jameson's newspaper? Using the popular line of comic books as a launching point, players take control of Spidey who finds himself embroiled in the timeless struggle of good versus evil as he faces off against a challenging collection of demented foes. Among them, Venom, Rhino and Scorpion—all dedicated to make life a living hell for our beloved web-head. This game allows you to do whatever a spider can. In addition to crawling up walls and swinging from the tops of skyscrapers, Spidey can wrap up enemies with his webbing and throw them against walls, fire solid web balls as projectile attacks, and create spiked gloves to wrap around his fists.

5. Banjo-Tooie
Rare/Nintendo • $59.95 MSRP

Rare squeezes more juice out of the N64 hardware than any developer in the world, including Nintendo. *Banjo-Tooie* taps into the N64's graphics processing abilities to produce some of the most incredibly vibrant, detailed environments ever to grace the console. Although the core gameplay remains the same—players must collect Jiggies to open new areas, collect honeycombs to increase their health, and solve puzzles as they make their way through the game—a host of new features and abilities have been added including the option to take control of multiple characters.



GameWEEK's Holiday Top 5

GAME BOY COLOR

$69.95 MSRP

By Jim Loftus

Sales Pitch:

"Honestly, I can think of no better way to have fun on the road than by playing this little sucker. I've pulled mine out at least a half dozen times at airports just this year alone! At only seventy bucks for the unit—the games are in full color, by the way—and with a ton of great, value-priced software available year-round, you just cannot go wrong."

Nintendo has truly been able to do what no other company has so far: keep a hand-held gaming device and the software that runs on it at or near the top of the sales charts for more than a decade. Fueled by an attractive selection of inexpensive software (can you say *Tetris*?), the original monochromatic Game Boy took the world by storm back in 1989. Since that time, Nintendo has hardly had time to look back and instead, focused on improving an already stellar idea. Take Game Boy Color, for instance. The unit is lightweight, battery efficient, and entertaining as can be when it comes to gaming on the go. There are literally hundreds of titles for consumers to choose from and, while those titles may not all be A-caliber, many of them are arguably some of the best playing pieces of software ever produced for a handheld. With the metamorphosis continuing in the form of Game Boy Advance next year (set to ship in the U.S. in July), the 2000 holiday season may very well end up as the last great year for Game Boy Color revenue (at least the current iteration.) From *Driver* to *Donald Duck*, from *Metal Gear Solid* to *Mary-Kate and Ashley*, there are more Game Boy Color titles than ever before lining the shelves. Of course, if you've been involved with the game industry for any length of time, it should come as no surprise that amid the 100+ new Game Boy Color releases this year alone, Nintendo once again dominates the charts with Pikachu and friends.

1. Pokémon Gold/Silver
Nintendo • $29.95 MSRP

Wildly hyped as one of the deepest and most detail-oriented Game Boy Color titles of all time, *Pokémon Gold* and *Pokémon Silver* are currently setting the world on fire. But hey, you didn't need us to tell you that, right? I'm sure the cash register is ringing away, even as you read these words. Containing an incredibly rich game world, a real-time internal clock (play at night and it's nighttime in the game, too), and a Pokémon breeding function, among other things, the *Gold* and *Silver* series delivers extremely long play value. Number-one with a bullet.

2. Pokémon Pinball
Nintendo • $34.95 MSRP

Take the Pokémon franchise, add two pinball machines and the ability to catch all 150 types

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NINTENDO GAME BOY COLOR

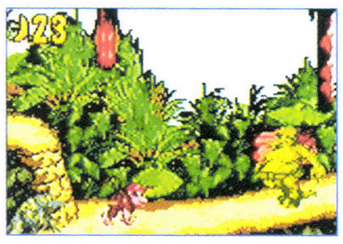
of them there critters, and what do you have? A best-seller. In addition to offering addictive gameplay, *Pokémon Pinball* also provides printer support, link compatibility, and a very clever rumble feature, built right in. *Pokémon Pinball* has been at or near the top of the sales charts for months now, and we don't expect things to change before the end of the holidays.

3. Pokémon Special Pikachu Edition (a.k.a. Pokémon Yellow) Nintendo • $29.95 MSRP

Truth is, this special edition is nothing more than *Pokémon Red/Blue* reworked with a few alterations, such as color tinting and different Pokémon placement. For those fans who have

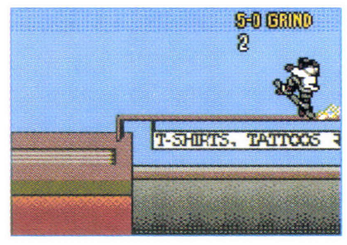
not had the fortune of experiencing Pokémon through either games from the *Red* and *Blue* series, though, this is an absolute must-buy.

4. Donkey Kong Country Nintendo • $29.95 MSRP



With but a few exceptions—namely a limited color palette, a loss of graphic detail, and some collision issues—this is an incredibly faithful port of the 16-bit Super NES classic. Rare has done a magnificent job squeezing every level and bonus round into the Game Boy Color, while keeping the overall gameplay intact. As if all this weren't good enough, two exclusive mini-games—fishing and "whack-a-mole" style events—have also been added. This is sure to please action enthusiasts.

5. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 Activision • $29.95 MSRP



Okay, so it's not composed of texture-mapped polygons and it's not exactly running in 3D, but considering the hardware we're dealing with here, this is pretty solid. Forget the first GBC *Tony Hawk*; the sequel is a huge improvement thanks to a nice mix of side-scrolling, overhead and "simulated" 3D levels. Throw in a ton of trick combinations, secret levels, and two modes of play and you've got a great little package, just begging to be taken on the road.

GameWEEK's Holiday Top 5 PC GAMES

By Andy Eddy

Sales Pitch:

"For the cost of a PS2 on eBay, you can get yourself a decently powered PC… and best of all I have them in stock!"

Game consoles may come and go, but the personal computer seems to be a perennial that maintains popularity over its existence. With a relatively low cost, easy networking connectivity, powerful processor and modular upgradability, a lot of gamers are sticking with the reliable PC as a must-have gaming platform-even if they own a console.

1. The Sims: Livin' Large Electronic Arts • $29.95 MSRP

We've got a trend alert: Sequels and expansion packs. If you're worried about what to stock, you'd be hard-pressed this holiday season to pass up the wealth of solid sequels and expansion packs-which, not surprisingly, hit every slot on this list. Indeed, the recent expansion pack to *The Sims* title is sustaining the goofy popularity of the gibberish-speaking family simulator with the computer-gaming public. Similar to an ant farm, which on the surface doesn't seem like it would offer much entertainment value, *The Sims* franchise strikes a nerve with a blend of strategy, humor and real-life behavior.

2. RollerCoaster Tycoon: Loopy Landscapes Hasbro Interactive • $29.95 MSRP

Who doesn't like the thrills and excitement of a roller coaster? Even those who can't bring themselves to hop aboard the fast-moving rides can still enjoy watching the screaming passengers as they go up and down hills, through loops and otherwise body-twisting turns. That explains the basic appeal of the *RollerCoaster Tycoon* series, which is boosted by this recently released expansion. One step up from riding or watching a coaster-and something generally unattainable in the "real world"-is actually constructing your own hair-raising ride, then putting a group of byte-sized patrons through it to see how well it came out.

3. Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 Electronic Arts • $39.95 MSRP

In the five years since *Command & Conquer* was first released, the real-time strategy genre has taken leaps and bounds. Still, the latest entry, *Red Alert 2*, carries along many familiar features from its predecessors, but avoids falling into a rut by adding and improving-sometimes in subtle ways. For instance, the interface is streamlined, the process of constructing units has been given added flexibility, unit control has been improved and more. Much of the press coverage has noted various "tweaks" and "variations," which means that *C&C* veterans will be comfortable, yet the overall playability has been improved to draw new players into the series.

4. Half-Life: Counter Strike Sierra Studios • $29.95 MSRP

On the surface, the original *Half-Life* looked like just another first-person shooter (FPS), but anyone who played it for more than a few minutes saw that it was much deeper, with a vivid storyline set in science fiction to go along with the thrilling action and compelling gameplay that most FPS titles have. Enter this new chapter, which builds upon *Half-Life*'s multiplayer aspects with a team-based terrorist vs. anti-terrorist premise, new weapons and the need to determine viable strategies. It also provides other "mods," the modifications to the base game that drives a game's replay value.

5. Who Wants to Be a Millionaire 2nd Edition Buena Vista Interactive • $19.95 MSRP

This almost goes without the need for explanation, but *Millionaire 2* certainly doesn't defy reason in following its predecessor to big sales: a trivia game that's at the same time simplistic in design and challenging in substance. Couple that with a nearly all-ages appeal and a good price, and you've got a formula for suceess.

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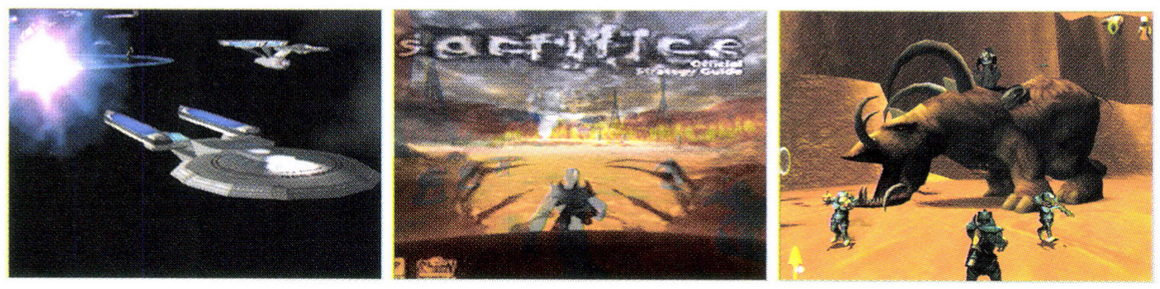
U.S.

MICHAEL
CLARKE DUNCAN

By Mike Dixon

MacPlay Continues Momentum

Company releases three more titles



Left to right: **Starfleet Command Vol. II, Sacrifice *and* Giants: Citizen Kabuto**

Late last month, MacPlay announced three more premium titles for the Mac to be published in 2001. As part of the original MacPlay licensing deal also announced in November, MacPlay has secured from Interplay the rights to publish *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*, *Sacrifice*, and *Starfleet Command Volume II: Empires at War* for the Macintosh.

"This is only the beginning," said MacPlay CEO Ron Dimant. "We're very pleased to announce the first part of our 2001 lineup. These games will look and sound great on Apple hardware, and truly original titles like *Giants* and *Sacrifice* should be in high demand among those who 'Think Different.'"

Giants: Citizen Kabuto is a single and multiplayer game in real-time 3D. In their quest for control of 30 separate islands, players choose from three distinct and diverse races. Sea Reapers are queens of the waters, and can command elemental forces. Meccaryns are an alien military force with technological prowess. Kabuto is the fearsome giant, who can kick around Meccaryns and Sea Reapers like soccer balls, or eat them for snacks.

Sacrifice is a real-time strategy game in which players become powerful wizards who must appease one of five gods. Players command an army of 55 unique creatures in this real-time 3D magical world, and with spells and wizardry, can rain fire upon combatants, or cause earthquakes to alter the battlefield.

Starfleet Command Volume II: Empires at War is the latest space battle simulator set in the Star Trek game universe. Players can command the ships of any of a number of races: Starfleet, Klingon, the Mirak Star League, and others. Several modes of play allow players to forge a career as a starship captain, or simply set up quick battles against computer or human opponents.

"Macintosh gamers will have a lot to look forward to in 2001," stated PR Director Jason Whong. "With these great titles, as well as *Baldur's Gate II* and *Icewind Dale*, MacPlay will provide some of 2001's best games for the Macintosh. HRG

Choosing New Mac Games with Longer Shelf Lives

Many games are released with the potential to sell well in a short period of time, but often lose their popularity quickly after the first several weeks after release. While there are numerous publishers releasing Mac titles these days, only MacSoft and Aspyr Media seem to be pumping out titles that have massive appeal to all audiences (and thus have a greater potential to sell well over a longer period of time). Since so many new Mac games have released over the past few months, here are some recommendations on games that should provide consistent sales in the long-term.

The Sims *and* LinksLS 2000

MacSoft has shifted their focus from hard-core games to titles that are more appealing to a general audience. Not only will this shift help MacSoft sell more titles, but it will help keep more of their games on store shelves longer. Recently released MacSoft titles expected to provide consistent sales include *LinksLS 2000*, *Scrabble* (2000 release), *Jeopardy* (2000 release), *Risk II*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *Mac Tonka Truck Pack*, and *Mac Kids Pack*. All (except *LinksLS 2000*) carry a below-$30 price tag.

MacSoft's *Mac Fun Pack 2* contains four "classic" MacSoft titles repackaged into one box: *Lode Runner 2*, *Play Two Win Casino*, *Real Pool* and *America's Greatest Solitaire Games*. All four games offer good family game variety, and will run on Mac systems that are 6-7 years old (as well as today's currently shipping Mac systems). It is recommended that you have at least a Power Mac system, although one game only requires a 68030 processor.

Aspyr Media caters to the hard-core gamer in a big way. *Madden NFL 2000*, *Need for Speed: Porsche*, and *Star Trek: Elite Force* are all likely to sell quite well in the short term, but you might want to keep an eye on a few other Aspyr titles that will likely out-last the high-end hard core games. *The Sims*, *The Sims: Livin' Large Expansion Pack*, and *Sim Theme Park* are all likely to remain in-demand for quite some time. Next year, Aspyr will release *Escape from Monkey Island*, another game expected to sell well for an extended period of time. HRG

3dfx Releases Mac Voodoo 4 4500 PCI Graphics

Earlier this fall, 3dfx released their high-powered Voodoo 5 card for Mac. Recently, Mac users enjoyed availability of the Voodoo4 4500 PCI graphics board, featuring fully integrated and accelerated 2D/3D rendering capability. Voodoo4 4500 PCI, though less powerful (and cheaper) than the gamer-friendly Voodoo 5, offers a design and publishing solution that delivers high quality image quality. Utilizing a 350 MHz RAMDAC for optimum 2D imaging, the Voodoo4 4500 PCI delivers resolutions as high as 2048 x 1536 (at thousands of colors setting). In addition, Voodoo4 4500 PCI can go beyond analog CRTs to deliver a clean, edge-to-edge creative workspace on all-digital flat panels. Enhanced 2D acceleration yields impressive responsiveness and is further tuned with integrated font and picture caching. So whether users are running Adobe Photoshop, doing layout in QuarkXPress, surfing the Web or taking a break fighting for survival on some alien world, on-screen images should look great at any resolution.

"Graphics designers can expect to take their artistry to a higher level with less hassle using the Voodoo4 4500 PCI," said Bryan Speece, director of Macintosh business development for 3dfx Interactive. "The Voodoo architecture simultaneously delivers better visual quality and higher performance for users of professional Macintosh applications. This means graphics designers, publishers and content creators can expect smoother, cleaner, faster video performance with better visual quality—it's just a better tool."

For $179.99 MSRP, the Voodoo4 4500 PCI exploits the VSA-100 2D/3D graphics processing chip. The Voodoo4 4500 PCI delivers decent levels of Macintosh 3D performance with an impressive fill rate of 333 Megapixels per second. Together with 32 MB of high-speed graphics memory and QuickTime multimedia support, the Voodoo 4 4500 will satisfy many owners looking for more graphics power for less money. Only 3dfx offers full support for Glide, QuickDraw 3D and Apple OpenGL on one card, ensuring compatibility with the widest array of Macintosh 3D titles. HRG

GameWEEK's Holiday Top 5

MAC GAMES

By Mike Dixon

In past years, picking the top five Mac games would have been a cinch. For the second year in a row, game publishers have been releasing record numbers of Mac-compatible games, especially triple-A titles. The choices are numerous, and while Apple might be experiencing a downturn in sales (as are most other PC manufacturers at the moment), Mac game publishers still seem bullish on the future of the Mac as a game platform. The following products are by no means the only high-quality items recommended for Mac users and retailers who sell Mac systems. However, these items do stand out from the pack due to their impact on the Mac game industry and overall popularity.

1. The Sims • Aspyr Media

The Game: A completely original "people simulation," this game allows the gamer to choose everything from when their "sims" to go to the bathroom to what career path they take for each person in each household.

The Sims has broken new ground in the simulation genre, and sold tons of units this year. Not surprising, *The Sims* was just as popular on the Mac as it was on the PC. *The Sims* is tops in this list due to its appeal by all types of gamers, its expandability (via *Livin' Large* expansion pack and numerous online add-ons), as well as its addictiveness. Aspyr Media's warm relationship with Electronic Arts paved the way for *The Sims* to release on the Mac. Prior to *The Sims,* Aspyr published EA Sports' *Madden NFL 2000* in late 1999, which was the first mainstream football game for the Mac and continues to be one of the more popular games currently played.

2. Diablo II
Blizzard Entertainment

The Game: The sequel to the role-playing smash hit game *Diablo*, *Diablo II*, allows the gamer to assume one of five different characters on a series of missions to thwart the evil "Lord of Terror" that is plaguing the countryside.

While *Diablo II* didn't ship simultaneously with the PC version (as had been hoped), this game was one of the most anticipated Mac titles this year. *Diablo II*'s biggest strengths are its incredible amount of game play coupled with even more longevity through its cross-platform network gaming features. Blizzard is now shipping *Diablo II* in a hybrid box (Mac/PC on the same disks), but gamers should be warned to check boxes carefully in stores. There are PC-only and Mac-only boxes still out there.

3. Unreal Tournament • MacSoft

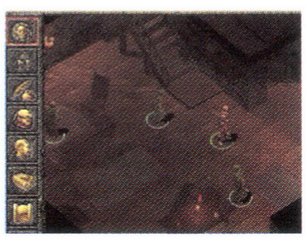
The Game: Based in the future, the "New Earth Government" is trying to reduce violence in its deep space mining colonies. Therefore, the government has decided to organize fighting tournaments that will allow miners to let off some steam. *Unreal Tournament* is a first-person shooter where the gamer assumes one of the miners, and attempts win the tournament.

Prior to MacSoft's shift to releasing more "family friendly" games this fall, they released *Unreal Tournament* earlier this year. *UT* is considered by many as a major challenger to *Quake III: Arena*. While *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament* are both sequels to previously titles and available for Mac, *UT*

is considered by many Mac gamers to be a more original, better-looking, and a more entertaining title than *Quake III*. The online networking features offer extended game play and several modifications can be downloaded from the Internet to allow more single-player gaming.

4. Baldur's Gate
Graphic Simulations

The Game: *Baldur's Gate* is an After *Dungeons and Dragons*-based role-playing game set in TSR's Forgotten Realms campaign. The gamer controls a party of six, who barter and chat with various characters in the game, as well as fight various monsters as well. Gamers can the game strictly by the rules set forth in AD&D.



Many in the Mac game industry almost "wrote off" this game as a viable title for Mac users due to its extremely late release for Mac (*Baldur's Gate II* was shipping for PC when *Baldur's Gate* shipped for Mac). To make matters worse, network play was temporarily left out of the Mac version mainly due to the time it would have taken to get it into the game, and thus delaying the release even further. Network play will be a downloadable updater when it is complete (expected in the next month or so). Still, this game provides nice graphics, a rich storyline, and a vast and extremely lengthy amount of game play even in single player mode, and when the network features are enabled, *Baldur's Gate* will be even more enjoyable.

5. Radeon AGP (2D/3D graphics accelerator card)
ATI Technologies

ATI has been making video cards for Apple for many years. Only recently has Apple's latest systems contained a decent 3D card capable of powering next-generation 3D games and approaching the quality and power found on the PC. Mac gamers got a real boost when ATI brought their Radeon card to the Mac (via bill-to-order option at Apple's online store). Superior to ATI's Rage 128 series, its only competition is from 3dfx's Voodoo 5500...a true gamer's card. ATI nudged out the Voodoo 5 card due to its compatibility with Apples DVD player, its AGP configuration, and the Radeon has slightly better drivers overall. The Voodoo 5 does offer compelling quality improvements in many games, thanks to its full screen anti-aliasing (a feature that the Radeon will offer later...via software update). Both ATI and 3dfx will need to keep an eye out for nVidia, who has indicated their entry into the Mac market is very close at hand.

Honorable Mention:
Deus Ex • Aspyr Media

One Mac game that deserves an honorable mention this year should be *Deus Ex*, published by Aspyr Media. This game truly offered original game play, a compelling and believable story for a first-person shooter game, and longevity. The downsides to *Deus Ex* were its heavy system requirements (prefers a high-end G3 or G4 with over 100 MB RAM available) and the lack of network game play. Otherwise, *Deus Ex* deserves high marks for all that it brings to the table.

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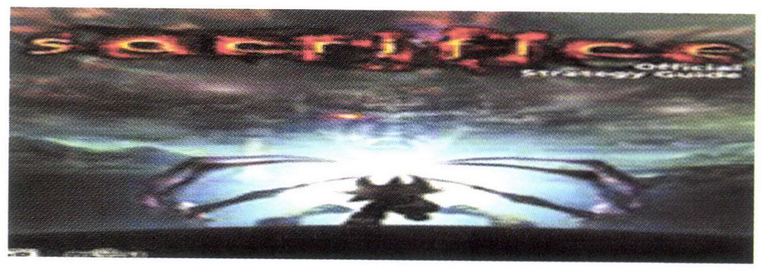

GIANTS CITIZEN KABUTO

FORGOTTEN REALMS Baldur's Gate II Shadows of Amn

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THE SCREAMIN' DEMONS OVER EUROPE

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The Fantasy Kingdom Sim

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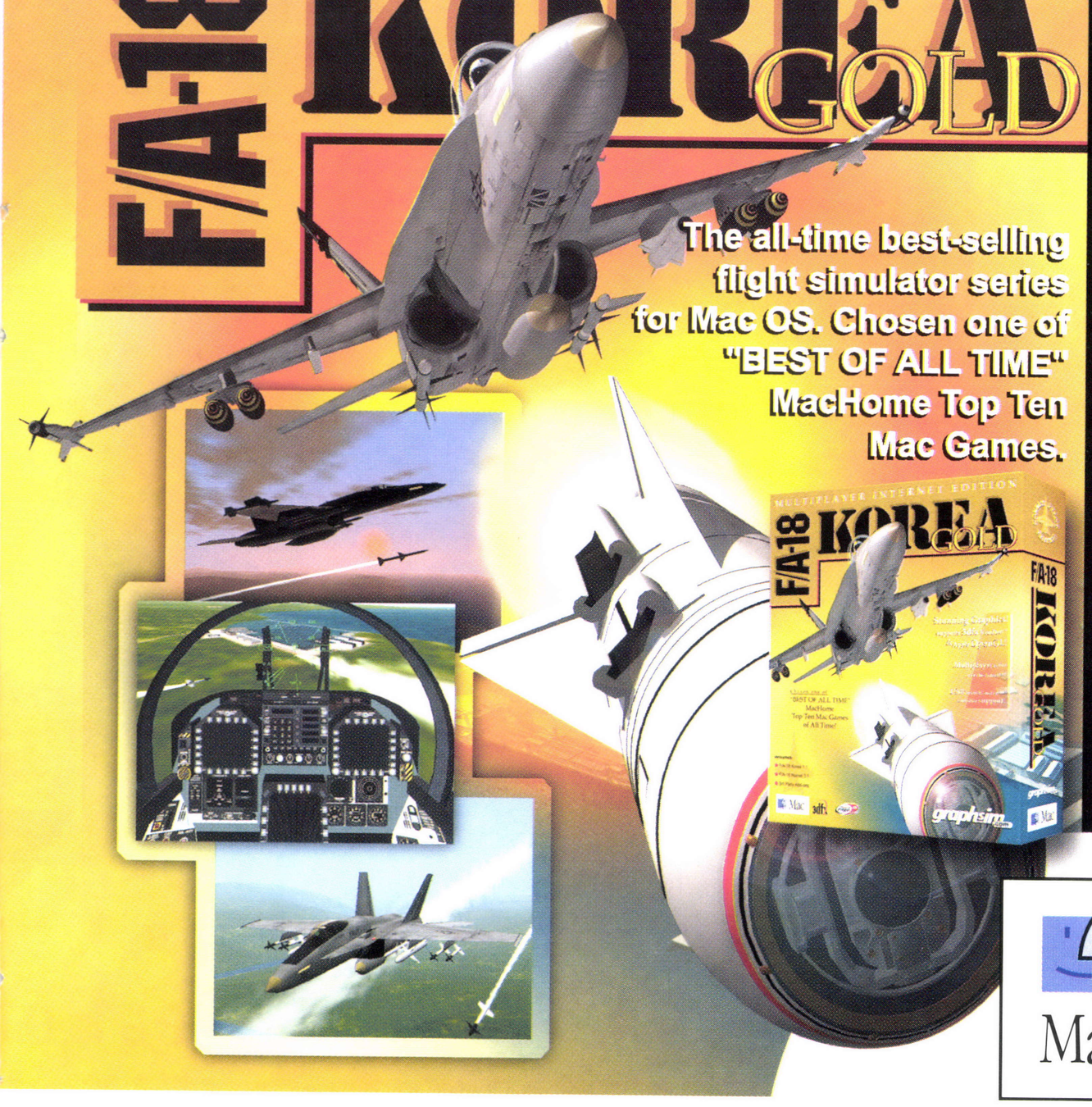

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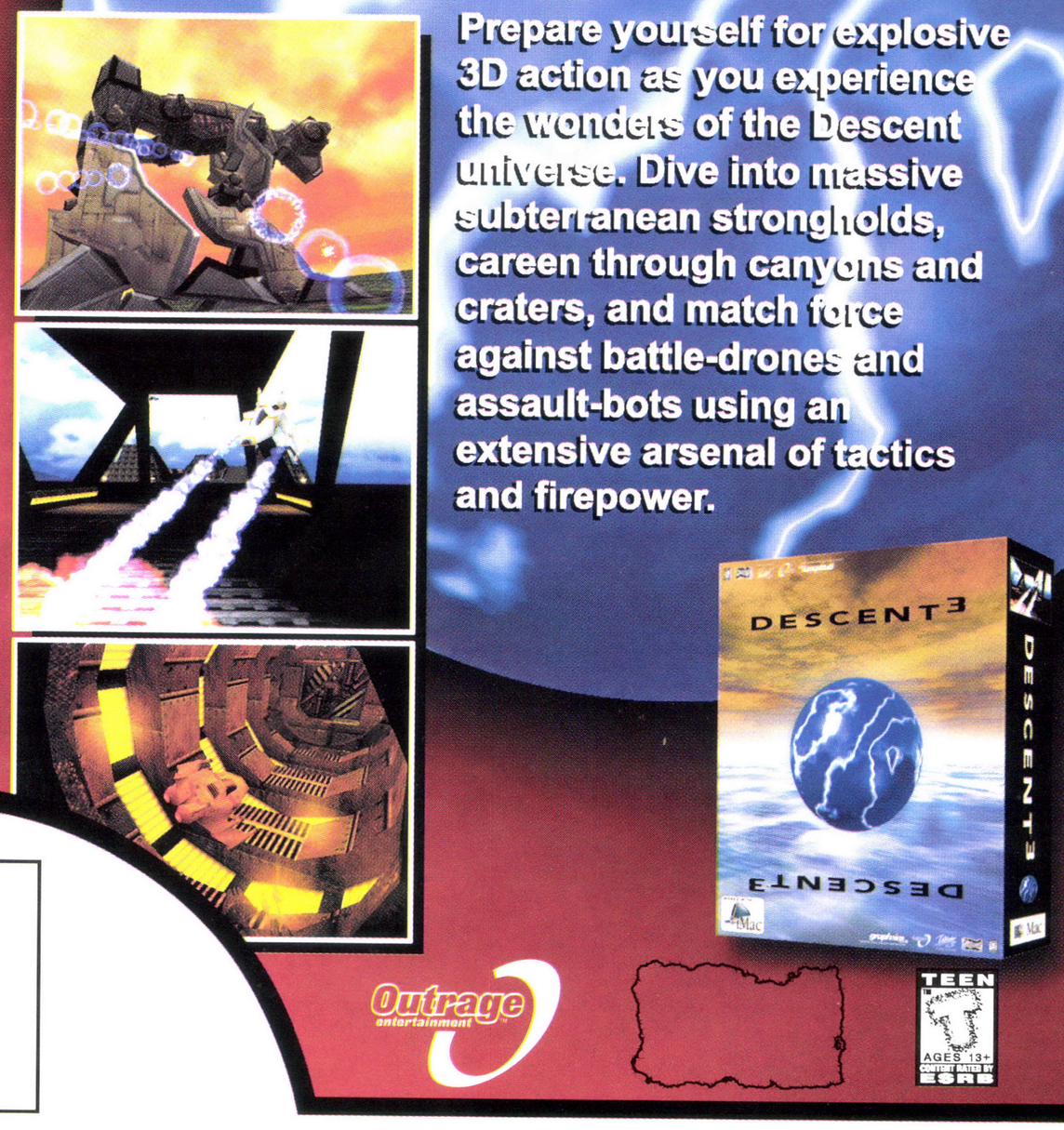

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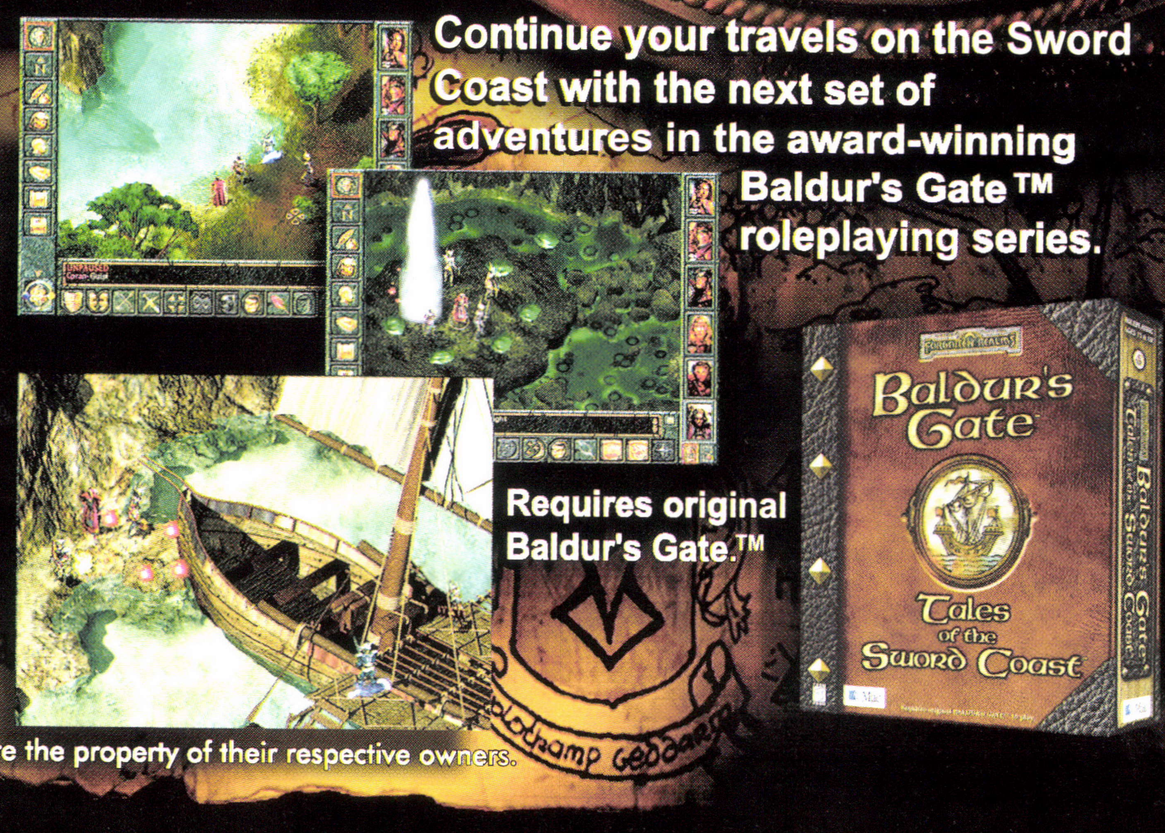

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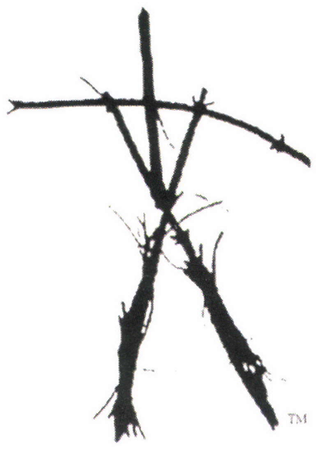
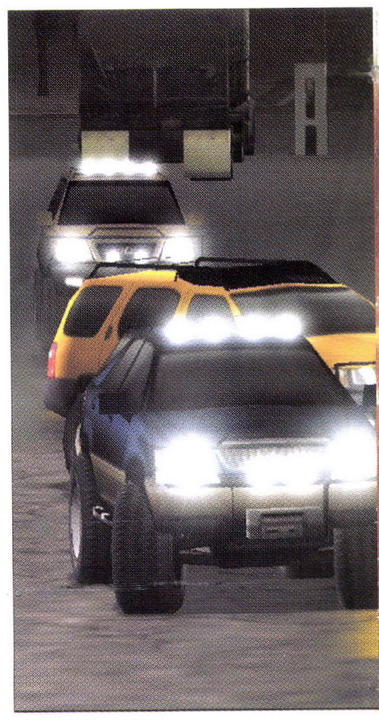
MOST PUBLISHERS WOULD THINK

"G.O.D.'s stuff is almost heretical in its attention ot art and c

"A new gaming trilogy based on The Blair Witch Project is redefining FEAR for computer games." — *RUE MORGUE*





"Dashes of the X-Files and Twin Peaks, combined with great sound and graphics, make [the Blair Witch Series] a winner." — *Fortune Magazine*

"What we found was a beautiful, entertaining, and intense gaming experience. Make no mistake, Rune is an awesome game."
— *Gamecenter*

Rune "9/10" and "Editor's Choice"
—*Gamecenter.com*

"Great of
game of

"The graphics in Rune are excellent, with an exceptional attention to detail on just about every level."
— *Amazon.com*

FAKK2 ETAINA Winner –
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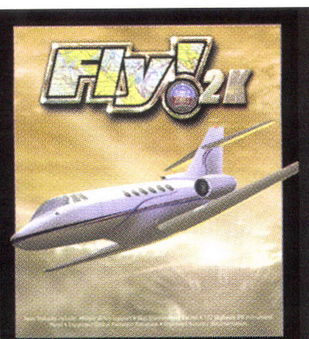
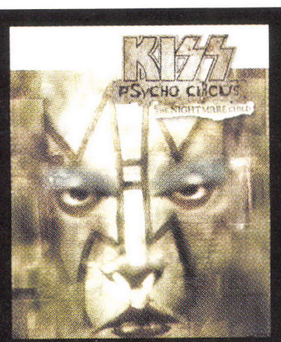
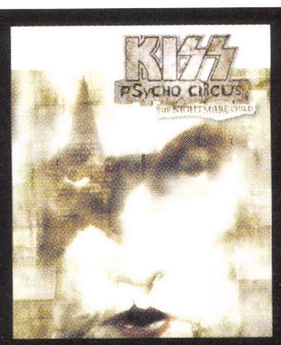
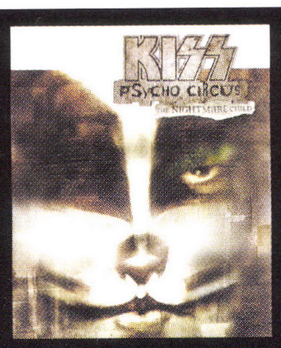
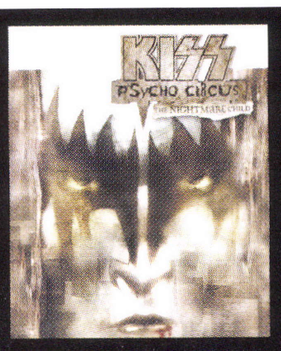










THIS WAS A PRETTY GOOD YEAR.

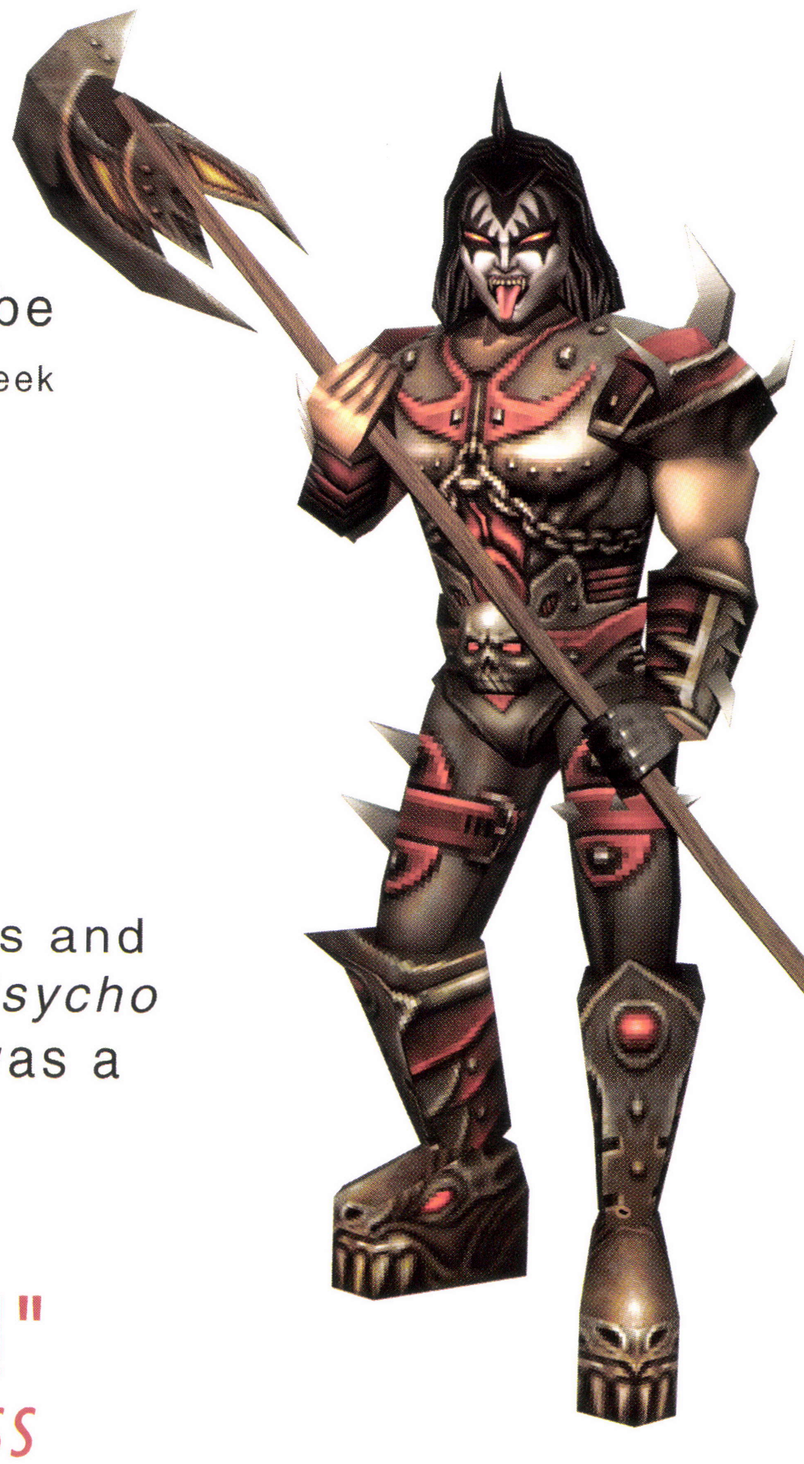
letail." — *SPIN*

"EVO is definitely one of the must-have games of the year."
— Computer Game Fan

"Evo is for the hardcore, whether they be hardcore into trucks or games." — Autoweek

"The bottom line: Deep gameplay and cross-platform online racing make 4x4 Evolution the best 4x4 game going."
— Gamecente

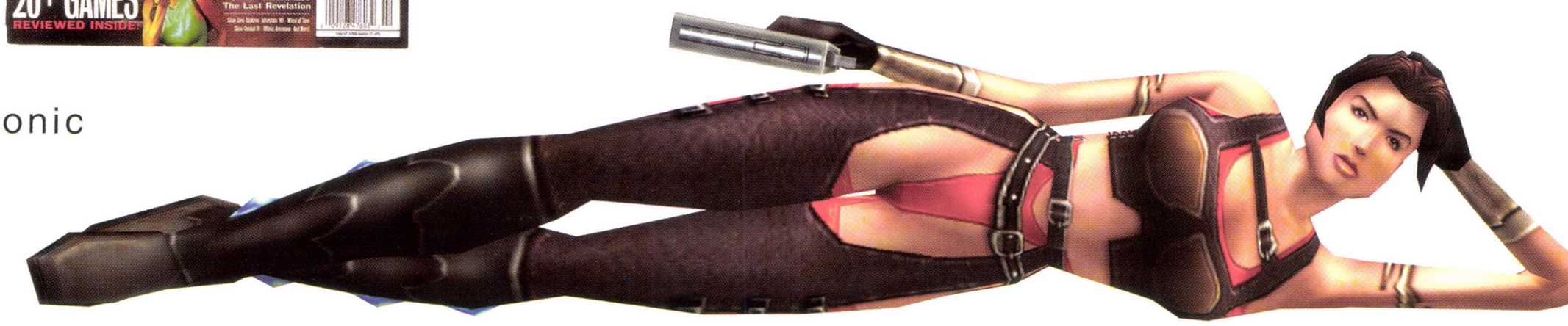
"Lovely to look at and an absolute pleasure to drive and tinker with.."
— PC Gamer



f-road action makes EVO a contender for the year" *— Computer Game Fan*

"Combining the fun of Kiss and Todd McFarlane's *Kiss Psycho Circus* in a video game was a very very good idea."
— Maximum PC.com

"This game rocks!"
— Jane Magazine on KISS



Europe's Electronic
Best Graphics

e" – PC Gamer

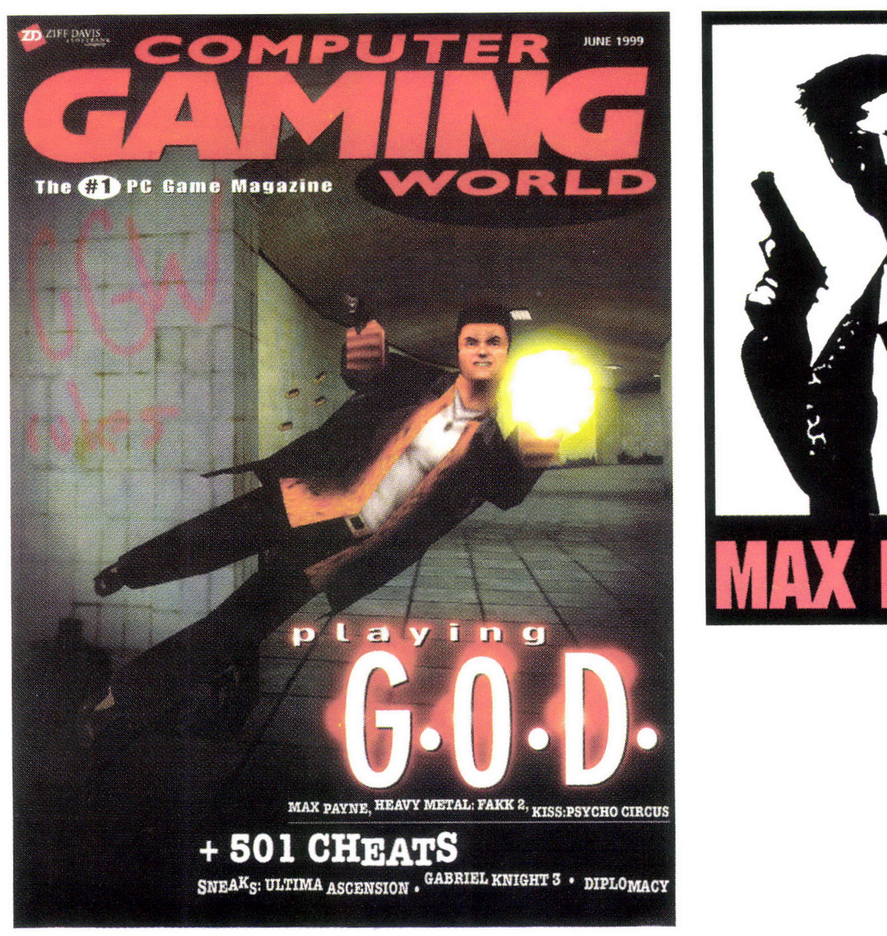
BUT THEN, MOST PUBLISHERS COULD

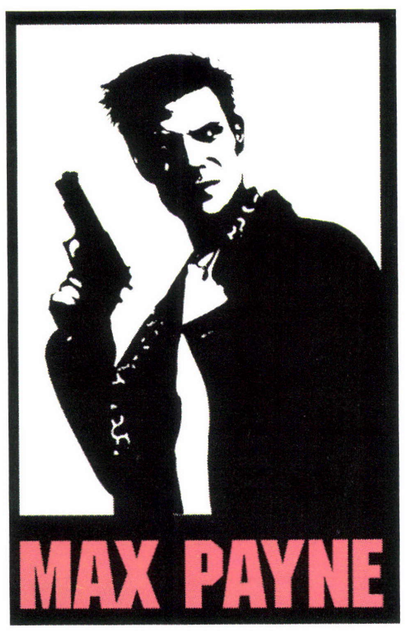
"What unites all of g.o.d.'s titles is that they're clearly made

"This is art...a beautiful game to behold." – *IGN.com*

"Shadowbane is truly spectacular." — *Daily Radar*

"Shadowbane, the #1 Anticipated Game
User Vote October and November 2000

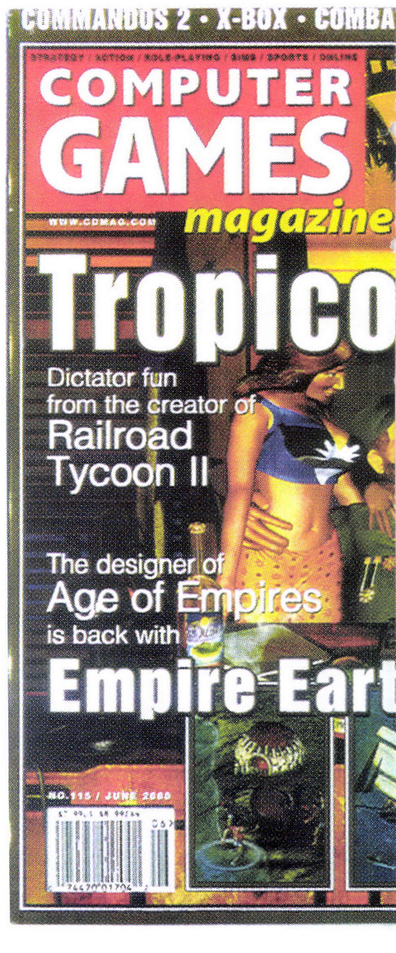




"Max Payne, 3D Realms and Remedy Entertainment is about to bust open a can of whoop ass all over the computer gaming world!"

— *Voodoo Extreme*

"Tropico looks like one of the most innovative and downright fun titles of the year." — Eurogamer

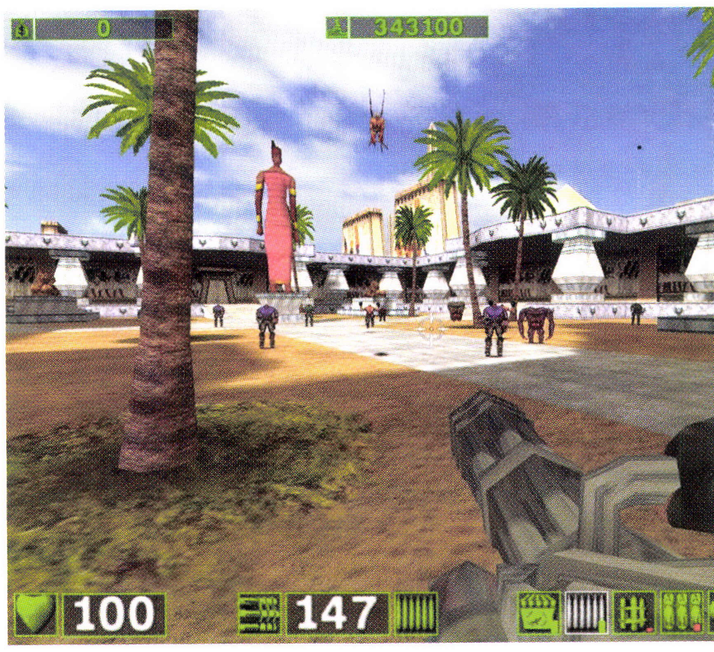


"If there's any game that has given hope to the little game developers of the world, it's Serious Sam."

— *Gamecenter*

"New technology and old-school gameplay mix in this FPS that has Net junkies buzzing"

— *PC Gamer Magazine*



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by gamers who love games." — *SPIN*

"Bungie strikes a cord with both Anime and combat fans with their all-out fighting escapade starring Konoko. It is the new face of third-person action adventure."

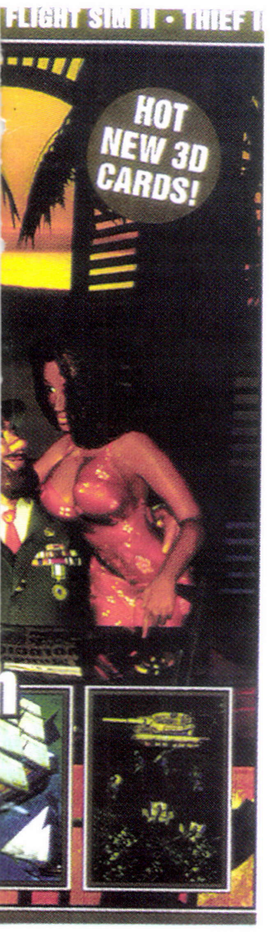
— *GameSpy*

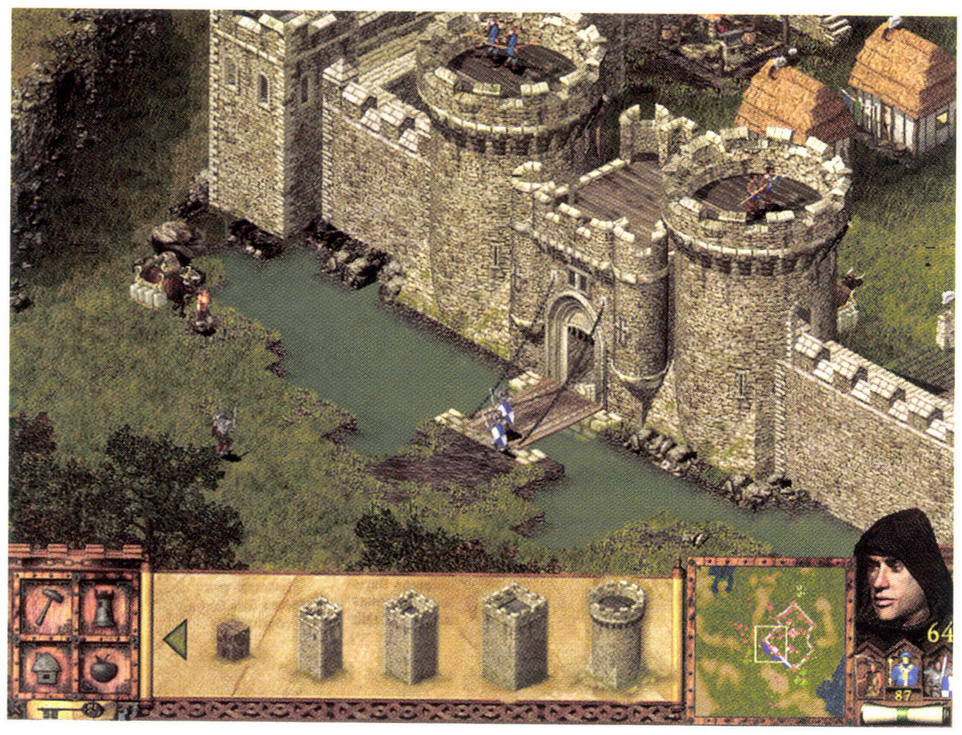
by

" — *PC Gamer*

"We can't wait for Oni!"

- *PC Gamer*





"Stonghold is impressive"

— *IGN PC*

"Stronghold brings an interesting mix of real-time strategy and city building" — *GameSpot*

"Duke Nukem Forever... the most anticipated game ever." —*3D Action Planet*

"In Kingdom Under Fire, Korean Developer, Phantagram, successfully mixes a dollop of Diablo II™ with a vat of StarCraft™ and cooks up one impressive RTS game." — *GameSpy*

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soles and software since the launch last fall, and "from the stores' perspective, games are contributing steadily to the growth of our video division, typically renting from $3.99 to $5.99 for five nights," he adds. Nine-month figures show overall rental revenues for 7,300 worldwide stores up 10.1% to $3.07 billion, compared to $2.79 billion for the 1999 period, with same-store increases up 5%. Online rentals at www.blockbuster.com as of October 30 were available in Austin, TX, and Denver, with other markets to be added soon. Online sales are also increasing, with recent offerings for PSX, PS2 and N64 under "new releases," "hot sellers" and "coming soon" categories. For the holiday quarter, Lundeen expects a big boost from Blockbuster's agreement to rent PS2 consoles and games at all U.S. outlets, with hardware $19.99 for five nights with a $200 deposit and rental agreement. There's also a consumer offer for a $20 PS2 special edition GiftCard. The chain launched the new platform with a 61-day sweepstakes from October 1 through November 30, with one PS2 console given away each day to online registrants.

For the 165 upscale, mass merchant ShopKo stores based in Green Bay, WI, the first nine months were slightly down from last year, reports Steve Boyea, vice president-divisional merchandise manager. He points to Dreamcast software and accessories as one bright spot, GBC slightly ahead for hardware and very much better for software and accessories. PC/Mac entertainment software was very strong but edutainment was way down, similar to NPD figures, and PSX hardware was way down, with software and accessories slow in anticipation of PS2. "Our core shopper is the mom who works," he notes, "and it's vital for us to make her shopping experience fast and pleasant." ShopKo took no preorders on PS2 and filled about 20 to 25% of requests. "Thank goodness for the EA titles that lent credibility to the launch in the absence of many first-party titles," he observes. For the holidays, he'll be watching the demand for DVD movies for the PS2, as he expects most consoles won't be opened until Christmas. "I think the wild card is Dreamcast, as it will depend on how many parents are converted over to the hardware, with the SegaNet launch certainly a positive factor on software sales," he adds. He also sees a strong holiday for GBC, driven by *Pokémon*, with N64 a question mark dependent on more titles like *Majora's Mask*.

At the Musicland Group, Scott Burtness, vice president, hardlines and merchandising for 78 Media Play and over 200 On Cue outlets, reports that overall PC entertainment sales-the core of their software business-were very strong for the first three quarters compared to last year. On the videogame side, in a transition year for PlayStation and Nintendo, he sees Dreamcast continuing to gain share, "and SegaNet looks like a great online gaming experience that also will drive software sales." For the holidays, he's very bullish on the PC side, looking to titles like EA's *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2*, Microsoft's *MechWarrior 4*, Disney's *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire Sports Edition*, EA's *NBA Live 2001* and Sierra's *Tribes 2*. For videogames, he observes that the PS2 launch has brought in a lot of customers, with the stores filling about a third of preorders and hopes for the balance by Christmas. PSX software continues to do well with strong titles like Square's

Continued on page 29

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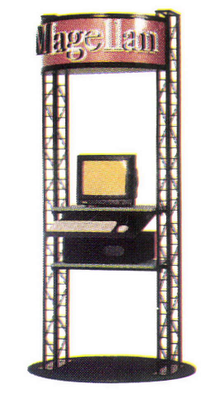

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upcoming *Final Fantasy IX*. For Dreamcast, he sees Sega's own titles *Shenmue*, *NBA 2K1* and *NFL 2K1* "really driving system sales and selling a lot of hardware." GBC also should have a good holiday for hardware, software and accessories, propelled by the recent *Gold and Silver* releases, and N64 should do OK with titles like *Banjo Tooie*.

While Wal-Mart chose not to participate officially in this survey, based on its market share of Sony games products, it's estimated the stores and online site received about 15% of the initial PS2 shipment or about 75,000 units. A big "if" for the holiday game market is Walmart.com, which closed down in late September for several weeks for "remodeling." While the brick-and-mortar stores continue to post double-digit quarterly increases, there was concern about the company's commitment to the Web after more than four years of false starts. However, recent previews of the relaunched site by several investment analysts were very positive about the improved search function and layout. Erik Hagerman, Walmart.com creative director, says he got his ideas from the wide aisles and plentiful signage in Wal-Mart's easy-to-use supercenters. H. Lee Scott Jr., Wal-Mart CEO H. Lee Scott Jr. insists that, "While we care about the numbers, the primary concern this Christmas has got to be customer service and establishing a base that you can build on in the future."

HOLIDAY PROMOS ABOUND

Bonus catalogs and online promotions are among the favorite marketing tools for the holidays. Babbage's Etc. is distributing a 100-plus-page book in mid-November and will have a gift givers' guide in early December. Dan DeMatteo notes that the chain has an ongoing promo on Barnesandnoble.com's software page, and soon will benefit by an in-store integration of the Internet and dotcom divisions, with Babbage's Etc. continuing to provide all games fulfillment.

At Electronics Boutique, major catalog distribution was set for early November, early December and post-holiday to catch new console and PC owners, Jeff Griffiths reports. For EBworld, Seth Levy notes the exceptional fulfillment performance of last year, and promises that the focus again will be on customer service.

At ShopKo, Steve Boyea is very enthused over a new computer software program that will preload special advertised game discount offers for the POS (point-of-sale) checkout terminals. Cashiers will instantly credit the buy a game, get a free accessory offer, or a 20% discount on two purchases, as examples.

For Musicland's Media Play and On Cue stores, Scott Burtness is excited about the first week-long, mid-December run for the chain's twice-a-year "More Byte for Your Buck" megabyte sales event promotion. It will feature all platform games, with added support from promo ads in the Sunday newspaper circulars.

Babbage's Etc. chief DeMatteo sums up the feeling of many retailers, observing that "PS2 is a much broader platform with the bonus of CD audio and DVD video playback that will be the first experience of many gamers with the new technology. If Sony delivers the three million units promised by March, this will increase the 10 million U.S. DVD homes forecast at year-end by 20% or more. The only thing that will sell a new videogame platform is great games, and with the initial two dozen or so at launch as an example, Sony has hit a high-water mark." HRG

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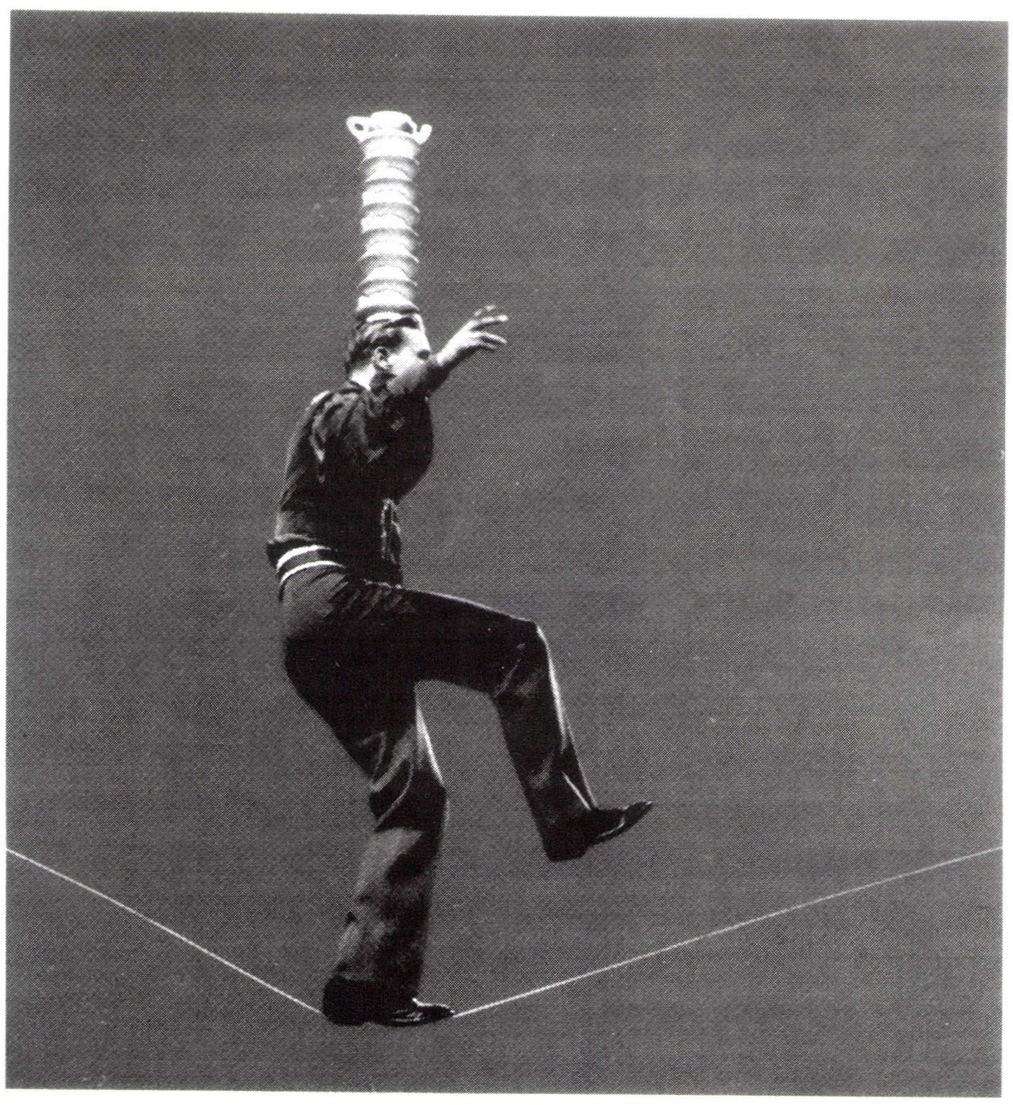

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