



Lifecycle 2 Vol3 #12 12/01

Next Generation Magazine

NextGen

EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

SOUL CALIBUR 2

The best fighting
game ever gets
reinvented for PS2,
Xbox, and GameCube

HOLIDAY REVIEW BLOWOUT

- Star Wars Rogue Leader
- Tony Hawk 3
- Luigi's Mansion
- Crash Bandicoot PS2

PLUS: 23 more heavy-hitters

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that blew us away



GameCube ■ PlayStation 2 ■ Xbox ■ PC ■ Dreamcast

START



PlayStation 2



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PlayStation 2

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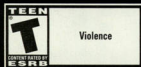
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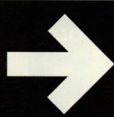
|| NVIDIA



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NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

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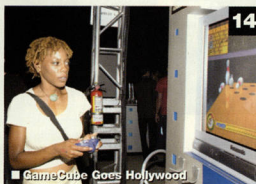
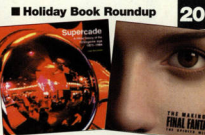
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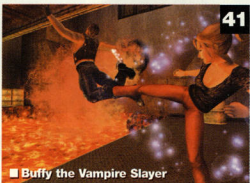
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SOUL CALIBUR 2

The original Soul Calibur stunned gamers everywhere and put Dreamcast on the map. Can the sequel repeat the magic? 64

Special

GAMECUBE LAUNCH!

The comprehensive guide to Nintendo's hotly anticipated new machine, as only Next Gen can bring it to you 76

12/01



EDITORIAL

62 and out



Well, after working on 62 of Next Generation's total of 84 issues, I have to do the hardest thing an editor can do, and that's say goodbye. I depart knowing this magazine is in the hands of a very talented and dedicated staff. And needless to say, it was an extremely difficult decision to leave the best damn videogame magazine on the planet.

There hasn't been a day in five years I haven't woken up thinking about how Next Gen could better cover the world of games. I'll never put this magazine behind me, as I know each month, I'll eagerly put it in front of me to get the best insider information, honest reviews, and cutting-edge previews of the games I want to play. The coming year promises plenty of fantastic stories just waiting to be told.

As this is my last issue, I've enclosed a couple parting gifts. The first is an incredible look at *Soul Calibur 2*, starting on page 64. And then there's the GameCube launch feature — the finest launch feature in the history of the magazine — beginning on page 76. To all of you loyal, hardcore readers, thanks for your continuing support. It's been a five-year dream.

Tom

— Tom Russo

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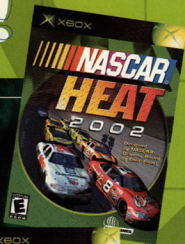
→ Ending

'Til next we meet

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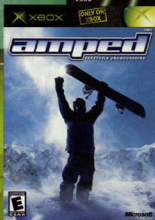
You've never played like this before!



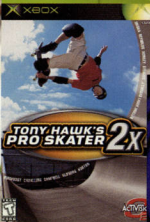
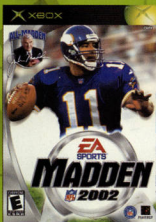
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→ News

Game industry news and analysis



■ PARTY TIME

GameCube Goes Hollywood

Nintendo kicks off its Cube Club tour in style



Los Angeles, CA — Celebrities were mingling, drinks were flowing, and music was pumping, but this was definitely not your average Los Angeles party — not when videogames

took center stage. Deep in the heart of LA, Nintendo threw an exclusive bash to launch its Cube Club promotion, a traveling nightclub/demo center drumming up excitement for GameCube's November 18

launch. The packed house was of the "don't bother if you're not on the list" variety, and **Next Gen** was on hand to see if GameCube's silicon would be well received by tinsel town's glitterati.

Hey, Isn't That...?

The MTV-cosponsored event had more than its share of pretentious wannabe starlets, but it also attracted celebs who truly wanted to check out Nintendo's new system before it hit stores.



■ Clockwise from top: A truly "Motley" crew: Nintendo EVP Peter Main, Nintendo VP Perrin Kaplan, actress/model Donna D'Errico, and Motley Crue bassist Nikki Sixx; Tony Denman (*Forza*) and The Shermanator from *American Pie 2* (Chris Owen); Nintendo's Main and Vin Diesel (*The Fast and the Furious*); Whatever It Takes' Aaron Paul (left) fights over the next game of *Wave Race*; LL Cool J snuggles up with a little NBA Courtside 2002



Who was that playing a little *Star Fox Adventures*? None other than *Titanic*'s Leonardo DiCaprio. Also on hand were Kirsten Dunst (*Bring It On*), Tobey Maguire (*The Cider House Rules* and the upcoming *Spider-Man: The Movie* film), Motley Crue bassist Nikki Sixx and his supermodel/actress wife Donna D'Errico, rap icon LL Cool J, Tara Reid (*Josie and the Pussycats*), Marlon Wayans (*Scary Movie*), and 'N Sync member/grammar-school pin-up boy Joey Fatone.

The first stop on Cube Club's 12-city tour (it will also

hit Chicago, Atlanta, Phoenix, Detroit, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Boston, Seattle, Dallas, and New York) featured demo kiosks playing Luigi's Mansion, Super Smash Bros. Melee, Wave Race: Blue Storm, Star Fox Adventures, NBA Courtside 2002, and Rogue Squadron II. Not unlike Nintendo's booth at E3 earlier this year, this last title was again the most impressive game on display, reinforcing the notion that it will be the system-seller required to compete with PS2 and Xbox. Although much of the

sound was lost due to the beats spun by DJ Paul Sevigny, special rooms were sectioned off that allowed attendees to sample the Dolby 5.1 surround sound that accompanied the games.

ID, Please

The choice of a nightclub-style promotion to market GameCube illustrates Nintendo's willingness to widen its core audience and capture the interest of gamers traditionally turned off by its Pokémon franchise. Obviously, Nintendo is trying harder to prove that





■ A sign of the apocalypse? N Sync's Joe Fatone with NOA's EVP George Harrison and Malcom Reese from *Malcolm in the Middle*.

GameCube isn't a toy.

With so many non-hardcore adult gamers on hand, the GameCube premiere party was an eye-opening testing ground for how the general public will take to Nintendo's new image. *Rogue Squadron II* impressed attendees who were willing to spend some time mastering the targeting system, but proved a little too complex for those looking to pick up a controller and simply play. Games such as *Super Smash Bros.* and *Wave Race* offered the simplistic gameplay that

made them much more accessible for the 10-minute spurts that most partygoers seemed willing to spend on a title. Those who obviously were comfortable with a controller in hand, such as Justin Berfield (Reese from *Malcolm in the Middle*), were better prepared to handle the complex control scheme of games like *NBA Courtside 2002*. And good news to those looking forward to November 18: All the games looked spectacular (although we say Nintendo loaded the deck a bit by having them play on HDiVs).

Can Nintendo capture a share of the market of older gamers currently held by Sony and also being targeted by Xbox? It will take a lot more than a swanky Hollywood party to convince us it can, but Cube Club was a pretty good start.

— Kevin Toyama

■ NO SOFTWARE = NO EXCITEMENT

GameCube Launch in Japan

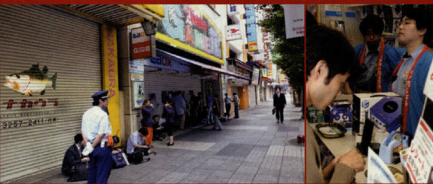
A measly three games spark little interest

→ The Japanese premiere of GameCube passed with a yawn on September 14, as GameCubes were still in ample supply the day after the launch. Despite having only 500,000 units available (versus 700,000 units slated for the U.S.), there was nowhere near the consumer fervor that accompanied last year's Sony PlayStation 2 release in Japan, when stores featured lines of eager customers often snaking around the block.

The relative apathy toward Nintendo's new console came from its extremely limited day-of-launch game offerings, which consisted of *Luigi's Mansion*, *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, and *Super Monkey Ball*. In Akihabara, Shinjuku, and Ikebukuro, areas of Japan catering to gamers, the lack of lines could be attributed to Nintendo's lack of available hardcore games. Many people in Japan view GameCube as a toy, and the brisker business being done by parents in department stores seems to confirm this sentiment.

What does this mean to U.S. gamers? In the short term, not much. There will be 15 GameCube titles available by the end of 2001, with a few offerings targeted at older gamers (see GameCube launch feature, page 76). But if Japan fails to embrace GameCube, it may lead game developers to choose PlayStation 2 or Xbox over GameCube, leaving GameCube owners with little more than first-party titles from which to choose.

— Christophe Kagotani/Kevin Toyama



■ Few hardcore gamers in Japan had enough interest to buy a GameCube on Day One

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

→ Microsoft may have stumbled here and there in bringing Xbox to Japan, but it's nice to see they're getting there. At a press conference held in Japan this past October, the big green "M" announced that Amped Freestyle Snowboarding will be renamed Tenku for the Land of the Rising Sun. Also, they were pleased to present Jockey's Rood, the Xbox's entry into that obscure, yet insanely popular Japanese subgenre, the "jockey RPG." Microsoft's fledgling equestrian effort will apparently feature "over 3000 horses" (though hopefully, not all at once). Now, if Xbox can just land a few dating simulators and a strip mah-jongg title or two, it'll be all set.

On the other hand, Microsoft got an inadvertent bit of kicking from the Japanese around the same time. The Japanese Computer Entertainment Software Association announced the cancellation of the Spring 2002 Tokyo Game Show, citing declining attendance by both exhibitors and the public. However, given the February 3 launch date for Xbox in Japan, Spring TGS had doubtless figured largely into Microsoft's promotional plans.

TGS will apparently now be a single, annual event (just like E3 in the U.S.).

And who is that sending out press releases again from deep in the heart of Texas? Why, it's John Romero and Tom Hall, late (way, way late, as it turned out) of Ion Storm, announcing the foundation of a new company, Monkeystone, whose first project is an action-puzzle game called *Hyperspace Delivery Boy* for Pocket PC, due out November 1. Yes, it's a small (but "really fun," says Hall) title for a handheld platform, which is where the new company will focus most of its attention, cranking on titles for GBA, Pocket PC, and mobile BREW applications. We can't help but comment on how the almost scrupulously modest goals of Monkeystone could not possibly be any different from the long legendary, grandiose excesses of Ion's rollout — what a difference a few years make, eh? (Although, they apparently still haven't ditched that penchant for awkward game names.) Still, we're glad to have them back, and wish them well.

As by now you've no doubt noticed, Sony

spectacularly failed to lower the U.S. price of PlayStation 2 for this holiday season. This means their year-and-a-half-old system will cost exactly as much as a brand-new Xbox (\$299 MSRP), and \$100 more than Nintendo's equally shiny GameCube (at a paltry \$199). In a nod towards fairness, however, Sony Europe actually did significantly drop the price of a PS2 over there — to around the equivalent of \$300 (£199). And yes, this actually is down, from the previous Euro price of \$385 (£260). Count your blessings while you can.

Here's a can in point: This had to happen sooner or later, and we guess this is as later as it can get, for which we are thankful. THQ, the industry's most consistently profitable company, built on the base of countless wrestling games, has found a new property to license and it is — Britney Spears. No, we did not make that up. Ms. Spears' taut, bare tummy will be gracing PS2, PC, and Game Boy Advance by sometime next year. We sincerely doubt THQ plans any Britney-WWF crossover titles, but maybe if we all wish really hard...

NextGen



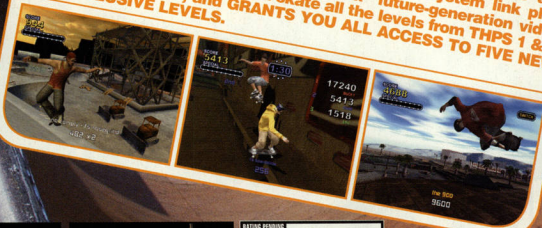
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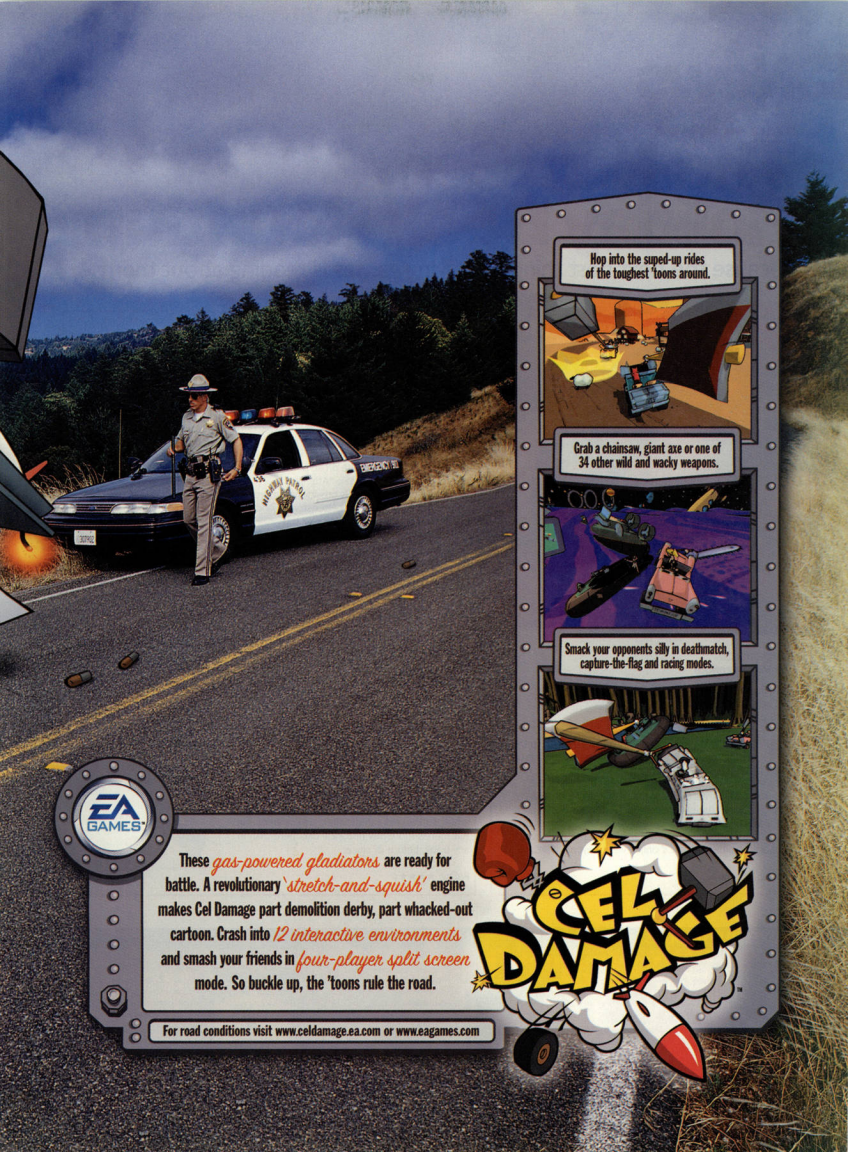
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Comic Mischief
Violence



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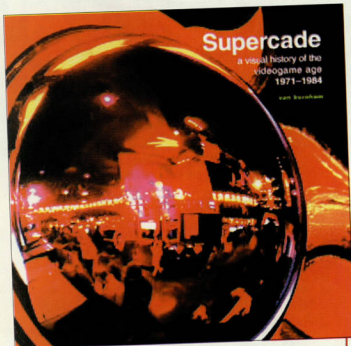
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■ READ 'EM AND WEEP

The NextGen Holiday Book Roundup

Because the next best thing to playing games is reading about them



Supercade By Van Burnham

MIT Press
10" x 10" hardcover,
448 pages, full color, \$49.95

➔ Though well-written and informative, the text in this striking tome definitely takes a back seat to page after page of sense-overloading images, covering every important arcade game and home console from the dawn of the industry to 1984. It's occasionally artistic at the expense of clarity, as when the entry describing Asteroids waxes metaphysical, or when a photo taken in 1975 accompanies text that discusses the events of 1972. Still, this is the ultimate videogame picture book. If only it went beyond 1984...

Rating: ★★★★★

Arcade Fever By John Sellers

Running Press
8" x 9" softcover,
200 pages, full color \$18.95

➔ This slim volume offers a fun (though slightly too nostalgic) look at 50 classic arcade machines, seasoned with plenty of pop culture. But it's definitely playing Pengo to the other books' Pac-Man. The prose tends to resemble teen TV hip-speak: "Asteroids rocked, hard style." Phoenix provides far more data. *Ultimate History* tells better stories. And unlike the larger, classier *Supercade*, this book shoplifts the cheesy art style of the period instead of paying tribute to it.

Rating: ★★★☆☆



Phoenix: The Fall and Rise of Videogames (Third Edition) By Leonard Herman

Rolenta Press
8 1/2" x 10 3/4" softcover,
388 pages, B&W \$24.95

➔ The original bible of videogame history. This new, larger edition adds coverage of the years 1997 to 2000. There are still a few inconsistencies. (For example, the Microvision's release date is given as 1982 on one page and 1979 on another.) The too-sparse photos are still B&W, and Herman is a historian, not a professional writer, so the text can definitely be cumbersome. But there's more raw historical data here than in any book, before or since.

Rating: ★★★★★



OLDIES BUT GOODIES

While the focus on these pages is on new releases, there are a few game-related books out there that should already be on your shelves.



Game Over: Press Start to Continue By David Sheff & Andy Edy

■ The story of how Nintendo transformed itself from a manufacturer of playing cards to the most legendary videogame company in the world. Originally published in 1993, but now covering events up through 1999



Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution By Stephen Levy

■ Features before-they-were-famous profiles of such famous computer geeks as Bill Gates, Steve Wozniak, and the MIT Model Railroad Club (creators of Spacewar!, the game that started it all)



Fire in the Valley: The Making of the Personal Computer (Second Edition) By Paul Freiberger & Michael Swain

■ Similar to *Hackers*, this title focuses more tightly on the people behind the genesis of the computer industry's mega-players Microsoft and Apple

DO-IT-YOURSELF GAME PROGRAMMING

While not quite on par with Time Life's Do-It-Yourself Home Repair series, Prima Tech's Game Development Series publishes a vast selection of instructional tomes for those who prefer their games a bit more hands-on. Titles range from broad, theoretical topics like Game Design:

The Art & Business of Creating Games to more narrowly focused subjects like Pocket PC Game Programming and Isometric Game Programming with Direct X 7.0. With subject matter like this, it's little shock that the prose can be mercilessly dry much of the time, but this is often an unfortunate byproduct of the large amount of technical knowledge and benefit conveyed within. Most volumes also come with a CD-ROM filled with HTML references, software tools, and sample projects.



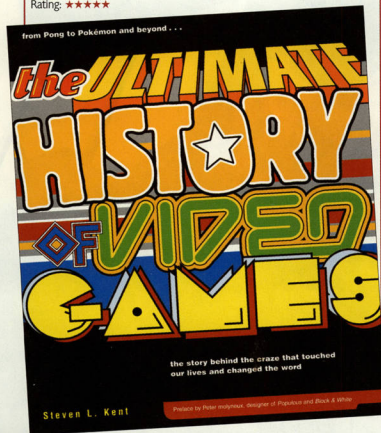
The Ultimate History of Video Games

By Steven L. Kent

Prima Publishing
6" x 9" softcover,
624 pages, B&W, \$18.95

→ Kent's excellent self-published book, *The First Quarter*, returns with a new title, 100 more pages (including a new, more current final chapter), a timeline, a B&W photo gallery, and meticulous error correction. It also makes the best read of the bunch, full of great stories — like the fascinating relationship between Atari and Kee Games — and constant quotes from people who were there when history happened.

Rating: ★★★★★



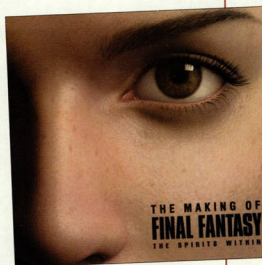
The Making of Final Fantasy The Spirits Within

By Steven L. Kent & Tim Cox Brady Games

11" x 11" hardcover,
240 pages, full color \$29.99

→ This handsome entry has an amazing cover image, tons of concept art, a storyboard gallery, and plenty of fascinating behind-the-scenes information. But there are some odd inadequacies. Hironobu Sakaguchi's foreword is badly translated. Then, for some bizarre reason, the book devotes 19 pages to reprinting a preliminary draft of the script instead of the final version. Why? (Don't tell us the script wasn't done when the book went to press — this was an animated film.) Most importantly, the book's page design completely fails to showcase the film's amazing visual imagery. Far too much real estate is devoted to creating an art-deco feel, with lots of empty (i.e. wasted) page space and atypically shaped text boxes. There are still plenty of "making of" pictures, but really dazzling finished shots — particularly from action scenes like the characters' confrontations with the phantoms and the Quatro's climactic descent into the crater — are strangely uncommon.

Rating: ★★☆☆☆



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"An Excellent Toolkit" - Dr. Dobbs Journal - August 2000

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Zap! The Rise and Fall of Atari

By Scott Cohen

■ This one's a bit dated — it was originally published way back in 1984 — and much of the information is covered in other books. But the author's misguided predictions for the future (now nearly 20 years old) are nearly worth the price of admission. Case in point: "No video game company is going to do as well as IBM, Apple, Commodore, or Radio Shack" and the assertion that, by the year 1986, "the systems will probably be so crummy that nobody will want a video game anymore."

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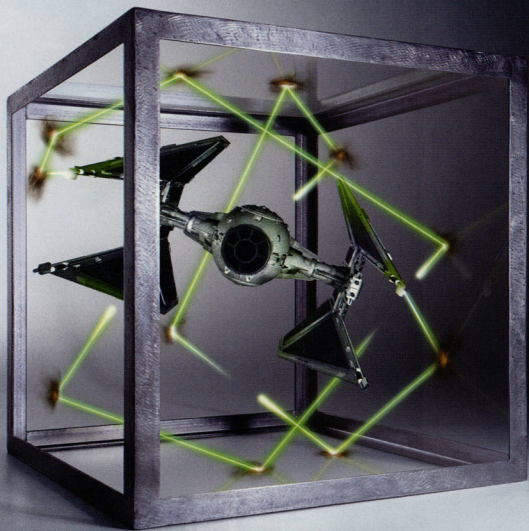


6 all new mission types



Violence





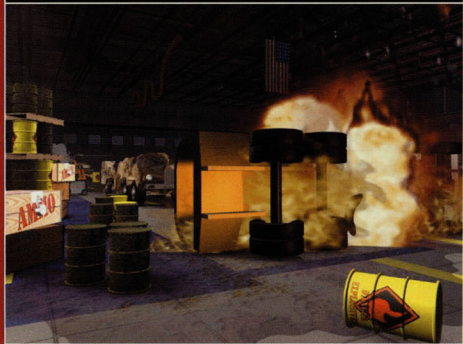
In the Studio

12/01

Development news as it develops

THE RETURN OF AREA 51

→ This isn't your Uncle Carmine's Area 51. For years, Midway's popular alien-blasters sucked in the quarters at every third pizza parlor across the land. This time, the company is foregoing the arcade's point/shoot/reload formula for a home title featuring tactical squad-based gameplay. Sources indicate the game will be similar in design to *Rainbow Six*, only players will have to destroy the alien forces that have overrun the least secret of secret government bases. Sounds cool to us.



19% AIN'T BAD...

→ ...If you're Sony, and that's how much of Square you've just purchased. Rumors had been abounding that Square was in ongoing negotiations with Nintendo and Microsoft for future deals. However, Sony swept in and purchased 11.2 million shares of the struggling company behind *Final Fantasy*. (The *Final Fantasy* movie yielded only \$32 million at U.S. box offices but reportedly cost around \$135 million to make.) Square will write off a 10.7-billion-yen loss, and while Sony's investment doesn't necessarily limit Square from making games for GameCube or Xbox, it certainly moves the company 19 steps closer to Sony's camp.

WAR OF THE RING LORDS

→ While the hobbits at EA are busy working away on *Lord of the Rings* games based on the upcoming movies, the ones at Universal Interactive are making their own plans. Universal has secured the rights to a massively multi-player universe based on Tolkien's books, and the company is currently negotiating with Australian-based Microforte to do the development.



AQUAMAN COMETH

→ Well it seems even second-tier super-heroes are getting their own games these days. Nowhere is this more evident than in TDK's decision to license the defender of the seas, Aquaman, from DC comics for use in games on undisclosed next-generation systems. Although the first *Aquaman* game won't be ready until 2002, we are expecting cross-promotional tie-ins with Starkist Tuna, and given Aquaman's telepathic powers — the Psychic Friends Network.



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Violence



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GameCube Watch

12/01

GameCube is here. Is Nintendo ready?

➔ By the time you read this, GameCube will be upon us. It's about time, you're probably saying, and we couldn't agree more. As we jump head-first into full coverage of Nintendo's next-generation console this month, we bid a hearty good-bye to GameCube Watch. But not before taking one last gander at what's happened leading up to the launch

of the console, the announcements made, and a brief summary of things to come.

Evil Arrives

Easily the biggest surprise of the last few months came directly out of Capcom Japan in September. The company announced that it had cancelled the PlayStation 2 version of *Resident Evil 4* and, going forward, that the

franchise would be exclusive to Nintendo's next-generation console. The first of the series to hit GameCube is a remake of the original *Resident Evil*. Director Shinji Mikami, who created the survival horror phenomenon, is responsible for the update, which features spectacularly enhanced graphics, tweaked gameplay mechanics, and a slightly changed

storyline to boot. The screenshots of the title you see below are running in realtime on GameCube hardware.

Resident Evil (the remake) will hit GameCube March 22 of next year. Following that, Cubists will see a port of *Resident Evil 2* which, according to Capcom, will not see the major visual overhaul of the original, as doing that would simply take too much time. The original *Resident Evil 0* — a game that takes place almost entirely on a zombie-infested train — is set to arrive shortly after that. You'll also see ports of *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* and *Code: Veronica*, both — like *Resident Evil 2* — with only minor tweaks from their predecessors. And finally, Capcom will debut the long-anticipated *Resident Evil 4* on GameCube at an undisclosed date, presumably sometime in 2003. It's clear that GameCube has become the console of choice for those hoping to blow a few heads off the walking undead.

More From Capcom

Capcom is also working on Mickey Mouse for GameCube, which Nintendo has previewed in video form at a number of its shows. However, Shinji Mikami recently told the Japanese press that beginning this past September, he had started work on an all-new, original, still-secret GameCube project. No word on what that title



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

could be just yet, but given the director's past work it's bound to be something targeted at an older audience.

Eternal (+ 3 months) Darkness

It seems that Silicon Knights' "psychological thriller" *Eternal Darkness* — a game all too often (and perhaps unfairly) compared to Capcom's zombie-licious franchise — may just go directly up against it next year. Recent word out of Nintendo suggests that the title will see a three-month delay from its scheduled December 3 release date to late February or early March of 2002 — coincidentally the same time *Resident Evil* will launch for the next-generation console in Japan. According to insiders, the Canadian-based development studio wanted a little more time to iron out chinks in the game's armor, so to speak, before release. Here's hoping that the setback doesn't put the game in a release window where it could be largely overlooked by Capcom's immense franchise.

NextGen



■ More over Luigi — these are big boy monsters. *Resident Evil* on GameCube running in realtime looks scary all over again

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→ Alphas

Next Generation warps in, blasts the Mutants, and gets the scoop, all before the Baiters are spawned

41 ■ Buffy the Vampire Slayer



46 ■ Wreckless



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Star Wars Obi-Wan 56

■ PLAYSTATION 2

DEFENDER

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: 7 Studios ■ Release Date: Fall 2002 ■ Origin: US

Can the publisher of *Spy Hunter* and *Gauntlet Legends* resurrect the mother of all shooters? It's sure as hell going to try



Arcade classics are usually better left untouched. The games that we remember as beauty queens 20 years ago typically come back today looking like the Bride of Frankenstein. But after Midway's excellent *Spy Hunter* modernization, we can't help being excited over the company's next project: a reworking of Eugene Jarvis' finger-blisteringly intense space shooter, *Defender*.

"It's simply all-out action, with some small elements of strategy involved. You just jump in and start fighting, just like the original *Defender*," promises Product Manager Patrick Dillon. And in fact, the basic theme of gameplay — blasting zillions of human-abducting, visually abstract, techno-organic things from outer space into little, tiny pieces — remains refreshingly

simple and elegant.

However, almost everything has increased in scale. For instance, the action will now range across seven different celestial bodies, from Saturn's moon, Titan, to the big, blue marble we call home. Actually, "big blue marble" may not be accurate: "It's no longer a blue planet," intimates Producer Dave Brooks. "It's more of a red. It's not the peaceful Earth you knew."

Your ship, too, has evolved. You'll eventually have six to choose from, each with different firepower, speed, armor, and cargo capacity. Ships will also boast new abilities necessitated by the move to a 3D environment. Pre-programmed evasive maneuvers like a barrel roll, a quick turnaround, and even a 360-degree loop can all

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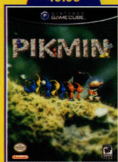
199⁹⁹

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GameCube
System**

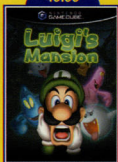
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■ This Alien Forge is an example of what the enemy's bases will look like — until you blast them

be executed with a simple twist of the joystick. Then there's the Super Thrust, a rocket boost that can carry the player swiftly out of danger, replacing the original game's Hyperspace feature. The Smart Bomb, too, will most likely be replaced by a variety of special weapons — each specific to a certain ship — ranging from a high-powered shot with a shotgun-like blast pattern to a small-scale nuclear detonation. Every ship will also wield some sort of basic guided missile attack — a critical addition if the game is to preserve the frantic action of the original. "In *Star Wars Starfighter*, you're always lining your enemies up exactly in front of you in order to hit them," Brooks explains. "We didn't want that. We have so many enemies; if you shoot at something, you need to hit it."

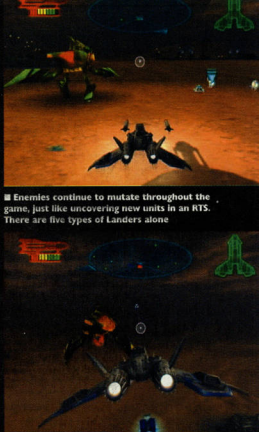
Your ships' specifications can also

be upgraded over time, thanks to the humanoids you protect. There are three types of colonists, who must typically be airlifted safely back to your base. Which ship upgrades you earn depend on which kind of colonists you rescue. If you save military men, they'll beef up your weaponry. Scientists, in turn, will enhance your armor, and possibly even develop a cloaking device. Finally, engineers will design faster engines or increase each ship's ability to carry things.

This cargo capacity becomes more important than ever before, thanks to the colonists' other role — that of ground support. Enemies will drop power-ups that, when deposited near (and subsequently manned by) a colonist, will become fully independent ground units such as tanks or missile launchers. These units can then be strategically placed to protect



■ In addition to protecting humans, you'll have to transport them back to your base



■ Enemies continue to mutate throughout the game, just like uncovering new units in an RTS. There are five types of Landers alone

"You just jump in and start fighting, just like the original *Defender*."

— Patrick Dillon, product manager, 7 Studios

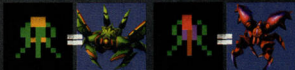
an important installation, or they can even be carried around the battlefield. In fact, they're better at destroying some enemies than you are.

You'll need every bit of help you can get, too. Five of the six original enemy types — Landers, Mutants, Baiters, Bombers, and Swarmers — are now joined by at least two brutal new classes. The first is the Ogres — massive ground units that tend to resemble huge walking tanks, or even giant centipedes. The second is so secret that Midway would reveal only its name: Raptors. Each class also mutates into several different subclasses, each with its own abilities, AI, and (we hope) weak spots to be exploited.

They're also brutally intelligent, even utilizing RTS-style group AI at

THE NEW MUTANTS

Because graphics technology was so much less advanced 20 years ago, it really wasn't always clear what was being represented onscreen. Nonetheless, while Asteroids were rocks, and *Space Invaders* were clearly living creatures, the original *Defender's* aliens were notable for their tendency to blur the line between mechanical and organic threat. (And we still don't know what the hell the things were in *Tempest*.) 7 Studios' new designs hew closely to this concept, but seem more clearly influenced by crustaceans and insects.



■ Lander, old and new

■ Mutant, old and new



■ There are 32 levels in all, spread across seven different planets and moons. These shots are of Mars

times — which is no surprise, given that 7 Studios employs several members of the team that redesigned *Battlezone* for Activision. Luckily, your ground units are plenty smart as well, and certain missions will grant you AI-controlled wingmen. In fact, if you don't mind the fact

that the framerate dips below 60fps, you and a friend can even take to the air together, frying aliens cooperatively in splitscreen mode. Given the team's *Battlezone* roots, will we see RTS-style base building in *Defender* as well? Maybe just a little, says Brooks. "We want to get the game 100% done as a shooter, as an action game, before we address that. But there are preliminary plans to incorporate some realtime strategy elements into the game."

Defender is far and away the most

Power-ups will become ground units such as tanks and missile launchers.

ambitious of Midway's arcade updates to date, and we have to admit we aren't yet completely convinced that the project will gel in the end. But *Spy Hunter* turned out beautifully, and we're convinced that this development team has the skills to get the job done. Now, whom do we have to bribe to make sure *Bosconian* is next? — Eric Bratcher

WHAT'S EUGENE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

We asked the one and only Eugene Jarvis, father of the original *Defender* (as well as *Starquake*, *Robotron 2084*, *Blaster*, and the *Cruisin'* series), about this new iteration of his classic creation.



NG: Were you involved?

EJ: I saw the original concept doc, which was your typical 200-page, buzzword-driven blueprint for disaster. I then met with the team and gave them my vision for the project (which no doubt would have blown all project schedules out of the water). I haven't heard from them since.

NG: Can *Defender* work in 3D?

EJ: The key is threat management and pace. In 2D *Defender*, the player has to deal with up to 25 simultaneous threats, targets, and friendlies. The kill rate can approach 3-4 enemies/second. You have to present a similar challenge in 3D without overloading the player or graphics subsystems. If you give up and reduce the action level then you end up with just another boring flight sim.

NG: What's your take?

EJ: There is awesome potential for a kick-ass 3D *Defender*. I hope Midway and 7 Studios can pull this baby off, 'cause if they don't, I'll have to do it myself.



■ Ground units will continue to fire on enemies as you carry them from one place to another, effectively granting you a tankgunner

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— **Expert Gamer** September 2001

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— **cnn.com** May 2001

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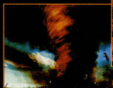
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■ Xbox has enabled the team to create in-game characters that look strikingly close to their real-world counterparts



■ XBOX

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts/Fox Interactive** ■ Developer: **The Collective** ■ Release Date: **Spring 2002** ■ Origin: **US**

Undead fiends beware! Buffy's finally ready for action

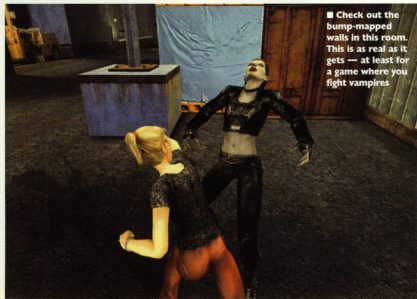
➔ You only have to watch a single episode of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to understand why it's being made into a videogame. The premise? An attractive heroine takes

out vampires and demons in her hometown using her wits and extensive martial arts skills — not necessarily in that order. Still, no matter how aptly the concept fits the interactive medium,

getting *Buffy* to consoles has been a long, drawn-out project. Originally scheduled as a PSX and Dreamcast game, *Buffy* is finally surfacing — years later — on Xbox.

On the surface, the game doesn't look to be more than a flashy beat-'em-up. Players take control of Buffy and run around town punching, kicking, and staking the hell out of the vampire population — or anything else that gets in her way. But, according to Co-Lead Designer James Goddard, the fighting system is much deeper than you would expect for this sort of game. "Buffy has upwards of 60 moves, ranging from hand-to-hand to weapon techniques," he explains. "The game has true arcade fighting roots in its combat system but it is fully unleashed in 360 degrees."

Players are going to need all of the techniques they can muster, too, as the



■ Check out the bump-mapped walls in this room. This is as real as it gets — at least for a game where you fight vampires



■ The team is doing its best to make sure that the game plays more like a fighting game than a traditional beat-'em-up

enemies are a bit smarter than the moronic thugs normally encountered in this kind of game. Try to go the whole way through the game with the same pattern, and they'll actually learn to counter your moves, forcing you to constantly improvise and learn new ones.

It's not all fighting, either. A lot of design emphasis has been placed on creating unique and well-thought-out puzzles for players to solve. "In addition to the common 'find this' and 'push that' type, we're encouraging players to observe their environment and use common sense to overcome obstacles," points out Co-Lead Designer Tony Barnes. "For example, an electronically locked door blocks Buffy's path and there's no key to be found. The box that

operates the door is clearly visible, but she can't affect it. Upon close inspection, a nozzle from a fire alarm system is located near the electronic lock and a pile of trash is located at the end of the hallway. By using a Hellfire vial, Buffy can set the pile of trash on fire, which starts the fire alarm, and the water shorts out the box, which opens the door."

In the course of the game's events, other stars from the show — like Willow, Cordelia, Xander, and Giles — will occasionally show up to give you some help or, at the very least, brief you before and after each mission. In fact, if it all goes according to plan, the game should play out like a missing chapter from Season Three of the show with all of the appropriate attitudes, story twists, and action scenes you might expect. Of course, that's also the zinger: The game has been in development so long that the show itself has actually passed it by. Buffy has since graduated from high school, gone off to college, lost her mom, and gained a sister — among other things.

Still in development, we must concede that Buffy as an interactive entity has the potential for gaming greatness. Given the show's popularity, the game is virtually assured attention when it comes out next year. We hope it'll feature well-polished gameplay that warrants it.

— Blake Fischer



BUFFY MEET BUFFY

Buffy the TV show has gained quite a fan base in the last several years, but it was all originally based on a mediocre movie of the same name, which relied on the single joke that Buffy was a stuck-up cheerleader who could kick ass. Luckily, the producers behind the TV show realized that the whole concept would wear thin really quickly without strong supporting cast members and deeper, more involved stories. The only thing from the film that the show might have benefited from (but chose not to) is Paul Reubens — that's Pee Wee Herman — who played one of the lead baddies in the film.



■ No relation...

■ Enemies range from your common run-of-the-mill vampires to the heavy hitters like Spike, Drusilla, and The Master



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→ Alphas



■ The player will take the wheel of not just typical sports cars and sedans, but more exotic entries like a dune buggy, a tank, and even a metemorph car

■ XBOX

WRECKLESS

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Bunkasha** ■ Release Date: **Q1** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Drive like the Blues Brothers through the streets (and malls) of Hong Kong

→ This mission-based driving game's title seems to imply its players won't wreck anymore. But to paraphrase an old drinking joke, they won't wreck any less, either. Formerly known as *Double S.T.E.A.L.*, the game stomps on the accelerator of a next-level physics engine that explores the ramifications of decidedly full-contact driving.

"We've worked very hard on the

physics to make the game more exciting," enthuses Lead Designer Masumi Nagaya. "The ability to smash through many different objects on the road, to ram enemy cars into one another, or to jump from the second story of a mall and ram into an enemy car — these are all examples of what the physics allows us to do."

There are 20 missions in all, with

most being destruction-focused variants on the established chase/deliver/escort themes. There's the added appeal of jumping over a dim-sum stand in a four-wheel ATV, or barreling through a densely populated shopping mall in a monster truck. Through it all, there are two storylines, which Nagaya describes as "very humorous, Hong Kong-style, wacky." One chronicles the adventures of two anti-Yakuza policewomen, and another details the exploits of a pair of male spies trying to discover the Yakuza's ties to the police force. Oddly, this is Bunkasha's first game since the 8-bit era (though some members of the team do have some industry experience). But if the gameplay in *Wreckless* comes together as impressively as the underlying technology, it certainly won't be the last.

— Eric Bratcher



■ Your first mission is to protect an armored car that is under attack from three Yakuza vehicles



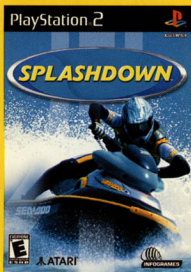
DIRTY BUSINESS

While the exact appearance and attitude of the lady cops in *Wreckless* is still under wraps, the more we hear about the game's wacky, destructive attitude, the more we wonder if they'll resemble Yuri and Kel, anime's *Dirty Pair*. With their tendency to cause much more trouble than they prevent, and a good cop/bad cop dynamic that could have been stolen from *Lethal Weapon* (if it starred scantly clad anime chicks, that is), it seems like they would be the perfect type of characters to emulate for this game.



■ Hong Kong is a busy, crowded city. Every street is filled with pedestrians, who scatter at your approach

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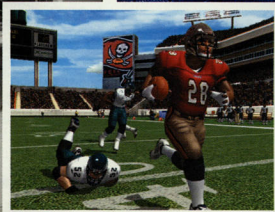


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XBOX



■ **Timesplitters 2** features a real single-player Story mode, as opposed to the plotless challenges of the first game

■ **XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2**

TIMESPLITTERS 2

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Free Radical Design** ■ Release Date: **Spring** ■ Origin: **UK**

With time on its side, Free Radical Design aims to show us what PS2 can really do

➡ It's ironic that the first *Timesplitters*, a PS2 first-person shooter based around time travel, was actually hampered by a lack of development time more than anything else. Under tight pressure to make PS2's U.S. launch, Free Radical Design, a team that includes several ex-members of the *GoldenEye* design team, smartly limited

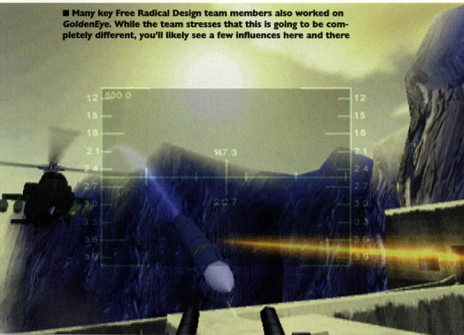
the scope of its first game. This decision enabled it to release a polished, original title on the same day the system itself hit the shelves — quite a feat for a company that had been formed just 18 months earlier.

Still, while the game garnered some acclaim, players expected a bit more from it. "It was annoying to have people

saying things like, 'Oh, it's not like *GoldenEye*,'" concedes Head of Design David Doak, who's clearly still irritated. "It wasn't intended to be like *GoldenEye*. We didn't forget how to do it; we were just doing something slightly different."

For *Timesplitters 2*, the team is again doing something slightly different, but with a greater sense of purpose. Free

■ **Many key Free Radical Design team members also worked on *GoldenEye*. While the team stresses that this is going to be completely different, you'll likely see a few influences here and there**





■ Sneak up on an enemy, and you can take him out before he even notices you're there. But be careful that you're not being watched by a security camera, because if the alarm sounds, you'll be in a lot of trouble



LEVEL-HEADED

Free Radical Design was pleased with the accessibility and flexibility of its previous level editor, and the team is keen to include this excellent feature again. This time around, rather than just being able to create deathmatch-style scenarios, you can set up story levels in which you place NPCs and assign functionality to them. For instance, you can create a patrol route and even determine whether a particular character will undergo a diversion along the way or just carry on from one patrol point to the next. You can also include doors and keycards, as in the main game. In fact, according to Head of Design David Doak, players can actually create levels that are about the same complexity as those found in the original *Doom* — which should give you a sense of the possibilities offered by this feature.



Radical has collated gamers' feedback on *TimeSplitters* and has been busy working on something with which to silence its critics. In short, you could say the team is aiming to do better than *GoldenEye*.

Certain elements remain the same, however. You're still an agent battling against the evil *TimeSplitters* across a variety of time zones, ranging from the Old West to a cyberpunk future. There is still a multiplayer option as well as a map editor (see boxout). New this time around are potentially superb iLink capabilities and a radically enhanced Story mode, with comprehensive mission scenarios.

To convincingly demonstrate the improvements, Doak proceeds to load up the first level for a demo — a Siberian military base, complete with a massive dam as the backdrop (one of several cheeky references to *GoldenEye*). Immediately, the visual improvement is evident. The environment is far more complex than anything seen in *TimeSplitters*, with a more adventurous use of textures. But it's the enhancement in the characters that is perhaps most

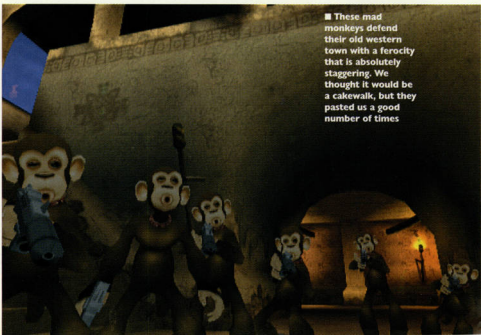
impressive. Not only are they substantially more detailed in terms of geometry, but their animation routines have been markedly improved.

As our demo continues, other improvements become evident. Enemy troops appear more intelligent than in the first game — the result of a complete reworking of the AI routines. Enemies can

now react appropriately if you cross their field of vision, which shifts when they turn their head. Guards also react to any noise you make, enabling you to use stealth to get by some objectives if you're wily enough. Naturally, the team is eager to exploit these advantages in the levels it is building, incorporating more AI-driven objectives (i.e. actually observing or interacting with AI characters) alongside the traditional point-to-point tasks.

It all adds up to a shooter that's more well rounded than the previous effort, and that will surely shine when it's released in 2002. Now that Free Radical has been given the time it needs to realize the game's potential, we smell a possible PS2 classic in the making. Even if it's not *GoldenEye 2*, *TimeSplitters 2* should still earn itself the fans it deserves.

— Nigel Edge



■ These mad monkeys defend their old western town with a ferocity that is absolutely staggering. We thought it would be a cakewalk, but they put us to a good number of times

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PlayStation.2



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■ The fluid physics are simply wonderful. Crossing another boat's wake bounces you around, just as it should. And just wait until you see the waves during a storm



■ XBOX

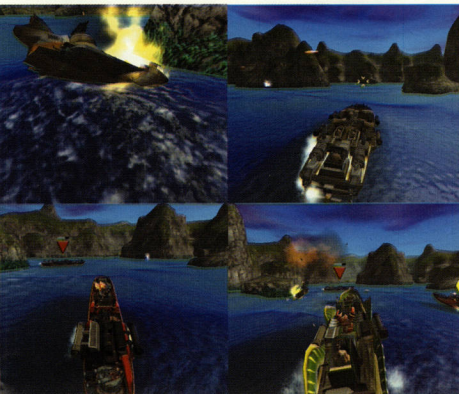
BLOOD WAKE

■ Publisher: **Microsoft** ■ Developer: **Stormfront** ■ Release Date: **January** ■ Origin: **US**

Developer Stormfront has laid a couple eggs recently — especially the Ubi-Soft-published *Pool of Radiance*, which shipped plainly unfinished and is literally harmful to your PC if uninstalled without being patched (though Ubi Soft's QA department must take some of

the blame for this). But Stormfront may just redeem itself completely with this title, in which *Hydro Thunder*'s fluid physics meet *Star Wars Starfighter*'s mission-based structure and *Twisted Metal Black*'s focus on manic vehicular combat. The water is simply awesome, both

visually and in the way it affects your craft. The beta build we played needed balancing — some of the boats were a bit sluggish, particularly when backing up — but all the elements of a great game were definitely, undeniably present.



■ In addition to 25+ single-player missions, the game boasts one- to four-player splitscreen action



→ Milestones



■ **XBOX**

STAR WARS OBI-WAN

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

→ This third-person action title is notorious among PC gaming circles owing to its long, beleaguered development history. We could have told them the problem: It should have been a console game, which it now is. The level we played was bland, but controlling the light saber with the right analog stick feels perfectly natural. Carving up Greedo, Walrusman, and even a strangely aggressive Hammerhead into little chunks is both effortlessly intuitive and incredibly satisfying. The force remains cool until further notice.



■ Obi-Wan may be little more than a typical platformer with a great license. But that may be good enough for us



■ The player has a wide assortment of light saber attacks, all executed with the right analog stick

■ **PLAYSTATION 2**

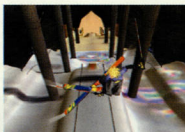
JOHNNY MOSELEY MAD TRIX

■ Publisher: **3DO** ■ Developer: **3DO** ■ Release Date: **December** ■ Origin: **US**

→ Do we really need a Tony Hawk variant on skis? Actually, we might. The courses are huge and wild. There are some sweet animations (although we hope they blend a bit better in the final build). And the stunts are truly over the top (but still authentic — these guys are insane). One big potential problem: There's no multiplayer at all, a flaw that the game's main competition — Shawn Palmer's *Pro Snowboarder*, which has an awesome "Push" mode (**NG 09/01**) — definitely does not share.



■ Special effects are just now being put in, but some of the lighting is already quite nice



■ The skiers are a mix of real-world skiers (like Moseley himself, for instance) and Wild Child, the colorful, fictitious lass shown here



wounds will
heal...

→ Milestones



■ Dragon Rage already looks pretty, and the finished version will run at 60fps (with full-screen anti-aliasing)

■ PLAYSTATION 2

DRAGON RAGE

■ Publisher: **3DO** ■ Developer: **3DO** ■ Release Date: **December** ■ Origin: **US**

➔ iRock Interactive's Ozzy Osbourne-based dragon dogfighting game (see **NG 05/01**) is still seeking a publisher, but this medieval-themed aerial combat title (also previewed back in **NG 05/01**) looks well prepared to hold you over in the meantime. The story spreads over some 15 levels, and while your dragon has a full range of destructive attacks — including breathing fire, lightning, or huge chunks of ice — our favorite method is simply to eat the enemy orcs, one by one.



■ Power-ups are elemental in nature, and can change your breath weapon from flame attacks to ice crystals, or bolts of lightning



■ Your moves include barrel rolls and a 180-degree quick-turn (sounds strangely like Midway's Defender remake, doesn't it? See Alphas, page 32)

■ PLAYSTATION 2

MEDAL OF HONOR FRONTLINE

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **EA LA (formerly DreamWorks)** ■ Release Date: **February** ■ Origin: **US**

➔ While PC gamers are still frothing at the mouth over *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, PlayStation 2 players can look forward to this new adventure from the developer responsible for the series original PlayStation incarnations. The original game's hero, Jimmy Patterson, has returned, this time to steal a super-weapon that could be the deciding factor in the war. It's a bit deeper this time, with more weapons, multiple solutions to many levels — some players like stealth, some like blazing gunfire — and team tactics, derived from the fact that Patterson now leads a small team of soldiers.



■ Squad-level tactics will be available this time around, but a sharpshooter's touch will still keep you alive a lot longer



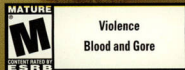
■ The environments range in setting from a submarine (below right) to climbing the superstructure of a bridge (above, and below center)





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SILENT HILL 2

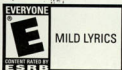
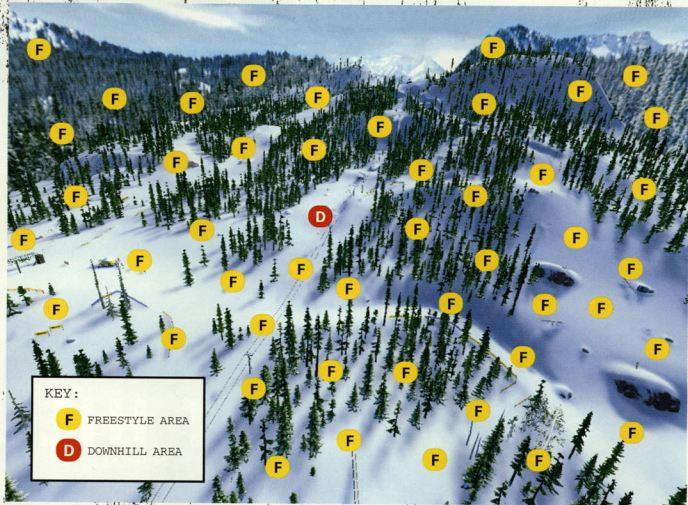


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FREESTYLE:

"DAG."

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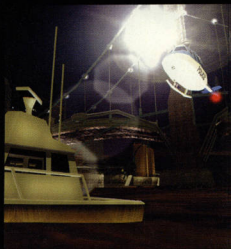
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→ Cover Story





■ The team has streamlined the fighting system so that it will be more accessible to new players. Don't worry though — the game should continue to be as deep as ever

■ GAMECUBE, XBOX, PLAYSTATION 2, ARCADE

SOUL CALIBUR 2

■ Publisher: **Namco** ■ Developer: **Namco** ■ Release Date: **Late 2001 (arcade), 2002 (everything else)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Can Namco's finest fighter maintain its cutting-edge appeal?

➔ The original *Soul Calibur* is undeniably among Dreamcast's finest titles. The game's Zen-like balance of finely tuned, weapon-based fighting, gorgeous visuals, and addictive extras established it as one of Dreamcast's few true system-sellers and a high watermark that other developers are still striving to beat. Now, two years later, Director/Producer Hiroaki Yotoryama and his team at Namco Development Dept #1 are back and must do what others so far have failed to accomplish: They must top themselves.

Luckily, their vision remains intact. While the world's other developers have focused on streamlining and expanding on the "fist and feet" kung-fu experience, *Soul Calibur*'s unique

weapon-fighting gameplay has remained unchallenged. It's easy to see why, too. Those who indulged in this Dreamcast masterpiece found the different weapons and accompanying styles tuned to perfection. No matter which weapon you chose, it just felt right.

With a PlayStation 2-based, System 246 arcade board powering its latest creation, the team has already managed to eclipse the look of its last effort, but that's only a small part of the overall formula. The real challenge will be whether or not its revised fighting engine can stand against the latest heavyweights: *DOA 3*, *Virtua Fighter 4*, and even Namco's own

Tekken 4. If any game has a chance of dragging fighting gamers away from their traditional kung-fu battles, though, it's going to be this one.

The first thing the team needs to do, however, is convince the arcade audience to bite. The original *Soul Calibur* was also released as an arcade game, but it didn't really garner any attention until it came out on



→ Cover Story

"Most 3D fighting games are still working in 2D. We wanted to make the gameplay evolve."

— Hiroaki Yotoryama, director/producer, Namco



■ The System 246 hardware has enabled the team to create some astounding visuals. The home versions should look just as good too, despite the fact that the three hardware platforms (Xbox, GameCube, and Playstation 2) are dramatically different



Dreamcast late the next year. Yotoryama feels that the success of the Dreamcast version — and most notably its incredibly popular Mission Battle mode — outlines the main problem with the initial release to arcade. "It appeared that the game was appreciated mainly by hardcore users and not by casual users as I'd hoped," he candidly admits. "We noticed that people who understood the game mechanics were enjoying *Soul Calibur* for a long time [in the arcade], so it became obvious we were lacking a tutorial. That was something we fixed in the console version, and I think it was one of the fundamental reasons for the consumer version's success. In *Soul Calibur 2*, we want a large public to enjoy it and I think we managed to design the game accordingly this time."

Key to this accessibility will be



a subtle reworking of the game's controls. The stick and four-button layout (kick, block, horizontal slash, and vertical slash) will remain the same as in the first game, but many of the moves will now be easier to pull off. It's obviously an issue that hasn't been completely resolved

yet, but Yotoryama stresses that he's not attempting to dumb down the gameplay at all; instead he's bringing it closer to the ideas he had for the first game. "*Soul Calibur*, in many aspects, was very different compared to a standard 3D fighting game, especially in its

■ Cassandra (in blue) is one of the new characters in the game. In typical Namco fashion, she's actually related to a character from the last game — Sophitia



fighting tempo and its management of the 3D environment," he explains. "While *Soul Calibur 2* offers previous basic moves

like the 'side strike,' 'front strike,' and 'run,' I found that these moves weren't developed well enough before. So they're much

better this time."

These changes may seem slight on paper, but the advanced emphasis on 3D combat will

likely change the entire battle dynamic. Now, for example, it will be much easier for players to maneuver around their opponents and stab them in the back instead of constantly relying on



■ There will be a stronger emphasis on 3D movement, so expect lots of dodging and countering



→ Cover Story

■ The game will offer more than 10 initially selectable characters, including old favorites like Ipy and Astaroth. We expect several hidden characters as well



WELCOME BACK TO THE STAGE OF HISTORY

While *Soul Calibur* on Dreamcast may have been the first you heard of the Namco's weapon fighting series, it's actually gone through several major incarnations.



Soul Edge, Arcade, 1995



Soul Edge Ver. 2, Arcade, 1995



Soul Blade, PlayStation, 1996



Soul Calibur, Arcade, 1998



Soul Calibur, Dreamcast, 1999

head-on attacks. "Most 3D fighting games are still working in 2D, as both fighters are located on the same line," elaborates Yotoryiyama. "When we introduced the 'run' feature in the first *Soul Calibur*, we wanted to break this rule and make the gameplay evolve. We weren't able to make it real enough at that time; now it's one of the

core features during a fight."

And while 3D movement will be encouraged, the arenas will still be finite, so players will have to constantly be aware of their positioning or they'll be likely to fall off the edge and lose the round. They won't, however, have to watch out for obstacles that could get in the

way. Despite the fact that many games — *DOA3* and *Tekken 4* most recently — have presented items in the environment that players can use (or that they must avoid) during a fight, Yotoryiyama believes that these obstacles upset the purity of the fighting game experience. "There won't be any 3D [environmental] elements in *Soul*

Calibur 2," he adamantly declares. "They were proposed during the development, and I also had few thoughts about this matter, but no — laying 3D elements on a stage is not very relevant. A fighting game is about two fighters confronting each other. It's about a player who tries to find a weak point (continued on page 70)



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→ Cover Story

(continued from page 68)
in his adversary. These are the basics. There's no need for 3D elements as well."

And, finally, it's a given with any fighting game sequel — especially a Namco one — that there will be a wealth of new characters to choose from. While we're certain to see some returning faces like Mitsurugi, Astaroth, and Ivy, many new fighters will also be available, like Sophia's (from the first game) sword-swinging sister, Cassandra, and another female warrior named Talim. Yotoryiama was reluctant to lock down a final character count, but he did say that there would be more than 10 initially selectable characters and a wealth of hidden ones beyond that. Who they'll be, and how they'll be unlocked, however, is

still being determined. Our guess is that — as in the Tekken games — many of the characters will be unlocked according to how long the machine has been on.

Honestly, it's still too early to tell whether or not *Soul Calibur* will win the mindshare that the first never really picked up in the arcades. Unfortunately, the team wasn't comfortable enough to let us get any real hands-on time, so it's impossible to say whether it has managed to preserve the elegance and intensity of the first game or whether the control tweaks have turned it into a different beast altogether. The pedigree's definitely there for this to be the best fighter to come out of Japan since, well, the first *Soul Calibur*. But with *DOA3* and *VF4* also in contention this winter, it's anyone's game. — Blake Fischer

COMING TO YOUR CONSOLE

One aspect of the original *Soul Calibur* that may have hindered it in the arcades was its dated System 12 (PlayStation) graphics. The Dreamcast version, of course, really accentuated this, as it came out sporting vastly improved visuals. Now, with *Soul Calibur 2*, Director/Producer Hiroaki Yotoryiama has planned ahead so all the versions — Arcade, Xbox, GameCube and PlayStation 2 — look as good as they possibly can without catering to any system's strengths or weaknesses. "We are using the arcade version as the core of our future conversions," he explains, "so when you see all the versions in front of you, I hope you won't notice too much of a difference. I mean, developers are always making games limited by each platform's weakest points, and the result is a game that looks terrible. We're making the arcade version based on very high standards so future conversions will look great as well."

According to Yotoryiama, his team has already taken a good look at the consoles to see what they can do, but the team is currently only working on the arcade release. After that's done, it's going to focus on the console versions. In fact, Yotoryiama says he's already got some cool new modes (à la Mission Battle) for the home versions planned, but he's still trying to think of more. Of course, he also realizes that time will probably be a big limiting factor — as it was with the Dreamcast release. "I already hear the head of Namco asking me to release the three consumer versions at the same time," he half-jokes, "so the coming months will really look horrible for us."



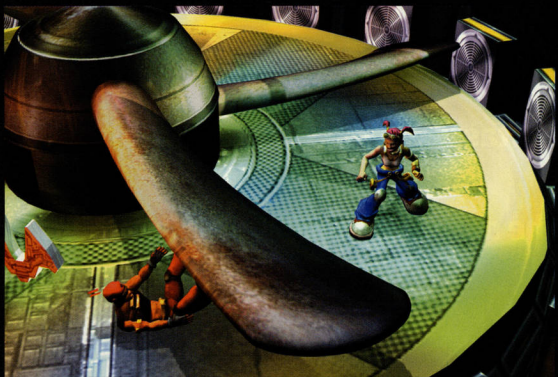
■ Director/Producer Hiroaki Yotoryiama and his team have their hands full not only with the arcade version of *Soul Calibur 2* but with all the home versions as well



■ *Soul Calibur* was known for its cool special effects. The sequel already looks to more than live up to that legacy — and there are still several months of development to go



#11 IN A SERIES OF MOTIVATIONAL POSTERS



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NINTENDO'S GAMECUBE IS HERE

No longer shackled by the expensive cartridge business, Nintendo has no excuse if it fails to regain its position as the console leader. Does GameCube offer the hardware performance and enough exclusive titles to lure gamers back from Sony and hold off newcomer Microsoft? It's going to be a slugfest — the fight begins November 18.

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GAMECUBE RATING THE SYSTEM

Next Gen puts Nintendo's latest console under the microscope and pulls no punches in analyzing its strengths and weaknesses

HARDWARE POWER

In the long run, this could prove to be GameCube's Achilles Heel. Although capable of quite a number of interesting tricks and possessing a rather elegant architecture, in the final analysis GameCube is barely state-of-the-art. The funny thing is, this hardly matters to Nintendo or particularly affects the company's own franchises. GameCube is more than adequate for the soft-edged, primary-colored worlds of Mario, Link, and Pikachu. Although a lack of power may present problems to third parties, LucasArts' *Rogue Squadron II* and the footage of Capcom's *Resident Evil* remake already demonstrate a significant amount of flexibility. At this point, it's also worth noting that the system's technological modesty makes it relatively inexpensive, which some might consider a virtue in itself.

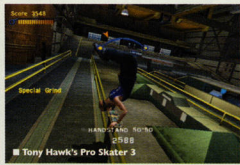
NextGen ★★☆☆



CURRENT SOFTWARE LIBRARY

Although legions of screaming Nintendo fans will predictably disagree, GameCube arrives with a short list of launch titles that are, for the most part, satisfactory. In fact, the only title that looks exciting is, oddly enough, *Rogue Squadron II*. Most of them, including *Luigi's Mansion* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, are pretty and reasonably fun, but also rather shallow and short. Again, among the Nintendo faithful, we doubt this will matter, but we feel it should be pointed out for the record.

NextGen ★★☆☆



FUTURE SOFTWARE PROGNOSIS



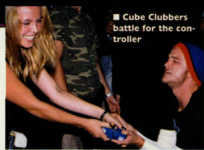
This is the system on which we'll play the next Mario, Zelda, and Metroid. Who wouldn't be excited about that? Plus, big third-party franchises should make a strong showing: Sonic is headed to GC, for example, and we wouldn't be surprised if it stayed put there. GameCube was designed with carrying on Nintendo's own franchises in mind, but it's also attracting third-party publishers. New *Resident Evil* titles will be exclusive, and the system will even get its own version of *Soul Collibur 2*. We expect much more.

NextGen ★★☆☆

MARKETING MUSCLE

With a few notable exceptions (the Perfect Dark campaign, for example), Nintendo has a history of relentlessly mediocre ad campaigns that, nevertheless, get the message out. And for a Nintendo product, it appears that's all that's needed. The Nintendo name alone will sell systems and games to Nintendo's target audience. Aside from the usual assortment of ads, Nintendo is working with Dr. Pepper and the Starz cable channel on giveaway promotions, and has organized a 12-city "Cube Club" tour giving gamers a chance to play GameCube games before launch (see News, page 14).

NextGen ★★☆☆



■ Cube Clubbers battle for the controller

BOTTOM LINE

How well GameCube stacks up depends entirely on what you're expecting from the system. It's been clear since the inception of N64 that Nintendo has been caring less and less about trends among third-party games, or for that matter, trends outside of anything it can't tightly control. And it doesn't have to. Every new Miyamoto title sells hardware and makes money as do its other ongoing franchises like Pokémon. The company has even spiked its system sales by merely issuing the same hardware in a different-colored case. We predict GameCube will follow a system arc very much like N64: periodic must-have releases from Nintendo (Mario, Zelda, and a few others) with a smattering of decent third-party titles in between. Because GameCube is not as risky to develop for (now that Nintendo has abandoned cartridges), third-party contributions will be more frequent than for its previous console, but they'll almost certainly never approach the quantity (nor relative quality) of what's available on other systems.

NextGen ★★☆☆

Control yourself GAMECUBE CONTROLLERS Gotta catch 'em all

Third-party GameCube peripherals will be slower in coming to GameCube; thanks to Nintendo's strict "no licensed products" philosophy, most items will have been reverse-engineered, which means waiting until after the finished GameCube hits the market (at least in Japan). But some prototypes are already surfacing.

Nyko Star Pad
M.S.R.P.: \$29.99

Nyko Radio Flyer
M.S.R.P.: \$39.99
(not shown)

Nyko Knockout Pro
M.S.R.P.: \$39.99

InterAct Black Thunder Racing Wheel
M.S.R.P.: \$39.99
(not shown)

InterAct ShadowBlade Arcade Stick
M.S.R.P.: \$39.99
(not shown)

InterAct SuperPad
M.S.R.P.: \$19.99

InterAct Starfire LightBlaster
M.S.R.P.: \$29.99
(not shown)

InterAct Fishing Controller
M.S.R.P.: \$29.99
(not shown)

Mad Catz Control Pad Pro
M.S.R.P.: \$19.99

Pelican G3
M.S.R.P.: \$24.95

Pelican G3 Driving Wheel
M.S.R.P.: \$24.95
(not shown)

Pelican G3 Arcade Stick
M.S.R.P.: \$19.99

Radica Core Control
M.S.R.P.: \$19.99

Thrustmaster Pro Victory Racing Wheel
M.S.R.P.: TBA
(not shown)

Thrustmaster Compact Racing Wheel
M.S.R.P.: TBA

GAMECUBE TECH SPECS

CPU: 485MHz IBM
"Gekko" Power PC
processor

Graphics: Custom 162MHz
ATI/Nintendo "Flipper" Chip

RAM: 24MB 1T-SRAM Main
Memory, 16MB DRAM

A-Memory

Memory

Bandwidth: 2.6GB/sec

Polygons/sec: 6-12 million
in real-world game conditions

Audio: Custom Macronix 16-
bit DSP capable of 64 simulta-
neous channels (this is actually
incorporated into Flipper)

Storage: Proprietary optical
disc system — 1.5GB 3-inch
discs, 4MB flash memory card

Connectivity: None included.
Ethernet and modem adapters
will be sold separately

Extras: Wavebird Wireless
controllers. Can link to Game
Boy Advance

What does it mean?

Nintendo's strength isn't so much
in pure power, but in elegance.
The custom chipsets used for
GameCube may not push as many
polys as the competition, but they
allow for all sorts of cool visual
effects with minimal computation.



UNDER THE HOOD

- 1 24MB 1T-SRAM
- 2 162MHz Custom
Flipper Chip
- 3 485MHz Gekko
Processor

THE MAKING OF GAMECUBE

Who designed the microchips Nintendo is gambling on?
ATI's Greg Buchner shares his story on how GameCube was born



As the vice president of
engineering at ATI
research, Greg Buchner

has been on the design of
GameCube's graphics processor,
codenamed "Flipper," since Day
One. We recently sat down with
Buchner and had him explain how
ATI and many of Nintendo's other
hardware partners helped create
the system that will power Mario
and Zelda in the new millennium.

NEXT GEN: Before being acquired
by ATI, your company was called
Art-X. How did Art-X get founded,
and how did it get involved with
Nintendo?

GB: **BUCHNER:** A lot of the
folks who ended up at Art-X had
been at Silicon Graphics, and part

of our original founding team had
also worked on Nintendo 64 as far
back as 1993. In '97, SGI started its
downward slide, and around that
time Art-X was formed and began
doing some stuff in the PC space.
In late '97-early '98, Nintendo
approached us to do their next-
generation machine, after they had
given up on SGI. They knew a lot of
our people [from the N64 team],
had trusted them to deliver on
their last generation, and pretty
quickly we signed a contract and
started working together.

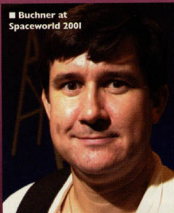
NG: At what point did Art-X
become part of ATI, and how has
that helped?

GB: The acquisition happened in
April of 2000. We were still an

engineering company, and ATI
already had the infrastructure in
place to support products and the
operations side of it. In return, ATI
got a very, very good team of
designers, and we allowed them to
get into a new business space that
they wanted to get into. By the
time we did the acquisition, we
were finished with the [Flipper]
hardware design.

NG: How different was the devel-
opment of the GameCube proces-
sor compared to the one for N64?

GB: To get to a launch now, you
need to have silicon working a year
to 18 months before launch. To
have that working silicon, you
pretty much need to lock and load
a year ahead of that, in terms of



■ Buchner at
Spaceworld 2001

your design being done, and you're
out there making a part. That is
certainly one challenge, trying to
predict where technology is going
to be just from a silicon process

(Interview continued on page 80)



Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader

■ Publisher: LucasArts ■ Developer: Factor 5

Want to be in the movie? This is as close as it comes

E The key to *Rogue Squadron II's* success as a game is that it isn't relying on the Star Wars name to provide the entire experience; it's actually a fairly accomplished shooter on its own, with fine control, great graphics, and lots of subtle touches. Then, when you beautifully integrate the world's best sci-fi universe —

well, the overall experience is simply incredible.

The gameplay is pure action. As leader of *Rogue Squadron*, you'll pilot a variety of rebel crafts — A-Wings, X-Wings, B-Wings, and Y-Wings, along with a few surprises — on a variety of missions starting with the Death Star Run in the first movie and ending with the

Death Star Battle from *Return of the Jedi*. Along the way you'll bomb the heck out of imperial turrets, take out AT-AIs with tow cables, and even take on a Star Destroyer (or several!).

This game not only ups the scale of each encounter, but also makes sure to introduce new gameplay, tactics, and enemies with each successive



■ *Rogue's* space battles are stunning

THE MAKING OF GAMECUBE

(Interview continued from page 79)

point of view. In this particular case, we worked very closely with NEC making a new process, the embedded DRAM, something that was very cost-effective but would allow us to do some very interesting things. The designs themselves are getting much, much more complicated. When I first started working with chips, they had maybe 50,000 transistors — Flipper has 51 million transistors. And you know, looking forward to the next console, that's going to be 200 or 500 million transistors. The amount of work we're doing is increasing, but the amount of time we have to do it in is decreasing.

NG: How many people worked on designing the chip from start to finish?

GB: At our peak, we might have gotten up to 40 people, but the bulk of the work was done with probably a team of 20. We worked with IBM on making changes to their Power PC, to make it better for gaming, and worked with MoSys on how the interface to the memory should look.

NG: As a system is divided into many parts, was it difficult to coordinate the development of the Flipper chip?

GB: Everything in the system is connected to

the chip we designed. The CPU talks to nothing else other than Flipper; the main memory talks to nothing else other than Flipper; the controllers talk only to Flipper; the disc drive talks directly to Flipper. So we worked with almost every hardware partner. IBM didn't really need to know about main memory or the controller. They didn't touch them.

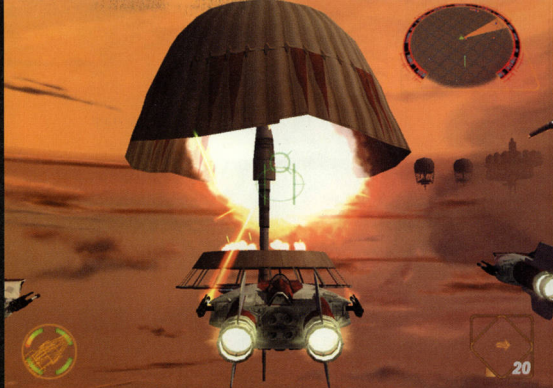
NG: So you're saying Flipper is more than just a graphics processor?

GB: If you take away main memory and the CPU, everything else is in that chip. All of the I/O functions, the memory controller, the video processing, and the audio. So, yes, it's more than just graphics.

level. And while some scenarios feature clear-cut goals, others require you to juggle several tasks at once in order to procure victory, adding a subtle yet welcome dose of strategy and planning to the frenetic action experience. Our only caveat is that the game does get insanely difficult near the end. While that's typical for a shooter, the incredibly steep learning curve (which starts really ramping up about halfway through) will no doubt catch some casual players by surprise.

Still, with some work, gamers will probably make it through the game in a couple of days. After that, you'll find it's time to go back and start upgrading your rankings on each level so you can unlock the secret levels. And, overall, while we're not big fans of retreading the same ground again and again, the multi-tiered medal system used here (combined with the relatively short mission times) makes it pretty fun. Trust us — there are also a few surprises you don't necessarily need to unlock, but you just need to find.

While some out there will



■ Keep an eye on your radar in the top-right corner during attacks or you may find some nasty surprises

complain that this game isn't anything really new, we argue that the incredible graphics, awesome soundtrack, and white-knuckle gameplay — we actually whooped out loud after we barely finished one harrowing level — make this the most exciting experience on

GameCube so far. Whether you're flying under the crossfire of AT-ATs on Hoth or defending a rebel train as it makes its way to

a heavily guarded imperial hangar, this is the *Star Wars* experience at its best. And that's all we've ever wanted.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you're going to buy a GameCube, you're going to want — no, you're going to need — this game.



NG: Then what exactly does Gekko do?

GB: The AI part of the game, the dynamics — all the random code that you wouldn't want to reduce to silicon — is running on Gekko. Things that really have to be accelerated are done on Flipper, like audio processing. That processing could either chew up all of Gekko, or could be handled by a dedicated set of gates in Flipper.

NG: Where did the name "Flipper" come from?

GB: Once Nintendo picked Dolphin as a codename for GameCube, we named it Flipper the next morning. A whole set of things took on a fish or sea theme. There was also a Marlin, a Barnacle, a Minnow, a Splash, and a Drift.

NG: Who conceptualized what the chip needed to do, and how were the tech specs locked down?

GB: It was very much a collaborative effort between our team at Art-X, Howard Cheng's team at Nintendo Technology Development in Redmond, and Takeda-san's team in Japan at NCL. The focus of Japan and our team's work together included the disc drive, the controllers, and the peripherals. What the graphics would be — the OS, the APIs — that was more of the focus of our team working with Howard's team. It was very much a three-way relationship, figuring out what we wanted to do.

NG: What were the major concerns during

this period?

GB: We're very cost-driven. If you look at the price point of this machine versus PS2 or Xbox, we are one-third less than they are. There was a lot of focus on cost as well as making it something developers would love and want to code to. So we set these high-level goals to be cheap yet high-performance, and to be something that's easy to program.

NG: Microsoft sought out developer opinions in its research to build Xbox's specs. How instrumental were Nintendo's developers in helping set the features for this hardware?

GB: From a raw graphics point of view, not very (Interview continued on page 88)



■ It's as cute as Nintendo games have always been, but Luigi offers much sturdier, more sophisticated 3D environments



Luigi's Mansion

■ Publisher: Nintendo

■ Developer: Nintendo

Luigi's house party, or *Resident Evil* for kids?

E Jump around, jump around, get out your seat and — stop. Please stop jumping. We've been jumping around since Miyamoto introduced us to Mario in *Donkey Kong* back in 1981, and now, 20 years and a thousand Mario clones later, it's time to stop. So it's not all that surprising that Shigeru Miyamoto, the man

who pioneered the jumping game (though you could also argue David Crane with *Pitfall!*) has moved on to create a different kind of game for the launch of Nintendo's GameCube.

Luigi's Mansion is, very simply, a haunted house adventure that swaps out the really spooky environs of the first *Resident Evil*

for charming, cartoonish ghosts on par with those seen in Disney's *Haunted Mansion* ride. Players control Luigi as they explore the house and solve a few puzzles, exorcising ghosts along the way. Refreshingly, none of the buttons on the GameCube controller will make Luigi take to the air. Instead, you'll find a button that takes the air to Luigi. The main gameplay mechanic comes through the use of Luigi's ghost-busting device. Not only does this unique backpack suck in the ghosts, but its vacuum properties extend to all kinds of objects in the game. Tablecloths can be sucked off tables, chandeliers can be made to swing, and dressers to shake. The physics mechanics and the level of interaction with the environment

herald more imaginative gameplay than we've seen in some time. The ghost-catching, which makes up most of the action, plays like a fishing game, as players must first bait, hook, and engage in a tug-of-war with numerous, colorful specters.

Unfortunately, it's here that the game gets a little repetitious. *Luigi's Mansion* is short and fairly easy; it took us about eight hours to beat, mostly because we were struggling with Japanese text. Meanwhile, there's not much to do aside from sucking everything up. Still, it's engaging enough that you'll want to play all the way through, and hopefully this departure from traditional platform-jumping gameplay will serve as a welcome wake-up call to other game developers.



■ Your ghost-busting pack can be powered up to become, among other things, a flamethrower

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: An entertaining first effort for GameCube. Not on the epic scale of *Mario* — but then again there's no jumping.

Wave Race: Blue Storm

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo Software Technology Corporation

No surprises here

➔ Next to Mario 64, Wave Race was the crown jewel of Nintendo's N64 launch lineup. So how well does its sequel show off GameCube? First, the obvious: The wave mechanics are jaw-dropping. Everything else looks — well, kind of plain. Clearly, the tracks were kept very basic so they could run at full speed in four-player mode. And overall, the game has a kind of cartoon-colored look, which isn't necessarily bad or good, but might not be to everyone's taste.

What really matters is how it plays, and just as with Wave Race 64, you'll have a blast just

splashing around. The physics engine seems more realistic, but the game plays basically the same: Race three laps around each course while zig-zagging through buoys. Eight competitors can now race onscreen at once, and amazing weather effects, such as rain and fog, have been added that affect the size and ferocity of the waves. And performing stunts now earns you points toward a turbo, a la SSX.

This is also a multiplayer gem, with both two- and four-player splitscreen competitions that run just as smoothly as the single-player race. It must be said that a



■ The water and lighting effects are simply awe-inspiring

fast-action game like this is so much more satisfying with virtually no load time.

The only real complaint here is that Blue Storm just isn't as ground-breaking as its predecessor. Most of the tracks are just higher-poly versions of those in

Wave Race 64, and while they've been tweaked with new details and shortcuts, it still feels like a rehash.

Wave Race: Blue Storm is an undeniable blast to play, and the whole package has been given that slick Nintendo polish.



■ Tricks can be achieved by stepping off the gas and achieving specific analog-stick combinations



ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's basically Wave Race on N64, only a lot prettier. A bit underwhelming, but you won't really care.

Super Monkey Ball

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Amusement Vision

Thank goodness for mini-games

➔ There's no doubt that Sega is the best there is at designing quirky arcade fare, and nowhere is this better exemplified than in its first GameCube game. While the concept is as quirky as they come

— think Marble Madness with a monkey inside a transparent marble — it still works owing to some exemplary tuning and tight controls.

The problem is that, at its heart, Super Monkey Ball is still an arcade

game, meaning the main gameplay is extremely simple. Players must guide their monkey (in his ball) through a variety of obstacles, collect bananas, and make it to the finish line. As you play the higher difficulty levels, the tracks get narrower and steeper, with more tricky moving parts to navigate. Simple in concept, and enjoyable in execution — for a little while.

Thankfully, the team has added a ton of extras. There are a few highly entertaining party games, including a monkey-fighting mode where players try to knock each other off a platform using giant spring-loaded boxing gloves (similar to Crash Bash). Some extra mini-games can be unlocked (bowling, golf, etc.) if you have the patience to gather



■ Monkey-pool is one of several mini-games that add variety to the game

enough points to do so.

Still, no matter how many extras that the team has added, we found it hard to commit any significant time to Super Monkey Ball. Not unlike Crazy Taxi, you'll have fun every time you play, but the concept gets tiring pretty quickly and you'll want to step away for a while.



■ You've got to have a lot of finesse if you want to finish Super Monkey Ball's more advanced levels

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A fun party game, but a little shallow to play for more than 30-minute blocks.

INCOMING!

A quick, hard look at the dirty dozen games that will be available between the launch on November 18 and the end of the year

SSX TRICKY

■ Publisher: **EA** ■ Developer: **EA** ■ Release Date: **November**

➔ Port or sequel? Tricky for GameCube is a little bit of both, almost falling into the "more of the same" category well served by Madden and Tony Hawk. Still, the franchise is only in its second iteration, so there's room for dramatic improvements: Improved AI gives opposing boarders a wider variety of interactions, and new tricks have been added. Finding shortcuts was an additive element of SSX, and this has been enhanced through expanded maps. If Tricky runs at a consistent 60fps, watch out.

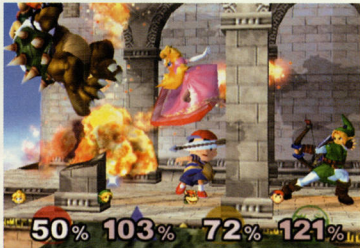


■ Tricky demonstrates that the SSX franchise is still the top snowboarding title in the industry

SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE

■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Nintendo** ■ Release Date: **December 3**

➔ One part party game and three parts fighting game, *Super Smash* lets players pummel each other as Nintendo favorites such as Donkey Kong, Link, and Mario. The goal is simple: Knock opponents off platforms before they do the same to you. Skills are required to defend against attacks (with power-ups liberally scattered about), but *Super Smash* is more action than depth.



■ Here's Nintendo's party game, a button-masher that's designed to be easy to play and entertaining for multiple players

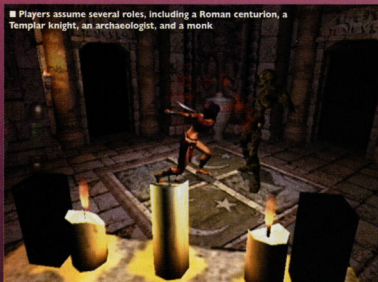
ETERNAL DARKNESS

■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Silicon Knights** ■ Release Date: **February 11**

➔ Originally scheduled for December 3, at press time we learned *Eternal Darkness'* release was pushed back two months. The first GameCube title targeted at a mature audience, *Eternal Darkness* attempts to provide some of the sophisticated psychological horror of *The Shining*, but not without some of the hack-n-slash action of *Friday the 13th*. Nintendo wants to prove it can provide edgy GameCube titles; this may be the first.



■ The gameplay is similar to *Resident Evil*, as players explore environments, fight zombies, and solve puzzles

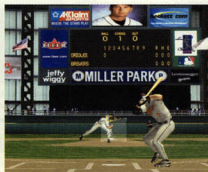
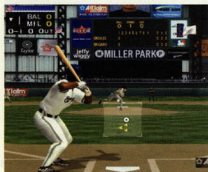


■ Players assume several roles, including a Roman centurion, a Templar knight, an archaeologist, and a monk

ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2002

■ Publisher: **Acclaim** ■ Developer: **Acclaim Austin** ■ Release Date: **November 18**

➔ The last time Acclaim put its baseball franchise on a Nintendo console, it was good enough to earn a four-star review (see **NG 55**). Baseball games are an acquired taste, but if you're a fan of America's favorite pastime, you'll want to look at *ASB2002*. Besides the batter's choice of "power" or "contact" swings (better emulating one of baseball's intricacies), it's the only pro-baseball game currently announced for GameCube.



■ *ASB2002* plays well, but can it succeed if the *High Heat* or *Triple Play* franchises make their way onto GameCube?

NHL HITZ

■ Publisher: **Midway** ■ Developer: **Black Box** ■ Release Date: **November 18**

➔ If SportsCenter's hockey highlights were turned into a game, it would be *Hitz*. Similar to Midway's *Blitz* franchise, *Hitz* offers over-the-top arcade hockey that highlights action and minimizes strategy. *Hitz* includes fighting, so opposing players will duke it on the ice, somewhat like a simplistic *Street Fighter*. Don't expect realism, and you won't be disappointed.



■ *NHL Hitz* adds to its rough-and-tumble arcade gameplay by integrating a fighting mode between players (right) in this 3-on-3 hockey game

EXTREME G3

■ Publisher: **Acclaim** ■ Developer: **Acclaim Cheltenham** ■ Release Date: **Nov. 18**

➔ Remember *Wipeout*? *Extreme G3* offers almost the same experience, only this is a cycle-racing game. The PS2 version looks and plays better than Sony's own *Kinetic*, providing frenetic racing and beautiful environments. While it's basically a racer, gamers should find *Extreme G3*'s sense of speed a worthy substitute for the lack of any *F-Zero* title.



■ The single-player mode is solid, but unless you've got a huge television, the multiplayer mode splits the screen too much to stay on top of the tight turns



PIKMIN

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

■ Release Date: **December 3**

➔ Miyamoto's take on the realtime strategy genre puts the player in charge of "*Pikmin*," small garden-grown aliens. The gameplay is part *Command and Conquer* and part *Sheep*: Players must correctly direct their Pikmin to accomplish tasks, whether that is to attack enemies or carry objects. With so many small characters moving around on screen, it's a fairly complex (read: slow) game — one that will certainly leave GameCube's button-mashers puzzled.



■ "Let's play a quick game of *Pikmin*" is something unlikely to be heard about Nintendo's upcoming strategy game



Score 3548

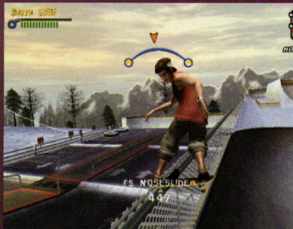


TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Neversoft**

■ Release Date: **December**

➔ If you've liked the first two games of this franchise (and there's a whole lot of you out there), you won't be disappointed with this game (see P52 review, page 94). It's now easier to string tricks together, which only adds to *Tony Hawk's* already addictive gameplay.



■ Million-point tricks are now possible in the latest incarnation of Neversoft's hit franchise



CRAZY TAXI

■ Publisher: **Acclaim** ■ Developer: **Acclaim Cheltenham** ■ Release Date: **Nov. 18**

➔ It's *Crazy Taxi*! On GameCube! Not much different from the PS2 version! OK, we're losing some momentum here. *Crazy Taxi's* frenetic, arcade gameplay would've been perfect to debut on GameCube, but this is a two-year-old arcade game. Still, if you haven't played it, it was one of Dreamcast's best games.



■ Look familiar? Acclaim is porting over a Dreamcast favorite to GameCube

DAVE MIRRA FREESTYLE BMX 2

■ Publisher: **Acclaim Max Sports** ■ Developer: **Z-Axis** ■ Release Date: **November 18**



■ Skate parks and open street-level environments are a canvas on which you can paint your tricks

➔ Let's just say it: Dave Mirra 2 offers gameplay that bears a striking resemblance to the gold standard in extreme sports, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, but still takes second place. The PS2 version earned four stars (see review, page 100), so keep an eye out for Dave if you're more a BMX fan than skater.

FIFA 2002: ROAD TO THE FIFA WORLD CUP

■ Publisher: **EA Sports** ■ Developer: **EA Tiburon** ■ Release Date: **November 18**

➔ FIFA's easy-to-use control scheme provides a simple yet effective way to shoot, pass, and move. It's more sim-like than Sega's forthcoming *Virtua Striker 3*, which offers faster gameplay. The graphics are quite pretty, but *FIFA* may appeal only to soccer fans because of the low scoring and slower pace.



■ Give-and-go touch passing is a nice feature, providing good control over more than just your player

MADDEN NFL 2002

■ Publisher: **EA** ■ Developer: **EA Tiburon** ■ Release Date: **November 18**



■ Madden can be "dumbed-down" in its options so you don't need to be an offensive coordinator to play

➔ Madden's such a good football game as of late that the development teams struggle with ways to improve it. Updated teams and rosters, prettier graphics, and more complex plays are a given. Reason enough to buy it? Maybe. But each new version refreshes the football experience, and this one is no different.

STILL MORE!

A quick look at GameCube titles coming down the road

ACTION/ADVENTURE

18-Wheeler American Pro Truckers: 2002

Get behind the wheel of a big rig in Acclaim's port of Sega's arcade hit.

Batman: Dark Tomorrow: 2002

Not much is known about this title other than that it's not based on the Batman: The Animated Series cartoon, and its DC Comics-written storyline features The Joker, Killer Croc, and Poison Ivy.

Bomberman Generations: 2002

Bomberman returns in this cel-shaded action game. Gameplay appears to be a mix of Pokémon-style quests and traditional four-player action.

Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex: Summer 2002

Traveler's Tales takes on the development duties in the latest incarnation of this 3D action platformer adding playable character Coco, Crash's sister.

Cubic Spring 2002

Based on the CG-robot that 3DO is also using for its GBC robot-racing title.

Die Hard: Spring 2002

Bits Studio is developing this first-person shooter set a few years after Die Hard: With a Vengeance.

Donkey Kong Racing: 2002

Rare's sequel to Diddy Kong Racing has you race through the jungle on animals, feeding them so they can grow into faster steeds.

Duke Nukem Forever: TBA

3D Realm's upcoming first-person shooter — ported from PC — features Duke's traditional macho action, plus the ability to use vehicles.

Galileo: Spring 2002

Play the role of Captain Rhema Sabrier in this seagiving adventure from Confounding Factor.

Kameo: Elements of Power: 2002

Adventure game lets players capture and grow wild creatures to command, as well as possessing them to do battle.

Kao the Kangaroo 2: 2002

Nonviolent arcade-action title aimed at kids follows the adventures of Kao as he tries to save the animal kingdom.

Kirby Tilt 'n' Tumble 2: Summer 2002

A special cartridge turns your GBA into a controller for this GC title, which plays much like Sega's Super Monkey Ball.

Legend of Zelda: 2002

Cel-shaded Zelda? People doubted Paper Mario until they played it, so we're willing to give it a chance.

Mario Kart: TBA

Expect more of N64's Mario Kart, only with better graphics.

Mario Sunshine: Winter 2002

Mario makes his latest platformer appearance. Probably one of the first system-sellers.

Metroid Prime: 2002

Retro Studios' much publicized third-person — make that first-person — adventure puts the player in the familiar role of Samus Aran.

Mickey TBA

Yes, there is a Disney Interactive, but no, they're not doing it. That honor falls on...Capcom! Yep, the company that's bringing you Resident Evil is developing this upcoming platformer.

Minority Report: Fall 2002

Little is known about this game other than that it is based upon the Spielberg sci-fi film of the same name.

Perfect Dark: TBA

We know Rare is hard at work on this sequel to the popular N64 shooter. Specific details are scarce, but we have high expectations nonetheless.

Rave: The Groove Adventure: Fall 2002

No, not a new rhythm game in Konami's Bemani series. It's actually an adventure title based on the Japanese comic of the same name.

Resident Evil: Summer 2002

Remake of the famous survival horror game has Shinji Mikami taking the helm as director.

Resident Evil 2: TBA

Unlike Resident Evil, this is just a straight port of the PlayStation version.

Resident Evil 3: TBA

Again, as with Resident Evil 2, a simple port of the original.

Resident Evil 4: TBA

Finally original content in the series, but no info available other than players being able to switch characters in the game.

Resident Evil Code: Veronica: TBA

Capcom seems to be on cruise control with another port.

Resident Evil Zero: 2003

Prequel to the series; players assume the role of Rebecca Chambers and unlock the mysteries of the Umbrella Corporation.

Ricochet Rick: TBA 2002

Pilot an airplane in this cartoonish action title from Titus.

Rune: TBA 2002

GameCube's first RPG that centers around a Magic: The Gathering-style card combat system.

Sgt. Cruise: Summer 2002

Cartoonish action game features cooperative multiplayer mode.

The Simpsons Road Rage: January 2002

This shameless Crazy Taxi clone includes dialogue written by actual Simpsons writers. Still fun — now funnier.

Sonic Adventure 2: Spring 2002

Some things are simply made for each other: Sonic on GameCube should fit perfectly together.

Star Fox Adventures: Dinosaur Planet: Spring 2002

Originally slated for N64, Rare took almost the entire adventure game design and ported it to GameCube.

Tarzan: TBA 2002

Tarzan Disney's Tarzan, play as the title character as he tries to rescue animals from poachers.

FIGHTING

Legends of Wrestling: Spring 2002

Go old-school fighting as Jake "The Snake," George "The Animal" Steele, and Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka.

Soul Calibur 2: TBA 2002

The next-gen fighter we've been waiting for (see Cover Story page 64).

WWF: Wrestlemania: TBA 2002

AKI, developer of the original game, is said to be involved but has not been officially announced as the dev team.

MISC.

Animal Forest Plus: 2002

Myamoto has created a virtual world where players can fish and engage in other activities such as textile design and interior decoration. Really.

Tetris Worlds: TBA 2002

It's yet another Tetris.

Universal Studios: Spring 2002

Developed by Nara Digital Works, this game houses several mini-games based on the Back to the Future, Jaws, and WaterWorld attractions.

RACING

Jeremy McGrath Supercross World: Spring 2002

Acclaim's Salt Lake City studio brings the Jeremy McGrath supercross racing franchise to GameCube.

RPG

Gold Star Mountains: 2002

Raise animals then train them in this action RPG from Soft France.

Phantasy Star Online: Spring 2002

Persistent-world RPG from Sonic Team looks and plays like the Dreamcast version and, in theory will be playable via GC's modem adapter.

SHM

Doshin the Giant: 2002

Before there was Block & White, there was Doshin on 64DD. Interact with villagers via Doshin and win over their admiration.

SPORTS

1080° Snowboarding 2: 2002

Nintendo's snowboarder racer earned five stars in its N64 iteration, so expect good things from its next-gen cousin.

College Basketball 2K2: January 2002

Visual Concepts brings its basketball expertise to the college level.

Little League Baseball 2002

Not much is known about this title, other than that it's coming from NewKidCo, which means it's not meant for you.

NBA 2K2: Spring 2002

Sega's NBA title moves to GameCube with more of its five-on-five NBA action, although it's not known whether online play will be present.

NBA Courtside 2002: January 2002

Developer Left Field delivers Nintendo's own entry into the basketball category with new passing controls.

Virtua Striker 3 v. 2002: January 2002

Sim-style sports games aren't for everyone, and AM2 has the arcade sports fan in mind with its latest offering.



■ Donkey Kong Racing



■ Kao the Kangaroo 2



■ Tarzan



■ The Simpsons Road Rage








■ Universal Studios



■ Phantasy Star Online

HOW DO THEY STACK UP?

Next Gen helps you find the console winner this holiday season

CONSOLE	HARDWARE	CONTROLLER DESIGN	CURRENT GAMES
GAMECUBE 	<p>Although GameCube may lack raw horsepower, Nintendo has created a cost-effective, efficiently designed piece of hardware. The games look great out of the gate, but developers may be stifled by the system's technical limitations later in its lifecycle.</p> <p>NextGen ★★☆☆☆</p>	<p>It features a beautiful, ergonomic design, although it's one that seems inflexible for certain non-Nintendo genres — specifically fighting. A step forward nonetheless.</p> <p>NextGen ★★☆☆☆</p>	<p>Having 15 games out before the holiday sounds a lot better than the measly three available in Japan, but the only bona fide system-seller appears to be <i>Rogue Squadron II</i>. The first-party games are good, but they're not obviously worthy of the initial \$199 investment.</p> <p>NextGen ★★☆☆☆</p>
XBOX 	<p>A monster truck of power under the hood — not surprising given its sheer bulkiness. When Microsoft announced Xbox's tech specs, many believed it was too conservative in its projection of what would still be a high-performance game machine. They were wrong.</p> <p>NextGen ★★★★★</p>	<p>Those with larger hands may really like this controller, but the button size and placement compromises the design. Microsoft should offer a smaller version devoid of the huge card ports.</p> <p>NextGen ★☆☆☆☆</p>	<p>As with GameCube, there are several solid games arriving before the holidays, but only <i>Halo</i> and <i>Dead or Alive 3</i> are worth a 6 a.m. wait outside Electronics Boutique.</p> <p>NextGen ★★☆☆☆</p>
PS2 	<p>PlayStation 2 is no longer the fanciest entry in the market. Although not the powerplant that is Xbox, it still has a lot to offer, especially as developers become more familiar with its intricacies.</p> <p>NextGen ★★★★★</p>	<p>Hard to fault something that 80 million people bought into the first time. Whether the Dual Shock 2's analog buttons ever amount to anything remains to be seen.</p> <p>NextGen ★★★★★</p>	<p>Four words: <i>Metal Gear Solid 2</i>. Add <i>Devil May Cry</i>, <i>GT3</i>, and <i>Jak and Daxter</i>, all of which are or should be at least four-star games available only on PS2 this year, and you can't go wrong.</p> <p>NextGen ★★★★★</p>
WINNER	XBOX	TIED: PS2 AND GAMECUBE	PLAYSTATION 2
	<p>Microsoft has surprised many by not pumping out marginal titles (no jaggies!) in its first wave of games like Sony did with PS2. A lot of that can be attributed to the hardware, which opens several doors for developers. And today's games are only using a fraction of Xbox performance.</p>	<p>A tie between PS2 and GameCube, where it becomes more a matter of personal preference.</p> 	<p>PS2's second-generation games have the advantage of being compared to GameCube and Xbox first-generation games — an edge PS2 earned by beating them to market. There will be around 150 PS2 games available this fall, including exclusive third-party games such as <i>MGS2</i> and <i>Devil May Cry</i>.</p>

THE MAKING OF GAMECUBE

(Interview continued from page 81)

much. But there was a lot of interaction at the feature-set level. So for example, working with Iwata-san, he'd say, "Hey, it'd be nice if you could do the following three things — we could do some wonderful things in games."

NG: Were there other developer concerns taken into consideration?

GB: We tried to make their development as cheap as possible. The cheaper their development is, the more money they're going to make, the more they want to write for this platform, the more games that are out there that are good games, the better we are all going to do. How much Microsoft did that, I'd question.

[Xbox is] basically a DirectX 8 machine, and how they create the DXs of the world is not driven by the developers, at least from our experience.

NG: Nvidia swallowed 3dfx and is now the de facto standard on PCs with the GeForce series, even providing the Xbox graphics chip. How do you see them as a competitor?

GB: What we hear back from developers is that across the board people are very, very happy with GameCube, and less than happy with Xbox. I think of that platform as a subsidized PC, but it's not going to have the performance of a PC. It's going to have much, much worse performance compared to putting something

like our Radeon 8500 or a GeForce out in a standard PC.

NG: Is writing for GameCube the same as writing to OpenGL?

GB: A lot of it's just a way of thinking. There's sort of a model of how you overlay the software onto hardware, and how you overlay the need to get to hardware. If you look at the DX releases, they tend to be an API for the sake of an API, and not so much the implementation of hardware — so we're able to make things a lot cheaper than having to write for DX8. We created this API from scratch with the sole purpose of game development; OpenGL was

UPCOMING GAMES

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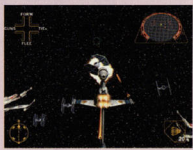
Many Nintendo games would make **Next Gen's** All-Time Greats list, and there's a lot of potential with the new *Mario*, *Zelda*, and *Metroid* games. Nintendo's exclusive deal on all *Resident Evil* games shows that the company is being aggressive in tying up big games to its system.

NextGen ★★★★★

Among the masses, Nintendo is synonymous with videogames. The company's main challenge is attracting the older gaming market that Sony has cultivated during the last few years, and Nintendo is working to do just that with promotions and events like its touring Cube Club.

NextGen ★★★★★

...Eat, breathe, and sleep Nintendo, or want the best *Star Wars* game available this year. And at \$200, it could actually become your second console.



Will third-party companies commit AAA franchises like *Virtua Fighter* to Xbox? *Soul Calibur* is a step in the right direction, but third parties seem hesitant to jump on board until Xbox proves itself — and first-party games aren't up to the Miyamoto standard.

NextGen ★★★★★

We've heard of Xbox branding problems and wonder if the world will ever equate Microsoft with anything other than productivity software. We're still waiting for signs that Microsoft is spending its \$500-million marketing budget. Plans for 10,000 Xbox kiosks are a good start.

NextGen ★★★★★



...Like to bet on the underdog, want *Halo* or *DOA3*, and technology that looks good for the long haul.

Now these are the games we've been waiting for! Titles such as *Maximo*, *Virtua Fighter 4*, *Final Fantasy X* and *XI* (as well as some secret games that **Next Gen** will be unveiling in the next few issues) will be must-haves — and those are just the games coming out in the spring.

NextGen ★★★★★

With over 15 TV campaigns for individual games airing on cable and network shows, promotional partnerships with Pepsi, Hershey's, etc., and advertisements in gaming, music, and entertainment pubs, it looks like Sony has its act together since that awful "PS9" debacle.

NextGen ★★★★★

...Want the absolutely best variety of action games this holiday season — and a DVD player to boot.



PLAYSTATION 2

It'll be hard for Nintendo and Microsoft to sign exclusive games because of PlayStation 2's installed base; there's just too much money to be made for a publisher not to also make a PS2 version. Still, many developers aren't fond of the hardware and have moved on to Xbox and GameCube.

PLAYSTATION 2

What's the most effective way to reach gamers? Highlight the games they want to play — which is exactly what Sony is doing with far-reaching TV ads. And by choosing PlayStation 2 as its console name, Sony also avoided the challenge of re-branding its newest system.

OVERALL WINNER: PLAYSTATION 2

While all of these categories impact the success of a console, it's still all about the games — and that's why Sony is this year's winner. Nintendo and Microsoft will need to keep working at breakneck speeds if they want to catch PlayStation 2. But if they can sign system-selling exclusive games, help their developers quickly maximize their consoles' performance, and successfully drum up consumer support, it'll be a whole new ballgame next year.

NextGen

created back in '93 or '94, at a time when gaming wasn't even on the radar.

NG: Can developers get close to the metal?

GB: It's up to Nintendo on how deep into the hardware they want to release specs. In some ways developers may be a little disappointed, because you don't need to tweak things around to get performance out of the machine, and some of the guys really love doing that.

NG: People want great launch games, but also expect the games to get better over the life of a system. Is this a Catch-22?

GB: N64 was a new model for a lot of the developers, going from 2D worlds to 3D worlds. With GameCube it's a double-edge sword, being able to get performance right out the

chute really easily without twiddling a bunch of registers. It may appear like you're not going to get better games down the road, but there's a rich feature set that I don't think everyone is tapping yet.

NG: What are GameCube's graphical strengths?

GB: It's got incredibly flexible, high-performance multi-texturing capabilities. We've got some very nice ways of blending and combining textures to get different effects. Textures can affect other textures, which allows you to do things like proper bump-mapping.

NG: What's your role been with Nintendo now that the chip has been designed?

GB: Over the last year, we've been working with

Nintendo and the main production partner, NEC, on getting to production and getting production quality up. We'll probably be working with NEC in the foreseeable future [to try to reduce cost]. Over time, you've seen machines go from \$199 to \$149, \$129, and \$99 — it's important to keep dropping the cost.

NG: Do you foresee your partnership going forward with Nintendo on any machine beyond GameCube?

GB: We certainly hope so. [Nintendo] maintains partnerships as long as their partners are living up to what they need. I think we've gone beyond what they've needed, and I think the personal relationships are there. Of anybody having the chance to do the next one, we've got to be high on the list.

NextGen

...on the other side.

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MGM INTERACTIVE



The logo for Teen magazine, featuring the word "TEEN" in a bold, sans-serif font, with a large, stylized "T" in the center. The "T" is composed of two thick, black bars forming a cross shape. The word "TEEN" is positioned to the left of the "T", and the word "MAGAZINE" is positioned to the right of the "T". The entire logo is set against a white background.

We've got our first-ever Xbox reviews, but the big news turns out to be the return of The Hawk — go figure



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2X.....96



■ With up to four players able to connect simultaneously, the online aspect adds a whole new dynamic to the series

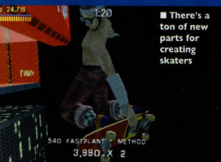


■ The new levels are huge and designed so as to enable expert players to build trick strings that easily exceed a million points and close to 100 multipliers

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Neversoft**

Truly orgasmic gaming



E If we've learned one thing about the game industry in the new millennium, it's that we should never underestimate Neversoft's ability to evolve the *Tony Hawk* series. As much as *Pro Skater 2* improved on the original — some consider it the best game ever created for the original PlayStation — *THPS3* makes even more significant

strides. And like its predecessor, THPS3 outshines every title in PS2's current library.

THPS3's most impressive refinements come in its level design and gameplay. Neversoft has packed each of the gigantic levels full of secret items, hidden areas, and challenging objectives. Furthermore, players will find each level full of activity and very interactive. Skate parks such as Los Angeles feature endless amounts of traffic, people

walking about, and even earthquakes and shootouts. Most importantly, Neverson's conspicuously elite design ability has created some of the most challenging, yet most rewarding levels ever conceived in a skateboarding game. Once you master a particular park, trick strings exceeding a million points are easily attainable.

In terms of gameplay, *THPS3* will remain familiar to fans, but with some very welcome new

PlayStation 2

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	94
Arctic Thunder	100
Batman Vengeance	100
Crash Bandicoot: Wrath of Cortex	100
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	100
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PC

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The Rating System

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

★★★★★	REVOLUTIONARY
★★★★	EXCELLENT
★★★☆☆	GOOD
★★★☆☆	FAIR
★★★☆☆	BAD

● Denotes a review of a Japanese product



■ **Ooh la la!** Each level features a number of obstacles to avoid — traffic, criminals, and even beach babes

twists. Besides obviously adding new tricks like the hilarious Jackass grab and Handstand manual and grind, Neversoft has enhanced the engine with new types of tricks such as Reverts. These enable players to execute a 180-degree out-of-ramp jump, which can then be connected to a manual; from there, the player can continue to grind rails or Ollie more ramps, effectively stringing the entire trick together. This translates into larger tricks limited less by the game's engine and more by your own imagination,

creating an even deeper gameplay experience.

Of course, none of these gameplay mechanics would matter without precise controls, and *THPS3*'s controls are seamless: Executing various tricks in long and complicated strings never poses any problems. This is certainly due to even tighter game code, but also to the fact that everything runs at a silky-smooth 60fps with crisp, clear characters and levels.

The other extras to which fans have grown accustomed have also been updated. The Create-A-Skater and Park Editor modes feature many more options, undoubtedly thanks to PS2's increased memory and storage. This means that you can design even larger, more elaborate levels and create a wider variety of characters — even Abe Lincoln parts are available!

Although the two-player mode remains essentially the same, it now seems insignificant in the face of *THPS3*'s newest, most



■ Besides special tricks, players can also access a few hidden grinds and grabs

important feature: online playability. The online aspect enables four players to compete against each other simultaneously in a variety of games such as King of the Hill, Graffiti, and Trick Point competitions. We can only hope that Internet rankings, clans, and tournaments will follow.

THPS3 suffers from no serious faults, although the soundtrack is arguably weaker than previous entries. There's a wide variety of songs — hip-hop, rock, and punk — to satisfy a wide variety of tastes, but this also means that everyone will have a track or two they hate. Fortunately, there's also an option that enables you to deactivate any song.

In any case, this in no way diminishes the game's overall quality. If you've never played any

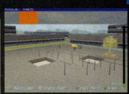


of the other games in the series (and if you haven't, how dare you call yourself hardcore?), you owe it to yourself to pick up a copy of this gem, immediately.

— Chester Barber

PARK IT!

The interface and controls for the Park Editor and Create-A-Skater modes, thankfully, remain the same, making it very simple (albeit time-consuming) to build levels and skaters. Since players now have access to a wider variety of parts, more elaborate layouts are now possible. We're hoping that, with Internet access now available on PS2, as with PCs, players will be able to upload and share new levels and skaters with the rest of the *THPS3* community. If that is the case, this game's replayability goes to 11.



■ Neversoft has added a new camera that enables you to look around in the level. Combined with the replay option, you can create very dynamic camera angles

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: PS2's most impressive game to date. Not just perfectly balanced — *THPS3* offers enough new elements to warrant the coveted fifth star reserved for revolutionary titles.

DAY 33:

*Killed Catalisks this morning by
combining water, air and fire elements.
Haven't saved the world yet. Really hungry.*

DAY 37:

*Fighting never ends.
Axion working overtime.
Pulled groin.*

DAY 42:

*Spent day in "fire" realm.
Got lost. Sure wish I had
"Backpacker's Guide to Perathia."*



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PlayStation 2



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■ PLAYSTATION 2

Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2

■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Developer: Z-Axis

The good extreme



■ Of all the Hawk challengers, Dave Mirra 2 comes closest to the mark

→ Time to free your mind a bit. You've no doubt eye-balled the accompanying screenshot, seen that this is a sequel to yet another "Xtreme" game, and decided to move on to the next review — but that would be a mistake.

What sets Dave Mirra apart from the other Tony Hawk wannabes is a truly rich stunt system. Although the basic three-button trick/grind/grab model is by now a genre standard, here you can mix all three together. So it is possible, for example, to modify a backflip with a no-hander and then land into a manual modified by a one-footer. There are over 1500 different tricks possible in this game, and it never gets boring trying to find every one.

The original Dave Mirra game was also underrated, in part due to a lack of variety. The sequel adds eight truly



enormous parks with plenty of hidden areas, lots of interesting challenges, and an excellent park editor that lets you create your own land of broken chins and hyperextended knees.

Completing every single task with a single rider is challenge enough, but with 14 different pro to pick from, it could take months to complete the entire game. Unfortunately, the graphics are just this side of mediocre, with few interesting touches to appeal to the eye. But that's why you skipped this review isn't it? You thought this was another boring same-old, and now you've missed out.

— Jim Preston

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Tons o' tricks; gigantic, engaging levels; a park editor; and excellent challenges. What more do you need?

Batman Vengeance

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Developer: Ubi Soft Montreal

One nice thing about Batman Vengeance is that it faithfully captures the retro aesthetic of the excellent animated series. It's based on, and its many cut scenes are highly entertaining. However, the glossy surface hides a darker heart.

First off, controlling Batman and his Bat-gadgets requires a pretty complex scheme. It bops back and forth between first- and third-person modes, and together with the less-than-precise analog control (the double jump, in particular, seems to require almost

random timing), too often the result is a worn try/die/repeat model of gameplay. That said, there's a lot of variety, with frequent stages in which you fly the Batplane, solve logic puzzles, and so on, along with a few unique, interesting challenges here and there. However, these intriguing elements can only offset, and not make up for, the often frus-



■ A screenshot can't show the slipshod gameplay

trating gameplay. It's entertaining, but needed a lot more tweaking. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: While it has a number of things going for it, *Batman Vengeance* still comes up short in a few key areas.

Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: Universal/Konami

■ Developer: Traveller's Tales

The Bandicoot's first foray on PS2 ought to have been great news. However, if you were expecting anything different, prepare to be disappointed. On the other hand, if you wanted a lot more of the same — well, it's still disappointing.

To wit, the game hasn't changed one jot since *Crash 2*. The bulk of this is still old-style platform challenges running on a track (a 3D track, but still a track), broken up by levels in which Crash pilots different vehicles like a hell-pak or glider, and at one point even a fairly goofy mech. Obviously, millions of folks have bought into this

style of gameplay and enjoyed it, so perhaps you can't fault them so much for repeating what's been successful in the past.

But even so, there are issues here. Mainly (and we seem to be saying this a lot lately) it just isn't that well tuned or balanced, including some collision detection glitches and many badly chosen camera angles. Worst of all, the load times are horrendous. They've tried covering



■ Same old bandicoot, same old gameplay

it up by adding a "falling Crash" mini-game in between stages, but it's very repetitive and quickly grows tedious.

However, Crash fans should certainly get their fix. The graphics are solid and colorful, and the gameplay is exactly what you've come to expect. We'll just keep hoping for more. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Even with the relatively low bar of just offering more of the same, this still comes up kinda short.

Arctic Thunder

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Midway

When *Hydro Thunder* appeared as a launch title for Dreamcast, it was a beautiful and very playable arcade racer. It's rather surprising, then, that two years later, its spiritual sequel is in every way inferior.

The concept is basically the same: You take control of a very fast vehicle (in this case, a snowmobile), fly through unusual fantasy environments, collect power-ups, get to the finish line, rinse, and repeat. *Arctic Thunder* features more combat than

its *Hydro* cousin, but has no more depth because of it. The power-ups are actually too plentiful, so combat consists mostly of jamming on the fire button. The graphics are sub-Dreamcast, and while all the tracks include hidden paths, the interesting architecture and leaps over lava and nuclear waste aren't enough to prop up an ordinary expe-



■ Arctic Thunder is no Hydro Thunder. Even two years later, it doesn't come close to being as cool

rience that's as routine as a metronome. — Jim Preston

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: There's plenty of "Arctic," but little "Thunder." But then, we suppose *Snow Snooze* wouldn't have been as catchy.

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A close-up, high-contrast image of Gordon Freeman's face, focusing on his eyes and the right side of his head. He is wearing his signature black-rimmed glasses. Overlaid on the right side of his face is a large, semi-transparent Lambda symbol (Λ), which is the iconic logo for the Half-Life series. The background is a warm, orange-yellow gradient.

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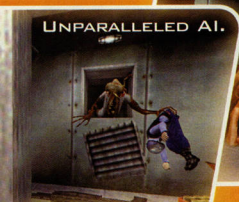
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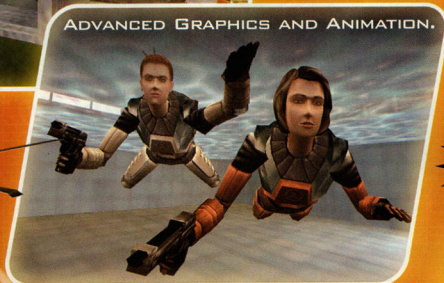
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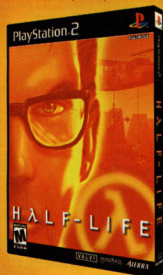
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■ PLAYSTATION 2

Extreme G3 Racing

■ Publisher: Acclaim ■ Developer: Acclaim Cheltenham

When fast is fast enough



■ **Extreme G3 Racing** won't win too many points for originality, but that doesn't mean it ain't fun

→ **Extreme G3 Racing** is the latest addition to that most stylized of racing's sub-genres, the futuristic hyper-speed racer. A couple of centuries from now, low-slung motorcycles capable of 600 mph are the vehicles of choice. **Extreme G3's** primary goal seems to be giving you the impression that you are going very, very fast indeed, and it can't be faulted in this regard.

Thanks to a low camera angle, some very slick track designs (10 in all), and little visible draw-in, the game

conveys a satisfying sensation of breakneck speed. It's not a quantum leap over other sci-fi screamers like *Rollcage*, *Star Wars Racer*, and the granddaddy of them all, *Wipeout*, but it moves right along.

Upgradeable bike systems and weapons (which, predictably, can be bought and sold at the in-game mall with the cash you earn from races), cool track designs, and a pleasing variety of game modes and leagues (including a neat cooperative two-player Career mode) will keep genre addicts happy. Unlocking the later tracks and more advanced racing teams will also keep you busy — at least until the next game like this comes out — and on the whole, this definitely delivers the rush speed freaks crave.

Still, many of us wonder how a sub-genre in which each new game looks and feels largely the same as the last can continue to keep people interested. — Gary Whitta

■ The graphics are nice and glossy, and it moves well

■ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Though it brings nothing substantially original to the party, this is a solid, slick-feeling playing for fans of *Wipeout*-style racers.

Half-Life

■ Platform: PlayStation 2

■ Publisher: Sierra ■ Developer: Gearbox Software/Valve

OK, we're well aware that this is a port of a three-year-old game. We liked it anyway. Sue us. *Half-Life's* claim to fame was that it added a story line that mattered and a modicum of character interaction to first-person shooters. Obviously, this has been done many times since then on both PC and consoles, with *Red Faction* being a recent PS2 example.

However, this is an exceptionally nice port. Concerns about unsteady framerates have turned out to be largely unfounded; on rare occasions it does chug slightly for a brief second, but only very rarely. It

uses a dual analog control scheme that works as well as any console FPS. It also adds a lock-on button that keeps you oriented on a chosen target no matter how you move, which is both a blessing and a curse — there's definitely a learning curve to figuring out how to use it best — but it remains an interesting and useful wrinkle. Last, deathmatch and cooperative multiplayer modes add a bit of replay value.

Half-Life won't set the



■ **It's not as groundbreaking as it once was, but Half-Life is still pretty cool**

current console world on fire, but if you want to see what all the fuss was about, this is an excellent, enjoyable chance to find out. — Jeff Lundgren

■ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: It may be getting old, but there's still a surprising amount of life in *Half-Life*.

Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland

■ Platform: PlayStation 2

■ Developer: Victor Interactive

The premise of this charming, unique game sounds patently ludicrous: It's a farming RPG in which you must save your late grandpa's farm by growing crops, raising livestock, selling herbs, or working at the stables. While all this sounds pretty menial (mostly because it is), there's a lot of *Sims*-like strategy in deciding just how to spend each day. Plus it's oddly satisfying to see an empty farm slowly fill with tomatoes, corn, cows, and chickens.

Farming aside, it's the interaction with a colorful cast of NPCs that drives the story — courting a wife and saving the town from being bulldozed to make way for an amusement park. There are nine ways to do this, from winning a baking contest to catching a rare butterfly, depending on how you



■ **Can you save your farm and the town? Further, does this babe want you?**

treat certain characters. In the end the slow pace and manual labor will almost certainly wear you down before you see all nine endings, but the first couple of go-rounds are well worth it. — Eric Brochner

■ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: A wonderfully charismatic, unique title that every gamer should play, though your mileage will vary with your patience

Kinetica

■ Platform: PlayStation 2

■ Publisher: Sony ■ Developer: Sony

Much like *Extreme G3*, *Kinetica* hardly reinvents the wheel. It too is all about blazing ultra-high-speed trails around space-age tracks while trance house music pumps away. But it does add a few things to help shrug off that "recycled" feel. Chief among these is an extremely liberal definition of the concept of a racetrack, as *Kinetica's* speed jockeys don't just burn rubber on the road, but the walls, ceilings, and virtually every other surface.

The sprawling tracks often split off into multiple levels and incorporate breathtaking freefalls and steep changes in elevation. There are fleeting moments when you'll have absolutely no idea where you are or what just happened before eventually realizing that it's impossible to really wipe out or "come off" the track. It takes a bit of getting used to, but the free-wheeling sensation that comes with some of the more adventurous tracks is a real breath of fresh air.

Its only real minus point is a stylistic one, in that the vehicles



■ **Kinetica comes out better than the sum of its parts**

are not strictly bikes nor cars, but bizarre hybrids that look like Transformers rejects. There's a cool variety of them and they do have some character; but ultimately they are, frankly, a bit silly and take the edge off. — Gary Whitta

■ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: An intriguing twist on a largely played-out genre, although the Autobots-style racers might turn some gamers off.

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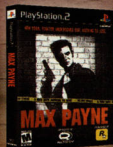
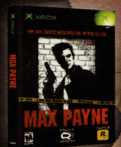
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PLAYSTATION 2 **NHL 2002**

Publisher: EA Sports Developer: EA Canada

Solid as ice



EA Sports' NHL series remains (once again) the clear leader in pro hockey

→ With NHL 2002, EA Sports once again creates a superb videogame with fantastic graphics, animation, and presentation. Although it ranks just four stars this year, its only real competition comes from previous incarnations of itself. NHL 2001 featured the welcome addition of sliders that enabled you to tailor the gameplay and physics to suit your tastes. Thankfully most of those sliders have been retained for this year's effort, but sadly so has the poor defensive AI. In fact, relying on your computer-controlled

defense players to block shots and passes is utterly futile, as your defense still has little idea how to clear the crease or shut the back door.

It's possible to turn down the passing accuracy and turn up the interceptions, or even adjust one of the four difficulty settings. Yet the simple fact remains that it's difficult to play deliberate, defensive-oriented hockey. Casual and arcade fans, however, will be thrilled at the obligatory graphical updates, better face mapping, and cool new breakout camera.

The biggest addition are the new NHL Hero, Celebration, and Easter Egg cards, which have to be unlocked by completing preset hockey challenges. It's a great way to bring more playability to the game and will hopefully be a standard feature from now on. Again, the defensive play could use some work, but NHL 2002, like EA Sports' hockey effort every year, is still the only game in town.

— Jim Preston

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Only frustrating defensive controls mar another brilliant effort from EA Sports.

Monster Rancher 3

Platform: PlayStation 2 Publisher: Tecmo Developer: Tecmo

Back in the pre-Pokémon days, the original *Monster Rancher*, in which players used music CDs to unlock pet monsters, then raised and coached them in gladiatorial combat, was an addictive, one-of-a-kind title, earning five stars back in NG 38. The series now continues on PS2, with cel-shaded graphics, many more monsters, and deeper creature/trainer interaction. In fact, *Monster Rancher 3* hews so closely to the now four-year-old formula, it's disappointing.

It's odd, given the incredible vision of the original game, but even with a slightly reworked

monster mutation/combination system and a Pokémon Stadium-style Versus mode, there are no truly new or fresh ideas here. If they had added the ability to raise multiple creatures simultaneously, for instance, it would have opened up new possibilities like team battles and monster-monster relationships. Instead, it's all just more of the same.

Make no mistake: This game is every bit as absorbing

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A unique, absorbing game that needs to expand its vision in order to live up to its revolutionary roots.



Monster Rancher 3 looks a little better but plays about the same

as the original (although the pace remains a bit slow), but there's still too much untapped potential here. — Eric Bratcher

The Legend of Alon D'ar

Platform: PlayStation 2 Publisher: Ubi Soft Developer: Stormfront Studios

Few things are more tedious than a "sprawling" RPG without any real wit, style, or engaging characters. But *Alon D'ar* is just such a beast.

The graphics are solid and show some variety, all without making any real impression. The character and production designs likewise flesh things out without being memorable. The dialogue and story often hint at larger ideas (conflicts among the game's half-dozen races, for example) then sort of abandon them. The only non-generic element is that, as in *Secret of Mana*, up to two

players can control the four-member main party.

Otherwise, combat consists of the usual, semi-realtime, "wait on your attack meter to count down" formula. Sub-quests pop up like weeds, but a depressing number of them consist of scavenger hunts to find the 30 Amber Beads (or Silver Acorns, Medicinal Tree Frogs, ad nauseum) that are literally just lying around.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: As middle-of-the-road an RPG as they come — frequently plodding, only sporadically enjoyable, and almost instantly forgettable.



The worst thing about it is that nothing stands out

In the end, very little about the rest of this game is any less of a chore. — Jeff Lundrigan

Victorious Boxers

Platform: PlayStation 2 Publisher: Empire Interactive Developer: New Corporation

Victorious Boxers puts you in the role of pugilistic hopeful Ippo Makunouchi on a quest to win the Featherweight belt. The boxing is fast, with both arcade and sim elements, requiring some of the technique and patience of the real sport but with a much quicker pace. Traditional RPG-like stat management has been dropped in favor of in-game cinematics in the styling of Rocky.

At first, the controls are a problem: The analog stick handles both ducking and 3D movement, which is awkward until you reconfigure it in the options menu. However, while

the controls can be mastered, the camera angle is occasionally less than useful. The graphics are decent; the framerate is good; and there's some fantastic knock-down animations.

As you defeat each of the 43 boxers in Story mode — there are also three other main characters to play — they become playable in the Versus mode, offering solid replay value. While manga-style characters may not substitute for



It looks, sounds, and feels like a Rocky movie — only with manga-style characters the real-world boxers in KnockOut Kings, this game does a better job capturing the speed and drama of the sport.

— Tom Russo

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's arguably the best 3D boxing game yet, but with a few odd quirks and fictitious characters, its appeal may be limited.



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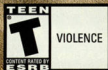
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XBOX

■ DREAMCAST

Ooga Booga

■ Publisher: Sega

■ Developer: Visual Concepts

Booga on, dude



■ There's something to be said for running around a small island smacking other players with witch doctor spells — really

→ There's a kind of apprehension and mild dread that creeps over a reviewer when handed a game called Ooga Booga. The name doesn't exactly inspire confidence, nor does the generic cartoon of a "wacky" Tiki-masked character on the jewel case, conjuring thoughts of yet another little-known, lower-tier title destined for a quick death at retail and an unmarked grave.

Which really just goes to show how misleading first impressions can be, because while Ooga Booga is unlikely to bring Dreamcast back from certain death, there's actually something to be said for it: Primarily, it's fun. It's a deceptively simple, arcade-style party game that casts up to four participants (either splitscreen or online) as cartoon witch doctors who like nothing more than to spend their days laying the smack down on each other

with a variety of magic spells. It's Looney Tunes meets Survivor with a big dose of Super Smash Bros. thrown in. Ooga Booga's action often appears manic and random as all four players rush around firing off spells in every direction. But there's a fair amount of skill involved, and while the most fun is to be had with friends in multiplayer Party mode, the computer AI puts up a decent fight as well. The whole thing is wrapped up in a charming Tiki-style atmosphere with cute characterizations for all four witch doctors, and a soundtrack of catchy samba-style tunes that you'll quickly find yourself bopping along to.

All in all, Ooga Booga's not going to set the gaming world on fire, but it does have the makings of a sleeper hit, and it's a surefire blast any time you can get two or more people around the TV. — Gary Whitto

■ **NextGen** ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A tasty slice of lightweight party fun that proves there's life in Dreamcast yet.

Sega Bass Fishing 2

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: WOW Entertainment

Sega lets one get away with its third Dreamcast fishing game, which finds the series struggling to evolve into a sophisticated fishing sim. However, like the flying protagonists in James Cameron's 1981 *Piranha II: The Spawning*, this creature doesn't quite belong.

The areas are bigger, the fish smarter, and the tackle box deeper. This sounds great, but it isn't. Too much time is wasted trolling about in search of fish — any fish — to angle. Once that's done, you'll discover that even the most gluttonous-looking specimens are apparently anorexic. Oh,

they'll track your lure intently for cast after cast, but they won't actually bite until some too-arbitrary combination of weather, time of day, lure, and (probably) planetary alignment occurs. Then, once you stumble upon this magical recipe, every bass within miles becomes ravenous until an eight-ounce Crappie inexplicably snaps your line. Finally, there is no Arcade mode, and while the fish are modeled quite



■ Notice how this lunker is following the bait but not eating it? Expect to see a lot of that in this game

nically, the visual effects, textures, and control are less polished than in the two-year-old original. — Eric Bratcher

■ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: More realistic, but not more fun. This is easily Sega's deepest fishing title, but it's alternately too hard or too easy.

Death Crimson OX

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Sammy ■ Developer: Ecole

Despite the current glut of gun games (*Time Crisis II*, *Silent Scope II*, *Confidential Mission*), the genre remains stagnant, unable to offer home players any real innovation or longevity (and no, releasing *Silent Scope* games without gun support does not count as innovation).

While *Death Crimson OX* is a serviceable arcade title, it's just another example of this trend.

Perhaps the problem is the fundamental simplicity of gun games. This is basically *House of the Dead 2* with enemies that don't break apart and some RoboCop-style visual

influences refreshingly blended into the zombie theme. There are a few nice touches: Your shots become more damaging when you near death; there's a "kill everything onscreen" smart bomb (oddly named the "deathnut"); and while the substitution of subtitles for spoken dialogue was surely a cost-cutting measure, it spares you from bad voiceover work.



■ The enemies range from cyborgs and giant beetles to kung-fu kicking skeletons

Still, with only a single path through six quick levels, there's no way for us to recommend this to anyone but gun game collectors. — Eric Bratcher

■ **NextGen** ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: A typical gun game with typical gun game problems: It's too short, too redundant, and too similar to everything else out there. Only the NRA would lobby for this one.

Reel Fishing|Wild

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Natsume ■ Developer: Victor Interactive

Reel Fishing|Wild focuses intently on capturing the almost Zen-like essence of fishing itself, with a few arcade elements thrown in. And for the most part, it succeeds.

The atmosphere is excellent, with each of the 14 locations — ranging from a Japanese mountain stream to the piranha-infested Amazon — beautifully depicted by a photorealistic, looping FMV. A lack of any user interface whatsoever actually adds to the immersion, and the minimalist music for each location rounds out the package.

the camera switches to an underwhelming 3D underwater view in which neither the environment nor any of the 24 fish species' models are particularly striking. The fish are both plentiful and hungry; however, and once hooked, they fight very realistically, responding to rod play almost exactly as real fish do. Sadly, while moving Sega's fishing controller will set the hook, the analog stick must be used to guide your pole. Still,



■ The above-water environments are all FMV, so they're literally photorealistic

this does a better job of recreating the true feel of fishing than any other Dreamcast title we've played. — Eric Bratcher

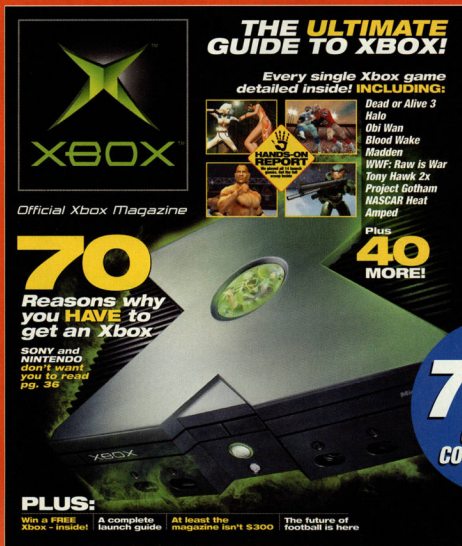
■ **NextGen** ★★★★★

Bottom Line: At full price, we'd throw this one back, but *Reel Fishing* actually feels a lot like real fishing. For \$20, it's definitely a keeper.

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Red Faction

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **THQ** ■ Developer: **Volition**

Released on PS2 several months ago, *Red Faction* proved to be one of the better first-person shooters for that console. It was hindered only by the bugaboo that seems endemic to shooters on console: unwieldy joystick control. So we were excited to test out the PC version, with its native mouse and keyboard support. The results are both quite nice, and slightly lacking.

To begin with, this is a solid and enjoyable experience. The well-integrated storyline places you in the role of an oppressed miner on Mars who spontaneously joins a rebellion in the opening seconds of the game. From there, you're on a mission to support the organized resistance and bring down your evil corporate overlords.

The main problems here are mostly due to *Red Faction*'s console roots. The graphics aren't as sophisticated as a PC audience expects from a brand-new FPS. The



■ The railgun lets you shoot through walls. How cool is that?

textures are simple, and the polygon count is likewise modest. On the other hand, it has a nice variety of weapons and manages a few innovations — the most notable being destructible walls.

In fact, the only serious knock you can make against it is that (ironically) having been designed primarily with the notoriously problematic joystick control in mind, the gameplay is a lot less challenging when attacked with a mouse and keyboard. It's still quite a kick, but any PC FPS veteran will likely breeze through. — Jeff Lundrigan

■ **NextGen** ★★★★★

Bottom Line: *Red Faction* on PC is well worth playing for its engaging storyline and varied gameplay, but as a PC title, it's enjoyable without being especially notable.

Ultimate Ride

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Disney Interactive** ■ Developer: **Gigawatt**

This rollercoaster construction game nearly lives up to its ambitious moniker. There are two styles of play: *Imaginer* mode, which offers some 24 missions with mostly intriguing parameters — constructing a coaster that lasts for two full minutes but uses no lift chains, for instance; and "free form" mode, which removes all building restrictions. The physics are slightly loosened for effect; our very first coaster went nearly 200 miles an hour and pulled a crushing 35 Gs. Of course, every coaster can be ridden in first-person as well.

All in all, this is a fine package. There are three coaster types — wooden, steel, and hanging — with varied visual themes and around 45 entertaining, larger-than-life decorations, such as erupting volcanoes and laser-blasting spaceships.

However, there are some annoying flaws. The clunky construction interface offers no way to



■ Despite a wimpy, chuggy engine, this game is undeniably pretty — just don't expect any Disney stuff

replace a section of track other than erasing and rebuilding every single piece that comes after it, making spontaneous adjustments a chore. Also, the game has been intentionally underdeveloped, ostensibly to make it playable on the largest number of PCs. It's still pretty, but a beefier engine with more demanding hardware requirements and longer dev time could have yielded fewer crashes, a smoother framerate, and more impressive overall visuals.

— Eric Bratcher

■ **NextGen** ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's slightly under-ambitious, but this is one ride that you should definitely consider taking



■ It does look good, and the special effects are nice

■ **PC**

Throne of Darkness

■ Publisher: **Sierra** ■ Developer: **Click Entertainment**

Group theory takes a hit

→ Sometimes, good intentions just aren't enough. Take *Throne of Darkness*, a Japanese-themed spin on the *Diablo II*-dominated action-RPG genre. While the game features tons of smart ideas and sharp sprite-based graphics, it ultimately stumbles because the developers failed to realize that what makes *Diablo II* work, largely, are its ultra-streamlined gameplay and easy accessibility.

Although it is cool in theory to control a party of warriors (four at a time out of eight total), the logistics of the situation require you to spend that much more

time navigating submenus. This disrupts the pace of the game dramatically, constantly making you stop and consult the priest, give items to the blacksmith, change out characters, or swap weapons and gold. The extra characters also upset the fine balance *Diablo II* strikes with combat, because the screen gets so cluttered it's hard to tell what's going on, much less to get the guy you're directly controlling to attack

the enemy you're after.

It's a shame, too, because the core game is fairly solid and the production values are very high. There are even a few smart improvements over *Diablo II* — a self-sorting inventory system, for example — that show the team really was committed to making more than just another knock-off. In the end, though, the pluses only just balance out the minuses.

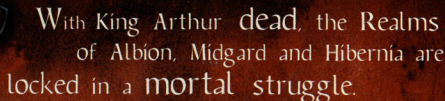
— Blake Fischer

■ **NextGen** ★★★★★

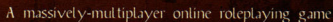
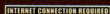
Bottom Line: Fun but frustrating. Ultimately, the steep learning curve (formations? Don't even ask...) and increased micromanagement keep the game from being a "*Diablo II* killer."



■ The core game mechanics will be familiar to *Diablo II* fans, but there are a lot of extra things you'll need to learn to succeed in *Throne of Darkness*



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→ Letters

Mail hormones

→ Today I discovered that my PS2 has decided to no longer play any DVD games or movies. After much troubleshooting (during which I discovered that audio CDs, PSX games, and non-DVD PS2 games all still work) I called the folks at Sony to see what they could do for me. Since I bought this machine on the day of its release (after a long and uncomfortable night on a cold Maine sidewalk) the warranty had expired, so I didn't expect to get the box fixed for free. What I also didn't expect was to be charged \$119, plus shipping, plus a possible mystery charge for parts not covered by this flat repair rate — all for a problem that just appeared out of nowhere, and

that was clearly not caused by anything other than normal use. Is 10 and a half months the expected life of a \$300 PS2?

Anyway, I did some research on the web, and lo and behold, I found dozens of people with the same problem as mine. Take a look at the forums at Videogamerepair.com and GamerXtreme.com, especially the threads mentioning "Read Errors" and other similar posts.

One user stated that the problem appeared only a couple months after buying the PS2, so they had it repaired for free, but several months later it happened again! The person I spoke to at Sony claimed to have never heard of anything like this. I have

no intention of paying to get this fixed. If Sony wants to pretend that this problem doesn't exist, then I can pretend that they don't exist and see how Microsoft treats their loyal customers.

Tony Taylor
Via email

We've been hearing similar stories for about this for months now, but as yet haven't gotten any response from Sony on the subject, officially or otherwise. We're not holding our breath either. You may recall how years ago, when it slowly became clear that the original PlayStation was having bad overheating and lock-up problems, Sony pretty much kept mum about that too. We wish we could offer something more concrete than caveat emptor, but at the moment that's about all we can do.

→ Did you by chance peruse those introductory paragraphs in your list of "25 Power Players" in **NG 10/01**? To wit: "past achievements... shaping the industry... creative talent... new directions." Where by God does some suit from Wal-Mart coincide with said criterion? At best this Rotarian stooge is some glorified stock boy! I cringe at the talent this capitalism byproduct usurped to make this list.

I do realize that given Mr. Connolly's helm at America's top hegemony, his personal rancor "perhaps towards violence, the digital aesthetic, etc." could affect product placement. This I understand perfectly well. But why taunt the good people in the world at large with such drivel endemic to these United States? A Japanese politician who advocates true freedom of speech would have been an uplifting piece. Why not him? Or her.

Daniel Yaffe
Via email

→ After reading the "25 Power Players" article in

issue **10/01**, I have decided that the journalists at **Next Generation** do not know a thing about the videogame industry. How is it possible that the two people responsible for the worldwide billion-dollar game industry are given only the number three and number two spots on your list? You know, Shigeru Miyamoto, the greatest developmental mind in the business, and Hiroshi Yamauchi, the man who aggressively brought the industry to America! Yamauchi is one of the most efficient men in the business world today, and Miyamoto the most creative.

You gave the number-one spot on your list to — I'm sorry, what was that guy's name? Oh, that's right, Ken Kutaragi. Who the hell is he? What did he do? Oh, he is the father of PlayStation and PS2. Big deal. That makes him the most powerful man in the industry? There wouldn't be a PlayStation if there weren't a Nintendo. You call Kutaragi a brilliant engineer. Where are his franchises like Mario, Zelda, Donkey Kong, Pokémon, Mario Kart, and many others? Sony may have sold more systems in recent years than Nintendo, but no one, and I mean no one, can make the quality games and consoles that Nintendo brings to us. Tell Mr. Kutaragi he's lucky Nintendo created an industry for him to work in. He may be good, but he is not the best.

Greg Finelli
Bangor, PA

This is just scratching the surface of the response to our "25 Power Players" feature (and doesn't even include those from company reps who felt their own CEO or head of design deserved a spot instead of someone else). We don't feel any particular need to reply directly. It's obvious that many of you have your own personal opinions, as we have ours. We explained our rationale sufficiently in the feature itself, and

LINK, WE HARDLY KNEW YA

I was recently surfing the Internet and I came upon pictures of *The Legend of Zelda* for GameCube. When I first saw the pictures of Link, I wasn't even sure if it was he. When I found out that it was, I was shocked. He looks more like a Powerpuff Girl than a supercool superhero. A friend and I were thinking about buying GameCube, but once we saw how horrible the new Link looks, we decided not to get the system. Why has Nintendo taken such a cool-looking character and changed him into something so weird-looking?

Richard Goldstein
Via email

While we take a bit of umbrage at your pejorative comparison — most of us here happen to think the Powerpuff Girls are pretty cool — we do sympathize. As we reported last month, Link's new look went over with a bit of a hush among Western gamers and game journalists when the character was unveiled at Nintendo Spaceworld 2001. As always, however, we reserve judgment until we actually see how the game plays.

■ Not everyone thinks the new Link is all that. Has Miyamoto lost touch with his audience?



KUTARAGI AND THE WRONG TREE

I had to laugh when I read Ken Kutaragi's interview in "25 Power Players" (NG 10/01): "I think 3DO was a much, much nicer platform than Xbox."

Sure you do, Mr. Number-One Power Player. His reasoning? More games. Ha! When Sony launched the original PlayStation, the credo was "quality over quantity," was it not? Now his story has changed to take credibility from Xbox. I feel his voluntary acknowledgement of Xbox shows a bit of trepidation on his part, if not Sony's part.

I do want to pay homage to Kutaragi for his ingenious designs and powerful consoles. He is obviously a man to be revered, 85 million PlayStations later. That number alone is simply staggering to me. However, his statement only inspires me even more to see just what Xbox can do in my living room.

Aaron Shimon
Via email

Kutaragi-san's 3DO quote provoked quite a lot of reaction and response, most of it in the vein of Mr. Shimon above. As we are not mind readers, we won't dissemble or guess as to his reasons for making such a seemingly bizarre statement, but feel free to discuss it among yourselves.



■ Just goes to show that one problem with being at the top is worrying about how to stay there

to go over things again would simply be repeating ourselves. We print the above purely in the interest of letting some of our readers share their opinions with the rest.

➔ Why is it necessary to run a 16-page advertisement on Xbox and the "Official Xbox Magazine" in your magazine? Isn't this somewhat a conflict of interest? I find this disturbing since I consider **Next Gen** as "objective, yet brutally honest" when it comes to games and the consoles they play on.

Don't get me wrong. As a 25-year-old PS2 owner, I'm way too old to have fanboy arguments about which is the better system. If Xbox has a killer app, I'll be in line like the rest of 'em come November to purchase one. It's just annoying to look for some readable content when I have to flip through 16 pages of Xbox propaganda.

"Shinna"
Via Email

As you may have noticed, Official Xbox Magazine is being published by **Next Gen's** parent company, Imagine. As such, several Imagine magazines that month ran that 16-page OXM ad. It had nothing to do with our editorial policies; **Next Gen** editors in no way contributed to its content; and it certainly hasn't changed our commitment to balanced reporting. We're

every bit as "objective, yet brutally honest" now as we always have been. We're sorry you found it "annoying," but honestly, it wasn't up to us.

➔ First off, I really loved the *Dead or Alive 3* cover story. I am so amazed at the graphics in DOA3. The women fighters are incredibly detailed, and that's not to mention the beautiful scenery that is used in each stage. The characters seem very realistic, and I'm really looking forward to meeting the new Hitomi and checking out her karate moves. I was knocked out by the ice cavern graphics, and Christie, our lovely British assassin, never looked better! Wow!

Paul Dale Roberts
Via email

On the other hand:

➔ I was excited to see that DOA3 was your cover story, but after reading through the article I was disappointed. You described the game's graphics in depth, the detailed character models, and the great, interactive backgrounds. You say that they are "incorporating new concepts" and "continuing to refine the combat system." But then you fail to elaborate. The closest you come is telling us of a "spine-snapping new special attack."

You close the article by declaring this game an undeniable killer

app, but you barely mentioned a single gameplay element in four pages of text! In fact, you describe *Virtua Fighter 3* and the first DOA in more detailed gameplay terms than this game.

This article is way below par for your magazine. It makes it appear that you think your readers are only interested in the graphical details. Did you actually play the game? If so, can you move efficiently in 3D? How has the reversal system changed? What gameplay modes are there? Is there a Tag feature? How do the more open arenas affect cornering someone? Do they affect movement? Do any of the stages help or hinder certain styles of fighting? On the hardware side, what use is made of Xbox's hard drive? Are there online plans?

Don't you think your readers would like these and other questions answered instead of your description of graphics we can see for ourselves? I for one am not willing to believe this is a "killer app" just because you think it's pretty. I know it's pretty. Is it good?

Leon Dexter
Via email

At the time the article was written, there weren't concrete

answers to many of the good questions you pose. But yes, we were able to play a demo version featuring several characters. And as we've since seen subsequent versions, we now have more answers for you. The characters move very efficiently in 3D. The reversal system now includes multiple counters per character. Modes of play include Versus, Team Battle, Story, Survival, and an improved Tag mode. Throwing opponents into 3D objects in the arena does damage. On the hardware side, the hard drive is used to eliminate load times. Online plans are being made for future versions but won't make the U.S. launch. Being more than a bit bowled by DOA3's sheer, knockout beauty, we may have unduly over-emphasized the graphics. For the record, what we have played and what we've seen since is very, very good indeed.

➔ I would guess that some people in your organization might feel your work seems somewhat "non-essential" with the recent horrific events. But please continue to provide us with the top-notch coverage we've come to rely on from **Next Gen**. My wife and five kids have been gathering around the set to watch scenes of destruction and mourning instead of hell hounds and green herbs, but when we do take up our joysticks again we'll appreciate how you help us find the gems and avoid the dreck.

Nick D'Orazio
Via email

In all the years that we have been writing **Next Gen**, this is perhaps the most heartfelt warning of the thousands of letters we've received. The entire **Next Gen** staff thanks you so very much for your support. It sounds as though you and your family of five children have found comfort in each other during this time of tragedy, and considering that you even found some time to share kind words with us, we're sure they couldn't be in better hands.

Thank you again, sincerely, from all of us.



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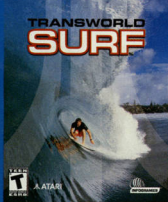
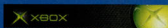
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→ Retroview

December 1992

Shareware gains respect — the old-fashioned way

→ Near the end of 1992, the console industry was a two-horse race, with Sega's Genesis edging out Nintendo's SNES (thanks to a certain blue-furred, fleet-footed mascot). Despite this, one of the most far-reaching developments of the year occurred in the PC sector. It was, of course, the release of id Software's original shareware masterpiece, *Wolfenstein 3-D*.

The result of the combined effort of designer John Romero and programmer John Carmack, *Wolfenstein 3-D* is easily among the most successful and influential games of all time. It basically created the first-person shooter genre, and in a broader sense, it did more to further the notion of 3D gaming than any other



■ *Wolfenstein 3-D* — the progenitor of the modern first-person shooter

title before or since. It also granted tremendous validation to the concept of shareware, which was largely considered an outlet for shabby, amateur-quality games at the time. And of course, the tremendous success of the game and its subsequent full release version enabled id to continue developing — which it did, going on to produce *Doom*, *Doom II*, and the *Quake* series.

Revealed: Jaguar tech specs and Sega's 32-bit console

→ Next Gen

Next Generation Magazine

WOLFENSTEIN 3-D

Deep inside the most intense PC game ever, with never-before-seen levels and enemies

PLUS:

Carmack and Romero reveal what's next for id

REVIEWED:

SNES: *Mario Paint*
PC: *Alone in the Dark*
Genesis: *Chakan*, *The Forever Man*

SEGA ■ NINTENDO ■ TURBOGRAPHX-16 ■ ATARI ■ CD-I ■ NEO GEO

What we were playing

Everybody was kung-fu fighting

■ STREET FIGHTER II: CHAMPION EDITION



■ Platform: Arcade
■ Publisher: Capcom

■ FATAL FURY 2



■ Platform: many (arcade/shows)
■ Publisher: SNK

■ MORTAL KOMBAT



■ Platform: many (arcade/shows)
■ Publisher: Midway

■ KING OF THE MONSTERS 2



■ Platform: many (arcade/shows)
■ Publisher: SNK

■ STREETS OF RAGE 2



■ Platform: Genesis
■ Publisher: Sega

Billboard's No. 1 pop/rock singles of 1992

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February 1	Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me	George Michael/Eton John
February 8	Fm Too Sexy	Right Said Fred
February 19	To Be With You	Mr. Big
March 21	Save the Best for Last	Vanessa Williams
April 25	Jump	Kris Kross
May 26	I'll Be There	Mariah Carey
July 4	Baby Got Back	Sir Mix-A-Lot
August 8	This Used to Be My Playground	Madonna
August 15	End of the Road	Boyz II Men
November 14	How Do You Talk to an Angel	The Heights (TV Soundtrack)
November 28	I Will Always Love You	Whitney Houston



...and in the real world

■ The one-millionth computer connects to the Internet, and audio and video are carried online for the first time, via the MBONE (Multicast Backbone), a primitive conferencing network.

■ 172 nations attend the Earth Summit in Rio De Janeiro, in an effort to address environmental concerns such as the greenhouse effect and decreasing biodiversity on a global level.

■ Notable passings: Isaac Asimov — author, Lawrence Welk — bandleader, Sam Kinison — comedian.

■ Microsoft ships Windows 3.1, selling one million copies in the first 50 days of the title's release.

■ Compact discs surpass cassette tapes as the preferred medium for recorded music.

■ Eric Clapton dominates the Grammy Awards. His *Unplugged* album takes Album of the Year and Best Rock Vocal Performance by a Male, and the single "Tears in Heaven" wins Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best Pop Vocal Performance by a Male.

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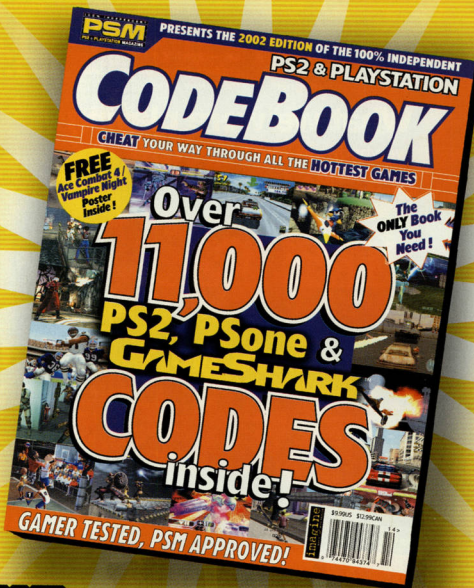
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Turn, we really only know one way to say goodbye: FRANKS AND BEANS!" Why oh why didn't you leave us any PS2 games?!" But really, Blake hopes you enjoy *May Day* (rated NC, but REALLY this time, we wish you the best in your newest venture and uh-huh...you know ummm...we know they'll enjoy...probably all think you're uh-huh...wicked smaaaaash...and a few paring words for Russia from that "if anyone's wondering" thingy). Also, Jen finally discovers the wonders of *Tony Hawk*. Does this mean the state can play during work hours now? Um, haven't we already reviewed, like, every possible version of that game already? Jen, not buying it for a second. "Now gimme the controller!" Meanwhile, Blake is off in the other room...for 16,000,000th time. Maybe someone'll read the book.



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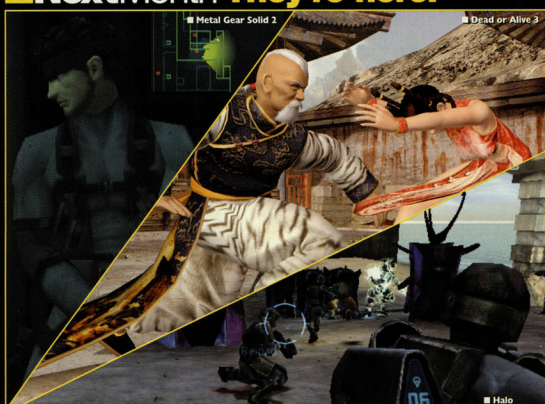
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You know, looking at these screens has forced us to admit that Sarah Michelle Gellar could easily kick the entire *Next Gen* staff's collective asses. Page 41. Crash? Why yes, it has. Page 100. So, you don't think there's any way Tony Hawk's *Pro Skater 2* could get any better? You're wrong — read this. Page 94. There's an old saying that says if you put 100 monkeys in a room with 100 typewriters, one of them will eventually write a Shakespearean play. But what happens if you give them firearms? Page 52. *Defender, Donkey Kong, Zaxxon, Centipede, and Pac-Man*. If you can identify the game we fire out, you are truly hardcore. Page 21. A console FPS ported to PC — you don't see that everyday. Page 115. What? You don't think that milking cows, feeding chickens, and picking tomatoes is suitable gameplay? Hey, at least you don't need to shovel anything, if you know what we mean. Page 105. Sure, both of these games you can breathe underwater. But only one of them looks strangely like Meg Ryan. Page 25. Don't mess with Ippo Makunouchi. Page 108. Even if you've beaten the original *Resident Evil* a hundred times (freak), you've never seen it like this. Page 28. One keeper, and one to let go — you won't believe which is which. Page 112. Despite what you might think, "volumetric grass" isn't really any louder than regular grass. Page 96. Why just drive to the mall when you can drive all the way through the mall? Page 46. The Fast and the Furious indeed — we heard Leo kicked Vin Diesel's arse at *Wave Race: Blue Storm*. Page 15. Every single thing you need to know about GameCube, before you buy. Page 76. Yes, you have to hit this baby with its own bouncy ball to proceed through the game. Could this be the most politically incorrect Nintendo title ever? Page 82. The two most important pages we've printed this year — and no. It isn't Tom's letter of resignation. Page 88.

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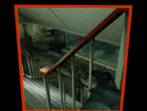
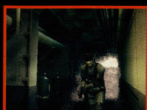
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