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WHOSE TIME IS IT?

Ive years ago, PlayStation redefined videogame chic. Today, the aging hardware serves to demonstrate two things. First, elegantly designed hardware can age gracefully, even in an industry that makes a hobby out of outpacing Moore's law. Second, even outdated hardware like PlayStation can still deliver great games in the hands of master designers like Capcom's Shinji Mikami. Our in-depth preview of his latest "survival horor" masterplece, Dino Crisis, starts on page 40.

It is, however, perhaps appropriate that what may be the best PlayStation game this year features dinosaurs as its main characters. While Sony says that it will continue to support the system "for the forseeable future," the writing is clearly on the wall for PlayStation. Sega has Dreamcast, a brace of titles for its U.S. launch, and a battle plan. And yet, the simple announcement of PlayStation 2 may have put just as many nails in PlayStation soffin.

Can PlayStation 2 advance Sony's dominance, or will Dreamcast prove that Sega still has what it takes? Our in-depth analysis of the strengths — and the weaknesses — of both systems starts on page 70.









Knights.

Castles.

Joan of Arc.

Oh my.

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Microsoft

JUNE 1999

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more funny little test





DINO CRISIS

The creator of Resident Evil, Shinji Mikami, is currently working on not one, not two, but three new titles. The best of the bunch? Dino Crisis. Exchanging the slow dread of the Resident Evil series for a more action-oriented, white-knuckle intensity, Dino Crisis seeks to re-invent the gaming genre its zombie-filled cousin began. So what's it like juggling so many projects at once? Find out from Mikami himself, in our exclusive interview starting on page 42



PLAYSTATION 2 VS. DREAMCAST The battle for the next generation of home consoles has already begun, but the real question is, is it already over?



DREAM TEAM

With the U.S. launch of Dreamcast almost here, there are a million questions about what's going to happen, and Sega's Chris Gilbert, Peter Moore, and Bernie Stolar patiently answer them all







INTELLIGENCE

Report from the floor of the Tokyo Game Show • Wry commentary on the Game Developers Conference • Psst! Hey buddy, wanna license a game engine? • A bevy of new handhelds





ALPHAS: 29 games previewed
The fastest, hottest, and smartest games (and developers) from all corners of the globe. If you don't
hear about it here, it's probably not worth knowing about



FINALS: over 600 games rated that's 13 "regular" reviews, plus the triumphant return of the Gamer's Guide. You wanted it back,

That's 13 "regular" reviews, plus the triumphant return of the Gamer's Guide. You wanted it back, so here it is. Now, put the rocks away and sit down — there will be no stoning today, thank you

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INTELLIGENCE

Game industry news and analysis

SPECIAL REPORT TOKYO GAME SHOW SPRING '99

The stage was set for a battle between the two Japanese hardware giants — but one of them didn't care





Sega went all out at the show, but didn't have as much on the floor as expected in light of Sony's recent PSX 2 announcement

wice a year in Japan, the Tokyo Game Show (TGS) is the videogame event to look forward to. The first day of the show is industry only (although we saw fans scalping tickets outside the hall for anybody willing to pay the ¥2000 price - roughly \$20), but unlike E3, the last two days are open to the public. As can be expected, more than 150,000 fans show up to see what's hot, to play the newest games, and to pick up some of the popular videogame merchandise that companies sell in the designated marketplace area.

Sega's big push

The booth of the show belonged to Sega. This was the company's last chance to show off the Dreamcast with absolutely no competition around in the coming system war, and it made the most of what it had. Upon entering the hall, gamers were treated to an absolutely immense video screen showing off the latest in Dreamcast games and commercials (many of which are brilliant) as well as presentations from many DC developers who wanted to talk about their latest wares. One of the first speakers at this forum was Yu Suzuki, who actually brought the only bad news of the show. Shenmue won't be ready for its August release date. As a result. Suzuki and team are breaking the game into two different parts that will be sold separately for ¥2800 (roughly \$25). Part one is scheduled to come out in August; part two will come out shortly before the holidays.

It looks as if the game could be worth the wait, judging from the five playable demos available in kiosks around the booth. While the full impact of the gameplay was hard to grasp from the pieces that we played, the game is artistically far ahead of anything else that is currently being shown for the system. If the final gameplay can match the astounding visuals, it looks as though Dreamcast will have its first app that demonstrates that the system's 3D power isn't so paltry when compared with the upcoming PlayStation 2. Other impressive titles at the Sega booth included Namco's breathtaking conversion of Soul Calibur, the surprisingly good Let's Make Pro Soccer Club, and Konami's Airforce Delta. Not so hot were Maken X and King Of Fighters Dream Match '99 (although there was a sign saying that it was only 40% done, so there

is some hope). Overall, the feel of Sega's booth was optimistic, even though there weren't as many titles as expected.

Sony holds back

Even though the high-profile announcement of PlayStation 2 was only weeks before the show. Sony stood by its current system. A sign on the show floor announced that nothing would be shown on the next PlayStation, so gamers had to be content with what was on the floor. What was on the floor, however, wasn't anything very new or exciting. The biggest game in the booth was the recently released Um Jammer Lammy (see review, page 94), which was playable on a huge row of demo systems. To accompany the game. Sony also had an elaborate concert stage show with PaRappa and Lammy along with various booth girls. Sony also showed off the Japaneselocalized version of Spyro, which seemed to be well received.

The final game in Sony's booth was Polyphony Digital's new shooter called Omega Boost. After waiting in a short line, eager gamers were actually led into a special room with the demo systems of the game to play. It's a fairly straightforward shooter with great graphics, but hardly any sort of big gun to use to combat Sega. In fact, Sony really seemed to have ignored Sega's looming presence at the show and continue on as if it was just another show. Is the company really that confident?

Third parties

The booths of the third-party software publishers in Japan dominated most of the show floor. While almost all of them had PlayStation games to show, quite a few showcased new Dreamcast titles. Some of the biggest games of the show came from the third parties this year, and there were some greats for both PlayStation and Dreamcast.

The big games on the show floor for Dreamcast were mostly shown in video form. Capcom showed off a much longer movie than had ever previously been shown of its upcoming entry in the Biohazard series (Resident Evil in the U.S.), Biohazard: Code Veronica. The footage that was shown was impressive, but there was obviously still some work to be done. Tecmo quietly - and not so quietly wowed the audience with Dead or Alive 2, also seen only on video. Even though the game is currently being shown only as a Naomi arcade game, it's no secret that it will be coming home, probably sooner rather than later due to the close relationship between the Naomi and Dreamcast boards. The video of DOA 2 was spectacular and showed a level of visual excellence that has never been seen before in a fighting game (eclipsing even Sega's own Virtua Fighter 3). There was little doubt in anybody's mind that if this game had been playable, it would have stolen the show.

What did end up monopolizing attendees' time on the show floor was Namco's excellent Soul Calibur, which was playable both at Namco's booth and at Sega's. The level of detail shown in both the fighters and environments is far ahead of that in the arcade



STOP THE PRESS

As Next Generation was going to print, we learned that two top Sega executives, Gretcher Echinger, VP of third party relations, and Eric Hammond, VP of product development. (Interviewed in NE 49), had left the company, Look for further details and analysis in our July issue.



A lot of the show floor is taken up by games to play, but many booths had space allocated for their elaborate song-and-dance stage shows

version, and the game plays very well. This title is due out this summer, and it looks to be Sega's next big killer app.

Despite Dreamcast's quality, however, PlayStation dominated the quantity front and was still the most prevalent system on the show floor. Still, there were quite a few high-quality games on display. One of the big standouts was, of course,

Cancom's Dino Crisis, which was shown on the same video as Code Veronica, Square Soft had its share of popular titles, with playable versions of Racing Lagoon, Front Mission 3 (a Mech strategy game series that has never come to the States), Saga Frontier 2, and The Legend Of Mana The Legend of Mana was the most popular of the games since it was the first time anybody had seen it, and it looked fantastic (although some may complain about the fact that it is entirely sprite based.) Enix had a hit on its hands with Bust A Move 2 running in its booth, but the game seemed to be a lot like the original (a good thing?). Dragon Quest VII was shown on video once again with the promise that it will be out late this year. As usual at the show, there were also a lot of games that, for one reason or another, will never come out anywhere but Japan. Two of these, Tecmo's horseracing sim Gallop Racer 3 and Taito's train-driving sim Tensha De Go, garnered a lot of interest from the Japanese crowds Many

developers also had a Resident Evil

WHO IS IT?

ie assistant manager of Nintendo's itertainment, Analysis, and Design ipartment, he reports to Miyamoto it created *Yoshi's Island* on his owi



Gamers lined up at both Sega's and Namco's booths to get a chance to play the spectacular conversion of Soul Calibur on Dreamcast

rip-off of some sort, usually with a sci-fi spin. Elsewhere on the show floor.

Essewhere on the snow noor, Bandai and SNk battled it out to see which of their handhelds will be #2 in the Japanese market (Game Boy is a very strong #1). Bandai seemed to have the edge with Wonderswan, but Neo Geo Pocket Color had some fun games at its booth, too.

TGS is usually a preview of what U.S. gamers can expect come E3 and the fall season. The verdict? Lots of Dreamcast, even more PlayStation, and a few healthy surprises.

IT IS...

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POCKET MONSTERS

Upstarts challenge Nintendo for the portable gaming market

ame Boy and Game Boy Color (GBC) are monsters in the world of portable gaming. More powerful systems such as Game Gear and Lynx have come and gone, vet Nintendo's tiny juggernaut has remained the company's top-selling system for over ten years, growing even more popular with the release of Game Boy Color. It's tempting for others to eve this market that Nintendo has to itself and want a piece. Exploiting price-point angles, big-name games, and technological advantages, two companies - SNK and Tiger - are hoping to wrest slices of marketshare from Nintendo



in 1999

Neo Geo Pocket Color has been out in Japan for a few months now and is enjoying moderate success. In April, the company started selling the system in the U.S. via its web site (www.snkusa.com) for \$79.99. While a spokesperson for SNK has told Next Generation that retail channels aren't out of the question in the future, she did say that the online venue was the only place the system will be available for now. NGPC is quite small, but it boasts a larger screen than GBC with only a minimal increase in overall space footprint. The screen is made of the same highly reflective material as GBC but also features a higher resolution as well as the ability to simultaneously display more colors (although we have yet to see a game that does so), and in theory. with its 16-bit processor it can make more complex games as well. There are also some added functions included in the system like an alarm clock, a calendar, and a horoscope.

There are currently 10 titles for the system, including some quality adaptations of popular SNK arcade hits like King Of Fighters R2, Samurai Showdown, and Bust A Move. Also available are sports games (baseball, tennis, and soccer) and

two casino games. When we asked SNK about future games from third parties, we were told there are "things happening" but these would be announced at a later date. Our prognosis, then, is mixed. The system itself looks great, handles well, and comes at a competitive price, but with online distribution only, it's hard to predict a bright commercial future for the system in the U.S. Games are another big question, and it remains to be seen what SNK has in the pipe as far as new releases. With some good thirdparty backing and the traditionally solid SNK first-party output, this system could be a cult success, but we doubt Howard Lincoln will lose much sleep over it.

Game.com.pocket.pro

Tiger Electronics has pushed its Game.com.pocket.pro in the portables market for quite some time without much success. This year, though, Tiger will re-launch the system: taking a page from Apple's book, the system will come in five fruity colors and will retail for a super-competitive \$29.95. Other

than that, though, it's the same system as before, complete with a backlit black-and-white touchscreen and calendar and address book.

Tiger is betting that where the system will get some attention is in its 1999 games lineup, which reads like a Who's Who of the top console games. In the coming year, we can look forward to portable versions of Metal Gear Solid, Castlevania. Command & Conquer: Red Alert. Madden Football, NASCAR, and NBA Live. Other titles include classics like Frogger, Centipede, Scrabble, and Monopoly. While we have our doubts that the game quality on some of these titles can live up to the legacy of their 32-bit counterparts (and, truth be told, conversions like Sonic The Hedgehog, Duke Nukem, and Mortal Kombat have been disappointing, to put it mildly), the screenshots look good, and Tiger promises that the quality of the gameplay will be better. With easily recognizable games and a price \$20 lower than its closest competitor, Tiger may well find its niche in the portables market.

NGPC TECH SPECS

CPU: Toshiba TLCS 900Hz (16 bit) @ 6.144MHz 2.6 inch 160x152 resolution TFT LCD screen 146 colors displayable at once out of 4.096

d CPII: 780 @ 3.072 MHz 12-bit DAC onboard with PSG 6-tone simultaneous output 5-pin serial port for connection to Dreamcast or other NGPC Batteries: 2 AA

Sharo proprietary 8-bit CPU 200x160 LCD resolution 4 area levels for 3 with 1 transparency) with backlight 13x10 touchscreen membrane Proprietary 9-pin serial port for head-to-head or modern

GAME.COM.POCKET.PRO

connection teries: 2 AA



きまった! せんせい ゴールだ!

のまま いきおいた のってほしい!

While nobody expects Nintendo to topple anytime soon, SNK and Tiger are both hoping to carve out a niche in the market with some high-quality titles

ENGINES OLD AND NEW

Is building your own game engine just re-inventing the wheel?

ver the last few years, game developers have increasingly taken to licensing an existing game engine rather than building their own from the ground up. This has some obvious advantages. "The benefit in using existing technology is that you can usually finish the game much more quickly," says Jack Mamais, currently the director of Heavy Gear II. "The engine you buy has probably already had months or years of testing in the marketplace. This means you have an opportunity to put out a very stable product, but you're tied to the original design."

Buying an engine also typically gives a developer access to whatever development tools are needed as well - another major time saver. Despite the possible savings of money and time, however, there are some drawbacks. Eric Biessman, project lead for Soldier of Fortune at Raven Software, explains, "Sure, you can just jump into the technology and start cranking out a game, but if you add no modifications, you run the risk of looking like a 'me too' product. In order to make a different game that will ride on its own laurels, you really need to modify the technology quite heavily, a process that sometimes seems to take as long as writing an entirely new engine."

The trend started, of course, with the runaway success of the Quake licensing program, and first-person shooters remain the mainstay of licensing deals. Today, the announcement of what engine an up-and-coming title may use is almost as important as who the hero is — that's one advantage of using an existing engine, and one of its pitfalls.

"Licensing an engine has become as much a marketing or PR decision as a technological one,"





Valve's Half-Life began with the Quake II engine — which was modified so heavily, the game still took a year and a half to complete

admits Rob Huebner, vice president of hihilistic. "If you license a opoular engine, you get a sort of built-in audience and built-in expectations of what the title will deliver. If I announce an Unreal engine license, the Unreal fan sites will immediately cover my game title and start a buzz about it. But how far could I diverge from the Unreal formula before I alienate those fans?"

DreamWorks Interactive's Lyle Hall sums it up this way: "It often happens that the team will want to heavily customize or modify the existing engine in order to achieve the best implementation of the game design or to top the competition's technology, which can wipe out any of the benefits of licensing. Creating your own engine means you own it, but it also means you're stuck with it, for good or bad. Ultimately you have to believe it is going to cost you less to license an engine than it is to build your own."

BATTLE IN ARKANSAS

wher last year's horror in onesboro, Ark, when a couple of foremented kilds armed with highproperty of the couple of the couple of fermented kilds armed with highpowered weapons shot and killed several of their teachers and schoolmates, one of the media's proclamations was, "Videogames made them do it." Do gooder state officials responded with a state senate bill (SSS), described by insiders as the greatest threat to made games, yet. SSSS would have made it. "unlawful for any serson to knowingly allow public, whithing to high visible or a segregation bill to wall off violent away that is not "readily visible or cocessible to persons under age." SI" in other words, violent games would be treated pretty much the same way as pornorarably.

Fortunately, on March 31, S.928 was referred to an "Interim Study Committee," effectively shelving it. The state legislature adjourned a few days later and won't convene again until 2001. For all intents and purposes, the bill is dead.

This happened because arcade and consumer trade associations are steadily becoming better at their lobbying efforts. The arcade industry worked with IOA, who in turn hired a lobbyist, Marc Stodole (a former prosecutor now with Catlett and Yancy), who immediately met with the lieutenant governor to discuss the situation. In the last few days before the bill was up for a vote, Elliott Portnoy, he legal counsel to AMDA (arcade owners) and AAMA (manufacturers) flev out personally. No doubt, the effort was successful due in part to promises of an industry campaign to post voluntary ratings on arcade cabinets throughout the state, particularly at high-profile locations such as airport gamerooms and arcades in the state capitol.

lawmakers had just amended the bill's language to force the physical segregation of games in all locations under 1,000 sc. ft.

NEW BOARDS FROM SONY AND NAMCO

Namco is apparently planning to reprise the role it played in developing the original Sony

PlayStation, some elements of which were used in Namco's own coin-op hardware for the Tekker series. Namco America Sales & Marketing VP Frank Cosentino confirms reports that Namco will replace its current System 12 coin-op board with a new one next year — and yes, it will share some technology with the new Sony console. Frank reports that the coin-op braid reports that the coin-op platform will arrive in early 2000.

Meanwhile, Sony exects in the U.S. flatly deny sugestions that they will create an "arcade equivalent" for the PSX2 and license that platform to arcadegame factories, as Sega has done with Dreamcast and Naom. "There is nothing to substantiate those reports," declares Molly Smith of SCEA. "I don't know where they're coming from." We'll keep you posted.

NAMCO TO THE RESCUE?

Masaya Nakamura, founder and chairman of Namco, says the arcade industry had better shape up if it wants to survive in competition with the internet and console games. "We have to make a much bigger difference between (consumer and arcade games) to have any future," Namco's chairman declared in a recent interview. Asserting that the arcade industry's woes run much deeper than Asia's economic recession, chairman Nakamura pointed to "the improved capability of lhome video) product and the onset of [internet] networked games" as factors which adversely "affected the stature of coin-opideo games." He added this stark conclusion. "If we do not produce innovative products, then the industry will continue to head downwards. But I do not want to see this and it our responsibility to develop something strong and different." So, what's Namco planning on to save the arcade industry. It's exploring network fournament play for arcades, possibly with touchscreens, Mr. Nakamura hinted, thinking about synergy between movieplexes and futuristic arcades.

HARDCORE

My videogame addiction started around 1986 with the NES and snowballed from there. It got so bad that my wife had to pick up one of my systems and threaten to smash it. into little pieces to get my attention Finally, in October 1994, after nine years of marriage, I was given an got the house and the kids, and I got the 25-inch TV, NES, Super NES Genesis/CD, 3DO, and my sanity. I now share a one-room apartment with my PlayStation, Saturn, N64 SNES, NES, Game Boy, PC - and I am expecting (Dreamcast). I don't know whether the next statement is bliss, or just plain pathetic, but: I've never been happier.

Ray "Takezo" Taylor

Have a hardcore story you want to share? Send it to hardcore@next-generation.com.

IN THE STUDIO

Gauntlet Legends isn't

the only Atari Games coin-op title heading home, as War: Final Assault is also heading to Nintendo 64. How well will this arcade first-person shooter translate to the N64? Likely pretty damn good, since one of the industry's legendary coders, Ed Logg (creator of Asteroids, Gauntlet, and Centipede) is directly responsible for the port. Logg was also responsible for the fantastic N64 version of San Francisco Rush. And on the subject of Rush, the true arcade sequel, San Francisco Rush: 2049 had just gone on test at the time of this writing. The sequel will feature all-new tracks based in a futuristic San Francisco, and all-new cars to choose from. Early test drivers report the game is running remarkably well.



Where do you go after working for Bill Gates? Well, if you're Brian Fleming, you go into game development. Fleming, a one-time technical assistant to Gates himself, has launched his own game development company, Sucker

Punch Productions. This Seattlebased group is at work on a character-based platform game for N64 tentatively titled Sprocket. Sprocket's fully-3D world sports a unique realtime physics engine with hundreds of interactive objects. Fleming explains the physics engine has enabled the group to create some unique gameplay elements, including a tractor beam players can use to move objects or swing Pitfallstyle through levels. "There's also new vehicles on every level." Fleming says, suggesting another feature of the physics engine. And the team has set its sights high with what Fleming describes as "topnotch visuals in the Rare/Nintendo mold." Sucker Punch's 13-person team has been working on the title for nearly 18 months and has just begun the search for a publisher. Considering how well Valve (another group of ex-Microsoft employees) did with Half-Life, it will be interesting to see if Sucker Punch can similarly shake up the N64 market. The plan is to have Sprocket on shelves by the holidays.



If you've been asking when DreamWorks Interactive was going to make a Saving Private Ryan game, stop asking — it is. Although it's not actually based on the film,



Medal of Honor is a first-person shooter for PlayStation set during WWII. The game will combine the tactical complexity of GoldenEve with the mowing-down-Nazis appeal of Castle Wolfenstein. DreamWorks has even tapped the assistance of Dale Dve, the military consultant responsible for the authenticity of films like Saving Private Ryan and Platoon (he puts pampered actors through a crash bootcamp). Dye assisted in mission layouts and character development. Medal of Honor puts players in the role of an intelligence agent, and this 30-level game with 15 authentic WWII weapons should be available this fall. Will it be game of the year? Possible, although there's a rumor of strong contention from Miramax Interactive's Shakespeare-based game. We'll keep you posted.

NEWS BYTES Compiled by Aaron John Loeb of Next Generation Online

games a respectable business again. In response to Sony's amountment of its next-generation PRofiscation specific and exceptionary of the New York Times and MSNBC both ran elaborate pieces on the impending large for your lining room." The Times Sony's next-generation Psylitation Sci in the struggle. Currously, all of these articles focus on the listenet and interactive lectivation as the real killer again out there. Does this mean that in the parallel

X Bard and Nat Link were massive successes? Apparently, until our industry is grossing a trillion dollars a year, the mainstrain press will continue to dence around the truth that shakes their button-down, pencil-pushing souls to the core: games are the future. Bureyean publisher Tims (Japanese In the sinessted heavily in troubled American publisher Instead (Japanese) has invested heavily in troubled American publisher Interplay (Japanese Interplay, Galatin's Gatat. The investment progress Trust the option of owning must then 30% of listerplay, ending months of speculation in the industry as to who would put money behind Interplay. When

the Los Angeles publisher posted another big quartey loss necestly, one industry analyst told us, "leterplay nearreduct have gone public, and now the poying the price." But it seems that Titus is the one paying — and the price is right, with Interplay stock will below \$5 a share. Mattel, eager for in k, ill in stakes, has acquired the remains of defunct girl-garnes publisher Purple Moon, a media derling without the selles to match. Perhaps paining Rockets with Barties will give Mattel the best of both works or media derling without selles to match. Perhaps paining Rockets with Barties will give Mattel the best of both works or media. for PlayStation 2. (Tokunaka is the

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFEREN

By Frank O'Connor, executive editor, Games Business



The newly renamed GDC is getting bigger, noisier, and increasingly focused on industry issues and, of course, money. Ah, we fondly remember the days when it was about game development...

rankly, the first couple of GDCs, back when they were CDGCs (for Computer Game Developers Conferences), were a geek utopia. Like-minded hairies descended on the small Santa Clara convention center with issues like Gouraud shading, sprite scaling, and adventure-game text parsing on their agendas. Apparently now they're all gone, shunted into dusty back rooms. This year's shiny new GDC (the first C was dropped so console developers wouldn't feel left out) was very different, with as many suits as jeans, more leather than flannel, and haircuts you could

set your watch by. The upscale San Jose convention center became a cross between a recruitment fair and a software expo.

Sure, there were still plenty of esoteric conferences, on subjects as diverse as 3D technology and, um, 3D techniques, but the overriding theme was money. A strip of booths, loosely termed Job Alley, was a minefield for wary programmers as slick little men in golf shirts darted forward to offer incentives of milk, honey, and Linuxbased PlayStation 2 development.

On the other side of the hall, flashy, well-staffed, slightly bloated booths served up the latest 3D software packages from companies like Alias and Nichimen, a far cry from the "good old days" in Santa Clara where the show floor was a forgotten afterthought.

Make no mistake: the latest GDC heralds the beginning of the real trend toward a Hollywood business model. This year might be the last time we see relatively accessible characters like Al Lowe, Sid Meier, and Alex Garden wandering the floor. Next year, we'll get to meet their agents - if they return our calls

Software and hardware companies threw up E3-style booths with lots of monitors showing games we've seen before. It's amusing to watch the eyes of a first-person shooter designer tear

as assembled developers watched Sony Vice President Phil Harrison extol the miraculous virtues of PlayStation 2. Dreamcast technology seemed like an illremembered imagining in the stark light of NURBs, DVD, and 60 million polygons per second.

The increasing similarity of consoles to PCs is making life a lot easier for the game development community, nowhere more visibly demonstrated than at Sega's Dream Big booth. Microsoft Windows CE salesmen tried to convince C++ mavens that it would take about two weeks to port a PC game to the Sega console. Turns out it's almost true. Whether that will be good for the Dreamcast market remains to be seen — especially given that Sega seems just as keen to ensure

At the recent GDC, the upscale San Jose convention center became a cross between a recruitment fair and a software expo

up as he spots a better one on a rival stand. An equally fun sport is watching shameless producers making notes and sketches under those same circumstances.

Sony - although it had no stand, booth, or visible presence effectively stole the show. Sega's "Dream Big" campaign seemed ironically appropriate nomenclature original development.

But the geek culture wasn't lost entirely. There was an impressive display of garagedeveloped titles, and Apple lured the biggest gaggle of phreaks, hackers, and coders at the show by running a QuickTime-enhanced Episode I trailer on every Mac at the Think Different booth.

is, of course, Microsoft. Also at the GDC,

Shigeru Miyamoto delivered a conference

Pats on the back all around to the boys at

For daily game news, go to www.next-generation.com



DREAMCAST COUNTDOWN

Next Generation tracks the progress of Sega's dream machine

Dead or Alive 2

FORMAT Naomi

PUBLISHER Tecmo

Tecmo

Fall/winter 1999

hen Tecmo's original Dead or Alive was released in 1996 as the first third-party title using Sega's Model 2 arcade board, it surprised many players who expected such a high-quality fighting game could only come from Sega. Capcom, or Namco. Although the title borrowed many gameplay and design elements from Sega's Virtua Fighter 2, it aroused attention through some risque animation and the innovative use of 'danger zones,' which lay in the perimeter of the ring and caused massive damace (and impressive explosions) to fichters



DOA 2 improves on the original in many ways vet still retains its risque attitudes

unfortunate enough to stumble into them.

Once again, Tecmo is surpassing all expectations with the sequel, which is powered by Sega's Dreamcast-based arcade board, Naomi. "We felt that Naomi is a very 'straightforward' machine," says Producer Tomonobu Itagaki. "As a game designer's talent is directly reflected by what they write to the game screen, it has been a challenge to meet the potential of the Naomi hardware."

The challenge seems to have paid off, to the point that many believed, after seeing the game at this year's AOU expo in Tokyo, that the game will use two Naomi boards at once. "We are using only one standard board," Itagaki confirms, so he does not predict any technical problems with porting the game to Dreamcast. What's more, says Itagaki, "As with the first game, there also is a strong possibility for DOA 2 to appear on a Sony console. My team could cope with it instantly if conversion work for PlayStation 2 is required." While much of the gameplay looks similar to the original, there are new battle modes as well as some breathtaking graphics. Even though the game is only 30% complete, Next Generation took some time to talk with Itagaki about the future of his game and that of the fighting-game genre.



Surprisingly, Tecmo seems to be giving Sega a run for most-impressive Naomi game

An audience with Tomonubu Itagaki



Next Generation: Why did it take so much time to release a second version of *Dead or Alive*?

Tornonobu Itensaki I wonder why...[Laughs] in 1996, we released Dead or Alive. Eleven months after that, we released the Sega Saturn version; then five months after that, the PlayStation one. Approximately six months after that, we released a System 1-based arcade version. In February, we just showed Dead or Alive 2.A Syou can see, we have a multi-platform

strategy, and we have kept very busy.

When did you start to develop *Dead or Alive 2*? Is the same team on the project?

TI. We started the project a long time ago, but we only started to implement it last September. It's the same team, approximately 40 persons.

NG: Presently, are you only working on the







Beautiful and surreal, MDK 2's environments are like nothing we've seen before

Naomi version?

TI Yes.

animations.

What was the initial concept behind Dead or Alive? I wanted to come back to a more primitive concept and a good-looking one. Our basic concept was "sex and violence." [Laughs] If you play the game, you will feel a mental pressure that can be associated to the physical pressure of characters. Visually, we included some sexy

(G): What are the main differences between the two games?

It is difficult to answer. In fact, apart from the "essence," everything is different.

But did you keep the same fighting system of "danger zones"?

Yes, but we improved it. We implemented different other systems related to the "danger zones." In fact, we wanted to make the game look more real, so we increased the ground effects, and we also introduced some new character gimmicks during the explosions.

The demo shows a team battle mode... Yes. In the screenshots, you can see four gauge bars.

But we also include a regular versus mode.

G: Does the game still control in the same way as the original?

Yes. I want to keep a three-button system for Dead or Alive 2. A good playability is very important. The buttons control system will be similar to Dead or Alive; attacks will be 70% similar. The way characters move in 3D will be different. Characters will always face each other.

Did you think about including an escape button like in Virtua Fighter 3?

No. We will stick to a three-button control. Personally, I do not like the name "escape." A fighting game has to be an offensive type of game. Virtua Fighter 3 is a "defense" type of game and players will alternate defense and attack position, defense, defense, and defense again... Dead or Alive 2 is an offense, offense, offense, type of game! [Laughs]

3: What difficulties have there been with designing the realistic motions in the game?

TI: Some characters' animations are designed manually,



The animation in the game looks far more detailed and realistic than even VF3. Characters look like they are really fighting each other rather than simply executing moves



The anime influence is readily apparent in this game. Surprisingly, instead of detracting from the action, it makes the game even more intense

and some others have been designed with motion capture and adjusted manually. Some facial expressions required some manual designing, too. For certain sexy animations, we used a real female staff member to make some real moves. It was pretty expensive, though! [Laughs]

NG: Are there more programmers or designers on the staff?

Designers. There are fewer than 10 programmers; all the other staff members are designers. The present team worked on both the PlayStation and Saturn versions of Dead or Alive. In fact, it was a parallel development, and the current team was split into two teams.

NG: How different is it to develop on Naomi than Model 2?

It's much easier to keep looking at the game in progress. For the Model 2, we were using flash memory as media. To test the game, you have to open the system, plug it in, and do what you have to do. This process used to take one day to do and now only takes two to three hours on Naomi. Now, quality checking has become much easier. Before, we could only check our game seven times a week, but with Naomi, we check around 20 times. The game quality becomes higher overall, as a result.

NG: How much do you cooperate with Sega?

Sega is not involved at all in the game development, but they help with tools such as the Naomi debug drivers.



Multi-tiered levels add a whole new dimension to the fighting. Knock a character off the cliff — then jump down to finish him off

- NCE: How many characters did you include in the game?
 TI: I cannot give you a precise figure. But in the end,
 Dead or Affive s will include more characters than a
 regular 3D fighting game used to have. I can say that
 building the new character skills has definitely been the
 hardest part.
- NIES What games have you worked on before DOA?

 TI. As a leader, Dead or Alive was my first game.

 Before, I worked on a game that was never released.

 [Laughs] Before that, I was graphics programmer for a

 Super Famicom game based on a Japanese animation

 movie named Captain Tsubbase.
- NG: Fighting games have become much more rare lately there were almost none on the show floor at AOU. Does this make you worry at all about the state of the fighting-game market?
- TI: I believe that fighting games were becoming too numerous and people were fed up with the genre. I am very confident about our game, however.
- NG: What do you think of weapon fighting games?

 It is a difficult genre; the games in it are not becoming hit tiles, for a weapon fighting game, I would prefer to use an analog control, as it provides a better feeling when hitting. Digital buttons and the joystick are inconvenient for weapon fighting games.

- NG: Where is the fighting genre headed?
 TI: I believe that we will come back to the origin, to linear fighting games. Soon, fighting games will come back to more simple and powerful directions.
- NIG. What are your favorite games?
 Ti. I like the ones make. In the past, I really liked
 Street Fighter II, but my favorite game is Zeldo. I also
 like Wizordry, and also Civilization on PC. I was so
 impressed with Zeldo that I included a waterfall stage in
 Dead or Alive 2. For the scene when characters are
 falling. I also studied very precisely the Zelda
 waterfalls-falling scene.
- NG: What are the rival titles to Dead or Alive?

 TI: My first rival is time. I have to fight against time. Of course, there are other fighting games from other companies, like Tekken, Virtua Fighter, and Ehrgeiz. I studied all of them carefully in order to determine the good and bad points of each game.
- NICE: Yu Suzuki and AM2 have been working on Shemmue for three years now instead of Virtuo Fighter, and surprisingly, it's not an arcade game. Can we expect you to make a console-only game in the near future as well — possibly not even related to the fighting genre? "I!" We are not only interested in fighting games.
- Please look out for what we'll do in a year!

SOUL CALIBUR

After a spectacular showing at the Tokyo Game Show, this game has become one of the most-wanted games on Dreamcast. The graphic have been upgraded from the System 12 version and now showcase the power of Dreamcast over the PlayStation-based original. Tiny details, such as breath being visible in the air on the ice level and hair that blows in the wind, accent the graphical power now available to Namco. Of course, the gameplay is still intact, so fans of the arcade game can still look forward to some rock-solid weapon-fighting action. Look for more next month.





Dreamcast by improving the graphics fivefold over the arcade original



The team battle mode, a first for 3D fighters, adds some variety to the standard one-on-one gameplay

Without question, this is the most important game in Sega's launch library

Visual Concepts





arp's D2 demo features both action and racing segments in order to give players an idea of the title's diverse gameplay



erful control tool lets designers tweak th controls and responsiveness for different position don't expect your linemen to be as agile as your backs

hile the Oakland Raiders may not mean much to the legions of gamers in Tokyo or London, few would contest that Madden Football had as much to do with the U.S. success of Genesis as Sonic. And if you don't think Sega has learned from the lack of quality sports titles during the Saturn launch, you haven't talked to Marcus Matthews, Sega's senior sports producer, "Bernie Stolar (see interview, page 80] has made it very clear," Matthews says, "that sports are key, and football is the key sport of all the sports. We'll have one of the strongest sports launches of any hardware platform." Matthews suggests there will be five other first-party Sega Sports titles, including basketball, hockey, soccer, baseball, and CART racing - all within the first year. But first, and foremost, is football.

When Visual Concepts finishes Sega Sports NFL Football (tentative title), the game will have been in development for two years, representing Sega of America's largest-ever first-party development effort. The size of the effort is directly in line with the importance Sega places on the title. Internally, it is viewed as a loss-leading title that must succeed if Dreamcast is to achieve early dominance in the U.S.

To ensure that success, Visual Concepts has designed a game that is far more than just the next step in sports games. From the huge amounts of

motion-capture data to the play-making features to the AI, NFL Football is being designed with one goal: to make a revolutionary, quantum leap past the stateof-the-art football games on PlayStation and Nintendo 64. Today, several months from completion, the game is coming together with all the enhancements promised back in 1997 — starting with a framerate that is a rock-solid 60fps.

"Sixty fps is the way you played all of the old football games," says Thomas, referring to the classic titles of the 16-bit era. "It gives you the most feedback on your joypad, and it lets us display more frames of animation." Until recently, the only way to play a wellanimated 3D football game at 60fps was to venture to the arcade and drop quarters into a Blitz '99 machine. "We're not making Blitz," Thomas says. "This is truly a football simulation game."



A unique weather system is based on temperature and precipitation, so weather can actually change in the course of game. If it rains, the field will gradually turn muddy in areas of heavy play

Still, Thomas is quick to point out that "we've got some good hard hist." He's not kidding. Sk of the 16 motion-capture days (using more than 14 athletes and actors) were devoted to the stuntmen, who took some devastating hist. "Other football games on the market currently have about 250 animations," says Thomas, explaining why his team used more than twice as many mo-cap days as most projects. "This game is going to have 1,500 animations, at least — possibly as [many] as 1,700, depending upon RAM."

The game will be the first to feature motioncaptured two-on-one tackles — 80 different versions were shot, and at least half should make it into the game. Different-sized athletes were also used to assure the right kind of movement for the right positions. "We actually motion-capture different positions," Thomas explains, 'Decause a quarterback runs differently than a lineman, and you'll see that in the game, for all the motions. There are different motion models, and there is actually different geometry to support the motion models."

According to Thomas, Dreamcast gives the developer plenty of animation storage space, and VC's engineers have also compressed the animation data to get even more in. On-screen players are segmented to support separate upper- and lower-body animations, and a unique timing-based blending method makes it all seamless. "It's all in seconds, kind file film," Thomas says, "in the sense that 'this is a 2.6-second walk animation." And, of course, with the blending and everything else and running at 60 frames, you don't see any thicup or jerking."

Still, all this motion capture and seamless animation would be wasted without a true 3D collision-detection system — which is exactly what VC has created. Most current sports titles operate

BUGGY HEAT

Buggy Heat comes from the creators of Aero Dancing, and once again, it is a game that features realistic physics and technique. This time, you drive a buggy on Rally-like dirt tracks, and the gameplay doesn't seem nearly as fun. The control seems to be where the game suffers the most, and just making one lap around the track is nearly impossible without long practice sessions first. Graphically, the game moves at a nice clip and is passable, but the scenery isn't exceptional. Perhaps when the game is released this summer, these problems will



No more little diagrams, as Visual Concept's playbook draws the play right on the field for players to see. Of course, VC will also enable players to secretly call plays via Virtual Memory Units





While the game moves nicely getting your car to corner a turn can be a chore

NBA 2000
Besides its NFL game
Visual Concepts is alshard at work onhardcore basketbal
game. With a frame rad
of 60fps and more motion
captured moves than an
other basketball game
the game looks like a T





Expect the animation and detail in this game to eclipse all other NBA games so far

with cylinder-based collision (picture an individual tube rising around every on-screen character). The Visual Concepts model has 18 different spheres, which encompass the characters' individual body parts.

"In other sports games," Thomas says, "if you just hit memore, and you just hit them in the leg, they'll do a tackle animation, and it will be a generic tackle animation. In ours, we know where you're hit, and we play the right reaction." It works: tackles look more realistic than those of any previous football title **Next Generation** has seen.

Extended animation isn't limited to tackles: ball-handling animations are accurate to the point of brilliance. During an in-game demo, Thomas runs a pass play in which the receiver's hands are skyward to line up perfectly with an inbound spiral. Then, a moment before what should have been an immaculate reception, a defensive back leaps forward and swats the pass away with all the grace and timing of the NFL's best. The moment is a beautiful glimpse of what 128-bit gameplay promises.

Of course, the player models

themselves have to look good, too. The team can scale individual bones in the player model, resulting in a realistic range of physical attributes. Every lineman will no longer measure exactly 6'2" and weigh 300 pounds. "We can actually scale muscle," Thomas says, "so you can see that linemen have big arms, and some of the other guys have smaller arms."

A wide range of equipment and features have been specially modeled, from helmet to shoes,

including 30 different facemask types, ten different skin tones, special pad placement, and even breatheright strips across some players' noses. And Thomas even intimates that most of the players' faces will be modeled under the helmets. "We are even going to do player-specific things," Thomas boasts, "like Dan Marino's boots. Marino has to have a special boot because he hurt his foot."

Aside from these graphics enhancements, NFL will tap into Dreamcast's 64 sound channels. Most significant will be the camera-based audio, which will maximize the 30 sound environments. If the camera is low on the playing field, the player will hear more of the on-field sounds, such as hits, grunts, and on-field chatter. As the camera rises off the field, it will pick up more crowd noise and general stadium sound. The crowd should also sound much more realistic because the audio is layered. If everything



A proper physics model calculates just how hard each hit is, and the players involved in the collision will react differently depending on the intensity of a hit

goes according to plan, the crowd noise should closely follow the on-screen action, complete with team-specific chants. And for announcers? Although the team is using professional voice acting, it opted to stay away from a nationally recognized sportscasters simply because of the massive volume of voice work going into this title. "We used Mary Albert for about two four-hour sessions on Saturn," says Matthews. "We're probably going to do over 80 to 100 hours of recording for Dreamcast."

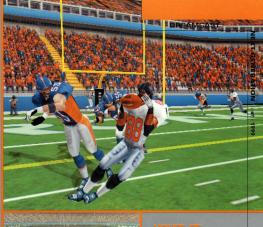
Despite all these graphics and audio advancements, the real secret weapon behind NFL Football will be Visual Concepts' powerful Al/ play-editing tool, which enables the designers and producers to adjust the AI and playbook behavior literally with the press of a button. "I've looked at a lot of other sports games' code," says Thomas, "and a lot of it is very specific, very hard coded. If you want to change something, you have to go back in and recompile it. We've got all this stuff set up with tables so we really can adjust the way the blocking works in under 10 seconds."

To demonstrate, he redesigns the pass-blocking assignments for the '49ers offensive line with a few keystrokes, changing the curvature of the passprotection pocket. "This just makes it a lot simpler," he says. "You don't have to remember any variable names. Everything is right in front of you - if you want to change diving versus spins versus stiff arms. I mean, all that stuff is right here."

The team is harnessing this editor to create team-specific playbooks, but more importantly, they want the AI teams to replicate these plays as would their real-world counterparts. "We actually have all of the data for that," Thomas says, "teams' tendencies, what they do, how the teams actually play. If the Niners are third and short, they're going to do a slant pass to Jerry Rice."

But hold on. Isn't Visual Concepts the same team that failed to deliver Madden '96 to the PlayStation? "None of the people who worked on Madden '96 are here now," says Tim Walter, VC's director of technology. "There have been mistakes made, but we're not making those mistakes again."

The powerful tools and state of playability of NFL Football — even in mid-March — suggest the game will be ready on time, and in a more playable state than Madden '96. Building the game from scratch has



An uninterrupted-season mode will enable you to

play right on through your season without ever made the process an entirely different one from the

one Thomas himself descripes as "a fiasco."

having to exit out to a menu screen

"When we were working with EA," Thomas says, "they ran the show. They told you what you could and couldn't change. We were using 3DO AI code that we didn't write. In this game, it's all us." Thomas also adds that it was the company's first attempt at writing a game outside of machine language, their first CD game, and their first 3D game.

"It was very painful for me, personally," says Thomas of the Madden '96 project. "I'm just very lucky and happy to have a chance to do it again, the way we believe is the right way to develop a game." Thomas sounds confident, and from what Next Generation has seen, he has every reason to be. Considering that this may be the single most important title launch in Sega history, that's good news.

FORMAT-PUBLISHER: DEVELOPER:



paced, but there's nothing new or exciting here



A perception system integrated into the AI has players responding with more authenticity

Climax Graphics' otherwise brilliant debut

is marred by a seriously wacky camera

Blue Stinger

rom the get-go, it's obvious *Blue Stinger*'s been designed to kick *Resident Evil's* ass. The atmosphere, the graphics, the soundtrack, and even the ambience scream, "We do cinematic horror/action better than anybody else." The *Resident Evil* clone is quickly becoming a staple in Japan, but so solid is Climax Graphics' freshman effort (it's a new division of Climax, which brought us *Landstalker* and *Dark Savion*), it's easy to believe the company could become the Rolling Stones to

Capcom's Beatles.

Like Capcom's now-classic zombie game and the forthrooming *Dino Crisis* (page 40), *Blue Stinger* is designed to make you feel that you're playing through a movie. The concept here: *Jurassic Park* meets *X-Files* meets *Army of Darkness*. The game begins with a long six-minute opening sequence that introduces the extinction of the dinosaurs, the meteor that does the extinction, Elliot Ballade (a vacationing officer of an ellie police force), enigmatic

PSYCHIC FORCE 2012 FORMAT: Dreamcast PUBLISHER: Taito DEVELOPER: Taito

Sega

Out now

Japan

The only really unique aspect of Psychic Force 2012 is that battles take place in a pseudo-30, cube-like environment. This may not be the most innovative of ideas, but it does provide an interesting change from the standard single-axis fighters that are predominant today, Unifortunately, the combat system is extremely rigid and allows for only preset combos and limited juggling. Aside from the minor upgrade in graphics, Psychic Force 2012 is almost exactly the same game we saw on PlayStation. Considering the power of Oreamcast, that is

of Dreamcast, that is simply inexcusable.



While a fully threelimensional fighter is nice, his doesn't make the cut





While Blue Stinger has its share of exciting sequences, there is also a deep storyline for you to discover

An Audience with Shinya Nishigaki

Shinya Nishigaki, president of Climax Graphics, began his game career 10 years ago, working for Enix on titles like Dragon Worrior 2. He moved on to work on Shining Force and Landstalker for Genesis and was director on Ladystalker for Super MES and Dark Savior for Saturn. We caught up with Mr. Nishigaki to talk about Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, and the split between Climax Graphics and Climax Entertainment.

Next Generation: When was climas Graphics Counded, and what urged you to separate from Climax Entertainment?

Shirnya Nishigaki: Climax Graphics was established in December 1996 as a "brother company" of Climax Entertainment, which Hiroshi Natio runs. I worked as Naito's right-hand man from 1990 until 1996. Around this time it became a necessity, in order to

keep up with the market, to improve the graphical quality of our games. I had the idea to gather a group together that would be dedicated to creating high-end graphics, so I then became the president of the independent Climax Graphics. But GG and Climax are constantly exchanging their resources. Climax provides us with programming technology, and we give them our graphics

NG: Why the name "Climax Graphics"? Are you mainly concentrating on high-end graphics — i.e., will we see you working in other areas, like in the movie industry, in commercials, or doing film sequences for other companies' games? SN: Climax Graphics also means "CG" if you look at the initials. We came up with this name because we thought it would convey the



corporate dealings, and another mysterious meteor that brings strange alien beings to life. In other words, you get a smokescreen and a McGuffin before the first button press.

The game follows the familiar linear pattern established by Capcom, and the gameplay — talking to characters to obtain clues, finding keys, and solving puzzles by moving boxes and hitting switches — will be familiar as well. Like any title in this genre, there are benefits and disadvantages to this method — it helps retain a coherent storyline, but can create immense frustration in a player who knows that a napalm launcher should be able to defrost a frozen door just as easily as the "required" card key

Still, Climax added a couple of touches that integrate the puzzles better Little features like goals with time limits and minigames within the overail quest make *Blue Stinger* feel somewhat RPG-ish and also help to both increase dramatic tension and keep things from getting too serious. The best new element, though, is the use of environmental details like door numbers and wall scrawlings as keys to a solution. Dramcast's texture-mapping abilities are good enough to force the player to see the level as a true environment rather than just a series of corridors.

The pacing is significantly more action-oriented than other *Resident Evil*-style games. Rather than just finding weapons, players can slaughter



The mobile camera enables some fairly spectacular screenshots, but it makes playing the game much tougher than it should be. Hopefully this will change for the U.S. release

spirit of the company. Now we are constantly forced to turn down offers! [laughs] Many people have asked us to do C6 films, especially with the fast-growing number of Japanese TV channels and the resulting lack of actual shows. Our relatively limited staff of 18 people couldn't handle a game and a movie at the same time, though.

NIG: With you specializing in games and CG, can we expect you to be a strong competitor of Square's in the near future?

SNI: Right now, I will take this as a joke! [laughs] But now that I think of it, Square started out with a team of merely to people to years ago. So maybe a decade from now, we really will be able to compete with them. [laughs]

CG and Sega
NG: How close has your
collaboration with Sega been? The
company has treated you almost
like a first-party developer.
SN: From the beginning, we

were respected for being a brother company of Climax and because we have only dealt with Sega so far. Sega has been treating us very nicely.

NG: What do you think about Dreamcast's situation in Japan right now? Sales have been quite disappointing, and PSX2 just recently stole its show. What does games — just look at how one game, *Pokemon*, saved Nintendo in Japan! [laughs]

NG: Sega seems to be expecting a lot from Blue Stinger, especially considering the fact that big titles like Sonic Adventure did not sell as well as expected... SIN: Blue Stinger is the first fully polygonal action/adventure

hardware power does Blue Stinger use?

■N: Sega's official numbers say that the maximum polygon power of Dreamcast is around three million per second. In reality, when the hardware has to calculate all the effects, sounds, etc., Dreamcast can't push more than 1.5 million polys per second. We started working on Blue Stinger when the

"Just look at how one game, *Pokemon*, saved Nintendo in Japan." — shiny.

Sega's future look like, in your opinion?

Smooth Smo

game to be released on Dreamcast (after this, there will be Shenmue, D2, and Resident Evil). I find this particular genre ideal to experience the full potential of the Dreamcast hardware, and I guess that is why Sega is giving us full support. They also find the idea attractive that a small company like us is able to make such a highend game. [Laughs]

NG: How much of Dreamcast's

hardware and development kit weren't yet finalized. Given that, Blue Stinger calculates only around 600,000 at peak moments. So we use less than 50% of its power.

Dreamcast and its competition NG: PlayStation 2 is approximately 20 times more powerful than Dreamcast. Do you think maybe that Sega cared more



While Blue Stinger may not threaten Resident Evil's crown, it features some nicely designed monsters as well as an excessive amount of gore

enemies for cold cash, which can then be redeemed at vending machines for anything from the local soft drink to raliguns or a lightsaber. Each controllable character has different strengths, weaknesses, and different types of weapons. Combat is singularly satisfying. Few sights are more gratifying than hacking limbs and heads off by delivering thick, meaty chops with an awe or setting monsters on fire with a napalm launcher. The weapon effects and the environments are delivered with graphics of the like that have arguably never been seen before.

Climax's delivery of the detailed environments is flawless. While much of the geometry is not that complex, every polygon is meticulously, exquisitely textured. Hello Market is festooned with discount signs, neon-lights, and incessantly cherful Christmas decorations, lulling you into actually expecting shoppers there rather than giant crab monsters. Other areas, like the boardwalk bathrooms and strip club, are cleverly designed and brought to life to the point that there are times when Dinosaur island is almost real.

Unfortunately, many players won't be able to get that far. Not that the game is bad, but the camera control is flat-out bizarre. Whatever intelligence Climax used for the game design failed utterly when it came to camera work, as it renders the game almost unplayable, it lags too far behind, doesn't turn corners fast enough, and

about being the first 128-bit console manufacturer on the market than about being the best?

SN: If you ask me, I think that

time. Come to think of it, many aren't even ready to develop for Dreamcast yet. There is a technical "ceiling" at the moment that only very large companies can typically Japanese form of entertainment, you could say it's the videogame console. Blue Stinger is thus an homage to American film in the form

"I think that the 'console war' has reached ridiculous heights... What the average buyer cares about are the actual games."

the "console war" has reached ridiculous heights, and the media is hyping this issue a great deal. What the average buyer really cares about are the actual games, no matter how powerful the

hardware specs are.

NIG: Will you be developing games for the next PlayStation? SIN4: With our current team size, it would take us at least four years to make Blue Stinger for PlayStation z! in fact, I think that of the roughly soo Japanese videogame developers, only three or four have the needed technical, human, and financial resources.

develop for PlayStation 2 at this

break — and PlayStation 2 goes far beyond these limits. I thus see a big chance for Dreamcast to succeed.

Blue Stinger and the U.S. NG: Blue Stinger has a very movie-like, "Hollywood" feel to it. Why did you opt for this particular

style?
SN: I've always been a film
freak. My father worked for a
company importing films to Japan.
I was thus heavily influenced by
foreign movies, especially by
American films because they
mainty focus on entertaining
people. I fourly looking for a

of a videogame.

NG: You hired American movie specialists to work on Blue Stinger. How did your collaboration come about, and how did you like working with Americans? SN: In 1985, a large Hollywood special-effects convention was held in Japan to which many SFX artists were invited. I was a university student back then and met one of the staff members who introduced me to several Hollywood SFX specialists. As a result, Academy Award winner Robert Short (for Beetlejuice) did the creature design for Blue Stinger and created the 3D models. Pete Von Sholly, who did storyboards for The Mosk and Mors Attacks, worked as our camera work supervisor. We also hired four professional actors to perform the character voices. I am very satisfied with all the work the American side did — not only that, they were all great people to work with!

NG: Speaking of America, what changes can we expect to see in the U.S. version of Blue Stinger? SIN: When making the American versions of Landstalker and Dark Savior, I realized that U.S. consumers prefer to play more difficult games than the Japanese. While the average Japanese gamer doesn't like to see the main character dying in the game, it doesn't seem to bother American gamers too much. [laughs] We will thus tweak the difficulty level and make battles tougher for the U.S. We will also change certain visual aspects in the game, e.g. some things aimed specifically at the lapanese audience and some



There are a number of different environments in the game, and the sheer number of textures make exploration worthwhile for its own sake. While the gameplay was very linear, we never found ourselves bored with where we were in the game

overcompensates for the player's every action. That means that for 95% of the time the player spends indoors, the angle is too high, too low, nowhere close to the character, too close to the character, facing something solid, or a combination of all of them. Take six or seven of those in the space of a few seconds, and nausea is sure to follow. It discourages exploration, makes the map virtually useless when trying to navigate on the fly, and frequently changes combat into something overly complex. Minor interface and graphics problems pale in comparison to this serious flaw. The camera may work well for creating dramatic, movie-like views, but it simply does not work well in a videogame.

If it weren't for the camera control, Blue Stinger could be a serious challenge to Capcom's Code: Veronica. In its current form, though, the one flaw is enough to keep all but the dedicated from playing. Which is a shame, because few games so far have demonstrated the power of Dreamcast like Blue Stinger — the expansive environments and beautiful textures are unrivaled, except possibly by Sonic. Unfortunately, though, the camera forced us to rate the game only as "fun," not as excellent or revolutionary. If it is tweaked before release in the U.S., expect to see one — or two — stars added.

RATING

elements that might be read as too provocative (alcohol, women, etc.) in the United States. We'll also add some hidden bonuses, like extra costumes, etc.

Blue Stinger the game NG: Four characters from General Entertainment's Dreamcast racer, Pen Pen Tricelon, are making a special appearance in Blue Stinger. How did that rather peculiar cameo appearance come SN: Daisaku Keijiri, the

producer of Pen Pen, is a good

it. [laughs]

friend of mine. So we just went for

NG: It has become very popular to have playable female characters such as Lara Croft. Why isn't Elliot's love interest, Janine, a playable character? SN: I must admit that we didn't have the time to make her a playable character. Hey, but you can see pictures of Janine wearing

various bikinis if you load the game

into your computer's CD-ROM drive, though! [laughs] Expect to see a female playable character in our next game, though.

NG: Are you talking about Blue Stinger 2 for Dreamcast? SN: I can't reveal the specifics, but our next project is definitely going to be a Dreamcast game.

NG: All right, so what

improvements or changes would you make if there were a Blue Stinger 2? SN: We would, of course, try to use 100% of the console's hardware power this time. We would also have the two "buddies" onscreen during actual gameplay (which our engine didn't allow us to do in the first game) and thus have the accompanying character help out the gamer in tricky situations and fights.

NG: That sounds very similar to the original concept of Activision's Apocalypse - which was eventually scrapped and replaced

with a standard one-player mode

SN: Actually, we already completed the Al for the "buddy" character, and it would have worked fine if the engine had allowed us to calculate the two characters at the same time. We even used Dogs for "comic relief" and he would randomly start skating, sleeping, drinking, etc. and reacting to the player's actions. Oh well, maybe next time? [laughs]

NG: You personally presented Blue Stinger at the Game Developers Conference in March. How did American developers and press members welcome the game? SN: The game received very good reactions and probably has a better recognition here in the United States than it has in Japan, I was surprised to see people rushing to Sega's booth when they heard that our game was being presented. Overall, it was a great experience, and I can't wait for the U.S. release!

FORMAT-PUBLISHER: CSK **DEVELOPER: CF**



Aero Dancing offers a far more technical flight sim than the console norm

Gameplay is a bit faster and more obnoxious than previous Capcom efforts, but it still has Thanks to Accolade, U.S.-bred giant robots

are coming to Dreamcast

Dreamcast

Accolade

September 1999

FORMAT-PUBLISHER: DEVELOPER:

RATIN



some depth to it







While the military may try to stop you, the sheer size of your Slave makes it prohibitive to stand in the way

ulking mechanical warriors have long been an icon of Japanese pop culture and have proved a popular export to the U.S. with properties like Robotech, Transformers, and Voltron. After more than two years in development on PC, Accolade is betting that its home-grown giant-robot game, Slave Zero, is unique and exciting enough to make an impact on Dreamcast.

"We didn't want anime style in our game," explains Matt Powers, producer on the Slave Zero team. "We obviously used some for inspiration, like Macross and Evangelion, but we've Americanized it and given it more of a Blade Runner look and feel." He's not kidding - the game's setting is much more Ridley Scott than Yoshiyuki Tomino. Cars fly along

futuristic skyways through the shadows of skyscrapers that go up hundreds of stories. It's a hard-edged version of a future gone horribly wrong.

Players pilot a newly designed combat robot called a Slave. Each Slave is a biomechanical monster many stories high that doesn't so much need a pilot to fly it as to meld with and control it. Obviously, there are some advantages to this: Slaves are faster, stronger, and more maneuverable than than older, inorganic mechs.

Gameplay focuses on your escape from a rival city-state with the stolen prototype Slave (Slave Zero, in fact) and your subsequent assault on the aerie of Soukhan, the evil warlord who controls the city. The view is third-person, but it is quite different than what



The game has many platforming elements, but the primary focus is combat between heavily armed mecha



In contrast to traditional giant robots, the Slave is highly maneuverable and can dodge and weave like a human

we've come to expect from a giant-robot game. "The idea from the start was to make an action game," says Powers, "so levels have been designed as a number of short engagements with other robots instead of longer battles like we usually see."

Powers acknowledges that the sense of scale in the game is just as important as the action. At sixty feet tall, the Slave is much bigger than the conventional forces — in turn, the city is that much more immense than the Slave. Creating a realistic city that is still open enough for combat with five-story-tall monsters has been a major design challenge. Each level brings you closer to your goal of reaching. Southan's perch, and as you get to the higher levels, the environment reflects these great heights by becoming more open and much more dangerous. The levels also become much more vertically oriented, so that by the end of the game you jump and climb rather than run to reach Southan's lair.

Since combat with other robots is the defining aspect of the game, it is fitting that the team has spent a lot of time making it as fun as possible, largely through the fully interactive environment. Players can

stomp on passing cars or pick them up and throw them at an attacking enemy. Ground-based troops make particularly amising targets, and it is mighty tempting to hang around and stomp on soldiers (or pick them up and throw them into walls) when given the chance Even crivillans aren't immune to your presence; when a battle is fought, cars will skid out around your feet and pedestrians will run for cover. The game world isn't just a place to run around in anymore—it's an entity in itself that reacts appropriately to you and your actions.

Although Accolade feels a pure PC port would be good enough to stand on its own in the Dreamcast market, multiplayer options will be enhanced with a split-screen four-player mode (internet play is still undetermined, largely because Sega has yet to provide details to U.S. developers on its Internet plans). Graphics will be similar, although the team will have several montts after the PC release to refine the look of the game and give it some console-specific touches, if the final version looks and feels as good as we're hoping, Slave Zero could be a brave new step into the realm of action gaming and proof that Japan doesn't have a monopoly on giant robots.

MONACO GRAND PRIX RACING SIMULATION 2

PUBLISHER: Ubi S DEVELOPER: Ubi S

Ubi Soft's initial Dreamcast offering serves as a promising, yet not faultiess, early effort on the system. Consistently high fram rates and an utter abolishment of environment draw in serve to establish a good sense of realism, as do numerous, albeit subtle, particle effects. Poor sound quality, uniforgiving handling, and the absence of officially licensed Formula 1 drivers and teams are ultimately enough to keep the title from joining the ranks of the genre's best. The included classic grand prix mode is an enjoyable complement to the main game, but its sole countryside track makes it a short one at best.

DATING





Unlike other titles in the genre, Monaco Grand Prix Racing Simulation 2 offers players two distinct racing scenarios







You can use the environments to your advantage. Destroy buildings only to salvage their girders as weapons

Biohazard: Code Veronica

FORMAT Dreamcast PUBLISHER Capcom

RELEASE DATE December (Japan)

> ORIGIN Japan

Capcom

METROPOLI

wizards at Bizarre
Creations have just
announced
Metropolis as their
launch title for
the Dreamcast in
Europe. The game
looks gorgeous and
is made up of several
real-world locations.
In fact, the team
went to each race
area and took
exhaustive notes so
that the game would
look as realistic as
possible, took for
some in-depth
coverage of this





This section of the game is based in Shubuya in Tokyo and, believe it or not, this is what it really looks like



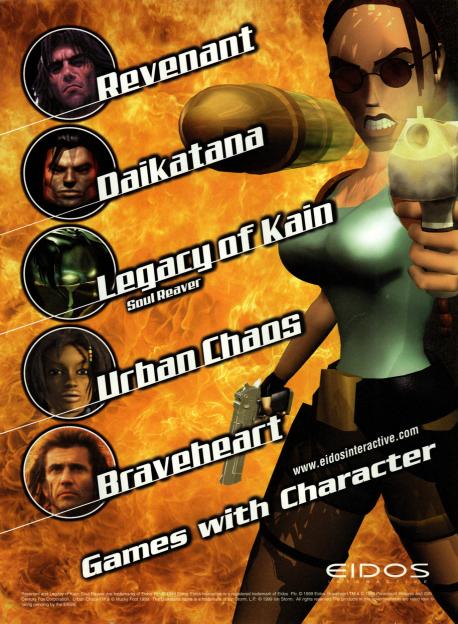
Dreamcast affords the new game with higher resolutions as well as realtime environments. This means that the camera is no longer locked in a fixed angle and can now track Claire around each room

hile the Dreamcast installment of the popular survival horror title is still in its early stages, it's hard not to be excited by what we've seen so far. The storyline takes place in Europe this time around, and you get to play as Claire Redfield from Resident Evil 2. The storyline revolves around Claire's continuing quest to find her borther after the events of REZ. She travels

to Europe and sneeks into a secret Umbrella Lab, where she is captured. She is then transferred to a place called the Umbrella Prison, where she is held captive. She is soon rescued by an Umbrella employee named Rodrigo and escapes into the building just as a large explosion goes off nearby. She opens the door outside only to see fire and, yes, zombles.



This new installment takes place after RE2 and follows Claire's adventures in trying to find her brother Chris



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ALPHAS

Our monthly report from the front line of games in development



























Throne of Darkness lapanese mythology meets Diablo... cool

Need For Speed: High Stakes PC You haven't seen it until you see it on PC

Wineout 3 PlayStation

Army Men: Sarge's Heroes N64

can version 3 keep up on aging hardware?

3DO's soldiers invade Mario country

PlayStation Move over jet-skis, it's snowmobile racing

Gabriel Knight III erra's last adventure game

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tari's 3D update of the arcade classic Gauntlet was, in a word, classic Fataling the core gameplay values of the original while giving the series a graphical facelift. As with any successful arcade title (especially one from Atari Games), console versions

updating is headed home — and the results may surprise you



A note about which screen shots are from which system: if there are two character boxes at the bottom, it's the PlayStation version

are inevitable.

Atari, however, is going through a tot of time and effort to ensure that the PlayStation and Nintendo 64 versions are significantly deeper gameplay experiences than the arcade game. Nintendo 64 version Producer Scot Amos jokes, "The arcade version was designed to suck your quarters. With the home versions, we've got all your quarters up front."

That means that unlike in the arcade, your health won't steadily drop as you play, and both home versions have a number of additional worlds. Also, the structure of the game has been altered slightly. 'We've really ramped up the adventure elements,' Producer Howard Lehr says. 'There's a quest cycle, seven quests which involve getting special weapons to help you whack the bosses.' These items of legend are scattered throughout the game's world, and finding them involves





On the other hand, the N64 version is instantly recognizable thanks to its four-player setup

FORMAT PlayStation, Nintendo 64

PUBLISHER Midway

> DEVELOPER Atari/Blam

RELEASE DATE

ORIGIN U.S.







The home versions have new levels and enemies, and all the old ones too

slightly more puzzle solving than found in the arcade. "It's still a run in there, kick ass, get the loot, then leave type of game," Lehr assures us, "but we've definitely added a whole lot of depth."

The expanded game world has enabled the developers - Atari itself is handling the Nintendo version, while San Francisco-based Blam is working on the PlayStation port - to include subquests, hidden areas, and placing a greater emphasis on gaining experience and building up your character's abilities. This has also made the home versions much less linear than the arcade, leaving you at your leisure to explore worlds in any order and fashion you choose. Even better, after playing for a time and getting a character "beefed up," in both versions you and a friend can plug your memory cards in and use your powered-up characters in a joint adventure.

In addition to expanding the experience and customizing it for the home player, the developers are also making sure that each version suits its





The arrows that told you which way to go are missing from the home versions — you've got all the time you need to find your way



In general, the PlayStation version has more detailed and colorful textures than those found on Nintendo 64

respective system. Lehr explains, "I set out to design platform-specific products. I didn't want to get caught in the trap of making it exactly like the arcade version for the home. The platforms have their own strengths, and they both do great things, but they're different things. So the games are going to be different on the different on the different platforms, and they're definitely different than the arcade, but we think it's for the better."

For example, although the N64 version will use a 16MB cartridge, thanks to the vastly greater storage capacity of CDs, the PlayStation version will offer two more worlds than the N64, the Jungle and Desert areas, for a total of nine. The tradeoff, of course, is that thanks to the extra controller ports, the Nintendo version will enable up to four players at a time.

There are other, subtler, differences as well. In general, the N64 version has flashier special effects, dynamic lighting, and roughly one-third more enemies onscreen at once. Cut scenes





The characters from the arcade have been faithfully re-created







PlayStation developer Blam is "pushing the PlayStation way out there," according to Blam's Matt Seymour

and other storytelling moments are told by using scripted sequences within the game engine itself, and digitized dialogue is limited. Thankfully, however, Atar has opted against the excessive filtering and anti-aliasing so common to N64 titles, and so, especially with the addition of Nintendo's 4MB expansion pak (which the game supports), the onscreen imase is very crisp and clean.

The PlayStation version, by contrast, sports higher-resolution textures and more of them. Also, the cut scenes are pre-rendered FMV, and you'll notice a greater variety of sound effects. In fact, by and large, the PlayStation version seems to have more detail overall. Matt Seymour of Blam says, "We're cramming it in. it's amazing how close we are to the arcade, in how good the characters look, in the textures, in the geometry, Look at the spider queen's world — that is verbatim from the arcade."

Yet the two versions have more in common than they do differences. Both support analog control and controller



feedback, and contain the same eight characters - warrior, valkyrie, wizard, and archer, each of which has a "hidden" version, the minotaur, falconess, jackyl, and tigress, respectively. Many members of the same team that designed the original arcade version are pitching in with design assistance to further the goal of keeping the series consistent, because above all, both versions must convey the sense of overwhelming odds that characterizes the series, "The game is based on that flow of enemies," Lehr enthuses, "that onslaught, that constant large number of enemies coming after you. Without that, it's not Gauntlet."

Remarkably, however, both home versions are slated for a simultaneous release late this summer. 'Getting two games on totally different systems out at the same time — especially with games of this size and magnitude — that ain't an easy thing to do," Lehr admits, then assures us, "but the ducks are in a row right now, and we're sure we can do it."





Adding adventure elements will definitely increase the replay value







The N64 version boasts a large number of flashy lighting effects, and a 4MB expansion pak cranks up the resolution considerably



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DINO CRISIS

The creator of the Resident Evil series unleashes a new breed of terror

n a time when groundbreaking hardware dominates the headlines, when new chipsets and graphics demos send industry watchers into inspired daydreams, it's important to remember that great software doesn't necessarily require a quantum leap in processing power. This fall, Dino Crisis should prove that even the stock PlayStation can deliver the goods in the





While the game is not set in the Resident Evil universe, the scenario is familiar enough to anyone who's played Mikami's previous works

Capcom's most talented and experienced producers, Shinji Mikami. Mikami produced Resident Evil and Resident Evil 2, and in addition to helming Dino Crisis, he's currently also producing Biohazard: Code Veronica for Dreamcast (see Dreamcast, page 30) and Resident Evil: Nemesis for PlayStation (see Milestones, page 63).

With Mikami's hand stirring so many pots, it was with some trepidation that Next Generation went into an exclusive demo of his only non-Resident Evil title. (For more on Mikami, see the following interview, page 42), However, what we found during our extensive gameplay session on a 70% complete

FORMAT

PlayStation PUBLISHER

Capcom DEVELOPER

Capcom

RELEASE DATE Fall 1999

ORIGIN Japan





Players will run across several survivors in the labs who usually give



Types of dinosaurs the player will encounter include numerous raptors, a T-Rex, and some grabby pterodactyls





Documentation can be found throughout the game, hinting at passwords and giving clues and backstory

version of the game was an amazing experience. The Resident Evil influence is clear, but with a completely new storyline, setting, and several new storyline, setting, and several new species of antagonists, the overall experience is fresh and more exciting than ever. Indeed, the only disappointment came when Capcom insisted that we leave their office, which had been closed for some time. The fact is, even at this stage, Dino Crisis already offers hours of polished gameplay.

While the game is not set in the Resident Evil universe, the scenario is familiar enough to anyone who's played Mikami's previous works.

Players assume the role of a government special-forces agent named Regina, who — along with a rookie agent named Rick and a hardened, square-jawed agent named Gale — must investigate the mysterious island laboratory of a scientist named Dr. Kirk. Of course, when the player arrives on the island, the lab is deserted, and the player's investigation begins. It's only moments before a victim's remains are found and not long after that, the titular dinosaurs make their first appearance. Your job: find Kirk, discover if there is any relationship between the doctor's work and the dinosaurs (hinthere is., duh), and escape alive.

Is your Spielberg alarm sounding? Wilkami freely admits that Jurassic Park was his primary inspiration. Considering the trouble Dreamworks has had with the franchise, it's amazing to see the outstanding level of suspense and action the game builds with its high-quality dinosaur models.





Meet Regina, a battlehardened agent who remains calm even in the face of velociraptors







you something. But there's always the risk of a giant T-Rex head busting through a window to swallow you whole







Expect familiar splashes of blood when the player collides with a dinosaur

The first thing players will notice about Dino Crisis is its use of realtime 3D environments as opposed to prerendered backgrounds. But the game's controls, cameras, musical socre, and loading transitions between rooms reflect its Resident Evil heritage. Dinosaurs are quicker on their feet than the zombies are, so a "quick 180" turn" has been added to the control scheme (assigned to the R2 button), and players can now move with their gun drawn.

Keeping with the formula that made Resident Evil and Resident Evil 2 so successful, Dino Crisis gameplay combines exploration, puzzle-solving, and fight-o-flight survival elements. Considering that the player begins the game with a pistot that is fairly ineffective against the dinosaurs, players will be running from them more often than not throughout the first half of the game — at least until a shotgun and some tranquilizer darts can be found.

While Resident Evil was fraught with the constant uneasiness of atmospheric haunted-house chills, the scares in Dino Crisis are more of the adrenaline-pumping, roller-coaster variety. There are more "jumping through the window"-style surprises, and we can't



The raptors pounce, bite, and tail-whip characters — more terrifyingly, they can even knock your gun away

emphasize enough how frightening the dinosaurs are. The raptors pounce, bite, and tail-whip characters — but even more terrifyingly, they can knock the player's gun away.

As expected, there's plenty of landscape to cover, including the interior and exterior of the lab and the staple underground facilities (expect the game to be longer than Resident Evil 2). Many areas are locked from the outset, with

SHINJI MIKAMI

t's quite a leap to go from creating Disney games like Goof Troop to Resident Evil, but that's what Shinji Mikami did when Capcom started gearing up for PlayStation development in 1994. Why the switch? "I was ordered to," answers Mikami. Clearly, his bosses knew what they were doing. Resident Evil has been a huge critical and sales success for Capcom on three continents. Now, while nominally producer of RE: Nemesis for PlayStation (see the first shots in Milestones, page 63) and Biohazard: Code Veronica (see the latest shots in Dreamcast Countdown, page 30), Mikami is focusing his day-to-day energies on Capcom's latest franchise bid: Dino Crisis. Next Generation caught up with him at Capcom's Osaka HQ.

Next Generation: The inspiration for Resident Evil seems at least to be partly based on George Romero's movies, like Night of the Living Dead. What was your inspiration for Dino Crisis?

Shinji Mikami: Actually, it was another film. Maybe you've seen Jurassic Park? Laughs |

NG: The setup of the game certainly parallels

Jurassic Park — will the game's story play out like the movie?

SM: No, no. But, unfortunately, I can't say how it is

different. I don't want to reveal too much of the plot. In the game, the player reveals sequences in the story one-by-one — I'd rather it's left for the player to discover rather than have me ruin it.

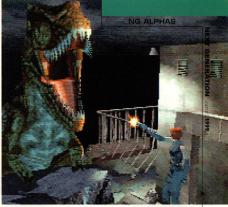
No: Fair enough. Resident Evil was, thanks to PlayStation's abilities, one of the first games in years to offer dramatically new types of gameplay, specifically a story-driven action experience that truly inspired fear and suspense in the players. Will Dino Crissi instill this same level of fear, and are there any new feelings you've trying to get players to experience?

SM: In Resident Evil, a lot of the fear factor was

SM: in Resident Evil, a lot of the fear factor was just from the horror setting, and it would go up and down like a roller coaster depending on what was happening in the game. In Dino Crisis, there will still be sudden moments where it is really scary, but dinosaurs add a new kind of tension, where the tension is always building through the game.







The inventory system provides five slots for weapons, ammo, and healing power-ups. Players now have an unlimited item page so they can carry as many keys or puzzle pieces as they want

small areas coming unlocked periodically to advance gameplay. Survive a stage and collect the right keys, then a cinematic cut scene will explain what's been unlocked and what the next mission objective is.

To compensate for the lack of replayability that an alternate main character would add, the storyline splits at several points, at which time the player must choose a subquest. The first one comes when Regina is forced to side with Gale or Rick as they debate

over whether to rescue a scientist or a member of their team. These branching subquests eventually weave back into the main storyline.

The puzzles will definitely be more of a challenge in *Dino Criss* than in *Resident Evil*. The player's inventory has been expanded to hold an unlimited amount of objects (ammo and weapons excluded), so there are lots more keys and ID cards to find. Besides standard door/key problems, there are many



Rooms still load with an "opening door" transition, but now they actually show the in-game model opening the door. If Regina is wounded, she will appear wounded as she opens the door

Dinosaurs themselves just add an entirely new dimension. If you think about it, they're really frightening, and I want to describe that in the game. Unlike zombies, dinosaurs can chase you and catch you, and because we are using skinned models, without joints, we can let the dinosaur get very close to the player, which can be very scary!

NG: What game are you spending the most time on — this or one of the Resident Evil games?

SM: Definitely Dino Crisis. I am producing the other games, but this is the one I am spending the most time on. I love Resident Evil, but I felt that I needed some variation in my routine, since I had done so many Resident Evil games already!

NG: Outside of work, do you see horror movies or read horror stories?

SM: Yes, I see all the big horror films, and specifically I enjoy reading Japanese horror author Edogawa Rampo, whose name is a play on Edgar Allan Poe. And I read lots of horror comics.

NG: In a horror movie or book, you watch or read what happens to a character. In a horror game, you are the character. Are games the best medium to express horror?

SM: Well, in certain ways it is the best medium, because in a videogame you can control the



"In Dino Crisis, there will still be sudden moments where it is really scary, but dinosaurs add a new kind of tension, where the tension is always building"

character, so you feel the shock when things happen. At the same time, in a videogame we can't describe how you are actually feeling, internally, moment to moment. This can be done best in books, and secondarily in movies. So we cannot tell you what you should be feeling, Videogames need their "horror factor" to be a lot more concentrated. It's also tough because you don't control the pacing, like you can in a movie. You never know where a player will want to go next. But we solve this by setting some parameters or objectives that the player must achieve before enabling them to go further into the game.

NG- Although Resident Evil certainly owes a debt to Alone in the Dark, it ploneered many concepts that have now become very commonplace in games, even down to characters — it's hard to find a game today that doesn't have zombles in it. How does it feel to have paved this way that so many are following?

SM: Well, I feel pretty pleased in some ways, of

course! But still, there are so many followers that are trying to make their own *Resident Evil* games today — I want to see designers become a lot more creative, exploring new possibilities. It's not very exciting for me to be looking at so many

NG: Was this part of the reason for making Dino Crisis instead of working on another Resident Evil game?

people just following my ideas blindly.

SM: Yes, of course.

NG: What do you see as the biggest improvements *Dino Crisis* makes over the games in the *Resident Evil* series?

SM: Well, the biggest, of course, is the fully polygonal world; it's not pre-rendered like Resident EVII, so we can change the camera angles on the fly. Since one area can now seen from several different angles, it gives us the ability to create more action, although it's tough, because we have to design a camera system so that it can cover all



other environmental puzzles to solve as well, including getting several generators running. Another major puzzle theme involves DDKs, or digital disc keys. Players must first find three discs of the same markings to form one key, and then, after finding the right door to use the key in, the player must decipiber the

correct password from a cryptography word-puzzle. The cryptographs start out fairly easy but increase considerably in difficulty.

Mikami's group has taken advantage of the fully 3D environments to set a new standard of cinematic camerawork, keeping fantastic





When bleeding, players will leave a blood trail







"I think there's a place for Dreamcast users, and there will still be a place for Sega... Releasing PlayStation 2 will not eliminate the Dreamcast market"

the possible potential areas. Otherwise, the camera misses the character, and that's obviously not acceptable! [Laughs]

NG: There wasn't much change in the puzzles between Resident Evil and Resident Evil 2. Have there been big changes with Dino Crisis? SM: Probably two-thirds of the puzzles in the game will be familiar to anyone who played Resident Evil, but we are introducing some new code-solving puzzles. At first, these puzzles look like weird combinations of letters, but when you really look at it and figure out what rules can be applied there, suddenly you can understand the message needed to open the doors. Also, of course, the dinosaurs change the gameplay. You can't just run away from them like you do with a zombie, although you can shoot the dinosaurs with a tranquilizer weapon. Other times you will need to press a button to close a door or shudder before a dinosaur catches you, or find a place to hide.

NG: Will the level of difficulty change when the game is localized for the U.S.? SM: Yes, the puzzles will be a lot tougher.

NGs Why do you think U.S. gamers like their games more difficult than Japanese gamers?

SM: I think the difference between Japanese players and American players is that Japanese players get bore with a game more easily. If they get too frustrated, they'll quit the game, so I just have to keep the players concentrated on the game and instruct them about what they're supposed to do next — otherwise, they won't complete the game.

But U.S. players will always try to feel like they have achieved something themselves, on their own power, or of their own effort. That's completely opposite to the way of playing videogames in our nation. So right now, we design the game for a Japanese level of difficulty, with plenty of hints, then we modify it for the American market afterward.

NG: Would you rather not give out hints to the game? SM: I'd rather not give out too many hints.

NG: Is Dino Crisis set in the same world as Resident Evil? Could there be a crossover game where the S.T.A.E.S. team ever came to the island — Resident Evil Vs. Dino Crisis? SM: No, there's no relation between the two worlds.

NGs What do you think of PlayStation 2? SM: Spec-wise, right? It's unbelievable, I have no complaints at all — but at the same time, when you look at PlayStation 2 specs, you're looking at the specs used by movie companies in hollywood. These entertainment giants can join in and do the same quality works a traditional videogame companies have, with their special-effects houses and their own expertise. So, we're going to have a lot tougher competition because the expertise of a videogame company is working under technical limitations. That has been our specialty, but there are no technical limitations anymore. Now, it's all about artistic teant.

NG: Still, Hollywood has tried making games before and didn't do a very good job. Don't traditional game creators have an inherent







The character models are improved over RE2, but the lighting has really progressed





Even unpolished, the sound design is once again masterfully subtle. The game opens at night, and while we

never see the island's shore, the sound of the surf pounding the sand plays rhythmically in the background. The orchestral soundtrack supports the action with feature-film-quality scoring, and the dialogue (finally) doesn't come off as forced or cheesy.

Frankly, the detail in *Dino Crisis*, such as when the unsettling sky animates with ominious scrolling clouds, almost elevates it to interactive poetry. And after seeing the way Capcom has even animated the little moths flitting in the lamplight outside the lab, we're ready to put Mikami alongside Spielberg in his ability to combine the natural world with that of fantasy — keeping us believing every step of the way.



The moonlight in this hallway is a perfect example of the lighting



advantage in creating interactive media?

SM: Sure, but that assumes that the things that will come on PlayStation 2 will just be games.

Maybe there will be new things, new kinds of experiences that aren't strictly games or strictly movies, and game companies may not have any advantage there. Games, videos, music CDs, they could all come together, so there will be more than just games on the system.

NG: When you saw PlayStation 2 for the first time, did you get some game ideas? Things you maybe always wanted to do, that weren't possible before? SM: For the first time, I thought, "Human have real personalities in games. For the first time, we'll see humans as real humans."

NG: What do you think of Dreamcast in light of PlayStation 2 now?

SM: I'm a firm believer in Sega, they have more than 10 years' history. So I think there's a place for Dreamcast users, and there will still be a place for Sega in the future, too. Releasing PlayStation 2 will not eliminate the Dreamcast market. In that respect, PlayStation 2 may not be successful, because it's still up in the air and there is no established Sony user base that has continued to Joyally buy only Sony PlayStation games. So those Joyally buy only Sony PlayStation games. So those

users can go anywhere, but there are those Sega users who will always be faithful to Sega.

NG: OK, so, bottom line, which new platform excites you more?

SM: Actually, it's Game Boy Color right now!

NG: Game Boy Color? Why?

SM: Well, monochrome Game Boy is too limited you can really just have symbols onscreen. But with Game Boy Color, you can have good graphics that show real things, but still, the graphics are so limited that you are forced to make the gameplay the thing that you focus the most on. So, right now, that's my main hardware interest.

NG: What are your favorite games, outside of Capcom games?
SM: Zelda 64.

NG: Do you play a lot of PC games?

SM: I don't play one game for too long a time.
I try a lot of games, but usually only for 10
minutes each, just long enough to get a taste,
both for PC and video games.

NG: Except for Zelda? SM: Zelda... [Laughs] Well, Zelda's my hobby.



THE RETURN OF ATARI

Can Hasbro Interactive bring back the old glory of this once and future brand?

Hasbro Interactive scored the deal of the century when it bought up the remains of Atari Corp. for only 5 million dollars, scooping up (count 'em) 75 intellectual properties and two truckloads of old Atari equipment and documents. Hasbro's plans? Simple. Discard all the late-era Jaguar bagsgage (tramiel family included), and relaunch the Atari Irand with updates on the classic games that made the name sacred in the first place.

"By the early '80s," says Hasbro spokesperson Dana Henny, "Atari had sold 130 million software units, with 2 billion dollars in sales." Big numbers. And if the Hasbro corporation understands anything, it's appealing to the mass market. That's exactly what Rich Cleveland, Hasbro Interactive's director of marketing.

wants to bring Atari back to. "We got some wonderful titles, some wonderful memplay, and some wonderful singulary and some wonderful history," says Cleveland of the acquisition. "We want to take all those components and rebuild the Atari brand to be the preeminent action-games brand." But Cleveland is quick to add, "We're taking ownership

"We know there a lot of dedicated Atari fans, and we don't want to disappoint them"

Rich Cleveland, director of marketing, Hasbro Interactive

of the Atari brand seriously; we know there a lot of dedicated Atari fans, and we don't want to disappoint them."

Of course, as any classic fan would quickly point out, plenty of retro gamers were disappointed by Hasbro's





FORMAT PC, PlayStation

PUBLISHER Atari DEVELOPER

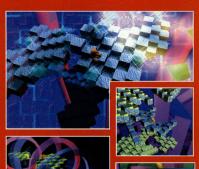
Blue Planet Software

RELEASE DATE
PlayStation: summer 1999
PC: fall 1999

ORIGIN U.S.

Q*bert

Abstract and lovable, O*bert was ahead of his time as his self-titled. puzzle/platform-hopper hybrid crossed expanded levels, but the object of the gameplay remains the same: hop across blocks to change their colors while avoiding that nasty snake Coily. (The ability to accidentally jump to your death should also be part of the experience.) The original Q*bert will be harnessed to a new 3D engine. The playfield will now be rendered in true the developer responsible for compiling the Midway and Atari Classic Collections, provided the O*bert given a bit of a story for his update, as he now must rescue the lovely(?) dimension. Oute.







The Namco Connection As if the Atari library weren't enough, Hasbro has just secured the rights to 11 classic Nameo properties. Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, and Dig-Dug have been secured as PC-only properties, while Pole Position, Galaga, Bosconian, Mappy, Galaxian, Dragon Buster, Rally X, and Metro Cross have been licensed for all platforms. Retrogamers, eat your hearts out.





ame as it ever was Pong goes tropical and even deep into the Arctic

Pong

PlayStation levels, Next Generation



FORMAT PC. PlayStation

PUBLISHER

DEVELOPER RELEASE DATE

ORIGIN



Pong mini-games, such as this one-player version of "whack-a penguin" bring variety to this simplest of simple games

Frogger, despite how well it sold. "Frogger was almost Frogger-Mario at one point," Creative Director David Walls reveals, explaining that at one point the design had strayed almost completely from the original concept, so far as to incorporate free-roaming 3D environments.

"It takes time, and it's a challenge," Walls continues. "We learned a lot from Frogger, so we were able to do Centipede better, and we're still learning from Centipede, so all these other games are going to be that much better."

"All these other games" Walls is talking about include PlayStation and PC versions of Q*bert, Pong, Missile Command, and Star Raiders. (Gottlieb did the original Q*bert, but it is a key part of the Atari era.) While not technically an Atari classic, Hasbro is also releasing The Next Tetris this summer. Pong and Q*bert are scheduled to appear this fall, Missile Command soon after those, and Star Raiders in early 2000. A Dreamcast

version of Missile Command is also planned for 2000.

But back to Walls' point - Hasbro has learned. And throughout the company's presentation to Next Generation, gameplay is the issue it stresses most. Because the games are updates of classics, they are not going to be positioned as products that will introduce the next great 3D engine. "We're dedicated to making great playing games," Walls says. "They'll be enhanced by the technology, but the technology cannot replace the play

Capturing the essence of the original arcade or 2600 version of a game is of paramount importance to Walls and Scott Balaban, Hasbro's inhouse designer on the Atari products "The question we ask," says Walls, "is 'What would this game be if it was continued?' the way Mario was. Nobody ever says 'Look, they're redoing Mario again,' because it was continued, nurtured, and developed. These games got left behind, and





The recently released Centipede is a promising step in the right direction for the new Atari brand



The brand's essence: "Play until you die... and play again'

we're asking, 'What would Centipede be like if there was Centipede 2 through 5? What would Centipede 6 be like today?"

The one thing everyone agrees on is that the addicting gameplay must be maintained. Cleveland fleshes this concept out into a rule governing the entire brand. "We call it the Five Minute Rule," says Cleveland. "If it's an Atari game, five minutes after you have the disc in your hand, you're playing the game. You're not reading manuals; the object of the game is immediate and obvious. When you play, the controls are simple and intuitive. When you fail, you immediately know why you fail, and



Unlike the Jaguar Missile Command, this version should retain gameplay

it's very easy to say, 'I know what I did wrong' and hit restart."

Sure enough, Pong, Q*bert, Missile Command, and Star Raiders are ramping up to provide just that kind of experience. (Art assets were still early on Star Raiders and Missile Command. but Next Generation will have screenshots in future issues.) And with

disc, you're playing the game

tapped (see sidebar, p. 47) the Atari consumer brand may just be destined to flourish again. (It is even becoming its own business unit within Hasbro

"But our vision extends beyond just relaunching old titles," says Cleveland. "We also want to create Atari. So we'll be developing some original content." Why not? According to Wells, many developers are inquiring about classic properties like Adventure. We can hardly wait.

The Next Tetris



TNT challenges players to clear the preset (brown) blocks within a time limit

> FORMAT **PUBLISHER**

DEVELOPER

RELEASE DATE ORIGIN clouding the identity of the original. The breakaway blocks preset to the board course, classic Tetris will be available as well. There's also one more '90s-style option: PlayStation owners tired of us catch you inserting the Titanic soundtrack.





Collapsing blocks — and blocks that gel to those of like colors — change the gameplay just enough to make *Tetris* new again

It's only a water drop but it's going to cause a tidal wave among PC gamers.



See the first splash at www.outcast-game.com









THRONE OF DARKNESS

Two Blizzard alumni bring a samurai epic to the world of action-RPGs. Is it a Diablo assassin?



The majority of the enemies come in the form of the dark warlord's undead warriors. but many other creatures from Japanese mythology make appearances



s revealed in a news story in our April issue (NG 52), two former Blizzard employees have left the Diablo team to form Click Entertainment, Their first project? A game that captures the fantasy of medieval Japan while advancing Diablo-style gameplay.

"The look we're going for is that of classic Japanese battle scrolls," says Click President and Lead Programmer Doron Gartner, "which were all isometric. They really fit in with our engine." The scrolls also dictated the look on the game: "The outdoor scenery is very Japanese, so it almost feels like you're playing a Japanese painting," says Vice President Ben Haas.

Gartner and Haas are avid fans of Kurosawa films, as the premise of Throne of Darkness shows. "I was reading about Kurosawa's Throne of Blood," Gartner says, "and it turns out the imagery he was going after in that movie was the isometric battle-scroll look. It's funny that we picked up on the same concept."

The game begins after a possessed warlord raises an army of the undead to attack four castles that lie in the valley

below his mountain fortress. The survivors are limited to those four warlords, each with only seven samurai at their disposal, After choosing to play one of the warlords/castles under siege, the player must launch an offensive up the mountain to kill the dark warlord.

From the moment the game appears onscreen, its Diablo heritage is obvious. The isometric camera locks in on the player's samurai, who viciously dismantle the undead soldiers with katanas. There's one big difference, however: the player's party consists of four samurai selected from a group of seven - not one lone warrior. Accordingly, each samurai is of the archetypal variety, and choices include an enormous warrior, a master swordsman, a stealthy ninja, a sorcerer,



asts sketched above



A spell with a solid blast radius can turn the tide of swarming enemies

PUBLISHER Acclaim

DEVELOPER Click Entertainment

RELEASE DATE Spring 2000

U.S

















Former Mainframe Studios artist Blair Simmons has joined Click to create some dark and creepy prerendered cut scenes

an archer, and a leader.

"Normally," says Haas, "it's like, What does a leader do? He doesn't really do anything," in this title, though, the leader of the party will be more than a figurehead. The reason? Players have the unique ability to call what Haas describes a "plays." In realtime, these plays enable you to set up four samural in offensive and defensive formations, a key strategy element in ensuring the survival of your samural. Each samural will have this play-calling ability, and each will feature unique plays. "But," Haas continues, "the leader will be able to call more than any other characters, and they'll be more effective."

While the player will control all four samural, they'll only be in direct control of one samural at a time, and the AI will assist in commanding the others — mostly. "There's a berserker character," Haas says, 'and if he gets into a fight, and you don't have a character with the right charisma, you may lose control of him. You actually have to become him to babysit him, because he'll go off and start doing overly aggressive things you might not want him to do."

Although calling the right play will enable players to neathy dispatch hordes of enemies, the enemies will be endowed with some strategies of their own. Heas explains that low-level undead soldiers may not be motivated to attack you, but their superiors will motivate them. "Their commanders are there telling them how to attack," Heas says, "and which formation to be in. Sometimes, if they're by themselves, they'll fall asleep, and you can sneak up



Click is using a motion-blending technique similar to those found in sports games to keep the characters smoothly animating



Despite the feudal-era setting of Click's game, the team of nine has taken an urban '80s approach to its photo. That's Haas getting air

on them and kill them. It's not like *Diablo*, where there's guys just hanging out in the dark waiting to kill you."

Like Diablo, Throne will use spritebased characters, but 3D-accelerated graphics will be used for lighting and transparency effects. "We went from Diablo to Diablo 2," explains Garrner "We saw the pre-production, got to weigh the benefits, and [were] part of the decision to keep that game sprite-based."

Garrner has written the 16-bit graphic engine for Tronce of Darkness and claims the conscious decision to go with sprites has enabled the team to put plenty more enemies onscreen without a framerate hit. "I suspect that our next game will be 100% 30-accelerated," he continues, "but to get this kind of look, we felt it would be better ore-nedered,"

Currently the gameplay is still very early - so early that Click is just finishing up its level-design tool. A unique multiplayer aspect is also in the works, which is tied to the single-player game, but that's being kept under wraps as well. Yet even in this fledgling development stage, Click's tangible assets, including a few demo levels, are as enticing as the lore they draw from. Given the team's proven track record with isometric action-RPGs, we expect great things from Click; we just hope they can improve on the most irritating aspect of Diablo - the late release dates.









Players can cast a fire spell (top) or just cut a path through their enemies. Of course, the latter offers more of that arterial spray effect

NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES

If you think you know all about EA's gift to car nuts everywhere because it's already out on PlayStation, the PC version will make you look again







Run from the cops, or chase down speed freaks, it's all up to you

Pursuit came out for Playstation, and it made an immediate impact. The series had always had its fans, but it had just as many detractors. Hor Pursuit silenced the naysayers. It was, in a word, the kind of game the series always should have been. Not only was it packed with dream cars, it was fast, responsive, and — best of all — let you outrun the police. The PC version followed several months later, but rather than being a simple port, it was its own animal altogether, with additional multiplayer orbins, 3D accelerator



Races and chases can take place in either the day or night, and under several different weather conditions, including rain and fog



The game's physics engine is among the most advanced available.

support, and a phenomenal attention to detail. In short, it took an already good game and made it great.

A year later, the PlayStation version of the sequel, High Stakes, didn't disappoint (see review on p. 91), but the PC version, even at the alpha stage of its development, looks like it will again surpass its console cousin. For example,

The simple truth is that the only thing both versions share is the 3D models used for the cars and environments

because storage isn't a critical issue, the PC version will include not only the ten tracks found in the PlayStation version, but also all eight tracks from the previous game, Hot Pursuit.

The simple truth is that the only thing both versions share is the 30 models used for the cars and environments. Everything else, including the game engine, is completely different — and in fact, even the models differ in significant ways. One of High Stakes' improvements over Hot Pursuit is that the cars can take damage. In the PlayStation version, this was represented by swapping texture

FORMAT

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER

Electronic Arts

RELEASE DATE
July 1999

ORIGIN U.S.







You can expect all the usual visual bells and whistles we've come to expect from a 3Daccelerated game, plus maybe a few surprises

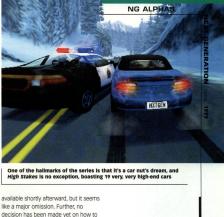
maps to give the car a "damaged" look, but for the PC version, the geometry of the car itself will change, Damage will even be location-specific: if a cop rams you from behind, the back end of your car will be crushed; scrape a guardrail, and the front-quarter panel will crumple.

Other features that had been finalized at press time included a fully 3D dashboard, special effects such as environment mapping, and 3D accelerator support (although exactly which features of next generation cards - bump mapping, texture compression, and the like - would be utilized was still being "explored"). The AI for pursuing police cars is also much more sophisticated, and when playing as the cops, you'll not only drive a police cruiser, but also direct all the other cruisers involved in the chase and be able to switch between them at will. However, what really sets the PC version apart is the continued product support that players can expect from EA. As with Hot Pursuit, additional cars, and perhaps even tracks, will be downloadable from EA's web site - not to mention the dozen or so unofficial fan sites dedicated to making new cars and tracks.

This is somewhat paradoxical. however, because High Stakes will not include Internet support when it ships. Presumably, a patch or update will be



The police AI is tough and getting tougher, but the developers are making sure that players of almost any skill level can jump in and have fun



decision has been made yet on how to

handle a PC version of the High Stakes "pink slip" race - on PlayStation, two players could load up their favorite cars, and the loser would have the car erased permanently from their memory card. PC

As with Hot Pursuit, additional cars, and perhaps even tracks, will be downloadable from Electronic Arts' web site

owners would, no doubt, get quite upset at a program that erased a portion of their hard drive, and it's also all too easy to simply copy a file somewhere safe before the race

Still, despite these (admittedly not inconsequential) question marks, Need for Speed: High Stakes would have to stumble very badly indeed to be anything less than enjoyable, given the acclaim and popularity of its predecessor. With its 19 high-performance cars, tournament mode, and the sheer thrill of the chase, all indicators point to a winner.



Great Fighters are Made not Born!

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Edit or use any of 800 moves, throws, and juggle combos, or invent something new







Test mode fine tunes your moves for maximum damage









Create ANY move you can think of complete with sound and visual effects



"...a landmark title in the console market."
-Next Generation





WIPEOUT 3

Psygnosis' signature series keeps right on going, looking better and getting faster



As we've come to expect from the Wipeout series, the soundtrack will be among the game's most appealing features

he original Wipeout was one of the games that helped put PlayStation on the map, and its immediate sequel, Wipeout XL, made PlayStation jump up and dance better than any racer up until Gran Turismo. Wipeout 3 wort exactly break any new ground for the series, but it makes enough of a departure from previous games to keep things moving.

To begin with, while all previous Wipcour games have featured only those trademark, wedge-shaped vehicles, Wipcour 3 will include three new car designs, each of which will have its own tradeoffs of speed, maneuverability, acceleration, and armor. Five of XU's weapons have been retained, with seven new ones on the way (none of which will be as powerful as those in Wipcour 44, a bad design decision that threw game balance out of kilter, especially during multiplayer modes). The eight track



Psygnosis promises that the progression system will enable lessskilled players to advance while still providing a challenge for more experienced players

designs, however, are all new, and once again U.K. visual-design firm Designers Republic is providing billboards and some track structures in addition to all the team logos and icons.

Most important, however, is that the engine has been further tuned to run at even higher frame rates than in XL, despite moving up to a high-res display. Also, for the first time, a Wipeour title will include

While previous games have featured only the trademark wedge-shaped vehicles, Wipeout 3 will include three new car designs

dual-shock and analog-control support, offering a fine level of control than the series has had before. And you'll need it too, since although you can still slide along walls as in XL go apposed to coming to an almost-dead stop in the original, the amount of damage you take is cumulative as long as you remain in contact with a surface — in other words, you can blow yourself up just by being a lousy driver. Rounding out the package are the usual multiplayer modes: tournament, challenge, and deathmatch.

Looking better than ever, and playing faster than ever, Wipeout 3 may have a familiar look, but if the tracks are tuned correctly and the new weapons balanced, there's little doubt it will be the best Wipeout yet.





The tracks are wider, but the pace is considerably faster — It balances out, sort of

PUBLISHER Psygnosis

Psygnosis RELEASE DATE November 1999

> ORIGIN U.K.

ORIGIN

ARMY MEN: SARGE'S HEROES

Fresh from its success with BattleTanx, 3DO refocuses its sights on N64 with a new twist on a proven franchise







There's nothing more satisfying than mowing down a cadre of those tan army fascists

hen Pixar's little green men from the film Toy Story invaded our world, the folks at 3DO did a patent search to find out who owned the name "Army Men" for interactive media. Faster than you could say "Disney licensing snafu," 3DO's Army Men was born. Today, the company has three Army Men games in stores and three more on the way. Sarge's Heroes marks the franchise's invasion of N64. While Army Men 3D for PlayStation

based its missions on the Army Men PC products, Creative Director Michael Mendheim (lead designer on BattleTanx) emphasizes that Sarge's Heroes is a departure from this, Mendheim's game concept? Create the first characteroriented action/adventure in the Army Men series, combining Mario-esque character elements with GoldenEye's mission-based design. But don't expect to see any diminutive plumbers running around in overalls with Soviet femme fatales

Players will freely explore large 3D environments with a personality-packed main character, squaring off against enemies with a classic military arsenal. 3DO also promises that each campaign



Spiking a mission-based shooter with exploratory adventure elements, the developers hope to set Sarge apart from the pack

level will be packed with tons of secret areas and power-ups for the adventurous gamer.

Mendheim's team is doing a great job of expanding the Army Men universe by introducing a number of new characters and integrating the story into the gameplay. As Sarge, you must thwart the world-domination plans of Plastro



Taking advantage of the memory Expansion Pak, the game will support multiple resolutions and a letterboxed mode that will give players a wider field of view

FORMAT Nintendo 64 PUBLISHER The 3DO Company DEVELOPER The 3DO Company RELEASE DATE Fall 1999

U.S.









We're especially partial to the missions that happen in our world — now we want a Micro Machines crossover game

think Fidel), the leader of the tan army, by using portals to go back and forth between worlds, Plastro brings weapons of mass destruction from our world to that of the Army Men in order to carry out his diabolical plan. A magnifying glass becomes a malicious ray of incinerating light, an M-80 becomes a razing, large-scale explosive; and a garbage disposal becomes a solider-devouring menace. To make matters worse, Plastro has captured your squad, Team Bravo, and you must rescue them one at a time, as well as your love interest, Nikki, who also happens to be your Colonle's daughter.

When a member of the squad is rescued, that soldier's special weapon is added to Sarge's arsenal. The list of weapons and Items Sarge can accumulate currently includes the following: M-16, M-60, sniper rifle with scope, TNT, landmines, landmine sweeper, grenades, grenade launcher, flamethrower, mortar, shotgun, and C-4



Multiplayer-specific environments will include two types: sections of the maps from one-player games, and maps that are unique to multiplayer

explosives. Once a weapon is deployed, a unique animation ensues that includes the classic Army Men poses made popular by the original plastic toys. One of the more impressive examples Next Generation saw: Sarge's head slightly recoils as he pulls a grenade pin with his teeth, then lobs it skyward. Using an interpolation engine, these animations are seamlessly integrated into the ingame action without the tell-tale "pop" in motion. "We're putting our chips on the animation," said a proud Mendheim, who showed NG some of the more than 150 hand-drawn animated sequences. Manual animating techniques are a surprising choice in an industry infatuated with motion-capture. But in early tests, when 3DO coupled mo-cap with the specular highlighting technique that makes all of the characters in the game look shiny and plastic, "It just looked scary-kind of surreal," says Mendheim.

Half of the 14 missions in Sarge's Heroes are with everything sized to scale. The other half of the missions take place in our world, where Sarge and his lik are the size of little, well, plastic army men as they storm gigantic kitchens, bathrooms, and backyards. Harnessing the critically acclaimed technology from Battle Tanx, the multiplayer section of Sarge's Heroes looks to be shaping up quite nicely with team play, deathmatch, and capture the flag modes.

All things considered, the development of Sarge's Heroes is pretty far along for a fall release date. If development of the game continues on its current path, not only will it be the best game in the Army Men franchise, but it just might earn its stripes in a category currently dominated by GoldenEye.





Taking a page from Syphon Filter's book, Sarge's Heroes will feature an auto-target mode as well as gameplay aids for aiming, jumping, and other instinctual actions





Some may find the dichotomy between our world and the plastic world jarring; we liked it

SLED STORM

Is there more to life than the need for speed?







Joyriding at night provides a new outlook on the same tracks for even more replayability

hile Snocross snowmobile racing isn't the most high-profile event at the X Games. EA is convinced that the intense feeling of high-speed snowmobiling is at least a starting point for a racing game. Producer Jules Burt says the project wasn't ever intended to be a simulator, but an edgy and exciting product, "[Snocross] is a little mundane in real life, but we've taken it over the top," says Burt.

To add this extra excitement to the title, EA has enhanced the demi-sport with quite a few aerial tricks from other racing events like motocross and BMX. The result is an adrenaline-inducing mix of Jet Moto-like intensity and tight control, which, although unrealistic, never defies reality to the point where the gamer can't believe that it can be done in real life.

There are a total of 12 different tracks, all of which can be flipped and played in night mode (complete with colored lighting effects from each racer's headlights). There are also a wide variety of racers, each with unique personalities and taunts as well as defining characteristics that rate their performance in areas such as top speed, handling, stability, and attitude (which















RELEASE DATE

Late summer

ORIGIN

Canada



Every track has at least one short cut to help you pull ahead of the pack if you are willing to risk it

helps with the tricks). Perform tricks and place well in each event, and you'll earn money for new equipment.

Rounding out the package is a fourplayer split-screen mode, which the team assured us will stay fairly close to 30fps. Coupled with solid design, this feature should enhance replayability. Still several months from release, the team has plenty of time to polish Sled Storm until it shines. Should EA Canada meet its goals, this will be another winning addition to the global publisher's lineup of franchises.

GABRIEL KNIGHT III:

BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED

One of adventure gaming's most beloved heroes has a whole new look — again



For the third time, Gabriel Knight solves a supernatural mystery — and, as his fans have come to expect, uncovers his own past as well







The game's indoor and outdoor 3D environments show a great deal of variety and detail

Ithough it's never had the phenomenal sales of a Quake or a Command & Conquer, few series have received as many accolades, or generated as fiercely loyal a following, as Jane Jensen's Gabriel Knight. Now the sometimes-cocky occult investigator and his partner, Grace Nakimura, are set to star in their third graphic adventure.

As with many other series, Gabriel Knight has seen its share of changes. The original game, Sins of the Fathers, released in 1993, used 256-color bitmapped graphics. The sequel, The Beast Within, moved to FMV in 1995, and this third installment will move Gabriel into a fully 30 environment. So, will the series ever settle into a graphic style? "Only if the industry ever 'settles into a style!" insens jokes. "We have to stay not only current, but ahead of the technological curve. This is why the graphic style keeps changing."

The game is set in Rennes-le-Chateau, a very real village in France, featuring a mystery inspired by events earlier this century involving ancient parchments with coded messages, the priest who found them, hidden treasure, and even the possibility of blackmail against the Vatican. And, because this is a Gabriel Knight adventure, the game gets its start when an infant is kidnapped by a sect of vampires.

As always with the series, players will be uncovering as much about Gabriel's past and mysterious lineage as anything else. "Just as the werewolf theme fit in with GKI in terms of reflecting Gabriel's own internal struggle with hedonism, the vampires in GKII mesh well with the main subject matter — Rennes-le-Chateau", says Jensen. "The Rennes-le-Chateau", says Jensen. "The Rennes-le-Chateau" says in the sound to some extent the subplot involving Gabriel's personal development, is tied in with the idea of bloodlines — Families."

Some felt the move to FMV deprived the character of some of his cocky appeal. With the move to 30, however, Gabriel is once again being voiced by Tim Curry, "I do think that the Gabriel in GKIII has a bit more of the GKI feel to him," Jensen explains. "Dean [Erickson, who played him in Beast Within] played him more seriously, which was in part the script, but also the fact that just being in video meant the dialogue, etc., had a more realistic feel. With a more animated look, the characters can be played broader."

Whatever form the hero takes, it's almost a sure bet that *Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned* will satisfy Gabriel Knight's legions of fans.







Will the move to 3D preserve the series' atmosphere and characterizations?

PUBLISHER

FORMAT

Sierra

DEVELOPER
Sierra

Fall 1999

ORIGIN U.S.

59



FOR NINTENDO 64

IT CAN'T READ Y JUST YO

Give your thumb a rest and let Tilt Pak's" Motion-Sensing technology control the game action.

Simply tilt your controller in the direction you want to move, and with Tilt Pak's enhanced rumble feature and motion sensing technology, you'll score an ultra realistic gaming experience.



















OUR MIND JR MOVEMENTS

TILTPAK's high-tech wizardry allows you to calibrate and customize the motion sensitivity and rumble on your control pad.



Slide TILTPAK into any Nintendo 64 controller and breathe new life in to all your Nintendo 64 action games.









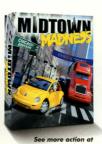
0-60 (off a skyscraper)? Yes.

Racers, start your mayhem. Grab hold of one of 10 wild vehicles and race through the windy streets of Chicago, where you'll have to deal with tough opponents, alleyways, drawbridges, newspaper racks, tunnels, and the police. Throw in five race modes and over 50 city landmarks, and there are plenty of sights to see. Just don't drive like a tourist.









www.microsoft.com/games/midtown











MILESTONES

Next Generation's monthly update on tomorrow's games

rash, Spyro, Jill Valentine. More than just names, they carry the same deeper sense of character instilled in names like Daffy, Pluto, and er... Homer. And now we find ourselves standing

among the crowded aisles at E3, where Crash, Spyro, and Jill Valentine will reveal where, when, and how they plan to reappear. Not going to E3? We've got you covered — read about them here

RESIDENT EVIL: NEMESIS PlayStation









VIGILANTE 8: 2ND OFFENSE PSX





Taking place after Resident EVII but before Resident EVII 2, Nemesis follows retired S.T.A.R.S. officer IIII Valentine as she leaves Raccoon City. Unfortunately for her, It's a little too late, as the zombles are already crawing through town. This one should be ready this year







The kings of car combat, Luxoflux, will bring to this sequel better graphics, new vehicles, new weapons, and an expanded quest mode

http://www.ign.com

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS PlayStation













First seen in NG 45, Xena's adventure is coming along quite nicely. New levels seen here include a battle with Amazons (top center). 989 will publish

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE



As a mercenary in this enhanced Quake II-engine game by Raven, players face Third World terrorists with real-world weapons

DEMOLITION RACER PlayStation











When several former Reflections employees joined Pitbuli Studios to work on Accolade's Test Drive series, they were also given the green light to work on this Destruction Derby-style game. Racer will offer many of DD's options, but now includes suicide racing (half the cars race the opposite direction), a career mode, and split-screen racing

FORCE 21



Red Storm hopes that Force 21 will do for realtime strategy on PC what Rainbow Six did for the first-person shooter

SPYRO 2 PlayStation









Spyro returns later this year with 30 new worlds to conquer and new moves including swimming, climbing, ground stomp, and supercharge

AIRONAUTS PlayStation







First described over a year ago in NG 38 as "PilotWings with guns," Aironauts by Red Lemon Studios features some odd, colorful flyboys

CRASH TEAM RACING PlayStation











Crash takes a break from platform hopping to star in this four-player Mario Kart clone. Expect to see it just in time for the holiday season

CROC 2 PlayStation









Croc 2 features better graphics, but the camera is as erratic as ever.

Controlling the character is frustrating, but Fox still has time to fix it

MIDTOWN MADNESS PC







Francisco Rush? Perhaps, but the designers give us Chicago, with rush hour traffic and rising drawbridges

TONY HAWK



One of the greatest skateboarders ever graces the PlayStation

BATTLE ZONE 64



Crave will be bringing Activision's action/ strategy hybrid to N64

FORTY WINKS



Change forms to confront enemy nightmares in this PSX platform game

TEST DRIVE 6



This sixth in the PSX series turns it up a notch with more cars — and trucks?

R-TYPE DELTA



One of the best shoot series ever gets a 3D makeover for PlayStation

SUPREME SNOWBOARDING PC LOK: SOUL REAVER PlayStation









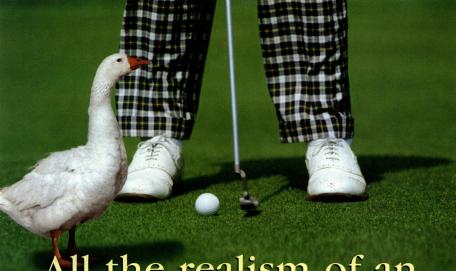
From developer Housemarque games, in Helsinki, Finland, comes this PC snowboarding game, which is also coming to Dreamcast







We expect Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver to be ready this fall. Recent additions include fantastic lighting for the soul reaver sword and spells



All the realism of an 18 hole golf course.

(Without the nasty goose droppings!)

Pro 18: World Tour Golf is the biggest thing to hit golf since titanium clubs. Unrivaled attention to course detail and TV-style coverage make a perfect foursome when combined with some of the hottest pro players and our groundbreaking 4-click swing system. Tee off on some of the world's greatest courses including Royal County Down (Ireland), The Lost City



(South Africa) and Coeur d'Alene (USA). Piqued your interest? For a free demo check out www.psygnosis.com/pro18/. And while you're there, find out how you can win a real trip to The Coeur d'Alene Resort.



Pro 18's 3rd hole, Coeur d'Alene



Actual 3rd hole, Coeur d'Alene

Honestly, if you're playing the course and you're playing the game, there is no difference!

General Manager, The Coeur D'Alene Resort

















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The ultimate application for Silicon Graphics' Visual Workstations for Windows NT: Now in its third major release, 3D Studio MAX software offers more ways to increase your productivity and workflow without compromising your creativity. And for breakthrough performance and realism, you'll want to run it on the newest addition to the Silicon Graphics family of visual workstations. Designed for Windows NT, the Silicon Graphics visual workstations move graphics data six times faster than AGP 2X-based systems—taking 3D Studio MAX to the max.

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3D Studio MAX software is the #1 NT solution among computer graphics professionals because it's optimized for large productions. 3D Studio MAX is infinitely extensible and completely customizable to meet your specific production needs. Character Studio* integrates seamlessly into 3D Studio MAX, providing a premium character animation tool to bring your characters to life with remarkable results.

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reamcast vStation 2

Next Generation cuts through the hype surrounding Sony's and Sega's new systems

hings don't look good for Sega. Sony has dominant market and mind share, and it's just announced a revolutionary system that should blow Dreamcast out of the water when it's released next year. In fact, when Sega head Shoichiro Irimaiiri was spotted at Sony HQ in Tokyo just before the PlayStation 2 demo, rumor quickly spread that Sega might be ready to throw in the towel (for Sega's explanation of why he was there, see our exclusive interview with Bernie Stolar on page 80). Some pundits have already written off Dreamcast and Sega as doomed. That's a mistake.

In early 1989, Sega's Master System had, functionally, zero market share and zero name recognition. Nintendo owned the videogame business. One year later, Sega had leap-frogged NES and was well on its way to console dominance, a fact which even the release of Nintendo's technologically superior Super NES couldn't change. (Nintendo eventually won the 16-bit race, but only because it kept supporting Super NES long after Sega had abandoned Genesis.)

This isn't 1989, and the difference between Dreamcast and PlayStation 2 will likely be much greater than the difference between Genesis and Super NES, but it's important to remember that Sega has found itself in worse positions.

At the same time, it seems that anyone who doesn't think Dreamcast will fail is just as sure PlayStation 2 will never launch, or that if it does, there will be no games to play on it.

With so much uncertainty about both systems, it's time for some answers. In the following pages. Next Generation presents a detailed — and hypefree — examination of the strengths, weaknesses. opportunities, and threats faced by Dreamcast and PlayStation 2, along with a brief bottom-line analysis of each system.

Our coverage of the next-generation system wars will continue next month, with a full report from the front lines at E3.



Dreamcast

Until Sony announced PlayStation 2 on March 2, 1999, Sega had the next generation to itself. Now, can Sega still compete?

With the PlayStation 2 announcement, and poor initial sales in Japan, the honeymoon is clearly over for Sega's next-generation machine. Anyone expecting Sega tog o quietly into the night, however, is clearly waiting in vain. The company has learned from its mistakes with previous

hardware, is committed to spending \$100 million in 1999 to launch the system in North America, and sincerely believes that it has a better-than-fighting chance to unseat Sony as the dominant player in the market, despite PlayStation 2.

Strengths

ega's biggest strength is the actual existence of its system. While PlayStation 2 is currently specs and prototype hardware — impressive specs and prototype hardware, admittedly — Dreamcast is real and ready for its U.S. launch. And thanks to some farsightedness on the part of sega of America, the system should have one of the best launch libraries in history.

While the Japanese launch was characterized by a lack of quality software, the 10-month delay before the North American launch has ensured that a high-

quality batch of Japanese and American first- and third-party games will be available — there will be no humiliating delays of key titles in the U.S as there were in Japan. Expect no fewer than four AAA titles at launch, bolstered by 9 to 12 supporting titles, with other AAA and supporting titles strategically released between the launch and the end of Sega's fiscal year in March 2000, when the first leg of Sega's faunch strategy ends. That's a lineup far better than Sega had with Saturn, than Sony had with PlayStation, or than Mintendo had with Nitendo 64, and if there will be no

PlayStation 2

Sony stunned the world with its PlayStation 2 announcement, but can it deliver games — and hardware — on time?

Dreamcast must infuriate PlayStation creator Ken Kutaragi. Not because the system outpaces PlayStation, but because it has received so much hype and yet is so conventional, unlike Kutaragi's revolutionary Emotion Engine chip design (see NG 53 for a complete report on the specs of PlayStation 2). It's easy to believe that the showing of PlayStation 2 technology in March was done

as soon as possible after Kutaragi — who first mentioned his goal of creating a system that could "synthesize emotions" to **Auxt Generation** in Tokyo in 1936. — had working silicon. Given its designer, **NG** expected nothing less than greatness for PlayStation 2, and we weren't disappointed. But specs don't guarantee success. How will PlayStation 2 fare? Read on.

Strengths

t is not at all an overstatement to say that PlayStating 12, is, simply put, one of the most ambitious system designs in the entire history of computing. Although nothing that it does — massive floating-point logic capabilities, vector processing, wide buses, integrated RAM — is revolutionary in and of itself, the combination of its features at an affordable price is a massive leap that can be compared without irony to the leap that Intel made when it decided to put together several pieces of established technology on one chip, creating the

microprocessor. The specs that Sony announced in March are better in many ways than graphic workstations costing \$10,000 or more

Behind physics applications like modeling nuclear explosions and weather systems (and after certain massive military and logistical databases), realtime 3D games are quite simply some of the most demanding computer applications on the planet. That Sony is planning to deliver a system that should actually outque the desires of almost all developers for the next 24 to 48 months is nothing









From Virtua Fighter to Grandia, Sega has already demonstrated that it can ship high-quality titles for Dreamcast. But is that enough?

games that demonstrate as dramatic a leap beyond the current generation as *Toshinden* on PlayStation did, there won't be many complaining about a lack of quality titles either.

The price, at \$199, is also going to be right—
although it probably won't draw the same kind of
mass-market support that Sony sees at \$129 (which
will surely drop to \$99 when Dreamcast launches), it
should prove a low barrier to entry for the hardcore
samers Sees aneeds to woo to succeed.

To achieve that price, Sega has taken some criticism for using conventional hardware. Still, the decision has made Dreamcast the easiest consoledevelopment target ever. Sure. that will result in a lot of questionable PC ports, but it also means that thirdparty support will be strong, and if PlayStation's success has shown anything, it's that having lots of titles is at least as important as having good ones. It's so easy to develop for, in fact, that many developers we've spoken to (who'd just as soon move straight to PlayStation 2) view not developing for Dreamcast as leaving money on the table and plan to support the system regardless.

The bottom line is that Dreamcast is an excellent console, capable of playing games far more advanced than any console available today. There are already great games available on the system, and more are coming.

short of amazing. Sony's greatest strength in the next generation is clearly PlayStation 2's pure 3Dgraphics-processing power.

But that's only the machine. Sony has one of the most respected brand names on the planet: in the videogame arena, PlayStation is quickly approaching Nintendo in name recognition among non-players, and Sony's videogame-marketing efforts worldwide have yet to miss the mark

In software, Sony has a respectable first-party development structure in place and is the target platform of choice for nearly every third-party console developer not partially owned by Sega or Wintendo. Given the strength of PlayStation 2, it's hard to imagine those third-party relationships — especially with top publishers like EA, Square, and Namco — weakening anytime soon.

In fact, it's doubtful Sony will need to do any evangelism for PlayStation 2 at all; it's much more likely that Sony's third-party division will spend the next couple of years simply figuring out how to allocate a limited number of development systems

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, more than simply making current types of games that look better (although that will certainly happen), PlayStation 2 is powerful enough to enable entirely





These shots of the development board, with its dual fans and large heat sinks over the EE and GS processors, give some idea of what the final board may look like

new paradigms of gameplay. Just as 16-bit sidescrollers gave way to today's console mainstay, third-person platformers, the advent of PlayStation 2 is likely to usher in totally novel gameplay mechanisms.

Weaknesses

preamcast is certainly not without weaknesses, however. The biggest, of course, is that even if Sony only delivers a system half as good as it's promising, it will still be five times better than Sega's machine. Dreamcast is an evolutionary system, PlayStation 2 is a revolutionary one. If and when developers truly learn to take advantage of PlayStation 2's capabilities, Dreamcast games will surely suffer qualitatively in comparison.

Sega also has serious branding problems. Saturn

didn't earn the company any trust among consumers, and even the company's 16-bit glory days seem tarnished when one recalls the dismal 32X and Sega CD. While the company has a well deserved reputation in Japanese arcades, for the bulk of U.S. consumers Yu Suzuki and Tetsuya Mizuguchi are not household names. Dreamcast will not sell many units based on the Sega name, and — especially to those consumers with 32Xs, Sega CDs, and Saturns in the closet — It will need to appeal despite the name,

Key Dreamcast launch titles

Shenmue



Not technically a launch title, Sega pins high hopes on this free-roaming Yu Suzuki game, which melds elements from brawlers, RPGs, and point-and-click adventures

NFL Football



Sega has invested an enormous amount in this Visual Concepts-developed title, which should demonstrate the kind of art assets needed to compete in the next generation

NBA Basketball



Another Visual Concepts title, the details in this game — down to the changing facial expressions of the players — mark it as one of the most advanced sports games ever

Weaknesses

espite its strengths, PlayStation 2 is by no means invincible. As we reported last month, the Emotion Engine CPU, which will be manufactured by Toshiba, uses notoriously difficult. 18 micron process technology, Switching to a new process in manufacturing processers (like from .25 to .18) can delay a project for months, and the Emotion Engine will be first attempt by Sony or Toshiba at. 18 micron technology. It will also be produced at a new plant (with, at start-up, a theoretical maximum of only

about 400,000 EE chips per month), by a new jointventure corporation. Will chips be so scarce as to delay the laury's Sony certainly hopes not, but the available facts so far are not confidence building, to say the least.

Ironically, PlayStation 2 may be too powerful for some developers. Unlike the easy-to-develop-for PlayStation (or Dreamcast), PlayStation 2 has, on the CPU, enough multiple-data paths and co-processors to confuse many developers. The solution, using

This Namco sequence offers a tantalizing glimpse at the animation quality that Playstation 2 can deliver. Namco's awesome C6 talent pool makes it best poised to take advantage of the next-generation machines









not because of it.

More worryingly, there seems to be no sure-fire killer app for Dreamcast. There should be great fighting games and great football games, but after years of derivative work like Sonic Blast and Sonic R. Sega's once-great mascot, alas, is not the hedgeling he used to be, the company has no Mario or Zelda to clinch sales. Sony took its time creating its franchise character, Crash, but the one thing Sega doesn't have right now is time. While Sega is holding

out great hope for Yu Suzuki's brilliant-looking Shenmue, its success is by no means guaranteed. In the end, Sega may not need a single killer app to succeed, but the lack of one to point to is a problem.

Finally, while EA may no longer wield quite as much power as it did in the 16-bit days, there are a significant number of people who simply ain't gonna buy a system unless it has *Madden* on it. Our advice to Sega: deal.

Sonic Adventure



It's flashy, it's fast, and the Japanese version is buggy as hell. Sega needs to give its flagship mascot title some serious work before the day of the U.S. launch

Power Stone



Capcom's 3D fighter hasn't sold well in Japan, but that isn't a reflection of quality: this is both innovative and fun, and if there's any justice, it will hit big in the U.S.

Soul Calibur



Another brilliant 3D fighter, Namco's followup to Soul Blade is excellent in its own right — and a tantalizing glimpse at what we can expect from Dreamcast Tekken

"middleware" APIs and tool-sets, may make programming easier, but at the cost of masking some of PlayStation 2's abilities. Although the conventional wisdom ("only three or four developers will really be able to program PlayStation 2 well") is probably an exaggeration (especially since we've yet to find a developer that doesn't count their team as one of those four), the fact remains that PlayStation 2 will be devilishly hard to develop for, especially in the first generation of software, which may lessen the

perceived distance between it and Dreamcast.

Finally, another problem may be a glutted marketplace: because PlayStation 2 is backward compatible, it will be tougher for new software to stand out. Publishers may have the Next Great Thing, but competing with 200 \$10 CDs in the used bin may make the (relatively empty) pastures of Dreamcast look a little greener. This won't hurt franchises like Game Day or Final Fantasy, but it may make it more difficult for new titles to find their niche.









Opportunities

gap has a number of opportunities to exploit with Dreamcast: a whole new potential user base that doesn't remember 32X, the possibility that the addition of a modern will prove unbelievably enticing; the chance to court young, innovative developers with the system's ease of development; and more than the system's page of the

But all other opportunities pale next to the year-long window Sega will have between the launch of Dreamcast and the scheduled launch of Playstation 2. For the next year, Sega has the high end of the market to itself. How well it exploits this opportunity in the U.S. will determine the fate of the system and very possibly the fate of Sega as an independent company. It has one year to deliver a killer software library, build brand loyalty, and harness economies of scale so as to undercut Playstation 2's price as steeply as possible next fall.

At retail — and in the hearts and minds of Sega's initial target audience, hardcore gameplayers — a year is forever. In one year, Sega dethroned Nintendo. In less than a year, Sony destroyed Sega. In a year, Sega is hoping to be so entrenched that, superior system or no, Sony will face an uphili battle with PlayStation 2 through Christmas 2001 at the very least.

Can Sega do it? It's certainly possible: for the next year, it's important to remember that Sega's competition won't be PlayStation 2, but the already-long-in-the-tooth PlayStation and Nintendo 64. Will Sega do it? If it hopes to survive, it has to.

Opportunities

It is a last year, a Sony executive suggested to Next Generation that PlayStation might be the system that became the de facto standard "VCK" of videogames and ended the three-to-five-year console cycle forever. We were polite in our response, but suffice it to say that we didn't believe him. This year, we might — especially since DVD-movie abilities could make it a replacement for the conventional VCR as well. While sony is naive to think that the power of PlayStation 2 can't be bettered, PlayStation 2 is powerful enough that it stands a real chance of ending the console wars once and for all, finally realizing Trip Hawkins' vision of a "do-everything" set-top box. After all, NTSC is a low-quality standard that's endured for 40 years, so it's not unrealistic to think that PlayStation 2-level graphics might be good enough for 10 or 15 years. To achieve this goal would be a Herculean marketing challenge, but

don't think that Sony's long-term business plan calls for anything else. It has been on the losing side of a standards war before (with Betamax), and it wants to win the next one. The inclusion of such features as FireWire, USB, and PCMCIA slots also hints that Sony has big plans for the system.

It's less likely, but there is a real opportunity for Sony and Toshiba to parlay the Emotion Engine chip into a serious threat to intel's and other U.S. semiconductor manufacturers' CPU hegemony. Although the EE has fairly dismal integer performance, its floating point capabilities are such that an "open" PlayStation 2 could be a real challenger in the workstation market. In fact, it's rumored that one middleware maker has ported its high-end 3D animation suite to PlayStation 2 and seen a 4x improvement in speed.



The soul of the new machine: Sony's PlayStation 2 Emotion Engine chip unmasked

What about Nintendo?

As it did in the 32-bit wars, Nintendo seems content to let Sony and Sega fight it out before it introduces its next-generation system. There are some key differences this time around, however, which should keep both Sega and Sony looking wer their shoulders.

First, while development of Nintendo's next system is already underway at ArtX, this time Nintendo has the benefit of seeing exactly what its competitors will deliver early enough to make changes to the hardware. Expect Nintendo to learn from its mistakes on Nintendo 6a, which had great special effects but a dismal polygon count and was almost impossible to develop for.

Second, Nintendo is finally jettisoning the moribund cartridge format for a custom DVD-based format.

Finally, while Nintendo is known for supporting its systems long after its competitors have abandoned theirs (game counselors will still answer questions about NES titles. and the company is still actively marketing Super NES at mass-market retail outlets), development is already underway on nextgeneration titles in Kyoto, and, if the job ads at GDC are any indication, Iguana offshoot Retro Games is already starting development for the new system. Donkey Kong expert Rare will supply the key first-party software in Nintendo 64's declining years, ensuring a steady flow of income as the wizards in Kyoto work on the next generation of Mario (which Miyamoto recently said would be "radically different" from Mario 64).

The bottom line?

The bottom line?

Nintendo is likely to be a much stronger contender in the next generation than it was in the last, and it will be impossible to call a definitive winner in the next-generation race until after Nintendo launches its next system, expected in the U.S. in fall 2001.

Threats

Infortunately for Sega, Sony and Nintendo luck will not spend the next year wishing it good luck and standing on the sidelines as it attempts a comeback. The two companies will spend the next year releasing what should be some of the best games yet on their respective platforms, and inevitable hardware price cuts will help reduce the impact of Segal's price point.

There are a number of other threats to Dreamcast as well, the largest of which is the huge anticipation for PlayStation 2 among developers, who rarely want to work on anything but the latest and greatest system. In fact, many are already shifting their next-generation project focus to PlayStation 2. If Sega is to succeed, it needs developers working on Dreamcast, not PlayStation 2. Making sure third parties do not jump ship will be a major challenge in the next year. That same anticipation among consumers will likely keep many on the sidelines; attracting consumers already committed to waiting for PlayStation 2 will also be a major Sega marketing challenge.

If the poor sales in Asia don't improve, expect to see the support of key Japanese third parties like Capcom and Namco waver: while Nintendo has proven that failure in Japan doesn't necessarily mean a U.S. launch is doomed, Sega is far more reliant than Nintendo on the support of fickle third parties to ensure success.

In short, while all the threats to Dreamcast can be managed, it is foolish to think that Sega has anything close to an easy year ahead of it.

Rumor Watch

Rumor: Dreamcast is selling terribly in Japan Reality: True: although it had a strong launch, Dreamcast is now routinely outsold each week by Nintendo 44, However, it's important to remember that there are huge spikes in hardware sales when new software is released, and the U.S. should see a steadier flow of software.

Rumor: Sega is planning a hard drive, and printer do not no Deame, ast drive, and printer dod no for Dreame, ast Reality: In Japan, where PC penetration into homes is almost fil, companies (Sega and Sony included) are positioning interior consoles a sharing the ability to perform PC-Like functions. Sega, in particular, has sharing the ability to perform PC-Like functions. Sega, in particular, has shown a chart featuring a number of PC add-ons for Dreameast. Dom't expect to see much beyond (possibly) a keyboard released in the U.S. — PCs are too ubdiquitous, and half-consode/half-PCs, like the CO+, have always fared poorly here

The bottom line

Despite Sony's PlayStation 2 announcement, and despite the last few great games that come for PlayStation and Nintendo 64, for the next year, Dreatncast is going to be the place to play the most advanced games on a console. Sega has one year to turn that lead into a real critical mass: an installed base of more than 2,500,000 units by the time its competitor launches. If Sega can do that, it has a very real chance of becoming a serious player in the next generation. If not, soon after PlayStation 2 arrives, Dreamcast will likely become a dream deferred.

Threats

Image: Sony's biggest threats are internal. First, Sony says it's going to keep marketing PlayStation 1. Although it makes sense on paper (again, just ask Sega about its brilliant plans to market Genesis, 32X, and Saturn simultaneously), the reality is that consumers get confused (especially the casual consumers sony will be targeting with PlayStation in 2000, and more worryingly, marketing departments trying to simultaneously push two disparate product lines can become dangerously stretched, giving competitors opportunities.

What's more, the company has never managed a console transition before. How hard can it be, especially if you're number one? Well, in the best-case scenario ever, Nintendo's transition from 8- to 16-bit, the company lost half its market share, despite introducing a better machine than its competition, a situation reminiscent to the one today.

Only partially in Sony's control is the PlayStation 2 release date. Every day Dreamcast is out and PlayStation 2 isn't is another day for Sega to gain market share, and another day for Dreamcast to make the PlayStation brand look old. PlayStation is an amazingly hot brand right now, but that can change quickly (just ask Sega) Consumers, especially traditional game consumers, are incredibly fickle: with one devastating ad, Sega could really hurt the equity of the PlayStation brand.

Dreamcast's head start also means that HayStation 2's first-generation software will be competing with second- or third-generation Dreamcast software, which may again reduce the perceived difference in the quality of the two systems.

Finally, if somy starts to change focus from PlayStation 2 as a game machine to PlayStation 2 as a set-top box, it will need to be very careful not to allenate the very people who will determine the fate of PlayStation 2; gamers. Nothing will kill PlayStation 2's cool factor faster than even a hint that edutainment may someday by released for

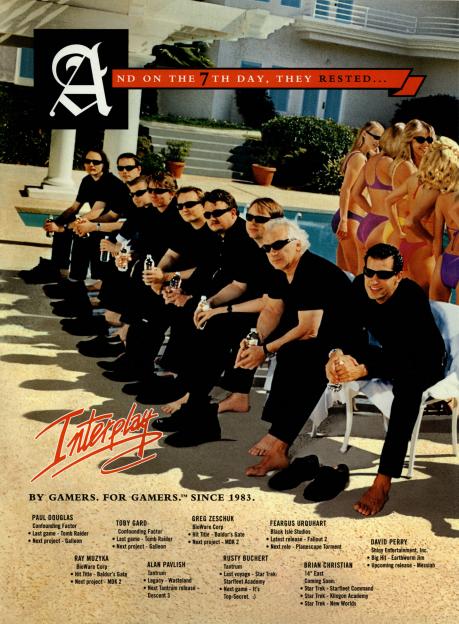
Rumor Watch

Rumor: PlayStation 2's price point will be too high — at least Saoo Reality: Sony may understand consumer-electronics marketing better than any other company on earth: it simply will not bring PlayStation 2 to market unless it can do it at a reasonable price point, even if that means taking a loss on the hardware. Don't expect PlayStation 2 to retail for more than 5200.

Rumor: PlayStation 2 can't succeed — Sony has no good first-party development Reality: When we first heard this, we wondered if we were in a time warp from 1995. Sony has a robust group of first-party developers, from 989 Studios in U.S. to exclusive teams like Polyphony in Japan.

The hottom line

While PlayStation 2 is an amazing piece of hardware, hardware is only part of the picture. With Dreamcast having a solid year's head start in the U.S., Sony may find itself with a fairly tough marketing challenge ahead. That said, Sony has yet to shy away from (or fail at) a PlayStation marketing challenge. Sony has a real chance to become the de facto videogame standard for the next decade, and it has the R&D and marketing dollars to spend to help it get there. But first, it needs to prove that it can do more than demonstrate PlayStation 2: it needs to build it in quality.







One year ago, Dreamcast technology was shown behind closed doors at E3. This year, Sega will unveil Dreamcast publicly at E3 for the first time. We caught up with Sega's senior management team to discover the...

State of the **Dream**

is the Dreamcast launch approaches, the software stutution seems well in hand — a number of quality titles have already been released in Japan, and the U.S. picture looks even more hopeful. The bigger question has been just how Sega plans to get the machine into gamers' hands. The Sega executive team responsible for the launch has solidified around President Berniel Stolar and Senior Vice Presidents Chris Gilbert (sales) and Peter Moore (marketing). Mext Generation spoke with them at Segas' new San Francisco headquarters to get an update on the state of the Dreamcast launch: the software, the rumors, the marketing strategy, and the competition.

Next Generation: Bernie, let's start by revisiting two questions you didn't answer the last time we spoke (NG 42). Last year you wouldn't reveal a price, but you did say that \$259 would be "too high." Care to be more specific? Bernie Stolar: Well, if I could bring it out at \$99, it would be great, but that's impossible. We're going to be very aggressive on price. I think you're going to see a price point right around \$199.

NG: And the release date? Bernie: September 9, 1999.

NG: Will there be a modem included?

Bernie: A 56K modem will be available, but we're not making any announcements yet on whether it will be packed in the box or not.

PlayStation 2

NG. Excellent. Let's switch from Dreamcast for a second. What did you think of the PlayStation 2 amountement? Bernie: I think their specs were impressive, but we're launching a system this year. And in diorig that, we believe the content we are going to deliver, from graphic quality to gameplay, is going to be far superior than anything else. The bottom line is, it will all be available their year.

NG: What about next year?

Bernie: Look, anyone who is developing for PlayStation 2, if you look at the specs and what kind of time farme it will take to develop, the system just won't be able to produce anything of real quality until at least 2001. To get out next year, you would have to rush development, so I don't believe their content will be anywhere near the quality of what we're going to deliver.

NG: Do you think SCEA will delay the launch? Is the fall 2000 date for the LLS too ambitious?

Bernie: Sony is a manufacturing company, basically, and they do that really well. I think they! I have a really difficult time, but you just never know with them. Uttimately, this is going to rely not so much on Sony right now, but on Toshiba. When you set out to build a chipset of those specs, you have to understand that the only people who have done that so far, the only people actually working at that level right now are IBM and intel. Toshiba has never done that. Can Toshiba do this? That is really the question.

NG: Fair enough. Do you think Toshiba can do it? Bernie: I think it's questionable.

Rumors

NG: The Dreamcast launch has been beset by perhaps more rumors than any other hardware launch in history. Why is that?

Bernie: I think it's a combination. First, Dreamcast is launching in the height of the Internet age. Back when we launched Satum, the Internet was an exclusive community, now it is as widely used as TV and newspapers. Second is the fact that this such a highly anticipated product, think for the last year and a half, people have been so desperate for information about Dreamcast they did anything to get it, even if that meant making it up or printing rumors online that they heard. Respecifiess of all



VPs Chris Gilbert (left) and Peter Moore (right) pose with Sega's new Dreamcas point-of-purchase klosk

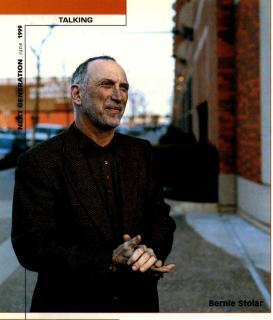
"For the last year and a half, people have been so desperate for information about Dreamcast they did anything to get it, even if that meant making it up"

that, it adds up to tremendous buzz, which has helped get the word out to many different consumers and even media, who are calling Dreamcast the "product to watch in '99."

NG. Well, let's go through the list. First, Sega head Shoichiro irrivaljiri was spotted at Sony Computer Entertainment's Tokyo HQ the day before the show, presumably getting a private demo of PlayStation 2. Is there anything we should read into this? Bernie: No. The group in Japan has a really good working relationship with the people at Sony, and there was a showing of the technology beforehand, just as we showed them Dreammash beforehand

NG: Why? What's the rationale there?

Bernie: Why not? You're going to be delivering it anyway, and any engineer at the level we are talking about fully understands the technology and the specifications. At some point, it becomes no secret, particularly once you send out the tools. When they did that, the tools were being shipped to several



that we want to hit leading up the launch of the product. Those have not changed at all. Originally, we were going to announce them at Toy Fair. When Peter Joined us two weeks before Toy Fair, we decided that it was in our best interest to delay those announcements until our San Francisco Retail Summit in April. There was some timing change from when we wanted to announce at Toy Fair, and we decided it would be in our best interest to delay that. So that change of timeframe, I think, helped to fuel some of those rumors you were talking about.

Peter Moore: Even if I had been onboard for a period of time prior to that, to announce something as major as the launch, as a subset of something else, Toy Fair seems to be vestly inappropriate. So I think to be able to have our Retailers Summit before E3, to bring people into a place that is purely focused on Sega Dreamcast and the sales and marketing programs and to do it on our turf is very important. With no disrespect to any decisions that may have been made prior my arrival, Toy Fair didn't seem an appropriate place to do it, frankly.

Marketing

NG: Ox, moving back to preamcast. We know the price, we know the release date — what's the marketing strategy? Peter: Starting this summer, in the May and June Issues of the magazines, there will be a viral campaign that is aiming, obviously, at the early adopter that's every familiar with the product and the logo. That will build then through the summer, as we get closer to the launch, into a more general TV campaign, and that will start in late summer. That will still be aimed at the early adopter in channels that they would view. online, cable, and particularly the MTVs, the UPNs, subsc You'll see a TV campaign start then, and we will then go a little bit broader-based as we set closer to the launch date.

As we get to the launch date and closer to Christmas, we'll be looking for that second wave, if you will. You'll see broad-based things. Our sports titles are excellent, so you'll see NFL and NBA advertising. Then as we go past Christmas into the fourth quarter of our fiscal wear, you'll see us driving some



"We're still negotiating with EA and will continue until this partnership is back in place. Sega has always been partners with EA, ever since Genesis, and my belief is that a deal will be struck"

third-party developers. The word was already out within the Japanese community, so why not?

NG: A lot of first-party development in the U.S. has been started, but a lot has been stopped, too. The ratio of projects started versus projects getting killed seems very high. Are developers having trouble?

Bernie: Over the years, when it comes to content, I have found the most important thing has been quality, and that's especially true now. Authenticity and realism in our titles is so important to our Dreamcast strategy that if we can't hit those milestones early on, we're not going to release the game.

NG. But most games come together at the end of the project, and we're hearing of games being idlied after a few months. Bernie: The gameplay comes together at the end, sure, but there are certain things that leady out to believe whether not you will be able to make that game work. If we can't see that early on, because of the costs right now of development—and those costs are getting higher and higher with every title—If or farther kill the title or stop the title in an earlier stake as opposed to later on.

NG: In the days after Toy Fair, we got a huge number of calls from people, all basically saying the same thing: "Sega canceled all these retailer meetings at Toy Fair, we're not sure what's going on with the launch." Comments? Chris Gillbert: Let me speak to what we wanted to accomplish there. We have a number of plans and millestones software titles, because January and February are excellent — especially on the new platform — they're excellent times to drive software that we'll be launching. So there will be five distinctive phases; the first one being a cryptic phase, then a pre-launch, a launch, the holidays, and a post-launch.

NG: Will the initial focus be on the hardware or software? Peter: Well, the first push has got to be to bring the hardware into existence for the consumer, but then it will be a very quick transition into software, because the software is going to drive, obviously, the sales. At first, you'll see the cryptic phase - it will all be about Sega Dreamcast itself - but then the launch titles will quickly follow. There is a very innovative way of how it will all blend. It's always been a problem, as evidenced by your question, that there always seems to be in the minds of the industry a sort of disconnect: "There is hardware, and then there is software." It's almost like they're church and state, and you've got to attack them differently. Well, we won't. We will blend the two together. Because of the capabilities of the hardware, it brings so much of the software to light, that you will see an execution that blends. I can't get too much into it without giving the game away, but...

NG: Ok if you won't get into specifics, let's talk about goals. What are the marketing and sales goals? Peter. The goal of the marketing program is to have the launch period, that first few days, be the biggest launch of a platform in videograming history, and I think we're well on the way to that. As Bernie said, we are first and foremost a gaming company, Maybe our competition has different long-term strategies, but we are committed to the gamer. From the first wave on, it will be about showing the capabilities of the hardware, but in a very unique way, and I can't give you the details. Tying in the software and fying in the icons that our gamers are very familiar with from Sega brands. From that sapect of it, it will be closely focused on that first wave. As we get 1.5 million units, which we're committed to getting, by the end of the fiscal year, we will get that first wave of early adopters, and well have a very strong pressile program.

The Sales Forecasts

NG: One and a half million units sold through by the end of your fiscal year in March 2000. Is that what you're shooting for? Peter: Correct.

NG: Is the 1.5 million number a best-case scenario?

Bernie: We've got a business plan that we're working
toward. That number is involved in our business plan, and
we look at that as a number that's very achievable.

Peter: And that developed in conversations we have had
with our retailers: It's not just plucked out of the sky; it's tied
into the presale program and the software that they've seen
and what they feel, rather than what we feel about what this
marketplace is capable of pushing through.

NG: You mentioned the presale. Obviously, there have been some unofficial presale programs going on right now at some of the retailers. When do you anticipate rolling out the official presale program?

Peter. About 60 days prior to launch, although that will go in phases, because as you say, there are a number of retailers already that have unofficial presale out there and frankly, their estimates of what they're expecting to presell are roughly about double now what they were six weeks ago. So despite the fact that there is not an official presale program, the consumer demand to get on the initial alunch list is

significantly stronger than they originally expected.

NG: Any chance there will a hardware shortage at launch? Bernie: I'll answer that question. Absolutely not.

NG: Overall, what is the sales picture like right know? To put it mildly, Sega didn't make tons of friends when it surpriselaunched Saturn at just a few retailers. How long are retailer memories?

Chris: The reaction has been terrific. When I joined six months ago and made my first trip to the retailers, I was expecting strong support in some areas and was frankly wondering what kind of support we were going to be getting in other areas, based on how Saturn Buunched. We're going to have over 12,000 storefronts. All the majors will be onboard, and the support has been terrific. It's been absolutely superb. Everyone is onboard, and that's Well-Mart, E.B., Babbages, Best Buy, KB Toys, Target, Seass, etc., and they'll all be there at faunch.

NG: Going back to marketing for a bit, will the sales strategy include comparing Dreamcast to PlayStation and Nintendo 64? Peter: Not necessarily. I think the consumer wants to see what Dreamcast is all about, not a comparison with other systems, because I think you're talking about two very different consumers. Sony and Nintendo are now in their thirdand fourth-year cycles of their platforms, and they're going after a very different consumer than we are. If we want to compare to them, it's very easy to do. Even the layman can understand what a 128-bit system can do. You just need to look at the content on the screen to draw the comparison, but I don't think that serves us well. We want to talk about our games on our hardware and really not confuse the issue with drawing direct comparisons, because that just turns into a pissing match a year later, and I really don't see the benefit to us in doing that.

NG: Right. And a year later is when PlayStation 2 is set to

"In the next year, you will see Sega take back marketshare from Nintendo and Sony, and you will see the company on the rise back to the number one position in the industry"



launch in the U.S. How will you compete with a system that is on paper clearly superior, technologically, to Dreamcast? Peter: Well, then we really start marketing! Bernie and myself were in a meeting in Tokyo on Saturday and saw an incredible lineup of software. Our biggest challenge now, I think, is just how we phase in all of this stuff. We saw so many quality titles that will be available to us down the stretch in 2000. It's just a question of phasing in these titles. By next year, we will have gotten our installed base. After we get that first 1 million to 1.5 million, then we want to leapfrog to 2 to 3 million in the following year, and you do that with content. You've got to give the consumer a reason to buy the hardware, and the reason to buy the hardware is not the bits or the sound system, it's the content. I was very impressed with what I saw in Japan on Saturday in regard to content that's going to be available, both by SOJ first party and Japanese third party, and the SOA first party development that we're working on, as well.

The launch software

NG: The software picture is already more impressive than it was for Sega with Saturn, just in terms of what's available to take from Japan. Sill, 15 million units in six months is pretty ambitious: what do you see as the key launch titles in the U.S. that will enable Seea to reach those soals?

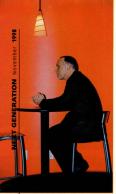
Bernie: We're going to have basketball and football, the day of the launch. That's really important. From a third-party standpoint, Midway will have, I think, an incredible boxing title as well as three other games, Acclaim will have their football game out as well.















Peter: Capcom with Power Stone.

Bernie: Namco with Soul Calibur, too But let me say, these titles are available for the launch. As Peter indicated, we've seen a lot of software, and the key for us is how we manage that library from September through becember and going through next year. It's like being in the film business, you need to release titles to continue moving the hardware. We're not going to go out and release 15 major titles on the day of the launch. They'lb be spread out through the year.

NG: One of the biggest titles being developed in the U.S. right now is NFL Football [previewed on page 20]. Sega is investing a huge amount of money in the game, and the developer, Visual Concepts, well beyond the development budget of a typical game. What's the rationale there?

Bernie: I've always been a great believer in visual Concopts. I believe they're a well-managed company. We wanted from the start to really bring Sega Sports back. In order to do that, football became a major aspect of launching Sega Sports. If you look at us over the last few years, we have not had a football game, particularly on Saturn. I believe from what we've seen, the investment will come back terifold, and it will be one of the games that bring Sega Sports back, along.

NG: And so far the investment seems to be paving off, at least in the pre-release copies we've been looking at. But it leads to a larger question. NFL Football has two or three times the animation data of today's football games. Are the next generation of systems, Dreamcast and PlayStation 2 and Nintendo's next system, going to require the kind of investment Sega is putting into NFL Football in every game? Bernie: The authenticity and realism that can be brought to life right now in games is the most important thing. The artwork becomes really critical, and polygons become a conversation piece, but if you look at the game right now and at the motion-capture moves that are in that game, each player has well over 2,000 motion-capture moves. If you look at PlayStation or Nintendo, they only have 200. That's really important when you start talking about realism. We're delivering an almost TV-like realism. Every company will have to do it. The bar is set so high that Sony, when they talked about their next PlayStation, said they only thought that five companies would be able to develop for it.

The third-party picture

NG. So far the third-party picture has been impressive most of the big ones have signed on but not the biggest. Will you sign Electronic Arts before the system launches? Bernie: We're still negotiating with EA and will continue until this partnership is back in place. Sega has allways been partners with EA, ever since Genesis, and my belief is that a deal will be struck.

NG: In time for them to ship software at launch?

Bernie: Idon't believe you'll see EA at the launch. They
weren't at the launch with Plasyfation, they weren't at the
launch with Nintendo, and that's been historically it. They
weren't even at the launch with 30O, and they owned 20% of
the company at that time.

NG: What about some of the other third parties? Are most companies agreeing to do one title, or are most people signing on for a whole range?

Bernie: Every company is developing more than one title, on the third-party side. You mentioned, like, four titles from Midway i can tell you the number of titles from Accialm, and I can tell you the number of titles from Namco, Capcom, and Habro, but it's up to those companies to release those title dates and how they want to manage their software libraries on their own. As partners, we're letting them speak to that first.

Shenmue

NG: At a recent private demo, along with Football, Shenmue

was shown as Sega's real killer app for Dreamcast. First, when's it coming?

Peter: Obviously, it's coming in August in Japan. But the localization is just so unbelievably complex, because these are all speaking characters, and the game itself is just so rich in depth of detail that it is going to take us a lot to localize.

NG: How tough will the marketing be? Except with very knowledgeable consumers, Yu Suzuki isn't really a household name in America.

Peter: I think the game will speak for itself. It's just an absolutely beautiful production, and I say production. because you know, you have heard of the production costs. This is a 30 million-dollar development, and it really brings into perspective the capabilities of the hardware like no. other title that will have preceded it. When I see the reaction, just as a neophyte in this industry, when I personally witness being shoved to the side as Suzuki-san made an appearance at Tokyo Game Show, and then just the oohs and ahhs of the details of the game ... Sega had playable demos at the Tokyo Game Show, and you just couldn't get near them. And there were plenty of gaijin playing, as well as Japanese, The excitement that Shenmue will provide, I think, will amaze you. It's such a magnificent game that it's going to take a long time to localize but it will be available in sometime between Christmas 1999 and Christmas 2000.

NG. So Bernie, for the last word, what's your prediction for where we'll see segain a year? In three years?

Bernie: You've seen the hardware, I've seen the titles, and I how the company's commitment to Dreamcast. In the next year, you will see Sega take back marketshare from Nintendo and Sony, and you will see the company on the rise back to the number one position in the industry, in three years? Well, I see Sega dominating the industry both with content in the home and outside the home.



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*** Good

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**

Average Perhaps competent certainly uninspired.

Bad

Crucially flawed in design or application.



























| 88 | Everquest Massively multiplayer in glo | Online rious 3D |
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| qn | Starsiege | PC |

| 90 | The Earthsiege series lives on | |
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| 91 | Need for Speed: High Stakes | PSX |

| 92 | Heroes of Might and Magic III | PC |
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| 35 | Breathing life into turn-based strategy | |

Gex 3: Deep Cover Gecko

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| Requiem: Avenging Angel | PC |
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The latest multiplayer, persistent online world is here — so, is it the Ultima killer?

EVERQUEST

Publisher: 989 Studios Developer: Verant



The Bard is able to charm enemies through the use of magical music

obody can deny that Ultima Online was a grand experiment. It proved that multiplayer online worlds could be done for the masses, and it broadened the scope of what people thought could be done on the internet. EverQuest has absorbed lessons learned from Ultima Online, and while the breadth of the game has been limited somewhat, the experience is altogether more exicting and accessible.

has taken is the complete move to 3D. Everything in the world of Norrath is beautifully modeled and, with even a moderately powerful system, looks spectacular. Awesome vistas and dark shrines lay hidden for the explorer to find, and each new discovery only makes you want to see more of this majestic world. And, unlike other online RPGs, each section of the world has a unique set of creatures and races to make it stand out making traveling from one side of the world to other a much more interesting proposition. When played from the first-person view (third-person is also available), the game is the closest anyone has come to portraying a virtual world, populated by people just like us.



Several classes are able to call upon the mana of the land to create spectacular spell effects — which are helped by 3D acceleration

With 12 different races and 14 character classes to choose from, you can customize your character to your liking. Once you're placed in your starting city floased on your race), you must fend for yourself. The options available to you can be a bit overwhelming at first and unfortunately, while the manual covers the basics of the game, it's woeffully incomplete when describing the different character classes, items, attributes, and miscellany. This tends to leave new players add iff. forced to leave new

intricacies of the game through trial and error. It felt to us like a thinly disguised ploy to get players to buy the strategy guide, which was irritating, to say the least.

Ultimately, it is the other players online that give the game its life, and, as with other online games of the past, this is a mixed blessing. To progress in the game with your character, you must kill monsters to earn experience - standard RPG fare. In a nod to game balance, however, it actually becomes easier to progress in the high levels when you join with other players and play out your adventures as a member of a party. Later in the game, you will actually come in contact with players from entirely different sections of the game world; this hammers home just how great the scope of this title is. It's actually possible, if just for a moment, to believe that you really are an adventurer in a brave new world.

Unfortunately, when you meet some cranky, foul-mouthed 13-year-old playing on his brother's account, it might cast a pall over your evening, but that's the price you pay to game with the masses. Luckily.





in your travels you will come across different races, human and non-human alike. If you band together with a group of like-minded players, there's nothing stopping you from trying to exterminate anything that moves





There are hundreds of items that you will come across in you travels. Mix and match them for maximum effectiveness

you cannot be killed by other players unless you deliberately select being vulnerable (enabling you to attack others as well). This not only gives the players that want to fight each other the luxury of doing so without bothering everybody else, but it also limits the more antisocial parts of society to bothering their own. This is a design choice that will be debated on Usenet until the end of time, but we feel that it is one of the most impressive new ideas in the game. Players will still have to deal with the occasional "d00d," but in our experience, most of the people you run across are going along with the fantasy, and at least trying to role play their character - some, of course, are simply more successful than others.

Overall, there are so many details involved with this game that it is impossible to convey them in a single review. There are guilds to join, social events to attend, and at one point we even witnessed a skeletal invasion of one of the







Cooperating with other players will enable you to take out much more powerful monsters than would be possible alone



Each character class has a fighting style unique to itself. For instance, the monks use their advanced martial arts to take care

major cities. The possibilities for the future are staggering, and the design team seems committed to constantly expanding and improving the game world so it won't ever get old. EverQuest is one of the rare games that gives back increasingly as you play it, and it is the newest high watermark by which all future persistent online worlds will be judged.



In the higher lands, barbarians must struggle against some of the more terrifying denizens of Norrath







Ogres and humans are natural enemies in the world of Norrath, so you have to be careful not provoke any fights

The Cybrids of fan favorite Earthsiege are back with a vengeance, and you're in for a world of HERCs

STARSIEGE







Customize your HERC or Cybrid for battle — even add an original paint job

his latest in the Earthsiege series is in an unenviable position. Released several weeks after its five-star spin-off, Tribes. the original is already referred to as "the other Starsiege."

The gameplay should be familiar not only to fans of the previous Earthsiege titles, but also to players of any similar series. You pilot a massive, robot-like HERC through various missions (seek and destroy, protect a convoy, capture a ship, etc.). When you return after a successful scenario, vou may upgrade your HERC with new armor, shields, weaponry, and other goodies, or trade it in on a bigger version. As in previous Earthsiege titles, you also choose wingmen to pilot additional HERCs and back you up in combat.

One nice feature from the previous game is notably lacking. however - the ability to pilot a flying auxiliary vehicle. But this slight annoyance is more than mitigated by the wonderful addition of a second complete campaign. Once you've won the war for the humans, you can trade in your animal urges for the pure drives of digital efficiency and try again as a Cybrid.



After saving the solar system, you can go back and try your hand at



As the Cybrids approach for one last invasion, humanity rallies its scattered forces

finest is a treat - not only do you get to sample a whole new range of vehicle chassis and weaponry, but you encounter some of the best characters in the game. Starsiege provides a separate storyline for the Cybrid campaign with full narration and cut scenes. Although the two plots parallel, they only converge near the end, once the Cybrids have begun their invasion of Earth itself. Their tactics aren't particularly pretty (they note, for example, that "research suggests that 85% of enemy forces will not fire if you strap a human child to your chassis"), but it's always a kick to play the bad guy.

Technologically speaking, Starsiege is extremely solid, with well-balanced play. The only flaw lies in the game's unimpressive AI - the enemies are fairly predictable, and your wingmen are a constant source of frustration. Although they're capable of following orders and good at ganging up on a target, they also have an inexplicable habit of launching themselves directly into your line of fire. There's nothing like opening up on an advancing Adjudicator only to see bits fly off your best pilot's HERC as he dances happily through your field of fire. Also, some of the "better" available weapons will never see use - their weight or power requirements make them impractical for even the most advanced HERCs you obtain.

In the final analysis, though, Starsiege is a worthy successor to the Earthsiege series and should be just as attractive to fans of Heavy Gear or Mechwarrior II. The missions are well-designed, the vehicles are highly customizable, the framing story is good, the voice acting is remarkably good, the soundtrack is so far beyond good that the word seems inadequate, and the gameplay is just plain fun. Once you've finished a few missions, you may even change your mind as to which game is "the other Starsiege."



RATING

The classic cop-car chase game enters its fourth iteration with the same great gameplay and a lot of nifty new features



NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts





EA always creates excellent interfaces that invariably move too slowly

he Need for Speed series has always been popular — even when the game itself wasn't all that great, it always had enough cars to satisfy the most hardcore gearned. Last year's Hot Pursuit added great gameplay to the mix, and while the gains made by High Stakes aren't as dramatic as the leap from NFS2 to Hot Pursuit, the changes are certainly for the better.

High Stakes does everything it

should to charm players with its many modes of play including a unique "pink slop" mode. Players work through tournaments and courses, building up their dream machine until they're ready to vie against another player. Each player's saved car is then used in a winner-takes-all face-off. the loser's car is permanently removed from their memory card.

If that isn't enough to entice you, the always-enjoyable hot pursuit mode comes in two flavors: you against the police, or you as the police. Either way, hot pursuit remains the burning ember of this series, and whether you play as the cop or as the pursued, it's always fun. Other new modes (the



Sometimes, it pays to slow down near a roadblock. Really



Cop AI has never been better. Here, an officer of the law attempts to ram you into the rail

tournament and special events modes) create a financial system for earning and repairing cars, and the random generator feature, which enables completely different scenarios each time, also adds a nice touch.

Technologically, High Stakes looks almost identical to last year's near tour-de-force. The specular highlighting on cars' curves and the window transparencies are just like last year's version, but this year cars can take visible damage. Beyond the cosmetic, this actually affects gameplay, as lights go out, windshields are shattered, chassis are scratched, and the car doesn't drive as well. Unfortunately, the problems from last year remain as well: the less-than-impressive framerates and load times haven't noticeably improved.

As always with this series, the number and selection of cars is an auto nut's ultimate fantasy. The lineup includes: BMW MS, BMW Z3, Ferrari S50 Maranello, Ferrari F50, Lamborghini, Diabilo SV, Chevrolet Corvette C5, Pontiac Firebird Trans Am, Chevrolet Camaro Z28, Mercedes CLK GTR, Mercedes SLK

230, McLaren F1 GTR, Jaguar XKR, Aston Martin DB7, and the Chewrolet Caprice. Not only can you play them all, but they each race and handle differently. As a nice trump card. High Stakes is the only driving game out this year with the Porsche license — and the Porsches drive brilliantly.

High Stakes has taken the impressive gains of Hot Pursuit and added more than enough new features and modes to attract series fans and newcomers alike. If you like fast cars — or just running from the cops — you'll love this game.

RATING





It's no SF Rush, but you do get vertical on occasion

Continuing its tradition of excellent fantasy games,

New World Computing offers another addictive entry in the Heroes of Might and Magic series

HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC III



Publisher: 300 Developer: New World

Computing



Set on the continent of Erathia, the game takes place after the king has died. You play the forces of good, evil, or "neutral" all looking to seize the crown and, as in StarCraft, you'll have to play as all three to see all the story elements in the game.

Gameplay in Heroes of Might and Magic III is very similar to its predecessors. The game places you in control of heroes gallivanting around a beautifully illustrated 2D countryside. Littered about the lands are monsters, magic items, and special exploration spots (like ruins, temples, and a wizard's tower). The goal of the game is to build up your heroes, amass armies under their command, and beat the tar out of the other guy in chess-like battles that occur on single-screen battlefields. Winning lets you take control of towns and cities, which are then used to produce more creatures for your

Like all great games, there is more to HoMM III than merely the gameplay on the surface. While it is an explore-and-conquer strategy



The battles are more epic and the magic mightler in this worthy sequel

game, it's really a game about fantasy. Tapping into the root pleasures of fantasy RPGs, dungeon crawls, and action games, HoMM III gives the sense that you are a part of a internally consistent world entirely unlike our own. It allows you to build up heroes until they are epic lords of titanic armies, rolling across the countryside, masters of all they survey

For fans of the previous installments in the series (both of which were also excellent), there are some terrific additions this time out. Heroes may garrison towns: there are multiple new special exploration areas; there is an entire

"subterranean world" to explore in many of the scenarios; and there are many new character types. In the past, each town had only one character type that was native to it. In HOMM III, there are two new town types, and every town has two characters native to it.

The story is also larger, with multiple threads working together to tell Erathia's war of succession. You play every combatant in the war, and it works as well here, as it did in StarCraft. On top of that, there are a fistful of one-off scenarios, many of which are excellent.

Added to all that, the game also has Internet multiplay. While we did the review equivalent of noke at this feature with sticks - HoMM is a fantastic single-player experience and we have no interest in playing it any other way - we did test it long enough to say it works.

While realtime strategy withers on the vine, with many recent releases lackluster at best. HoMM reminds us that turn-based play is alive and well. In fact, it's hard to remember why people said turnbased was dead in the first place.





Living proof that turn-based strategy games still have a place in the gaming landscape, HOMM III is a must-have for strategy fanatics



GEX 3: DEEP COVER GECKO

PlayStation Publisher: **Eidos Interactive** Developer: Crystal Dynamics

hen the first Gex game was released for 3DO way back when, it was a fun platform adventure. When Gex 2 hit PlayStation, it was proof the system could do a good free-roaming 3D game Now Fidos Interactive has acquired Crystal Dynamics, and it appears that Gex 3 suffers from Tomb Raider syndrome passing breasts and old technology off as a new and exciting game

Apparently believing the Gex series needed a little more T&A, Crystal added model Marliece Andrada as Agent Xtra. Gex's old nemesis Rez has kidnapped Xtra and it is up to Gex to rescue his damsel in distress. Xtra serves little purpose in-game aside from a few cinema scenes. She's just there to serve as window dressing and, presumably, to look good in ads.

Gex 3 isn't anything exciting simply because it has all been done before. The game looks and plays much like Gex 2. The levels are mildly amusing, and Gex's quips are good but nowhere near the quality of his last outing. If you've played Gex 2, or just about any 3D adventure, you know what to expect here.

Level design has suffered a bit since Gex 2, with precision jumps being used to increase the difficulty on later levels. There is nothing more annoying than nearly finishing a level





Gex 3: Deen Cover Gecko isn't even as good as its last outing only to die and be forced to restart.

In the end, Gex 3 is a passable game - barely. Everything about the title is cookie cutter from beginning to

end. Tomb Raider III, at least, had good level designs to back up its aging engine. Gex 3 doesn't even have that. Suffice it to say we expected more from this one. Hopefully the next Gex game will be a little more original.

RATING ***

LEGEND OF LEGAIA

PlayStation Platform: SCEA Publisher: Developer: Contrail

ith the RPG genre finally gaining some real steam on PlayStation - no fewer than 10 titles are slated for release this year - SCEA's port of the Japanese Legend of Legaia has drawn some serious attention from enthusiasts. Drawing its strength from an innovative combat engine, Legend of Legala follows the adventures of three unwitting warriors who must, in a stunning new RPG plotline, go on a quest to save the world

Any worthwhile RPG consists of three fundamental parts: a good combat engine, an involving storyline, and memorable characters. Legend of Legaia strikes out into bold new territory in the first category with a fighting system that mimics fighting



Legend of Legala has a few new wrinkles, despite being mostly the same old console RPG stuff

games more closely than RPGs. Instead of the usual attack/item/magic menu found in most RPGs, Legaia utilizes a directional menu that allows the player to manually enter in different attacks. Attacks can be strung together to create killer combos that add strategy as well as a high level of interaction to an otherwise tedious task in most role-playing titles.

But despite an inventive combat engine, Legaia's storyline does nothing to move console role-playing games away from the typical "party of hopeful idealists with colorful hair who hattle self-doubt and bizarre monsters to save their medieval-esque world (which usually consists of four continents and a floating city) from evil (in the guise of either: (a) an androgynous long-haired god/goddess; or (b) three progressively tough forms of a massive, spellwielding behemoth; or (c) a free-form floating entity that has the power to cast spells called Apocalypse but can't seem to destroy the world in the time it takes to finish the game)." (For the clueless: we were being sarcastic before when we said the plot was original.) Still, if you can deal with the trite, hackneyed story, the new fighting engine makes this worth checking out.

RATING

RATING

★★☆☆☆

STREET SK8TER

Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Micro Cabin

o-called "extreme" sports seem to be all the rage these days with snowboarding, mountain biking, and the like filling up more games than you can shake a Mountain Dew can at. And now there's Street Sk8ter, the first all-skateboarding console game since Skate or Die on Atari 7800

Sk8ter delivers just about what one would expect from a skateboarding game. Like Sega's Top Skater coin-op, the emphasis here is not on speed as much as it is on performing tricks - tracks can only be beaten by reaching a certain trick score. Simply racing to the goal line will not result in a win. There are checkpoints and a countdown timer to keep players from hanging around one particular area of the track, but lack of time is never a problem. The tricks in Street Sk8ter should

be familiar to skating fans. Sliding the board along a rail and executing a handplant at the rim of a half-pipe are just a few of the moves that come into play. Each trick is rated according to difficulty and given an appropriate score. Execute a trick properly and you will be awarded points - mess up and you will be penalized.

Although the gameplay is fair, Street Sk8ter suffers from terrible graphics. The game is rife with pop-up and clipping. Basic graphical errors like this are inexcusable: the game feels rushed, and it's just not fun for long to play an ugly game. Street Sk8ter also fails to support the analog pad. Maneuvering along the track would have been much more natural had analog control been in place.

In the end, Street Sk8ter is mildly diverting, but it just isn't polished enough to be a standout title. Skateboarding fans will just have to keep playing 720° until a triple-A

skating title hits the market.



et Sk8ter isn't that me. In fact, it's pretty tame - and ugly

UM JAMMER LAMMY

PlayStation Publisher: SCEL Developer:



Um Jammer Lammy is the electrified, power-chord-loade seguel to PaRappa the Rapper

aRappa the Rapper was like a breath of fresh air in a time when developers had been content to pollute the PlayStation world with "me-too" games. The idea of a sequel had fans excited but concerned that more of the same would defeat the novelty of the original.

The developers obviously shared

the same concerns, because Um lammer Lammy is an entirely new experience, yet still maintains the same quirky outlook on life that made the original so endearing. The main difference is actually not so much in the gameplay, but in style and approach. This time around you play a lamb named Lammy who plays a guitar rather than sings. The core of the gameplay - pressing the appropriate gamepad keys in time to the music - is unchanged, but the result is guitar riffs instead of rapping,

and it alters the whole feel of the game. In fact, the switch to guitar is a definite improvement - when improvising to score extra points, it actually sounds like a guitar solo (if not always a good one) instead of a bunch of gibberish. However, if you beat the game with Lammy, you're then given the option of playing the game as PaRappa, so those who miss the old style really don't have to miss anything after all. Even better, the game now includes a two-player mode, dueling with two guitars (Lammy squares off against a blackclad metal chick, Rammy) or even PaRappa vs. Lammy.

Where the game falls ever-soslightly short is in the story. While the characters are still 2D over 3D backgrounds and just as odd as ever, the plot of Lammy being late for a concert isn't as compelling as PaRappa's quest to better himself so he could date Sunny Funny, and not quite as charming. On the other hand, the gameplay is still tops (maybe even better), the songs are still catchy (and hilarious), and there are tons of extra goodies packed in, making this a worthy successor in every sense of the term.

Besides, any game that includes a stage dive deserves five stars out of hand.

RATING ****

HYBRID HEAVEN

Publisher: Developer: KCEO

Nintendo 64 Konami

intendo 64 is one of the few consoles in the history of videogaming that manages to be successful despite lacking games in key genres. Shortages are particularly noticeable in the RPG department. where you could previously only point to THO's less-than-spectacular Quest 64 as the only turn-based RPG out there. Thankfully, Konami's Osakabased KCEO team is trying to fill the void with a full-fledged sci-fi RPG.

While it's nowhere near the quality of the many Japanese titles that have appeared on PlayStation over the past years, Konami's first RPG outing on N64 is a successful one. Hybrid Heaven, a mixture of action, fighting, and roleplaying, uses a convoluted plot about aliens cloning and replacing humans to kick off some fairly original gameplay. Set in the year 2000, players take control of a member of a



N64 RPG fans could do worse than Hybrid Heaven, but it wou be nice if they could do better

mysterious organization and literally descend into the underground to get to the bottom of a government coverup. Gameplay mostly consists of Tomb Raider-style exploration of the game's 11 futuristic subterranean halls and tunnels, complete with jumping crawling, and some mildly engaging action sequences.

However, as soon as the oneman party bumps into a hostile creature. Hybrid Heaven's RPG heritage shows its face. Although players can move around dynamically between attacks, battles are strictly menu driven: get close; select from kick, punch, and special-move attacks; and wait for the results. While the ensuing battle animations are smooth and well-animated, they lack the visual punch of fantasy-based RPGs and get old very quickly. After you've seen the main character do a "piledriver" on a mummy-like creature for the fifth time. you will probably try to avoid battles simply because they're so boring. It also doesn't help that the game's initially impressive environments eventually all look the same

Had Konami thrown in some variety, such as a city scene, the game could have been so much more than just an interesting hybrid with great graphics and sound. As it is, it's certainly fun, but not quite excellent.

★★★☆☆

SMASH BROTHERS

Platform: Publisher:

Nintendo 64 Nintendo of America Developer: HAL

ne thing's for sure: Nintendo has guts. Five years ago, the company wouldn't even dare attempt this - a fighting game featuring all of its popular NES, Super NES, and N64 characters? Sacrilege! But the times, they are a-changing.

Rather than pitting the characters against each other in a traditional formula. Nintendo instead created a new style with a unique point system. The idea is to whittle the opponents' energy down to where a single attack will send the player flying offscreen.

Accidentally falling off the playing field will deduct a point from your overall score, but getting knocked off by another character will increase their score by a point as well

This is one of the first successful attempts at bringing four players into a side-scrolling fighter, making Smash Bros. one of the most entertaining party games ever released. And while it's certainly weird to have Metroid's Samus smack around Kirby, the surreal atmosphere is definitely one of the game's charms. Everything from the characters (Mario, Donkey Kong, Pikachu, and Fox McCloud, to name only a few), to the individual powerups (such as a Super Star from Mario)

to the stage designs (Castle Hyrule, anyone?) have been accurately lifted from Nintendo-published games. There is even a hilarious, hidden revisit to the original 8-bit Super Mario Bros.

Desnite the violent behavior Nintendo has covered itself to ensure that its properties haven't gone to the dark side. The minute-long intro shows that these characters aren't ripped out of their respective games - no, they're actually beanbags brought to life by a child's imagination. And after the fight, the losers politely applaud the victor a visual disclaimer indicating the brawl was all in good fun.

Fighting games have definitely not been N64's forte, but Smash Bros.



Smash Bros. is a nearly heretical departure for Nintendo, but hey, it's a great game

changes that forever While not a traditional fighter, it is a fighting game, and the best one by far on N64.

ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR

Publisher: Fox Interactive Developer: Fox Interactive

ver three years in the making, and with the backing and pressure of one of Hollywood's biggest action licenses, a lot was expected from Aliens versus Predator (AvP). Fortunately. Fox has managed to pull it all together in a product destined to have a similar impact in shaping game design as Half-Life.

That's not to say that AVP is in Half-Life's consummate class. It lacks much of Valve's masterful style and shape, but in their place is a level of tension that surpasses even that created by the daddy of them all. Doom. With the option to play as either the Colonial Marine, the Alien, or the Predator, AvP's single-player levels are only of average design, but have a pacing normally reserved for the movies that spawned them.

Six different levels for each creature constitute a variety of familiar settings - space station, alien hive, and outdoor environments - that highlight the flexibility of an engine sporting many visual similarities to Quake II. What's different is the use of dynamic lighting and sound effects. Lights can be blown out - which is fine for the Predator, with its separate alien- and human-targeting sensors, or for the Alien, which has a view enabling it to navigate in the dark - but it's terrifying for the poor Marine.

Finite ammunition for the Marine and the Predator (the Alien uses its claws and tail attacks) makes every burst critical. No midlevel save ontion adds to the tension but also makes successfully navigating the levels unnecessarily frustrating. Every move has to be carefully calculated, and here AVP treads that fine line between having a danger-filled atmosphere and simply being fun to play

Varied multiplayer modes re-create many epic scenes from the movies and comic books, and although the game lacks Quake It's pure visceral action quotient, it makes up for it with immersive gameplay design. Played as the Marine, late at night with the lights out and the movie-inspired music cranked up. AvP is a totally absorbing, even terrifying,



Allens versus Predator is one of the most frightening titles ever released for PC

experience. It's a shame that the engine didn't have the graphical clout of, say, an Unreal, or some more inventive level design, but it's fine for creating atmosphere, a commodity it gozes at every step. making it one of the most memorable gaming experiences you're likely to survive.

RATING ★★★★☆

REDLINE

Publisher:

olade Developer: Beyond Games

n paper, Redline sounds good: a mission-based car-combat game in which the player can exit the car and fight on foot. But whatever points Redline gets for its high concept, it loses in flawed execution.

To begin with, the game's 3D engine just isn't that great. Sure, there are all the requisite flashy special effects, but otherwise, it just looks bland, even when using 3D acceleration, Worse, the image onscreen occasionally just freezes while the engine continues humming underneath - the net effect is that nothing moves for a second or so and when it starts up again, you find yourself instantly slamming into the wall on the other side of the arena.

Admittedly, the car combat is fast paced, and the enemy vehicles are nothing if not tenacious, but the constant need for hand braking and 180° power slides (the game's single "hook") gets old fast. The first-person action is just plain bad - the control isn't any better than Doom, enemy Al seems to mostly consist of standing in place and shooting in your general direction, and the weapon selection is pure "seen it all before."

Add in other, smaller deficiencies like poor character animation, silly dialogue, and the occasional moment when you're left with no idea what to do next, and you've got a title that's a misfire all around. Combining two different types of gameplay into one game is a terrific idea, but someone should have mentioned that welding a mediocre first-person shooter onto a mediocre car-combat game is not the way to make the whole better than the sum of its parts.

RATING

★★☆☆☆



There are two distinct types gameplay in Redline, but they don't make the cut, either separately or together

REQUIEM: AVENGING ANGEL

Platform: Publisher:

300 Developer: Cyclone Studios

PC. Mac

irst off, Requiem has a great story With a plot pulled straight out of Milton's Paradise Lost, the player assumes the role of Malachi, one of the faithful angels, who is sent to Earth to stop the fallen angels from bringing about the Apocalypse.



iem won't win any awards for its technology, but a great story and a few clever touches make it well worth your while

Like Half-Life (to which inevitable comparisons will be made). Requiem blends its storyline into a first-person shooter and is, in some ways, even more successful at it than Valve's trendsetter. Certainly, its nightmare vision of purgatory in the game's first level grabs your attention right away.

Still, it's not without its annoyances, either. The graphics engine, while serviceable, is barely state of the art, coming up a bit bland. when set next to Half-Life, much less Unreal: Tournament. This "split hair above average" leaks into the game's control (it's too easy to get hung up on corners) and weapon design (pretty much seen 'em all before).

Likewise, while the enemy designs are imaginative, the AI isn't that smart. Most of the bosses can be defeated by relatively simple

patterns, but can withstand so much damage that they still take forever to kill. While some levels are strewn with NPCs, very few are interactive.

But if some aspects of the game are simply "good enough," other things largely make up for them. The aforementioned story, for example, is given life by better-than-usual voice actors. Also, Malachi slowly gains a large number of divine powers, which enable him to do nifty things like throw lightning, turn enemies into pillars of salt, and resurrect dead foes to fight on his side (it's a thrill to charge into a room with your undead army right behind you, then quickly exit and watch them all fight it out).

In the final analysis, Requiem is no technical marvel, but its uniqueness is divine.

RATING

Nintendo 64

THE **GAMER'S GUIDE**

The quintessential guide to released software

Welcome to the Gamer's Guide, the ultimate resource for checking what games to buy. Every month we add the reviews from last issue and push out an equal number of older ones. Which ones, you ask? Generally we leave the console titles in, even for games that are out of print, since there's a large used market. So PC games get dumped

first, especially old, really bad PC titles (which, paradoxically, makes PC games look really, really good if you just check the ratings). Once again, please note the issue number — technology and game design march on relentlessly, so a game that got *** in NG 6 might be hard-pressed to score ★★★ today.

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SLAVE ZERO

SYSTEM: PC PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: ACCOLADE

INTERVIEWED: MATT POWERS, PRODUCER









"Our goal was to make a thirdperson action game that uses the same controls and method of play as your favorite first-person game," says Powers

Next Generation: For someone playing *Slave Zero* for the first time, do you have any general tips or hints on how best to become an expert at the game?

Matt Powers: In general, I would recommend becoming very good at strafing and aiming. In many ways, the skill set to be good at Slave Zero is the same skill set as other action shooters primarily first-person). Our goal was to make a third-person action game that uses the same controls and method of play as your favorite first-person game. Overall, the ability to maneuver and fire at the same time is vital.

Practice makes perfect. Oh, and save often.

NG. What mission or specific area of the game do you find the most difficult? What's your personal strategy for getting past it? MP. At Init's pass through the game, the bosses are the most difficult. Each boss (there are five total) has unique weapons and requires different strategies to defer But once you have mastered a boss, it will be easy every time after that. The strategy for the bosses is to: 1) remember to save your game and 2) keep playing it until you learn the pattern and the best moments to fire or dodge.

NG: Which team member is best at the game?
MP. The designers are really good. They know
where the enemies are going to come from,
where the ammo is placed, and where all the
secret areas are. After the designers come the
testers — they play the game so much they are
definitely experts.

NG: How does your render engine, the Ecstasy Engine, affect the gameplay in Slave Zero? Does it improve or limit the amount of objectives the player has in each "mission" or level? MP. The Ecstasy Engine has allowed us to make a beautiful, interactive, action game. The gameplay (and artistic style) we designed for Slave Zero was based around the capabilities of the Ecstasy Engine. My feeling is that the Ecstasy Engine has allowed us to make a unique, exciting game that couldn't be made using any other existing engines.

NG: Do you recommend any specific peripherals or controllers that might make playing through

Slave Zero a more "enhanced" experience?

MP. Personally, I am a big fan of the
keyboard/mouse combination. I know people
who enjoy a joystick and some who live and die
by the SpaceOrb. Whatever your peripheral of
choice is, Slave Zero supports it.

NG: What's your proudest achievement in *Slave Zero*? (i.e. quickest playthrough, low casualties, satisfying kill, etc.)

MP. In regards to my gameplay achievements (versus the development of the game), I guess I am most proud of my Plasma Rail aiming ability. The Plasma Rail is an instant-hit weapon that does lots of damage. Usually I can take out either a ground enemy or lying enemy without missing. This is extremely important when you are getting attacked from all sides by four to six different enems.

NG: What weapons in the game are favored by the team? Why?

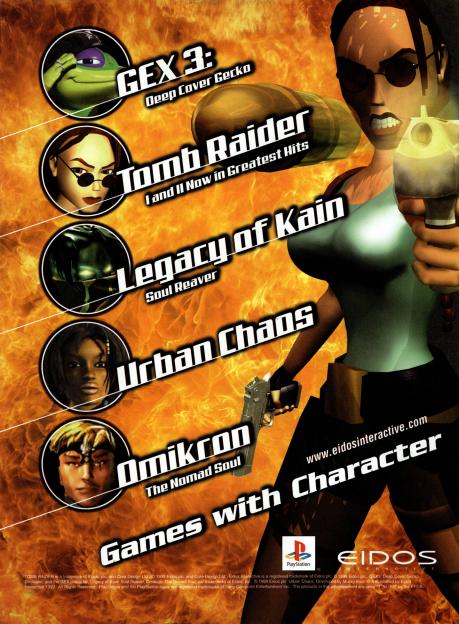
MP. There are different camps within the team. Many people favor the guided rockets. Then there are those who lean towards the more classic, rough-'n'-ready Cyclone (machine gun). The Plasma Rail is a great weapon but requires much more skill/aim.

NG. Are there any cheats, tricks, codes, or game elements in *Slave Zero* that were added for personal reasons (inside jokes, etc.)? If so, what are they, and how do they relate to the team?

MP. One of the areas we were really able to add some personal touches is the signage in the



"The Plasma Rail is a great weapon but requires much more skill/aim [than the machine gun]," says Powers



city. Many of the neon signs are related to people, phrases, or jokes within the project. In addition to neon signs, the attentive game player will find textures hidden in the game with inside messages from the team.

NG As a member of the development team, how important do you feel codes or cheats are in games? Do they usually enhance the gameplay experience by adding replay value, or do they draw attention away from the actual game?

MP. Codes cheats are important. They can assist the player in seeing all the features of the game. Of course, they also can be used to ruin the solo game experience. My suggestion is that someone play through the game without cheats first, then as a second or third pass, try out the cheats.

NG: Multiplayer or single player? Which mode requires the most strategy, and which mode do you prefer to play in?

MP. Both single player and multiplayer require different strategies. In many ways, they are two separate games We turne the weapons slightly differently. Then the team-play multiplayer options are even more different than the solo game (in regards to strategy). I really enjoy them both. The solo game is absolutely great,







"We spent a lot of time developing a story that is both engaging and exciting," says Powers







"At first pass through the game, the bosses are most diffficult (obstacle)... The strategy for the bosses is to 1) remember to save your game and 2) keep playing it until you learn the pattern and the best moments to fire or dodge," says Powers

but after playing through it dozens of times, I must admit I favor multiplayer.

NG: What was the original, ideal concept for the game? How closely does the end product match it?

MP. The original concept went something like this: "Giant robot combat in a bustling future metropolis. Sense of scale is vittal, as is lots of interactivity with the environment. Action gameplay, not simulation, twitch gaming." I believe we match this description exactly.

NG: What games influenced the design of Slave Zero? What games are you currently playing? MP: We were influenced by a lot of different it. We wanted to create our own art style, mixing anime with the style of hard-edged European graphic novels. We probably examined the Evangelion anime series the most.

We spent a lot of time developing a story that both is engaging and exciting but doesn't interfere with the action.

NG: What ideas for the game ended up on the cutting-room floor?

MP. Slave Zero generated tons of ideas. Both from within the team and from outside the company. The glant-robot action game concept really seems to hit home with lots of people. And a wide variety of people. Some ideas we just couldn't include in this version

"The attentive game player will find textures hidden in the game with inside messages from the team"

games. The team loves Quake II and Half-Life. We looked at a number of PlayStation games for action inspiration like One and Einhander. The games I play currently are Half-Life and Quake II.

NG: What is your favorite moment in the game?
MP: I have many favorite moments. I really like
our FMA (full motion animation) system. The
seamless cuts from gameplay to cinematic is
cool (the FMAs are all done in-engine).

And the sense of being a giant robot and creating havoc — I truly feel as though 1 am in an actual city — the mood and atmosphere is awesome. Also, several of the enemy engagements are fast paced, and my hands are sweating, and the city is in ruins when it is all done.

NG: Seeing that the game is based around Japanese anine mecks, which anime series did you draw the most influence from? In regards to the story, what were your inspirations? MP We looked at a lot of different Japanese anime to get ideas for Slave Zero. Slave Zero is inspired by Japanese anime but not based upon include: scaling buildings, flying, transforming the Slave. Look for many of these ideas in future projects.

NG. What was the toughest obstacle for the development team in creating the game?

MP. Overall, the toughest part of making Slave Zero was creating the sense of scale and the interactive environment. Slave Zero is almost two games in one. One huge part of the game is the living city and the feeling that you are a glant robot in a bustling metropolis. The other part, and what is even more important, is the action gameplay — giving the player tons of weapons and letting them battle it out with other gant robots. Balancing these two aspects was challenging.

NG: What other games/titles have you worked on in the past?

MP: Members of the team have worked on a variety of titles. Some of the games our team members have under their belts include:

MechWarrior 2, Interstate '76, Deadlock, Duke Nukem: Time To Kill, and Test Drive 4.



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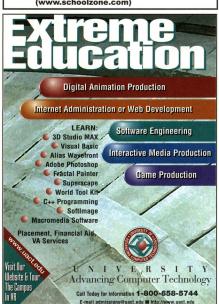
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System Shock

n 1985, the game console was dead. Had Nintendo chosen not to pursue the U.S. market, the console industry might have gone the way of the dinosaur, but the company believed there was still a market in the U.S. (2.5 million Famicoms sold in Japan instilled some confidence).

Nintendo didn't expect to actually produce and distribute its system. It looked to Atari in hopes that the former juggernaut had enough steam left to bring the platform to the U.S., but Atari turned Nintendo down. (After NES hit big, Atari chose to move ahead with its mothballed 7800 hardware.) With retailers less than enthusiastic about consoles - they had shelves of discount hardware and software gathering dust -Nintendo struck out on its own, packaging NES with a gimmicky toy called R.O.B. the Robot. The trick worked. With NES

labeled as a toy, the channel opened up. However, NES couldn't do it alone. It

needed a killer app to lure consumers away from their home computers. With the help of Shigeru Miyamoto, NES led the charge with one of the most successful games to date, Super Mario Bros.

The system retailed at \$159 in a package that included R.O.B., a light gun, and two games, Duck Hunt and Gyromite. Roughly 20 games were available at launch, but none took advantage of the system's unprecedented 56-color display as thoroughly as Shigeru Miyamoto's creations, and NES, along with Super Mario Bros., soon reached critical mass.





QUESTION

this colorful tile-based arcade puzzler in Amiga Basic, then converted it line-by-line to C



Retroview by Steven Kent, author of a forthcoming book on the history of videogames

NHAT EVER IAPPENED TO?

er, the mind boggles about nat could have happened had o shoot ghosts, rats, and as doesn't detract from the game was to shoot defenseles humans in the most gory manner possible. It was no Crossbow, but we loved it.



reated in 1986 and released C in the United States in 1987, The Legend of Zelda for NES not only helped Shigeru Miyamoto begin to establish his reputation as the greatest game designer of his time, it also forced Nintendo of America to establish a new convention that would one day become a company hallmark.

Prior to Zelda, Miyamoto's work was more twitch than thought. After Donkey Kong, Nintendo brass knew he had good ideas, and Super Mario Brothers showed that his fantasy worlds could be big, but it wasn't until Zelda that he showed his skill at developing stories and puzzles. Unfortunately, when Zelda was created, no one knew how consumers (especially U.S. consumers) would react to a sprawling NES game in which players roamed through worlds filled with dungeons and monsters. Although games like Wizardry were popular on PC, there was simply

no analogue on consoles.

When the first prototypes of The Legend of Zelda arrived in the United States, Nintendo president Minoru Arakawa was not at all confident about the complex game filled with text windows. Worried that perhaps the game was too complicated for American audiences, he decided to test the game on his employees. Since the prototypes had all Japanese text, Arakawa arranged for Japanese-speaking workers to sit with American employees and translate any Kanji

It was all in Japanese, which made it really hard to play, but it was just so compelling that we kept playing it and playing it. The way the game mechanics worked, the fact that it did this great thing with that sword. Typical of Miyamoto, it had puzzles. You would come across things that would be on the island or behind a

that appeared in the text boxes.

door or whatever, and you could see them, but you couldn't have them.

Howard Phillips

Former game master and spokesperson Nintendo of America

As he tested The Legend of Zelda on his employees, Arakawa noticed that most of the American workers did not warm up to the game instantly. Although everyone ended up giving the game high marks, some people needed as many as 10 hours before they understood the game and enjoyed it.

The Legend of Zelda was a different kind of game, and also, it took a long time until people really liked the game. I hoped people would be patient enough and understand that it was a different game and enjoy it. I was worried at the time.

Minoru Arakawa

Zelda

ith the introduction of The Legend of Zelda for NES, Nintendo introduced millions of gamers to the underworld of the RPG. Unlike Ultima and other games before it, Zelda relied on reflexes instead of the turn-based strategy interface. Also, bright colorful graphics — a Nintendo staple - replaced the dark fantasy earthtones usually associated with RPGs.

The gaming world (which was one enormous space rather than disparate levels) enabled a newly immersive and cohesive gaming experience - finding items and secrets actually increased the play area. It was also one of the first battery-backed-up games, enabling players to save their games (and its creator to make a much longer, more epic title).

Combined with the exuberance and creativity of its director, Shigeru Miyamoto, it can be said that Zelda has done more for the RPG genre than any other game, paving the way for Square Soft's Final Fantasy games and the incredibly successful DragonQuest series. The best example of its impact on gamers can be seen in the overwhelming success of The Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time for N64.







Although the look of the game is now antiquated, the scope of the adventure and the solid gameplay foundation cannot be denied

When it was finally released, the American version of The Legend of Zelda was housed in a shiny gold cartridge that included an internal 10-year battery that enabled it to store three players' progress so that they would not have to start again after every game. The Legend of Zelda was the first NES game to include the feature

It also came with more documentation than earlier games a thick instruction booklet that identified most of the monsters and weapons in the game, and a large fold-out map of the fantasy land of Hyrule. As a final precaution. Arakawa took the bold step of adding a toll-free telephone number that players could call if they needed help with the game.

The game was so different that we were afraid that people couldn't figure out how to play and would give up, so we put the 800

telephone number in the game (booklet). They could call us for free and we could answer any questions about the games.

We released The Legend of Zelda on June 27, 1987, All of a sudden, the telephone started ringing. We hired four people to answer the questions over the telephone, and those four people were busy all the time, so we increased from four to five, 10, 20, 40, 50, and we ended up with 200.

Minoru Arakawa

Customers called non-stop and asked questions about more than The Legend of Zelda - they wanted to know about every game. To cover the calls, Arakawa expanded his telephone bank to 10 full-time operators, but it wasn't enough. He continued expanding the telephone operation, running ads in the Help Wanted sections of the Seattle Times and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer for people who "want

to play games for a living," although a better description might have been "play games while answering questions for a living." By 1990, there were more than 200 people working on the help lines, and the toll-free number became too expensive to maintain. Expecting to reduce the number of calls, Arakawa approved a suggestion to keep the help center as a free service but eliminate the toll-free number. Throughout the '90s, the Call Center continued to maintain a staff of 200 operators fielding an average of 100,000 telephone calls, 3,500 email messages, and 1.900 letters per week. During the holidays, the staffing grows to 500 operators fielding as many as 250,000 calls, Call Center staffers have also served an important PR function, generating countless stories for Nintendo in the local and national press on those lucky employees who "play games for a living." RE

NSWER



Letters

Readers' block

was reading your review of Street Fighter Zero 3 in NG 52 and was very excited, being a longtime SFII fan. But about halfway through the article it struck me that you had a less favorable review of a previous SFII game for PlayStation. I dug into my old pile of NGs and found that in NG 45 you remarked during a X-Men vs. SF review that "Capcom has always had problems converting its memory-hungry, sprite-based fighting fests to PlayStation due to the low system RAM, and X-Men vs. Street Fighter should convince the company that it's time to stop." How about we chalk X-Men vs. SF up to a learning experience that paid off very well in the end.

> Keri Carpenter keri@uci.edu

Fair enough. It's tempting to say something like, "They've had three vears - it's about time" but we like to think we're above that kind of

noticed a small error in your review of Baldur's Gate. On page 85 of your April issue, you stated that "multiplayer mode [is] an innovation that is entirely new

was a small game called Towers I by JV Games - released on the Atari 1040ST and 386 and 486 PCs (Pentiums were still a twinkle in Intel's eve) - that had a multiplayer feature. If I'm not mistaken, Towers I was the first multiplayer RPG to be created. Utilizing a 14.4 modem, you could call up a friend and play together in realtime. As a matter of fact, using the insane power of a serial cable, you were even able to play cross-platform between Atari and PC. A modern patch for the PC was being developed, but due to horrible PC sales it was dropped. I believe cross-platforming an RPG was also a first that still hasn't been duplicated. Now I know we're just a small garage development team and easily overlooked (sniff sniff). but Towers I was a commercial release and deserves a tad bit of credit. As far as Baldur's Gate is concerned, it's the game I'm playing now and one of the best I've ever played. I wish all of them the success they deserve and highly recommend it. Their design has given me some great ideas for our next project, once we finish Conquer Wyrm (Shameless Plug).

for RPGs." Way back in 1994, there



Capcom has learned a lot about bringing its 2D fighters to PlayStation, and the excellent Street Fighter Zero 3 is proof



Seems we named the wrong guy when we mentioned the animation director for massively oversuccessful anime Mononoke Hime

holding onto the glories of the past with the death grip of a pissed-off warlord.

> Jag Jaeger Jag@jvgames.com

Thanks for the info. We'll have to take your word for it, though, since we can't seem to track down a copy of the original Towers. One question springs to mind - Towers II: Plight of the Stargazer seems to have dropped this feature. What gives?

have written to you about eight times with many different questions about my N64 system. How come you haven't printed even one of my letters in your magazine? How many letters do you get anyway (it can't be all that many, can it)? As a dedicated reader of your magazine for five years, I would hope that you give all of your readers a fair shot of getting their questions posted in your magazine.

> Chris Norton Berkley, MA

Actually, Next Generation receives a staggering number of letters every month - dozens upon dozens a day, counting email, and that's just

from readers. Just so you know, we generally cull out the illegible, the unintelligible, the stark declarations that "SonY RuLeZ!!!!" and the odd [whatever game]"-type question (not to mention those from the clearly insane). Aside from that, we'd like to say there's a rhyme or reason behind which few get chosen for reprinting and a response. We more or less try to pick the ones that seem representative of what most readers want to know or care to point out. Or that simply catch our

Now, sit back down and he quiet

am usually not picky about errors, but being an anime fan myself, I couldn't let the one in NG 52 pass, in your Alpha look at Jade Cocoon, the credit for the animation direction of the film Mononoke Hime was given to Katsuya Kondo instead of Masashi Ando, Kondo was only on the staff as an animator

It is true, however, that Kondo is a talented artist. He was the animation director for the film Kiki's Delivery Service (recently released in the U.S. by Disney/Buena Vista).

He also did the animation direction and character designs for several other movies completed by Studio Ghibli, the creators of Mononoke Hime (which, by the way, is not only the highest-grossing animated film in Japan, but also the secondhighest-grossing film of any kind, beating the likes of E.T. and losing only to the unsinkable Titanic). Please correct me if I am wrong

John David Garza

Thank you for pointing this out. The editor who failed to fact check was going to be ripped apart by wild dogs, but in view of our new policy of non-violence, he was instead given a stern talking-to and a fifteen-minute Time Out. We're sure he feels really bad.

am shocked and appalled at the low you guys stooped to in order to sell your goddamn magazine! On the cover of your April Issue (NG 52), you had in clear sight "Half Life 2 - EXCLUSIVE info revealed!" But when I looked inside. I couldn't find a preview of the game or even a news article about it. The only things I found that were close were the article on Team Fortress 2 and an interview with Valve's Gabe Newell. The only "exclusive info" I could find in either of these articles was Mr. Newell's response to a question: "Obviously we haven't announced Half-Life 2 or said anything about it yet. "Exclusive info," indeed! You flagrantly gave the impression that you had information on a game that wasn't even announced yet! I hope that you cease this disagreeable practice of yours and try to be a more respectable and trustworthy magazine in the future.

weirdo_MK@hotrnail.com

Well, Michael, at the risk of sounding sarcastic, have you ever heard of reading between the lines? If you had kept reading, you would have seen that immediately after he said "we haven't announced Half-



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MOULD YOU RATHER HAVE

COOL GRAPHICS IN AN

ADVERTISEMENT OR IN YOUR GAMES? DECAUSE, garza@keyframe.cjas.org Gabe Newell really did talk about Half-Life 2 in NG 52 - he just couldn't say explicitly that's what he was talking about SATURN, PSX. N64. LYNX. TURBOGRAFX-16, SNES. Life 2." he proceeded to reel off a The reason is simply that Tomorrow number of new features pertaining Never Dies was never Nintendo's to NEO-GEO, GENESIS, "sell out" in the first place. Nintendo to "future Valve games." (In fact, during the interview he read the list JAGUAR, 3-D-O, and Rare acquired the rights only to off a legal pad.) No, he didn't say GoldenEye, not the entire James MASTER SYSTEM. "these are the feature additions Bond series, and you can bet that we're making for Half-Life 2." but when MGM saw the kind of money PC-CD ROM, ATARI, CDI. then again, he couldn't, since it's up a Bond game could make, they to the publisher, Sierra, to officially were less than willing to give up **GAME GEAR, GAMEBOY,** announce the game's existence. those rights for Tomorrow Never VIRTUAL BOY, WHEWA It's all very "nudge nudge, wink Dies. And we're sorry (although it's wink," but we figured our readers certainly not our fault - it's a SYSTEMS & ACCESSORIES sympathy kind of sorry), but MGM would get it. Apparently, we were wrong. Interactive currently has no plans to release this game, or for that matter am kind of confused. The any game, for N64. original GoldenEye came out The good news is that Perfect for N64 and was, of course, one of Dark for N64, not only developed by the best games of all time, right? Rare but even by the same team Now what confuses me is why did that created GoldenEve, is due out Nintendo give the rights to sometime late this fall, just PlayStation for Tomorrow Never in time for the holidays. Dies? The main reason a lot of people I know bought an N64 was because of GoldenEye, so why did Nintendo sell out? I have heard Michael Kluge rumors about Tomorrow Never Dies coming out for N64 also, but I haven't heard any confirmation. Maybe you could clear this up for me, and also, when is Perfect Dark scheduled for release? "Chuck" After seeing the success of GoldenEye, MGM kept chuck6@sgi.net **Tomorrow Never Dies to Itself** Next Generation Letters, 150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005. www.McVansVideoGames.com Fax us: (415) 468-4686. Email us: ngonline@imaginemedia.com Phone: 219-493-3722



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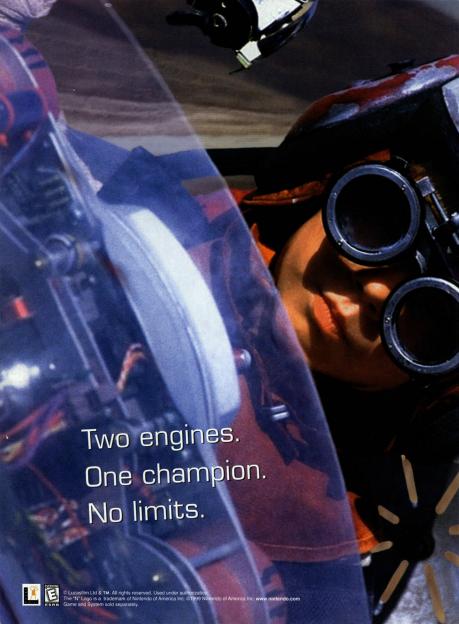


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