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Nintendo and Nichimen Speak

and a Complete 1996
New Release Chart



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**Dark Savior, Tomb Raider,
Fighting Vipers, Burning Road,
Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo,
BallBlazer Champions, Disruptor,
Crash Bandicoot, Virtua Fighter Kids,
Blast Chamber and Three Dirty Dwarves**



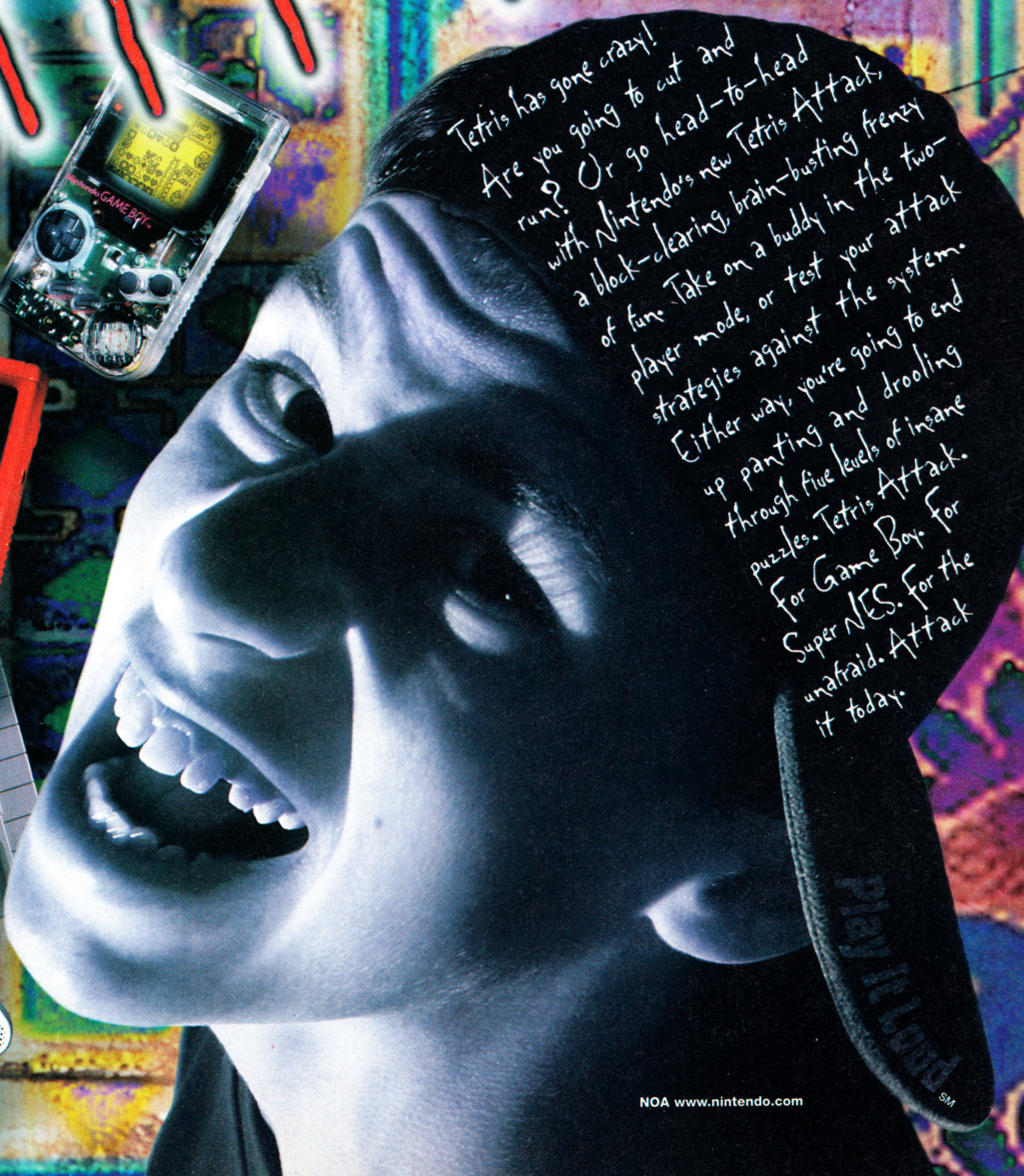
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 For Game Boy. For
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 unafraid. Attack
 it today.

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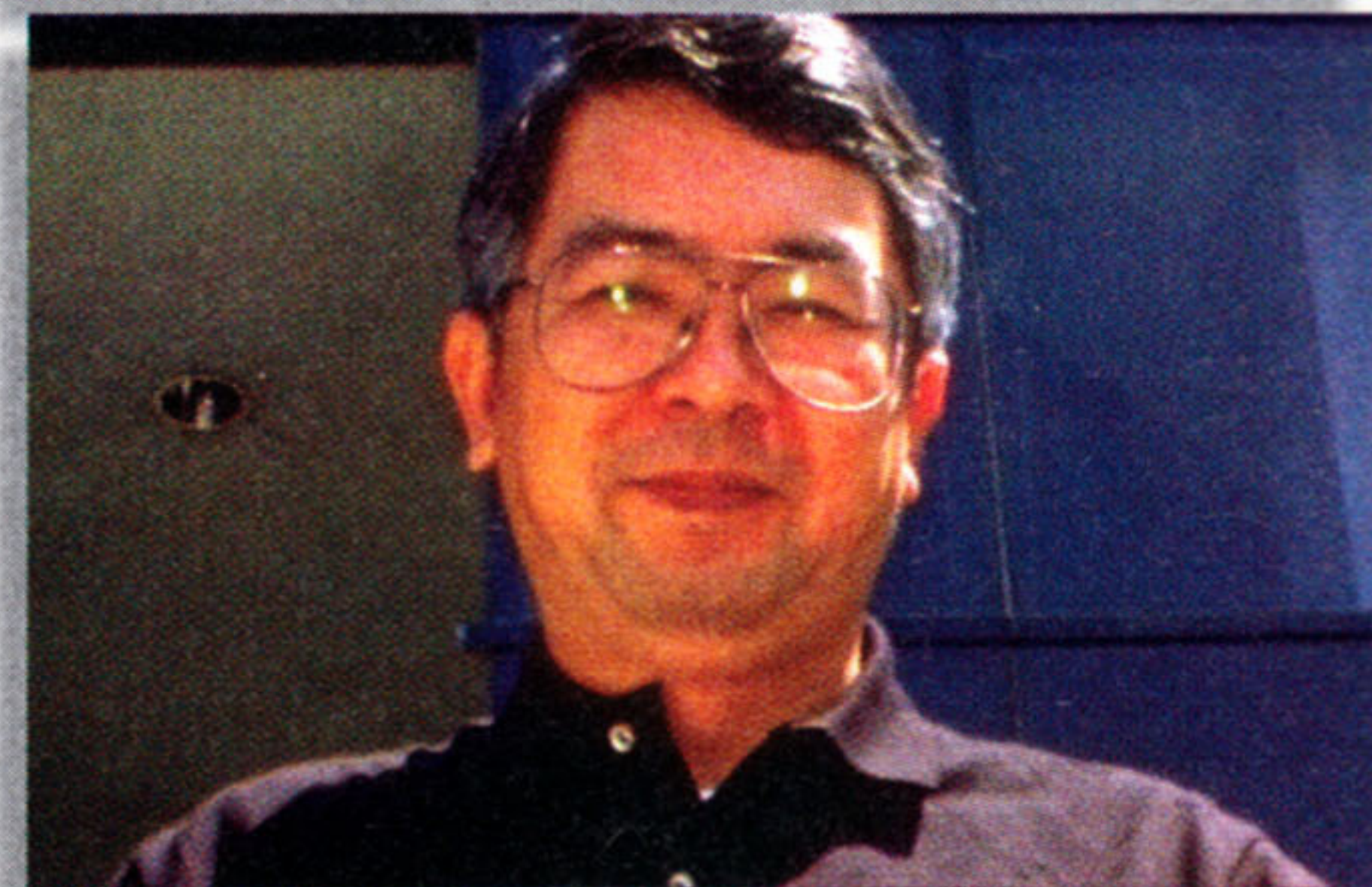
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Lay back, grab a glass of something cold, and enjoy our newest issue...



The cover illustration was rendered exclusively for IG by Flo using a Silicon Graphics workstation with Soft Image and Photoshop software.



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Fortune Telling



If you believe the old adage that "the more things change, the more they stay the same," there's a good chance that video game players in 1996 and beyond are set to bear witness to a repeat performance of the Genesis versus TurboGrafx-16 versus Super NES battle that took place some years ago. Sega and an established consumer electronics company will fight amongst themselves for a couple of years as Nintendo

slowly prepares to release something more powerful than its competitors' hardware; Nintendo ultimately will enter the market late and have to fight to gain parity with competing installed bases. There are several important differences between today's and yesterday's Nintendo, however, that we need to watch closely as the next few months play themselves out.

Price point: For the first time in its history, Nintendo appears to be set to enter the North American marketplace with a product intentionally priced out of the range affordable by their supposed target audience (8- to 14-year-olds). Not including sales taxes, a Nintendo⁶⁴ with one game will cost roughly \$300 — that's if a person picks up the only \$50 game in Nintendo's bunch, Tetrispear, and ignores the remainder of games which are all priced between \$70-80. Clearly, Nintendo understands that winning the North American marketplace will involve competitive pricing with Sega's and Sony's \$199 hardware and \$30-60 software, and it appears from their pricing strategy that they're not even thinking about beating their competition in 1996.

Why? Supply—there aren't enough machines to go around. As David Sheff describes in the oft-cited industry encyclopedia *Game Over*, on the day of Nintendo's Japanese Super NES launch, "One department store closed down its toy department by 11:30 a.m. because it feared a riot... Three hundred thousand Super Famicoms were delivered that night, though the orders numbered 1.5 million. Four out of five customers were disappointed, including some who had paid in advance." Notably, the once-scarce Super Famicom went on to dominate the Japanese market, and few people were miserable in the long term. Attempting a similar strategy here—a country where parents physically attacked each other over Cabbage Patch Dolls back 10 years ago—may not be wise, but at least some lucky American gamers will get their machines. Five out of five customers here would be disappointed if they can't get any N⁶⁴ hardware, and rather than delaying the launch again, Nintendo appears to be intentionally setting the price high in an effort to decrease the number of people waiting in lines for the new console.

As mentioned in previous *IG* editorials, the most important problem Nintendo faces is the present lack of top-notch support for its new platform—all of the best Japanese-developed arcade and console series titles are coming out on Sega and Sony platforms. Nintendo made no new announcements of additional Japanese developers at E³, and with only a handful of talented exceptions, its American and European development base is weak. Like the launch of its last machine, Nintendo will have a lot of initial consumer demand and a variety of solid initial titles, but the long-term success of the Nintendo⁶⁴ platform will depend on increased availability, lower prices and getting their old allies to jump on the bandwagon.

-Jer Horwitz, Editor-in-Chief

August, 1996

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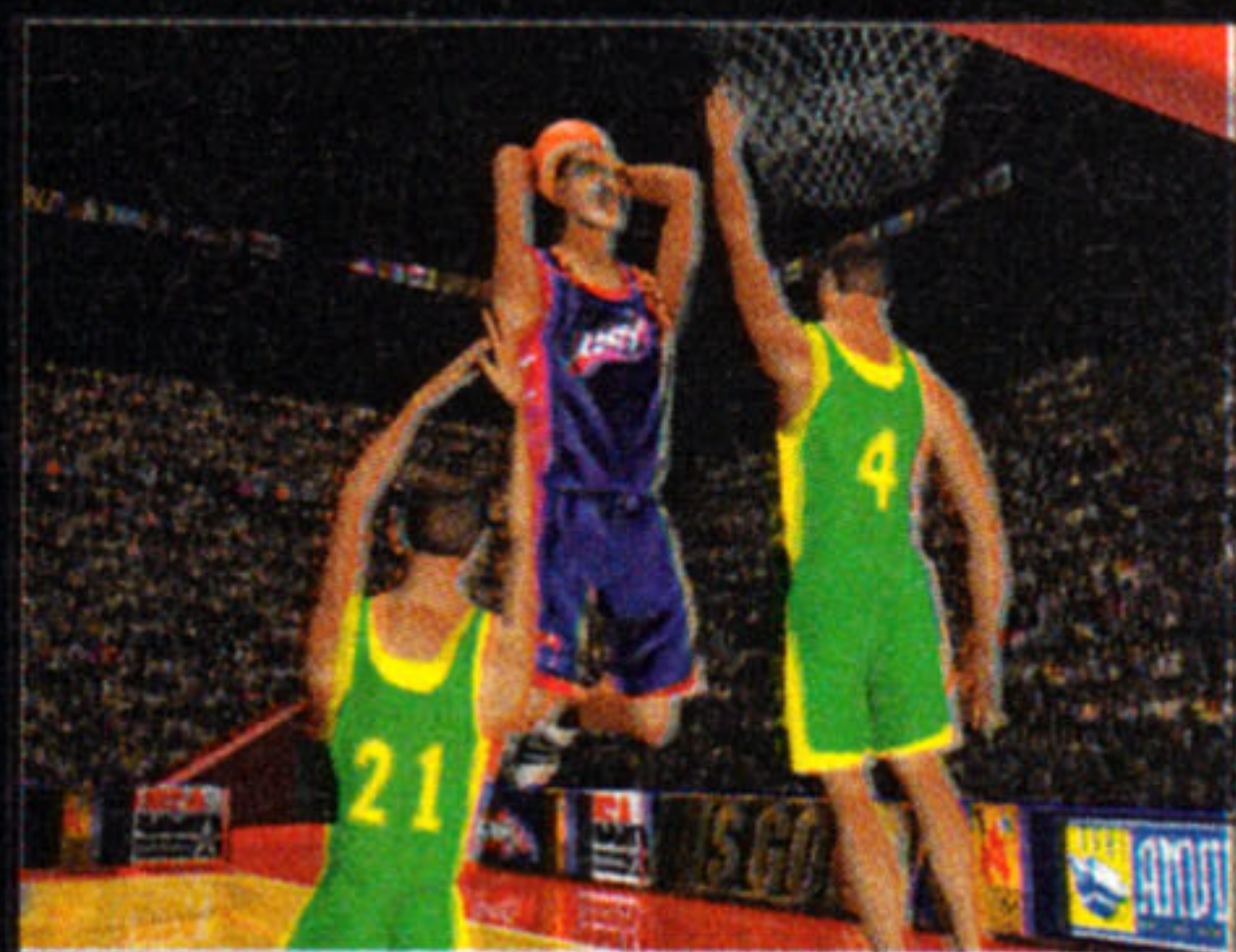


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BUZZ WORD

GAMING

pr

relations

By Christopher Drost

After three months of a heated battle, the time has come to settle on a winning strategy for the video game industry. The time has come to settle on a winning strategy for the video game industry. The time has come to settle on a winning strategy for the video game industry.

What is Public Relations (PR)? Public relations is the communication between an organization and the public. It is the process of managing the flow of information between an organization and the public. It is the process of managing the flow of information between an organization and the public.

For many different reasons, some companies cannot justify the cost of hiring a good PR team.

In-House vs. Contract PR

For many different reasons, some companies cannot justify the cost of hiring a good PR team.



Panzer Dragoon II

The 2-D games that have come out for the PlayStation have demonstrated its ability, but will Sony allow any more to come out?



I read with interest the "Buzz Word" feature by Christopher Drost concerning gaming public relations in the June issue of Intelligent Gamer. I'm actually on both sides of the PR coin. I do a radio show on electronic gaming that's heard by an estimated 55,000 people each week through their PC speakers using RealAudio(tm). I'm also the communications manager (PR guy) at FormGen, publisher of PC games such as Duke Nukem 3D, Rise of the Triad and others.

As both a radio show host and a member of the media, I'm frequently in touch with PR people who are either employees of a game publisher or who work for PR firms. I'm a little biased on the subject because I'm an internal PR guy, and because I'm also a gamer, both of which help me personally serve editors and press better. I know what media people need, because I've bugged other PR people for coverage of their products on the radio. I also know first-hand how important it is to make materials and information available as soon as possible, and what it means to be "on deadline."

My experience when trying to get guests and editorial materials for coverage on the radio show has been that dealing with someone inside a game company is often much more rewarding for me than dealing with an agency. In his column, Mr. Drost makes the point that smaller companies tend to use internal PR people while bigger companies tend to hire agencies. The media guy reaching a smaller audience than a gaming magazine, for example, is weeded out of contact about products by many of

these large PR agencies. I've had to get back in contact with agencies several times after being dropped from their media list, just to keep current on their products. I've even had PR agencies arbitrarily decide not to book a developer for my show because they don't want to inconvenience their client on a weekend for a "paltry 55,000 impressions." Because I'm treated this way, I go out of my way to make sure I never treat anyone else in that manner.

Due to the fact that PR agencies handle a variety of products, it's difficult to get in-depth product information from them quickly—you often play ping-pong with them. It's like dealing with a middle-man. You ask them a question about a product, they hang up and call the developer or publisher for the answer, they call you, you play phone tag and ask a follow-up question, they hang up and call the developer or publisher again... all of the time working under the pressure of a deadline. The inside PR guys, on the other hand, are usually much closer to projects, and can usually immediately answer a wider variety of questions about the product than agency employees can. There's also a difference between working with someone who's a PR professional and someone who's a gamer as your PR person. I would much rather get information from a gamer who is doing PR for a company than some PR firm with someone who's familiar with the game because they were forced to play it "just for (his/her) account."

I disagree with the flavor of

Christopher's column, which seems to be that bigger is better, and that hiring a PR firm is better for a company than an internal PR staff. I think it's time companies stop looking at what's more convenient for them and start looking at what's better for members of the media. After all, they're the most important people in getting the word about about a company's products. Media people are not an annoyance, they're part of the lifeblood of a product cycle and should be treated like royalty, like game developers themselves.

Mark Shander Host, The Mark Shander Show Communications Mgr., FormGen

[Ed.: Having spent a lot of time dealing with public relations firms, we find unique advantages and disadvantages in dealing with different types of agencies. Smaller PR companies and internal PR staffs do tend to have better personal access and information to the individuals and games they know about within companies, but larger PR companies can take on grander tasks of coordination (i.e. huge trade show booths, mass interviews) with greater ease. We can understand how it might have been assumed that we thought "bigger is better"—large companies tend to hire external PR firms and separate their internal people from the media to keep them focused on the quality of the final product—but that's not to say that we prefer it that way.]

THE CRITICS CAN'T ESCAPE THE SPELL...

"IT MAKES MYST LOOK LIKE A WORD JUMBLE."

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"ZORK NEMESIS IS A BRILLIANT EXAMPLE OF WHAT AN ADVENTURE GAME SHOULD BE."

PC ENTERTAINMENT/GAMES

"I CAN'T OVEREMPHASIZE HOW SPECTACULAR ZORK NEMESIS LOOKS."

CD-ROM TODAY

"THIS GAME CAPTURES YOUR ATTENTION WITH ITS STUNNING GRAPHICS AND HAUNTING AUDIO..."

COMPUTER GAME REVIEW

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just picked up and read your June issue, which is the first issue of your magazine that I've ever read. As a loyal reader of (magazine name deleted), I must say that you guys have a far superior magazine with much more current information. Trust me, the barf and snot jokes aren't enough to keep me reading them any more.

After reading your June issue, I did take note of one fact which annoyed me—you refuse to get involved in system advocacy, huh? That is a disservice to your readers. Unlike the spoiled folks who work for video game magazines, we don't get free hardware and software—you magazines are all a bunch of scared kiss-ass pussies who are more concerned with advertising revenue than you are with informing the gaming public honestly about what these companies are all about.

Back in the fall of '94, I bought a Genesis, SegaCD and a 32X. At the time, Sega stated that it was committed to all of its formats, and that it would release at least 100 quality games for the 32X in its first year. Well, I got one good game, one mediocre game and a slew of crap! As late as last November, Sega was issuing its lies about continued support for the 32X.

I suffered for years as a loyal Sega owner (I bought the new Genesis because my old one broke), and I'm an RPG fan, not a sports game fan. After investing \$750 in that martian-module piece of crap under the pretense that they'd be supporting the SegaCD and 32X, I believe that someone should be willing to hold them accountable for their total commitment to profit and total lack of commitment to gamers like myself.

There are 500,000 32X owners and 1,500,000 SegaCD owners who deserve better from magazines.

You also had a letter in your June issue where a guy complained that Sega's target audience is brainwashed. We aren't brainwashed, we just have good memories—I would have saved \$1,000 if I had access to honest, hard-hitting information. At least I read enough between the lines to sell that ugly piece of junk last year and got back \$250 (today I might get \$50). I thought that I'd have only a six-month wait to jump into Nintendo⁶⁴ heaven, but after two monumental delays obviously designed to keep people such as myself from buying a PlayStation, I'm wondering about them again. The M2 looks promising, but there's no release date for the hardware and I can't wait forever. Maybe I should just go with Sony...

Matt Hulett
Short Hills, New Jersey

[Ed.: Intelligent Gamer has not and will not become involved in political system advocacy games—we do not believe that it is our role as journalists to tell you what to prefer and believe. Some magazines believe it is their place to say that (in a marketplace with two or more strong competitors) only one new game console has something to offer everybody; clearly, this is not the case. PlayStation owners still do not have access to Night Warriors and Virtua Fighter 2. Saturn users cannot play Tekken or Warhawk.

Instead of backing one company (i.e. telling you that the PlayStation is the messiah one month and then

Every company has their Waterloo, and Sega is no exception. But should we prejudge new hardware based on the failures of the past?

reversing direction months later), we will continue to serve your needs by giving you the most balanced and thorough coverage we can and let you make the final call. We can best do this by presenting the information we have gathered in clearly labeled fact, rumor and opinion sections (News, Overheard, Advocacy) and sharing our playtesters' opinions with you for upcoming hardware and software releases. In addition, we intend to make sure that readers such as yourself have ample space to voice their feelings, whether we agree wholeheartedly with them or not.]

would like to first say congratulations on your new print magazine—it is the best publication I have yet read dealing with the industry. Anyway, on to my question: A while back, I read about Atari threatening Sony on the subject of hardware dumping. If selling systems at substantially different prices in different territories is illegal, then how does Nintendo get away with charging inflated prices on its software in Japan? Are there regulations involving hardware which are non-existent on software? Or is the monetary difference generally too small on software? It just seems that the difference in price between territories is approximately the same when considering the price the PlayStation was going to go for in Japan Vs. the U.S. and the software discrepancies.

David Hill
Bedford, Nova Scotia, Canada



Sony has been accused of dumping by now-defunct rival Atari—but do those laws apply to game software as well?

[Ed.: Complaints about software prices are difficult to prove considering two factors: The worldwide and even local difference in prices and market values for similar games, and the difference between suggested and actual retail prices. Unlike game machines, which are often kept at fixed prices by game companies in markets throughout the world, software prices routinely fluctuate as supply and demand grow and wane. (It could be argued, for example, that prices in Japan's Akihabara (see IG's Japan Today, issue 1) are far lower on new games than they are in the rest of Japan, as Akihabara aggressively discounts software immediately upon release, or that prices in New York City's electronics districts are more competitive than stores in Omaha or Nebraska.) A greater issue is whether precedents exist by which software dumpers could be prosecuted: Car or VCR cases may have come to court, but no one has sued over video tapes and CDs yet.]

Clarification: In IG's June issue, we included a capsule review of BPS' Tokyo Highway Battle and would like to clarify a few details and improvements about Jaleco's U.S. version of the game. Car modification is an important part of the game in Jaleco's view, the frame rate maxes out at 30 fps, and you can use either the drift button or a gas/brake combination to initiate drifts. IG's capsule reviews are intended to be concise, and we stand by our grades, but we wanted to make you aware of these additional details.

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As new hardware hits Japanese stores, hungry gamers swarm to Super Mario 64

Nintendo⁶⁴ Launches in Japan

As the first Nintendo⁶⁴ demonstration kiosks were put on display in Japanese stores some weeks before the Nintendo⁶⁴ launch, players crowded around to get their first hands-on experiences with Super Mario 64. At one Laox store in Tokyo, three Nintendo⁶⁴ demo kiosks were placed next to their PlayStation and Saturn counterparts, and predictably, the 20 or so people waiting around the kiosks were only interested in Mario 64. The established PS and Saturn hardware sat idle.

Initial response to the system was mixed, however: While many were wowed by Mario 64 and stated that the system was a definite "must buy," many others in line took a "wait and see" attitude, as they felt that the system's software was too expensive compared to its competitors, and said that there aren't enough games that they were interested in. Surprisingly, it was still possible to prebook a Nintendo⁶⁴ three weeks before the launch of the machine—especially given the Japanese attitude toward new technology and Nintendo launches in particular.

While the system only launched with three titles, Hiroshi Yamauchi, president of Nintendo, announced at an analyst's meeting that Nintendo expects to have 20 titles out for the Nintendo⁶⁴ by year's end. Several new titles have been announced in Japan, including base-

ball and racing titles by Imagineer, an adventure by Hudson, a Nintendo sequel to the Mother RPG series and an action title by Kemco. Konami is unofficially confirming five N64 titles appropriate to Nintendo's target demographic. Worldwide, Yamauchi said that Nintendo expects to sell 5 million N⁶⁴ machines by the end of Nintendo's fiscal year in March 1997, with 3.6 million machines for Japan alone.

Meanwhile, on these shores, importers are charging early adopters a pretty penny to be the first American gamers to have access to the new Nintendo machine. *Intelligent Gamer* contacted several mail-order game shops to see what they wanted for the Nintendo⁶⁴ at launch, and the prices were between \$700-800 with the two games available that would appeal to American gamers: Mario 64 and Pilotwings 64.

For those gamers who have decided to wait until the official U.S. launch, several of the more

anticipated titles have recently been delayed. One such game is Doom 64, published by Williams Entertainment—apparently, the game has been delayed until 1997 due to the fact that the Williams development team changed all of the original's demonic icons into more generic imagery, and id Software requested that their original artwork be reinserted before release. A rumor has been circulating that Lucas' Shadows of the Empire will also face a delay, but neither Nintendo nor LucasArts would confirm a delay at press time.

Another title pushed back indefinitely is Mindscape's Monster Dunk, due to problems stemming from the company's difficulty in obtaining development kits from Nintendo. According to Mindscape, their situation is not uncommon in the industry, as Nintendo⁶⁴ development kits are reportedly in very short supply.

Retailer Chart:

Retailer	Loc.	Price	Includes
Die Hard Game Club	CA	\$800	N ⁶⁴ , Mario 64, Pilotwings 64
Gamex	NY	\$699	N ⁶⁴ , Mario 64
Japan Video Games	CA	\$700	N ⁶⁴ , Mario 64, Pilotwings 64
Tommo	CA	\$799	N ⁶⁴ , Mario 64, Pilotwings 64
Tronix	NY	\$650-700	N ⁶⁴ , Mario 64, Pilotwings 64

Sega unleashes a flood of new add-ons for the Saturn in preparation for their entry into the Internet appliance market



▲ New World's Might and Magic may well give 3DO the name they need to fight Ultima Online.

3DO Acquires New World Computing

In their continuing efforts to steer their company in a new direction, the 3DO Company announced today that they have signed a letter of intent to acquire New World Computing from their parent company, NTN Communications. Under the agreement, 3DO will buy the assets of New World Computing from NTN for a total of at least \$13.5 million.

NTN Communications is a company whose core market is developing interactive broadcasting technology, like interactive cable, and a decision was made there to concentrate on their primary business. New World was just one of three subsidiaries of NTN Communications that were either divested or sold to strategic partners; the other two subsidiaries were LearnStar Inc., a producer of educational multimedia systems and software, and IVN Inc., a company developing an online wagering service. Both of these companies had a large portion of their stock sold to various strategic partners.

New World has historically developed for the PC platform, and the two flagship Win95 compatible titles shipping later this year will be Heroes of Might and Magic 2, and Wages of War. In keeping with 3DO's new tack, New World will continue to develop for Win95 but will also assist 3DO in their online efforts with their role-playing and strategy expertise.

Crystal Dynamics Shakes Up Development

Crystal Dynamics, one of the first companies to jump onto the 32-Bit console bandwagon with their pioneering 3DO titles, has undergone some major changes in recent weeks. The company, suffering from slow sales of their more recent CD-ROM titles, has announced that they will lay off roughly one-third of their 102 employees over the next few months in a major restructuring.

Among the people leaving the company are CEO Randy Komisar (a former LucasArts executive), co-founder and Executive Vice President Madeline Canepa and their Chief Operating Officer, John Eastburn.

Heading up the new Crystal Dynamics will be Ted Ardell, the company's new CEO. Under the new regime, Crystal will follow the lead of other companies such as 3DO in moving toward Internet-based entertainment rather than console-based software. Crystal is still trying to decide whether or not it will publish their remaining titles under development, and is considering farming them out to other companies to publish.



New Sega Peripherals

In addition to the analog control pad for use with NiGHTS (which will come in white to match the new Japanese Saturns), Sega of Japan have announced a number of interesting peripherals. One of the more intriguing ones is the Virtua Stick Pro, an arcade-quality joystick; in fact, it looks just like the control panel from a typical Japanese arcade machine. It should be noted, however, that although it is true that it is using actual arcade parts, the standard joysticks and buttons used on Japanese arcade games are not quite the same as standard arcade parts here. For example, the Virtua Stick Pro will be using a ball-handled microswitch joystick rather than the typical bat-handled stick common in the U.S.

Also in Sega's lineup are a whole host of Internet peripherals, beginning with a recent announcement that Sega will release a modem for the Saturn in July, allowing Internet access without a dedicated computer. Another feature of the Japanese modem will be access to the Saturn version of X-Band, which will be starting up in August with a special version of Virtua Fighter Remix. Other titles that will be modem-compatible will be Sega Rally Championship, World Series Baseball, and Daytona Remix (Daytona USA Championship Circuit Edition in the U.S.). The cost of the modem and software will be 14,800 yen, and Sega expects to sell 500,000 of the units over the first year of release. Curiously, the Japanese version is apparently a 14.4K modem, while reports at E³ stated that Sega of America's NetLink modem would be a 28.8K model.

In addition, Sega will be rolling out a keyboard which should make sending e-mail that much more tolerable, as well as a 3.5" floppy drive which will allow users to save data locally. Pricing will be 9,800 yen for the disk drive, and 7,800 yen for the keyboard.



▲ The Saturn modem (inside a white Japanese Saturn) looks like an X-Band; a phone card fits in.



▲ A Sega-brand keyboard will enable Saturns to reach the 'net.



▲ A Saturn disk drive, in Japan's new white case, will be 'net-ready.



▲ Sega's Virtua Stick Pro is the most expensive joystick yet.



▲ The PriFun video printer is an inexpensive color screen dumper.

VF2 Fight Continues in Japan and the U.S.



On a quiet Sunday afternoon, a hot battle was taking place in Roppongi, a place in Japan that has many dance clubs that cater more to the English-speaking crowd and the Japanese people who want to meet them. The finals for what could be the country's last Virtua Fighter 2 tournament were taking place; preliminaries for the tournament had been going on for the last three weeks to qualify for the June 2 Virtua Night "Midnight Heaven" tournament to see who was the country's best Virtua Fighter 2 player.

In order to qualify for the tournament, players showed up at Gigo, a Sega-owned arcade chain. There were an estimated 400 people trying to qualify during the preliminary rounds. After the preliminaries, there were a total of 36 participants left. Within the 36 was a single foreigner, Dirk Tebben, a 20-year-old from West Virginia who is currently in Japan as an exchange student at a Japanese university.

The final match was between an Akira player and a Shun player, who was finished off by Akira's patented "stun-palm-of-doom." All that was left after the final

match was the giving out of prizes to the contestants and the consolation prizes. The third prize was an acrylic plaque the size of a postcard with an image of Jeffry hunting the devil shark. The second place player got an acrylic plaque with a picture of Lion on it, while the winner of the tournament got an acrylic plaque of Sarah autographed by Yu Suzuki.

When the champion was asked about his thoughts on winning the tournament, he replied that he had been very nervous and could not believe that he had won the tournament. He then added that he would accept any challenges to his title at the Roppongi Gigo.

Meanwhile, halfway around the world at the Funland Arcade in downtown Toronto, Canada, another VF2 tournament was being held. Inspired by the VF2 tournaments from Japan, the "VF2 Mother of All Tournaments" brought together a group of dedi-

cated VF2 players from all over Canada, the U.S. and Asia. Most of these individuals were brought together by the Internet; where tricks, strategies and general VF2 chitchat were traded back and forth via the Usenet and e-mail.

According to VF2 MOAT organizer Lan Bui, a number of people "chickened out" prior to the event due to the level of competition. "Some of the locals refused to enter especially when they found out who was coming," said Lan, a rather accomplished player who lost out in the semi-finals. "There were even a couple people who dropped out after the first day of competition."

Despite everyone's fatigue and a few blisters, it took over three hours to determine that 21-year-old Colin Leong from Singapore was champion—although based on a number of recent Usenet postings, Leong was expected to score top honors. He's reportedly the best VF2 player in

Singapore—and it goes without saying that Leong is quite a thrill to watch in action, especially how he decimates his opponents, one by one.

Due to timing and coordination issues, no prizes were handed out to the winners for their efforts. According to Lan, Sega of Canada fully endorsed the event and will probably be supporting the next MOAT, said to be in July at an arcade just outside of Toronto with plenty more space.



Two fine ladies dressed as Fighting Vipers were on hand to present the award.

3DO Ceases Opera Development

Outgunned by newer 32- and 64-bit consoles, 3DO has now unofficially thrown in the towel in development for their aging 3DO Multiplayer console. The last Studio 3DO title, 3DO's Decathlon, was finished by its programmers and reportedly offered to and declined by Panasonic for publishing. Studio 3DO now claims that it is ready to release the game on its own for both Opera and PC formats. Panasonic's remaining titles, Olympic Soccer and Obelisk, may or may not be released this summer as lukewarm sales projections have dimmed Panasonic's enthusiasm for the 3DO platform. The company's port of Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 was cancelled after numerous development delays and programming difficulties.

Sega Announces New Advertising Partners

After parting ways with longtime advertising agency Goodby, Silverstein and Partners (as mentioned in IG#1), Sega has announced that it has reached a decision on which firm will work on the next round of Sega television spots.

Ingalls Moranville was selected from six possible contenders for the coveted account. Other agencies under consideration were Bozell/Salvati Montgomery Sakoda, Foote, Cone & Belding, Ground Zero, McCann Erickson and Dailey and Associates.

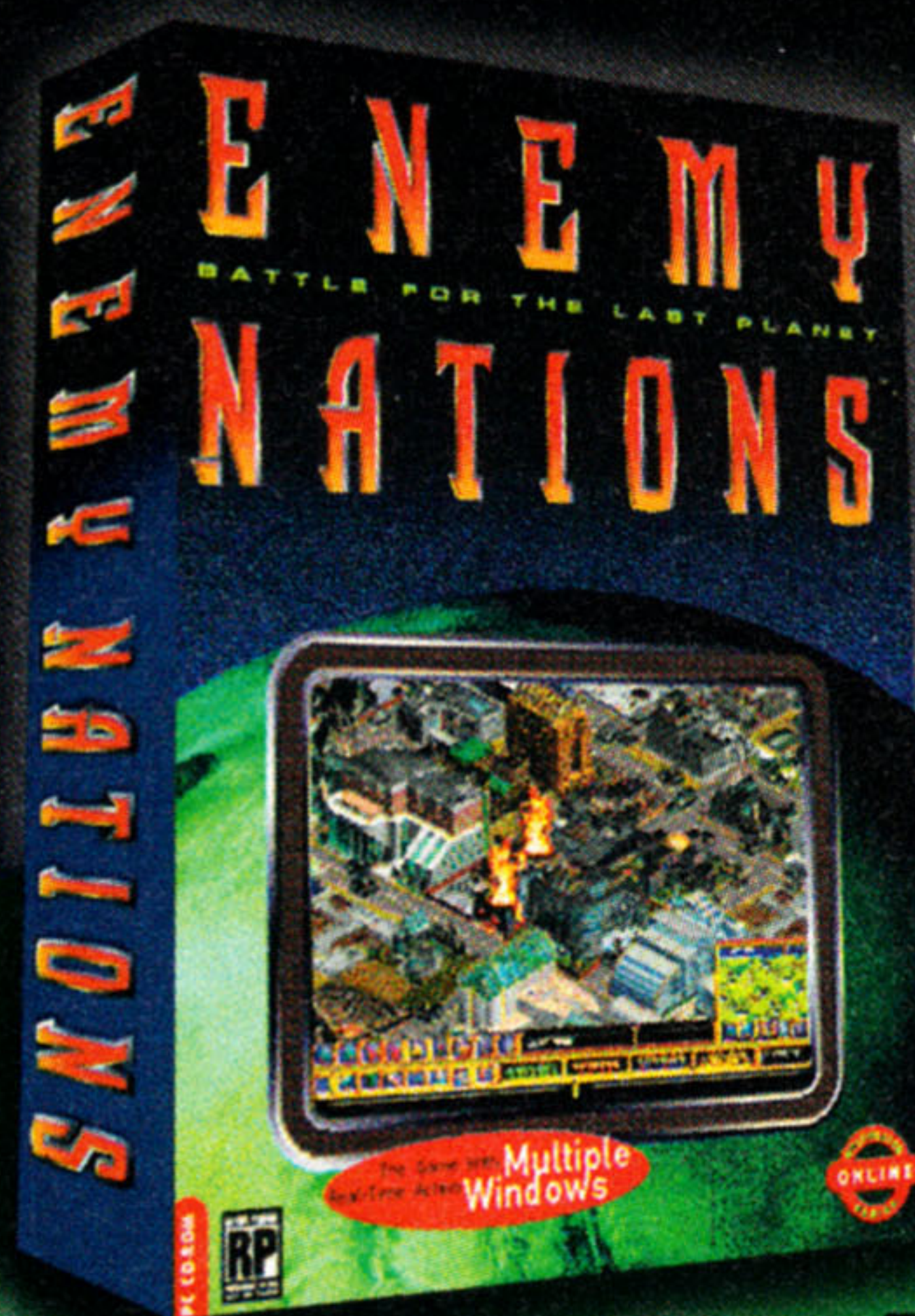
Despite the changeover, the next round of TV commercials from Sega will feature the return of the trademark "Sega Scream," which was pioneered by Goodby, Silverstein and Partners over the last four years.



Flanked by announcers, organizers and other players, VF2 players duked it out in Tokyo.

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IG Shorts: Nintendo Holds Tetris Attack Contest at E3: At E³, Nintendo held a tournament to promote Tetris Attack, the U.S. version of the popular Japanese puzzle game Panel De Pon. The winner, former IG contributor Christian Svensson won a Nintendo⁶⁴ game system, and the second place winner, our own John Ricciardi, won a copy of Super Mario 64. Tetris Attack is scheduled to come out on the SNES and Game Boy, with the SNES version to be released on Sept. 3 at a retail price of \$34.99.

■ **Spectrum Holobyte Gets \$10 Million Infusion:** Spectrum Holobyte, headed by former Sony executive Stephen Race, will receive \$10 million in private investments in the next few days. NASDAQ requirements have forced the company to seek outside financing in order to stay listed on the stock exchange after several quarters of losses. Spectrum, who publishes both under their own name and the Microprose label, have recently narrowed their focus to only publish for the PlayStation and PC CD-ROM markets. Most recently, Spectrum has released their arcadish Top Gun: Fire at Will for the PlayStation, and Spectrum plans to release Grand Prix 2, Falcon 4.0 and a pair of Star Trek titles in the coming months.

■ **Activision and Universal Pictures to Bring Spycraft to Movie Theaters:** Following in the footsteps of other properties like Street Fighter and Mortal Kombat, Universal Pictures has just inked a deal with Activision to bring their PC CD-ROM game Spycraft: The Great Game to the big screen. The Spycraft movie will be produced by Laurence Gordon Productions, who has produced big-name titles like Die Hard and Field of Dreams. In addition, Universal has also picked up the rights to turn Spycraft into a TV series at their discretion. This is the second time in recent months that Activision has announced that one of their properties would be making the great transition to the silver screen; a few months ago, Activision and Threshold Entertainment announced that Zork would be becoming a feature film as well.

■ **Sony Drops Price of PlayStation in Japan:** Following Sony of America's lead, Sony of Japan has announced an immediate price drop on the Japanese price of the PlayStation. The new price, 19,800 yen (roughly \$200), is 5,000 yen lower than the previous price of 24,800 yen (roughly \$250). This puts Sony at the same price point as Sega, who dropped the price of their Saturn to 19,800 yen in March.

■ **Working Designs:** Well-known for being one of the highest-quality publishers of RPG and Strategy games for the Sega Saturn, Working Designs is now said to be leaning toward PC development as well. Although no official titles have been confirmed yet, the company is reportedly leaning toward conversions of popular (although for the most part unknown in America) Chinese PC RPGs. More on this as it develops.

HOT TOP

Top 15 Arcade Games



1. **Tekken 2**
Namco
2. **Golden Tee 3D Golf**
Incredible Technologies
3. **Bust-A-Move Again**
Taito
4. **Metal Slug**
SNK
5. **Raiden DX**
Fabtek
6. **Dungeons and Dragons: Shadow over Mystara**
Capcom

7. **Marvel Super Heroes**
Capcom
8. **Soul Edge**
Namco
9. **Toshinden 2**
Capcom
10. **Run & Gun 2**
Konami
11. **Viper Phase 1**
Fabtek
12. **Street Fighter Alpha 2**
Capcom
13. **19XX**
Capcom
14. **Striker 1945**
Worldwide Video
15. **Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3**
Midway

Courtesy of RePlay Magazine, July 1996



Current Release Top 15

1. **Quake** (Shareware)
id / PC
2. **Baku Baku**
Sega / Saturn
3. **Bust-A-Move 2**
Acclaim / PlayStation
4. **Gungriffon**
Sega / Saturn
5. **Iron Storm**
Working Designs / Saturn
6. **Night Warriors: DarkStalkers' Revenge**
Capcom / Saturn
7. **DarkStalkers: The Night Warriors**
Capcom / PlayStation
8. **Super Mario RPG**
Nintendo / Super NES
9. **NBA Action**
Sega / Saturn
10. **Street Fighter Alpha**
Capcom / PS & Saturn
11. **NBA Shoot Out**
Sony CE / PlayStation
12. **Panzer Dragoon Zwei**
Sega / Saturn
13. **Command and Conquer**
Westwood / PC-CD
14. **Warcraft II**
Blizzard / PC
15. **Jane's Longbow**
Origin / PC

Most Wanted Top 15



1. **Super Mario 64**
Nintendo / Nintendo64
2. **Tetrisphere**
Nintendo / Nintendo64
3. **NIGHTS**
Sega / Saturn
4. **Wipeout XL**
Psygnosis / PlayStation
5. **PilotWings 64**
Nintendo / Nintendo64
6. **Street Fighter Alpha 2**
Capcom / PS & Saturn
7. **Spider**
BMG Interactive / PS & Saturn

8. **Dark Savior**
Sega / Saturn
9. **Final Fantasy VII**
Square / PlayStation
10. **Tomb Raider**
Eidos / PS & Saturn
11. **Daytona USA C.C. Edition**
Sega / Saturn
12. **Sonic X-Treme**
Sega / Saturn
13. **Formula 1**
Psygnosis / PlayStation
14. **Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II**
LucasArts / PC-CD
15. **Command and Conquer: Red Alert**
Westwood / PC-CD

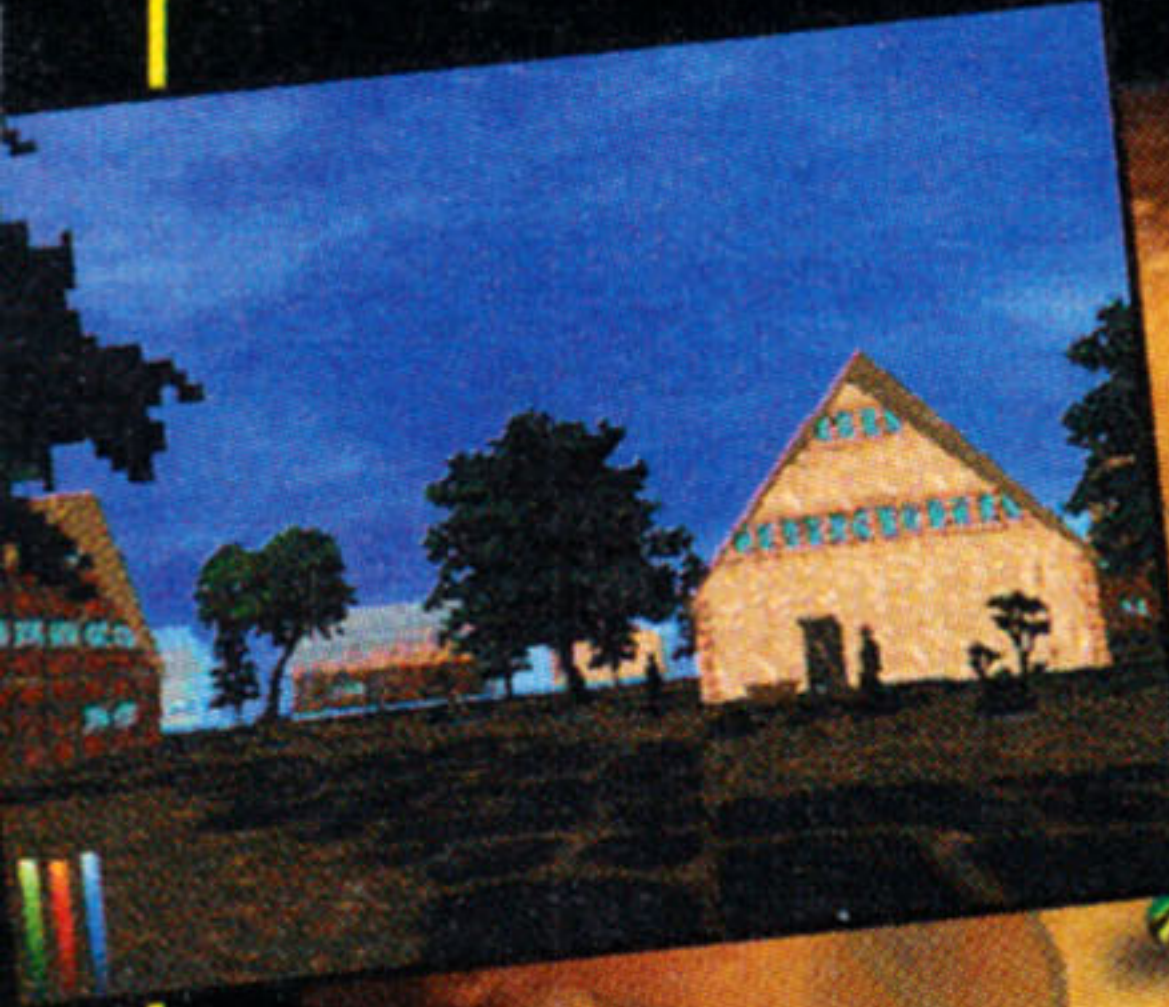
Japan Current Release Top 15



1. **Super Mario 64**
Nintendo / Nintendo64
2. **PilotWings 64**
Nintendo / Nintendo64
3. **Dragon Ball Z**
Bandai / PlayStation
4. **Bio Hazard**
Capcom / PlayStation
5. **Dragon Ball Z**
Bandai / Saturn
6. **Fire Emblem: Bloodlines to...**
Nintendo / Super Famicom
7. **Tekken 2**
Namco / PlayStation

8. **King's Field III**
From Software / PlayStation
9. **ESPN Street Games**
Sony / PlayStation
10. **Treasure Hunter G**
Square / Super Famicom
11. **Nonomurabyo-
uin no Hitobito**
Elf / Saturn
12. **Pocket Monster**
Nintendo / Game Boy
13. **Derby Stallion '96**
ASCII / Super Famicom
14. **Namco Museum Vol. 3**
Namco / PlayStation
15. **Motor Toon Grand Prix 2**
Sony / PlayStation

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 —Trent Ward, PC Gamer



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The Story:

A Reader Writes:

I recently read your article "NEC Primes PowerVR For Homes and Arcades" with much interest. In fact, I was only thumbing through your magazine when the article caught my eye, and I couldn't purchase it fast enough. Let me just say that the last Sendai publication I subscribed to was the short-lived Duo Force/Turbo Force—I have since stopped buying gaming magazines, because the only interesting thing to me is information on the NEC PC Engine Duo and games for it, of which there is practically zero info to ever read about. Three years after NEC went running out of the marketplace, I am still playing happily with my Turbo Duo. The only info I can get is what I decipher from the Japanese magazine PC Engine Fan. Thankfully, all import CDs are compatible with the Duo, so I've continued to buy games through a few import specialists.

I seriously considered buying the NEC PC-FX, but one of my friends who is Japanese (and a raving Super Famicom freak) told me to save my money and continue buying imports for my Duo. He and everyone else "in the know" about what's hot in Japan in the video game world just snickers at the PC-FX.

My question to you and NEC is this: What in the world are they doing? If the demise of NEC and the Duo in the United States wasn't bad enough, the demise of the PC-FX in Japan before it really ever got started is nothing short of astonishing to me. How can an innovative company with the name NEC and the support of a company such as Hudson Soft be in the sad situation they are in?

If anybody is listening or cares at NEC, I'd like to give them some advice, if nothing more than to get a response from IG or anyone even remotely connected with NEC. Anybody who has a clue about the PC Engine knows that its strong points are RPGs and innovative little character games with names such as Bonk, Zonk and Bomberman—remember them? I would compare the PC Engine and its

NEC Primes PowerVR For Homes and Arcades

Opting to enter the highly competitive 3-D chip market with a bang, NEC Electronics and VideoLogic have teamed for the production of the PowerVR chipset, which the companies intend for use in PCs, arcades and home game consoles.

Based on a scalable design which allows developers to choose from "low-cost" and higher performance "arcade" configurations, the PowerVR chipset includes hardware support for perspective correct texture-mapping, antialiased textures, realtime shadows, linear MIP-mapping and both fog and translucency effects.

At a resolution of 640x480 with a 24-Bit color palette and all effects turned on, the "low-cost" configuration can handle 257,000 10x10 (or greater) pixel triangles and the "arcade" configuration can handle 1.028 million such triangles. PowerVR supports a maximum resolution of 1024x1024 and texture bitmap sizes from 32x32 to 256x256, and can handle 16-Bit colored textures in hardware.

The home version (which can be used in PCs and game consoles) is thus on par with the Nintendo⁶⁴ and M2, while the arcade board can compete favorably with Sega and Lockheed Martin's Model 3. Interestingly, NEC has said that the chipset will be used in home consoles by 1997, which seems to imply that NEC may use the chipset to compete with current rival Matsushita's M2 and past rival Nintendo's N⁶⁴, perhaps either as a new system or as an upgrade to their flagging Japanese PC-FX system.

RPGs and character games to the Neo•Geo and fighters; the Neo and SNK have found a very comfortable and profitable little niche in the market by doing quick arcade ports. If there is any company that stands to gain more from simply translating phenomenal Japanese games, NEC is surely that company. What will it take for them to figure that out?

If anyone is listening, I can tell you right now what the solution is for NEC:

1) Concentrate on what you do best (i.e. RPGs and character games); if you remember when the PCE was King in Japan, you had companies such as Hudson and NEC Avenue churning out these kinds of games.

2) Don't make the same mistakes in the United States as you did with the PC Engine and PC-FX. You have another chance now with your innovative PowerVR chipset. Don't blow it! Simply employ a company to translate your fantastic RPGs (such as Working Designs) and export these games and PowerVR technology so that consumers can purchase them— isn't that the point?

That's all I have to say. I hope that somebody out there has heard me!

Victor Villano
Giza, Egypt

Intelligent Gamer's Response

Though we appreciate your concern for NEC's products, let's begin by facing a few hard facts up front: The PC Engine was never the king of the Japanese games marketplace, NEC repeatedly dropped the ball by failing to attract support for a variety of expensive PC Engine peripherals and new hardware configurations, and they utterly failed to attract support for the largely underwhelming and overpriced PC-FX machine released some time ago. When the PCE arrived in the States as the TurboGrafx-16, it was handily outsold and outmarketed by Sega and later Nintendo.

To dig a little deeper into each of these subjects, let's begin with the PC Engine as a machine: It was released in Japan during the latter half of the Nintendo Famicom's (NES) life span and never once enjoyed software sales comparable with those of big Famicom RPGs such as the Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy games or big-named character titles such as, oh, Super Mario or Mega Man. The biggest games for the PCE were the Y's and Far East of Eden series titles—CD-ROM-based software at a time when CD-ROMs were expensive and not yet readily accepted by consumers. While moderately popular in Japan, gamers flock to buy new Final Fantasy and Mario games much faster than Y's or Bonk titles.

After building up a respectable if not incredible line-up of software and developers for their machine—there were some very good PCE games, to be sure—NEC released a variety of new game machines and peripherals which received little or no support from even the company itself, let alone developers: Remember the SuperGrafx, CoreGrafx 2 and Arcade Card? Only a handful of games ever became available for any of the new configurations, which were only worthwhile in that they were downwardly compatible with old PCE titles. After receiving almost no support for the SuperGrafx, NEC launched the PC-FX without third-party support as a multimedia machine, virtually excluding any use of the hardware for purposes other than showing language-heavy anime movie

games. Some of the more interesting ones are currently being ported to the Saturn, if you're really interested in owning \$60 interactive video cassettes.

Though there are some very enthusiastic PC Engine and TurboGrafx-16 fans left in Japan and the United States, the hardware will likely be remembered as a niche product and little more.

NEC's key developers (Hudson, Irem, Namco, Asmik, et al.) have either moved themselves and their hottest properties on to greener pastures or have folded or fallen into obscurity, and if you notice, even SNK's most notable third-party games haven't lingered for long on Neo•Geo hardware—no designer of Viewpoint or Bust-A-Move wants to sell to 75 percent of an under 100,000 unit niche when they might sell to upward of 25 percent of a 500,000 or ten million machine installed base.

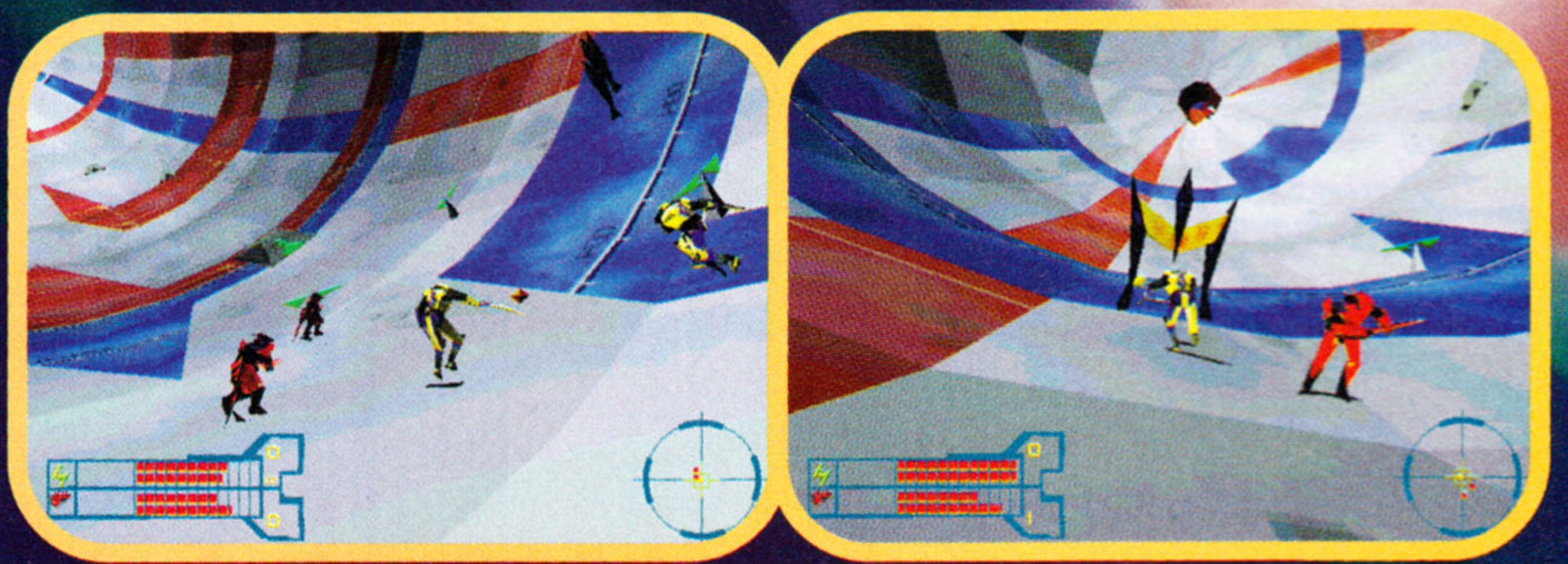
Finally, PowerVR is but one of a number of video configurations NEC will be helping to produce—let's just hope that they stick behind one format and help to get some great games for it.



NEC's PC-FX sales make Atari's Jaguar look like a mass-market console—it's 85 percent anime games.

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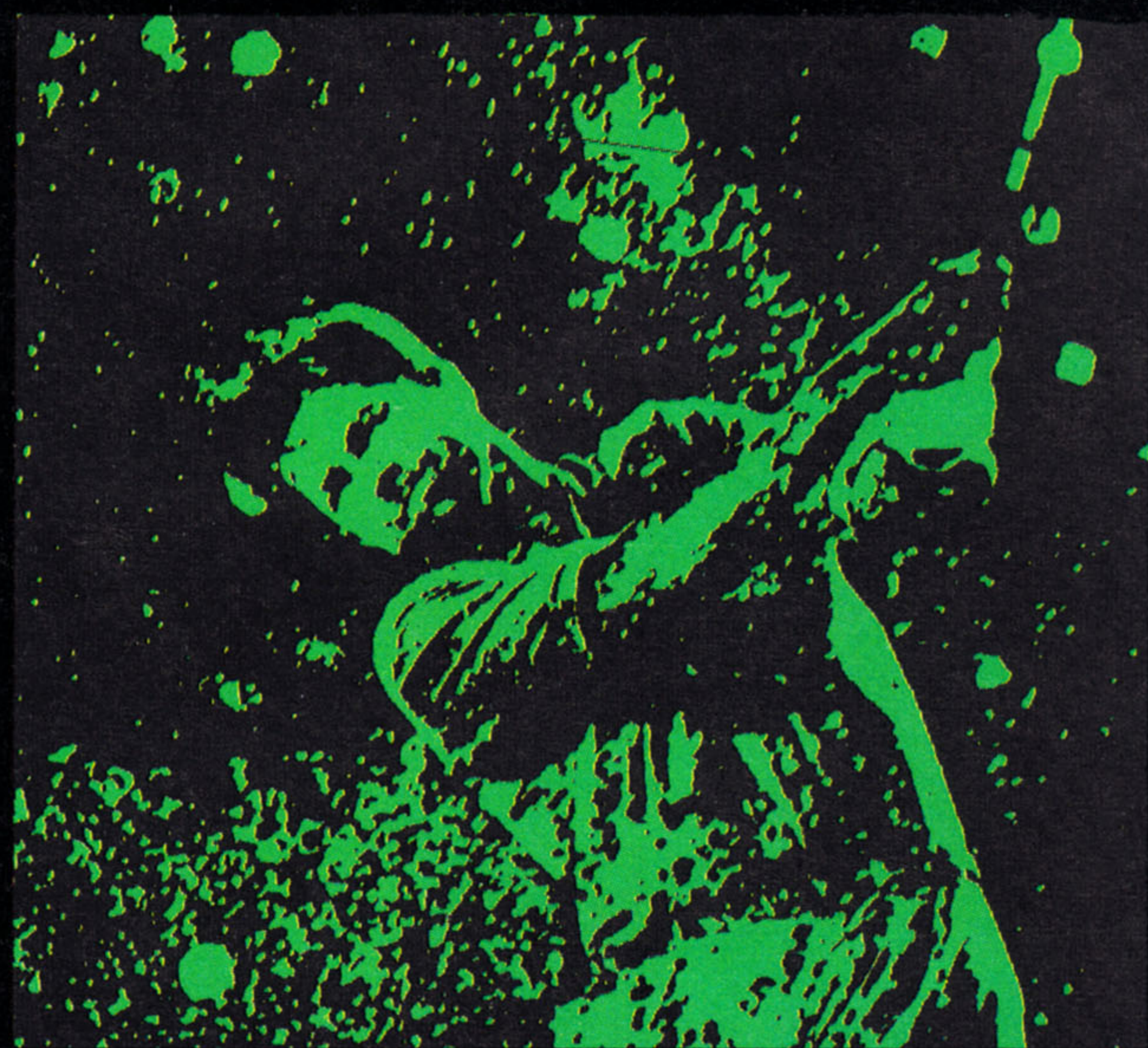
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IG OVERHEARD オーバーハート

As this issue goes to press, IG is hearing a variety of exciting and depressing rumors about possible changes in the industry.

Rooting For The Home Team

The most intriguing rumor we've heard as of late surrounds R.J. Mical, Dave Needle and Dave Morse, men whose names and abilities continue to impress developers and the media despite the fact that their projects often wind up suffering from strategic planning problems in the marketplace. After working on the Amiga chipset—one that had enough success in Europe to be deemed successful in the mass market—Mical and Needle went on to develop the Epyx Handy, which was purchased by Atari and sold as the Atari Lynx, and the SMSG Opera, which was transformed by 3DO into the chipset for their Interactive Multiplayers. Every time Mical, Needle and Morse get together, they develop easy-to-use hardware that has plenty of power, and now they're coming together to work on a brand-new machine—non-compete agreements with 3DO end for Mical as of July 1. What will the new chipset do? Wait and see...

N⁶⁴ Bottleneck

Where are supplies really getting held up in the Nintendo⁶⁴ production chain? IG has heard there are at least three possibilities as of this moment: Japanese launch-ready software is said to be extremely short supply, with delays hitting even some of the titles once thought to be just around the completion corner; hardware may still actually be hard to manufacture, or Nintendo may intentionally be holding back on their Japanese supplies to prevent their latest release from resembling its underwhelming (Virtual Boy) predecessor—hardware left all over the place and store managers grumbling about the need for more good games.



Acclaim to buy Psygnosis?

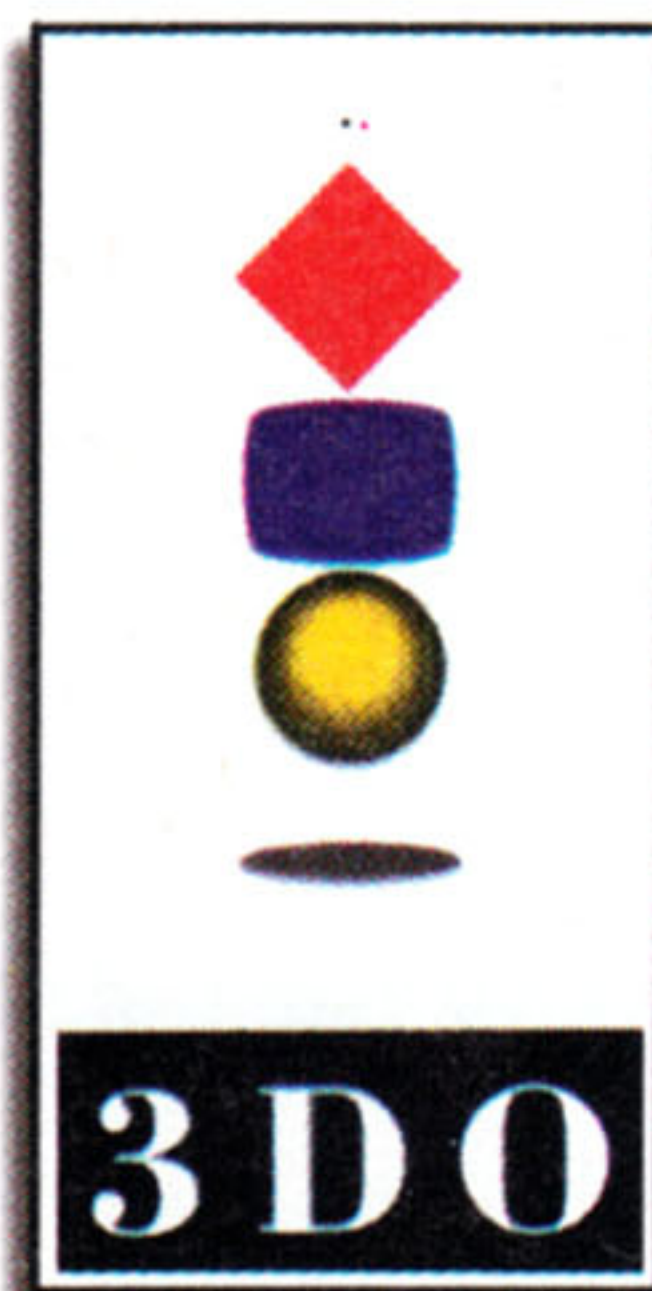
Will Acclaim buy Psygnosis? We can't imagine that the folks at Sony's California- and U.K.-based Psygnosis development houses are thrilled about the prospect of untangling Acclaim banners over their classy logos, nor would we imagine that those running Psygnosis would break free of Sony only to become programmers for the next generation of Sylvester Stallone and Batman game licenses. Regardless, the rumor is out there.



M2 OS Completed

Are developers hedging their bets on M2? As we've been mentioning in *IG's* Overheard column for some time, the technology may be hot, but as of today, developers are writing it off as past its prime. Eighteen dark blue M2 prototype consoles are said to be in existence as of this writing, and though the 3DO Company is back doing American technical support for Matsushita's chips, calls for help are not apparently flooding their hot lines. The ambitious plans of 3DO to have M2 appear in home consoles, PC cards and arcade machines might not be reaching fruition because of some lag in support from Matsushita, which apparently has just recently finalized the hardware spec with the conclusion that they will indeed include two PowerPC 602 chips in M2 consoles instead of one. While Matsushita has failed to make any sort of major public announcement about the technology, rival technology competitor 3DFX is said to be easily winning the support of hundreds of PC developers—and rumor has it that Sega is in talks to bring the 3DFX technology into a new game console.

What's ironic here is that *IG* knows firsthand that developers think plenty of the M2 hardware, which is claimed by its supporters to be more powerful on the whole than the emerging standard 3DFX chipset—texture blending is said to be twice as smooth on the M2 as the 3DFX, amongst other technical superiorities—and the goodwill to develop for M2 would have definitely been there if only a game plan had been proposed by Matsushita. After the funding plug was pulled on a bunch of noteworthy North American M2 third-party products, *IG* heard that 3DO has prepared to develop some of the titles once believed to be M2 exclusive (i.e. *Army Men*) for PCs as well, freeing the company from depending on the unreliable nature of Matsushita's console development wing. (On a side note, we've heard that some preliminary level maps have been finished for 3DO's 3-D action-platformer *G3*—we can't wait to see it...)



M2 Cooling Off

In other interesting M2 news, the 3DO Company has recently completed work on the M2 Operating System under contract from Matsushita, which essentially means that had Matsushita even wanted to release the hardware prior to this month, they would have lacked one essential component. Another way to put that: There was little chance, given the existence of a contract to complete the OS by June, that M2 would have emerged as a console in its own right by the end of this year.

Any thoughts or feelings?
E-mail them to us at
iglee@aol.com.



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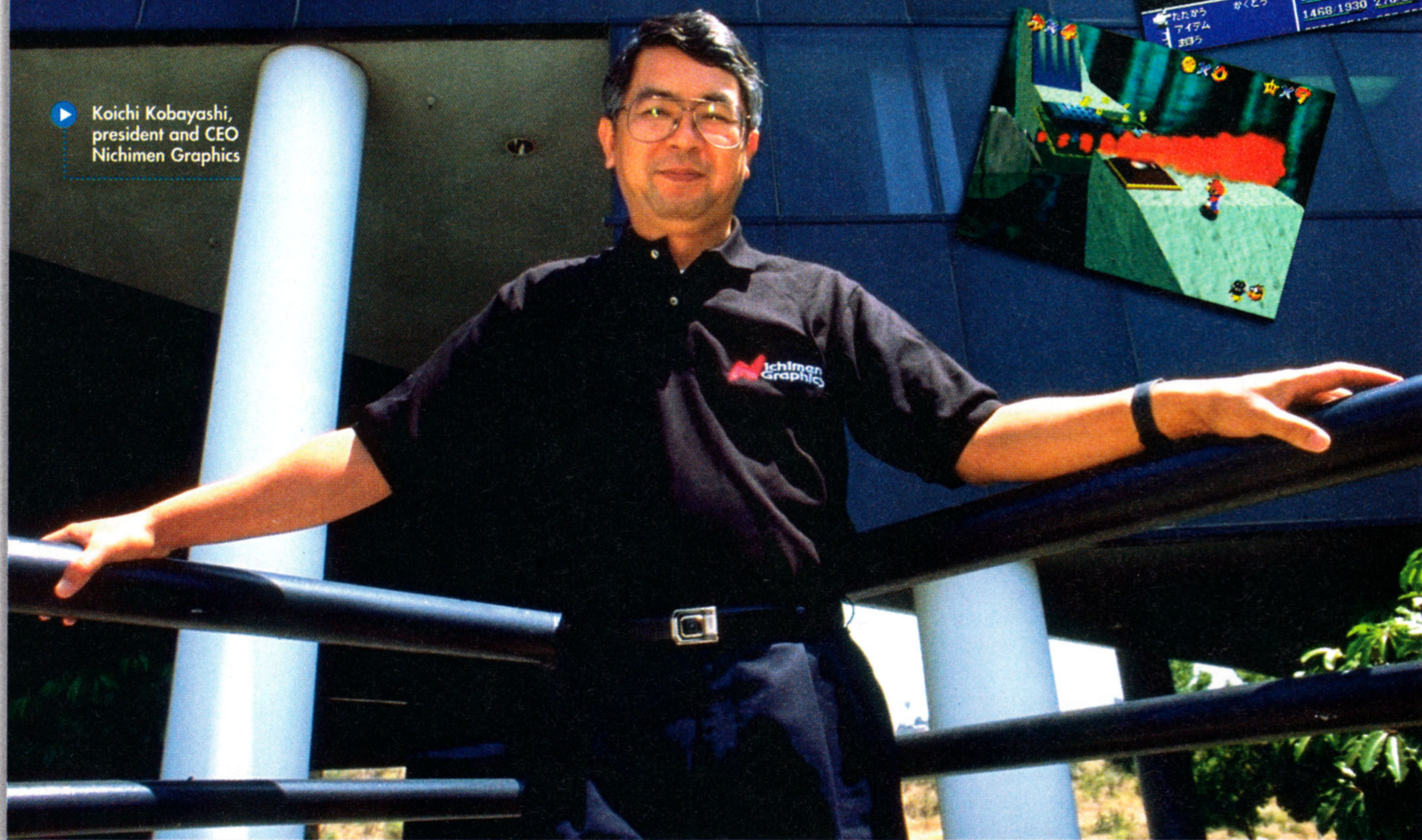


KONAMI.

"INTERNATIONAL TRACK AND FIELD"

Nichimen Graphics

Bringing Good Games to Life



▶ Koichi Kobayashi, president and CEO Nichimen Graphics

Nichimen Graphics makes the tools that make new games, and when Nintendo made a new machine, they called Nichimen.

*Story by Christopher Drost
Photography by Kristin Miller*

The most difficult test faced this year by last year's hot game developers has been to create three-dimensional versions of established two-dimensional hit titles. From Sega's transformation of their speedy mascot Sonic to Square's redesign of their popular but flat Final Fantasy interface, waves of revolutionary change have been felt by the industry, and even the smallest programming teams are now going the 3-D route.

But no company's development has been as important as Nintendo's choice to carry their leading man Mario into the world of 3-D gaming with Super Mario 64. Their character's interactivity with his worlds, co-actors and items is second to none in the industry, and moreover, their game's development has required extra time, at least twice, as a result

of its inherent complexity. With nearly zero experience in programming realtime 3-D games—only the 16-Bit StarFox and Stunt Trax FX used similar technology—Nintendo found itself in the middle of a complex 3-D world even Mario might have run from.

Over the last few years, companies such as Alias/Wavefront, SoftImage, Autodesk and SideEffects have made a significant presence in the films we watch and the games we play. While the film industry has been embracing computer-generated special effects for some time, it was only a few short years ago that stunning 3-D models and prerendered graphics in video games came into being. It was in 1994 that Nintendo announced it was working with a Canadian company known as Alias for the graphical toolsets of a top-secret system dubbed Project Reality, and that some of their tools had been responsible for their brand-new and thoroughly stunning Donkey Kong Country for the SNES.

Shortly thereafter, several headline news grabbing events such as Microsoft's purchase of SoftImage and Silicon Graphics merging Alias &





"...what we try to do is make it easier by leaps and bounds than anybody else can."

—Barton Gawboy, Director of Software Development, Nichimen



Wavefront together suddenly shed light on this virtually unknown industry—making terms such as “3-D graphics,” “SGI” and “rendering” household names. Few people realize that it’s not an easy task for a game developer to seamlessly utilize a bunch of different graphics technologies such as modeling, rendering, texturing and animating characters and backgrounds. As some game developers might tell you, it’s often tedious, painstaking work. Now there’s a new kid on the block of this growing crowd of graphical tool developers that has already staked out a chunk of the proverbial video game pie by claiming to make content creation for video games faster and much easier.

A subsidiary of one of Japan’s largest trading companies, Nichimen Graphics Inc. (NGI) has been adding its own value to the industry ever since it brought N-World to market in July of last year. Armed with a wide range of tools and brochures heralding the fact that some of the largest video game companies have adopted Nichimen’s software, ample evidence exists that these folks are doing something right.

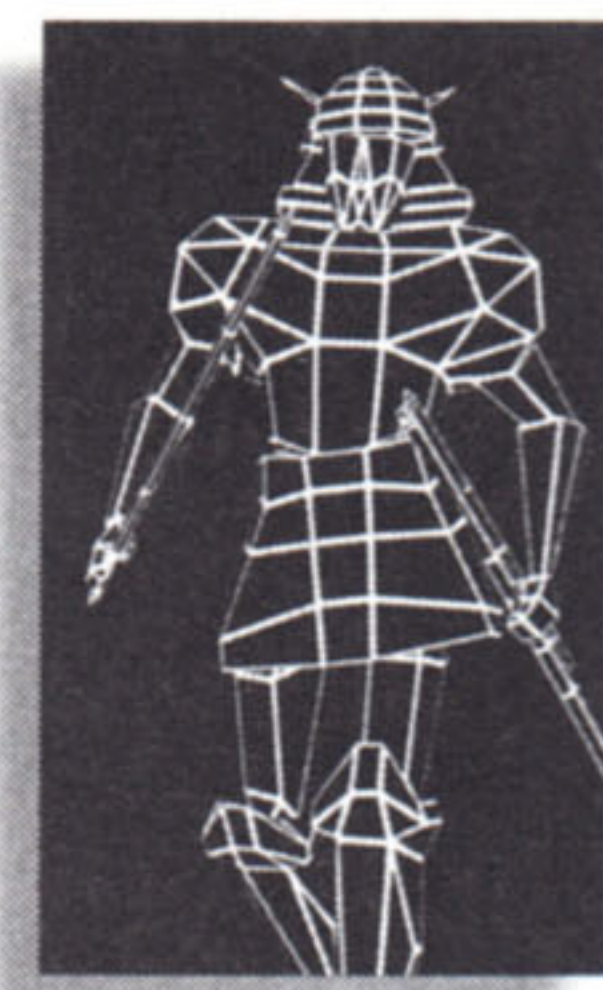
In fact, in the past year since NGI brought N-World to market, the company has consistently surprised a number of people with some rather significant announcements. How significant? It’s a well-known fact in certain circles that several of the toolsets Nintendo originally recommended for Nintendo⁶⁴ content creation were too limiting, difficult to use or underdelivering on their promises. In Japan, meanwhile,

a team of developers led by Nintendo’s Shigeru Miyamoto were being pushed to their limits readying the flagship Super Mario 64 title for their new hardware with frequently disappointing results: The coders knew what they wanted to do, but the old tools were unwieldy and annoyingly unpredictable.

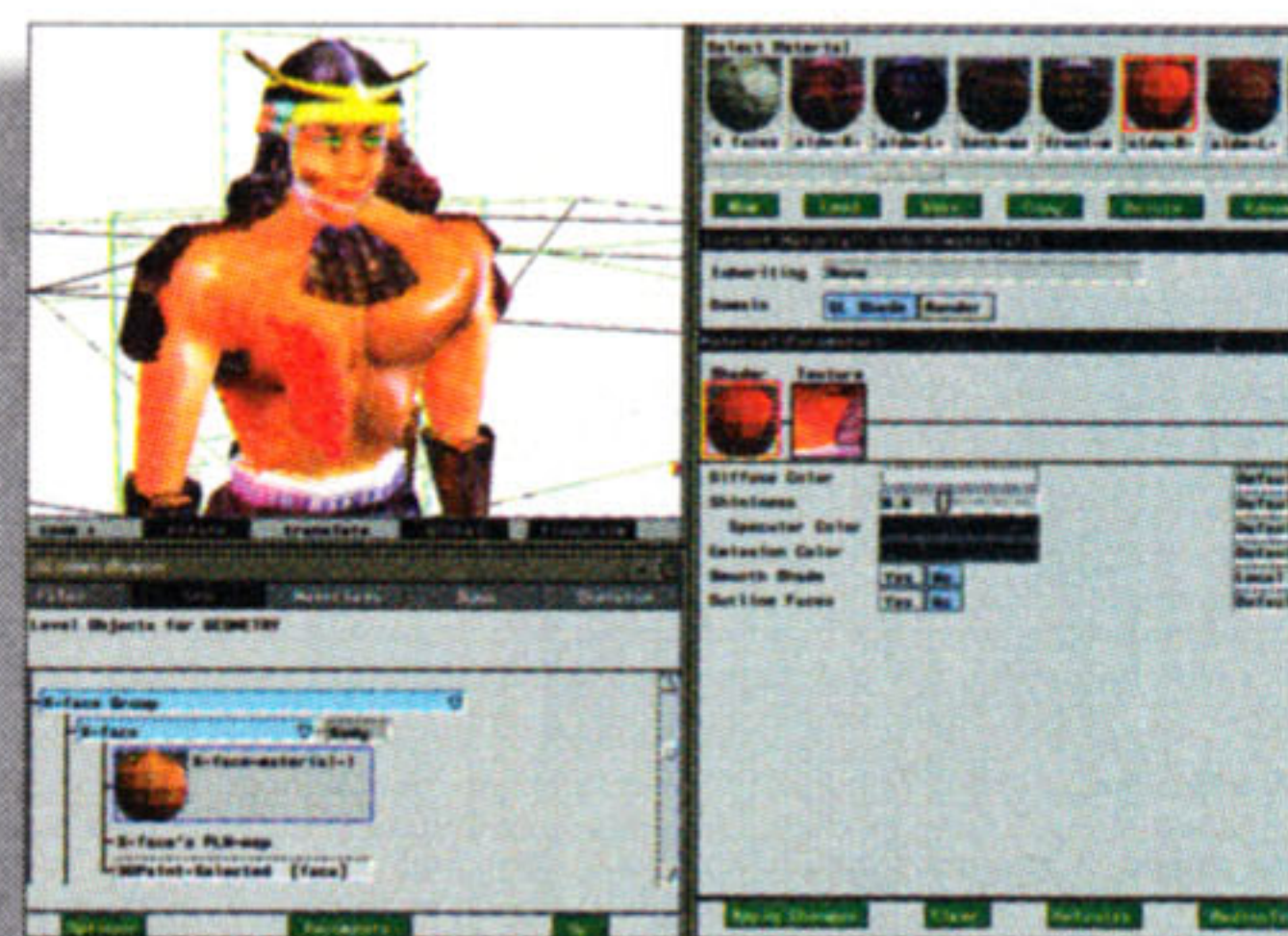
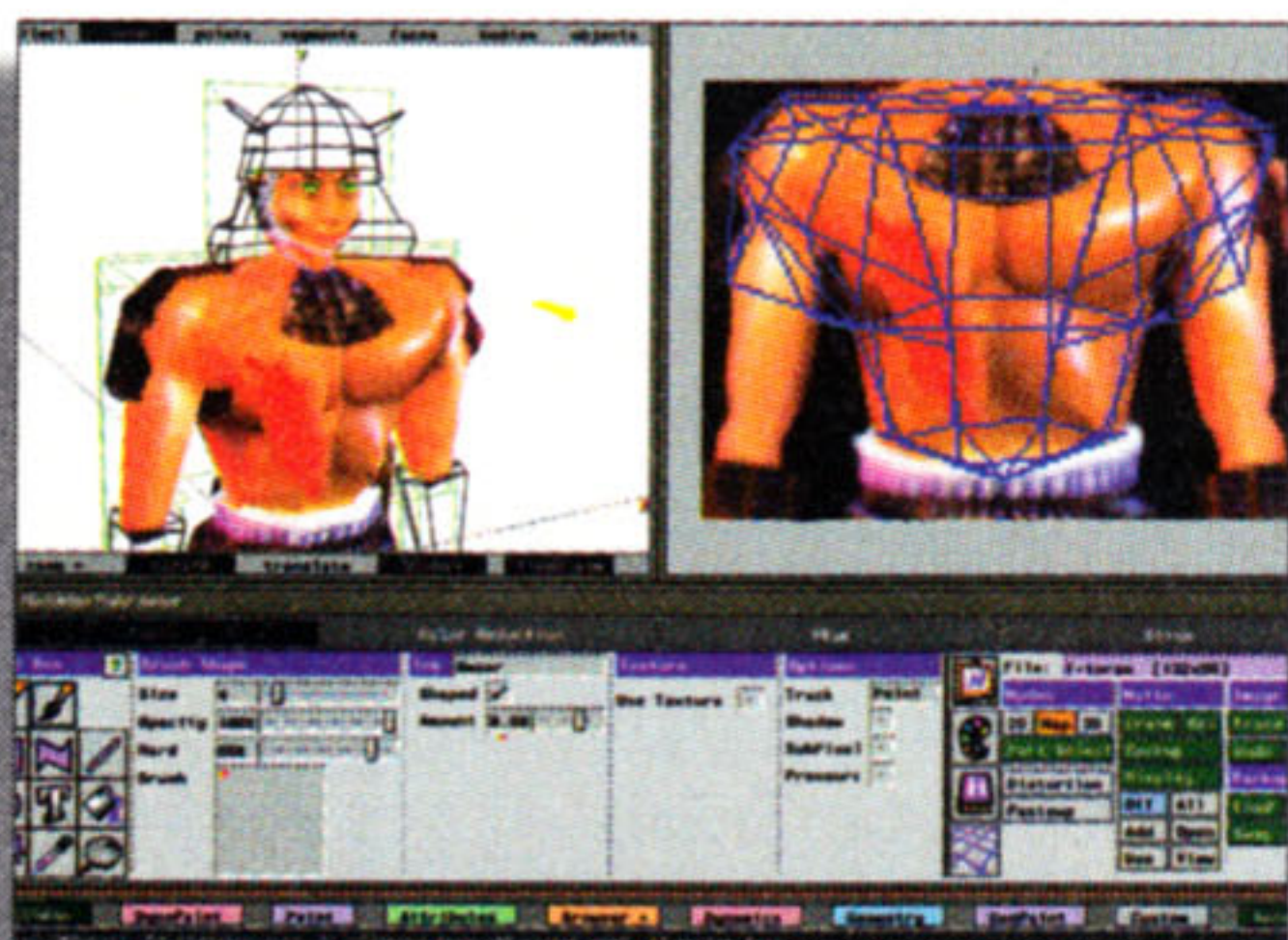
That’s the point at which Miyamoto’s team quietly decided to use Nichimen’s N-World software to finish development of Super Mario 64. As Nichimen Graphics Inc. President and CEO Koichi Kobayashi told *IG*, “Nintendo was looking for a good polygon modeller to create 3-D environments for their games, especially for character creation. They were using other software products and found out the polygon modeller in N-World was the best match for their development needs.”

How did Nintendo respond when it discovered that its finest programmers had to use special software outside of the recommended development tools to create their most important title? In a number of ways, especially considering the fact that their release had already been delayed and that longer-than-anticipated software development times were being blamed for the shipping slowdown.

Following Miyamoto’s initial successes with the new tools, the little-known Nichimen Graphics was formally asked by Nintendo in March 1996 to help them reduce the time it would take to develop N⁶⁴ titles. Nintendo’s enlistment of Nichimen followed a report in



From the top down, the Samurai’s various stages of development from early wire frame model to completion, featuring applied N-Paint, Render and Geometry special effects.



These images are polygonal models in the midst of development on Nichimen’s workstation-based N-World software. (See *IG*’s FUSION, issue 8, for a full description of rendering.) On the left an object is displayed in shaded mode in N-Geometry. Applied maps are laid over the images to serve as reference points as different light and color effects are applied to the models in progress.

N-World 3.0: The Game Creator

Nichimen Graphics unveiled version 3.0 of their N-World package at E³, complete with a variety of new tools and enhancements provided from Acclaim’s technology transfer which they claim will make the software “a total solution for game content creation.”

One of the key features included with version 3.0 is an integrated color reduction system, a feature which was requested, according to Nichimen, by a number of game designers—it allows a developer to color reduce one image or a whole sequence of images to make easily compressed or stored sprites, 2-D backgrounds for 3-D games, or rendered sequences. Other features include an advanced polygon modeller; a texture-map painter that allows a designer to paint textures onto a model’s surface, as well as a Skeletal Animation System that provides developers with the opportunity to load and edit motion capture data from companies such as Acclaim, BioVision and Motion Analysis.

However, the most significant features included with 3.0 are within Game Express, a tool for 3-D artists who want to instantly preview their models and animations just as they will look on a target platform (PlayStation, Saturn, N⁶⁴, PC, M2). Game Exchange provides programmers with the opportunity to take animation data as well as object and texture data and convert it into any platform desired, providing game developers with a simple method of porting games from one platform to another—this is a key feature for multiplatform developers who want to bring their new 3-D game to many machines quickly. Plus, the Nichimen Graphics software provides a sample library of all sorts of high level and general purpose 3-D character engines (with source code) for all the different hardware platforms, designed specifically for 3-D character animation. Another key feature provides developers with the opportunity to customize the N-World software to any level of detail.

Says Barton Gawboy, “At the 1995 E³ show, Acclaim was showing off a technology that allowed a developer to create something on one platform and easily port it over to another format. Obviously we were interested in this and it became part of the exchange. We already had the tools to make this a feasible thing because Acclaim did their first rendition of this multiple platform engine by extending our software, which they’ve been using now for over three years.”

“This feature is our goal,” adds Gawboy, “Of course, it isn’t a magic push of the button, as nothing in this industry is. But what we try to do is make it easier by leaps and bounds than anybody else can.”

The N-World software itself revolves around being an open technology, where users are able to customize their copies of the software by adding specific routines, add-ons or plug-ins to go along with the standard code of the program—this approach is something that Alias is also aspiring to with their upcoming Project Maya software. Says Gawboy, “You can change functions and modify the system, so we are the most open system out there and it’s a good match for the game development market.”

▶ Matt Navach (right) works on Nichimen promotional materials with N-World.



▶ Maija Beeton (far right) works with N-World 3D Paint using object preparation for attaching several body pieces into one.



the Japanese daily paper *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* noting that Nintendo was looking to reduce the development time on their games by between 30 and 50 percent; the report went on to say that Nichimen was going to send three engineers to Nintendo of Japan's Kyoto headquarters to provide technical support for developers plugging away on various N⁶⁴ software projects.

Suddenly, one month later, Nichimen Graphics and Nintendo signed an authorization pact to provide Nintendo, its developers and licensees a customized suite of computer graphics products specifically targeted for N⁶⁴ development. "To meet Nintendo's needs," said Kobayashi, "we developed an N-World module specifically designed to preview content on the N⁶⁴ so developers can instantly preview models, textures and animation in realtime." For the layman, game programmers could now use the Nintendo⁶⁴ hardware to test out and perfect the polygonal characters they had created on SGI workstations.

Having provided Nintendo with what it

needed, Nichimen's industry importance has continued to grow steadily as their software has been adopted by a host of other key game creators, including those working on projects for Matsushita's M2. At best, Alias/Wavefront's software currently supports the big three while SoftImage and SideEffects software is being used for Sony and Sega platforms. As

one of the world's leading multiplatform publishers, Acclaim considered the breadth and depth of Nichimen's software expertise when it announced that it would be combining resources with Nichimen Graphics in a highly touted technology agreement.

The announcement, which was made just one week after Nintendo signed with

Nichimen, saw Acclaim's proprietary 3-D character engine technology (software which has been under development by Acclaim's Advanced Technology Group for over three years) included within NGI's N-World 3.0 toolset, allowing "game developers to animate 3-D characters in realtime more easily than ever before across a variety of platforms including Sega Saturn, Sony PlayStation, N64, M2 and the PC."



Where The Nichimen Came From

According to Kobayashi, it was just over 10 years ago when the Nichimen Corporation, a \$60 billion trading company in Japan, started doing business with Symbolics, a company focused heavily on artificial intelligence based on various technologies from MIT's laboratories. The company manufactured a proprietary hardware/software system that was used in everything from defense research to automating the manufacturing of steel.

Says Kobayashi, "At the time, Symbolics also had a graphics division which was solely focused on computer graphics software. Nichimen Corp. was the exclusive distributor of the Symbolics system, so they also established a subsidiary called Nichimen Graphics. However, Symbolics in the United States highly depended on defense research with a project called DARPA. Due to the shrinking budget cutbacks of such advanced research projects in the defense field, Symbolics unfortunately died as a company."

Meanwhile, over in Japan, the Nichimen Corporation and their subsidiary Nichimen Graphics were still marketing the Symbolics system rather successfully. According to Kobayashi, who at the time was general manager and director for the Nichimen Graphics Corporation in Tokyo, NGC eventually evolved to the point where "instead of throwing away the business of Symbolics, they (Nichimen) acquired all of Symbolics' computer graphics technology and hired a lot of people for Nichimen's graphics division."

Asked how the company became involved with the electronic entertainment industry, Kobayashi responded that "with the release of advanced gaming systems in Japan like the

PlayStation and the Sega Saturn back in 1993-1994, we believed it was a wise time to establish a company focusing on the video game industry by the function of software development, support and sales. As a result, our company started on April 7, 1995."

With a vision to solidify his company's position as the "leading tool provider for the next generation of video games," Kobayashi was responsible for quickly initiating a number of business relationships for NGI including Sony Computer Entertainment and Nintendo. Says Kobayashi, "Right now, 400 copies of the software are being used in Japan. Of course, Nintendo is one of our biggest customers, but also Sony Computer Entertainment and software developers like Square, who are using 65 licenses for Final Fantasy VII for the PlayStation."

With a new office in the heart of Los Angeles as well as the Nichimen Graphics Corp. in Japan, Kobayashi and Director of Software Development Barton Gawboy set off with a team of two salesmen (Bill Clark and Mark Graffam) to convert U.S. software developers

"Nintendo was looking for a good polygon modeller to create 3-D environments for their games... N-World was the best match for their development needs."

— Koichi Kobayashi
president and CEO
Nichimen Graphics



▶ Nichimen Graphics Development Staff at Corporate Headquarters in Los Angeles



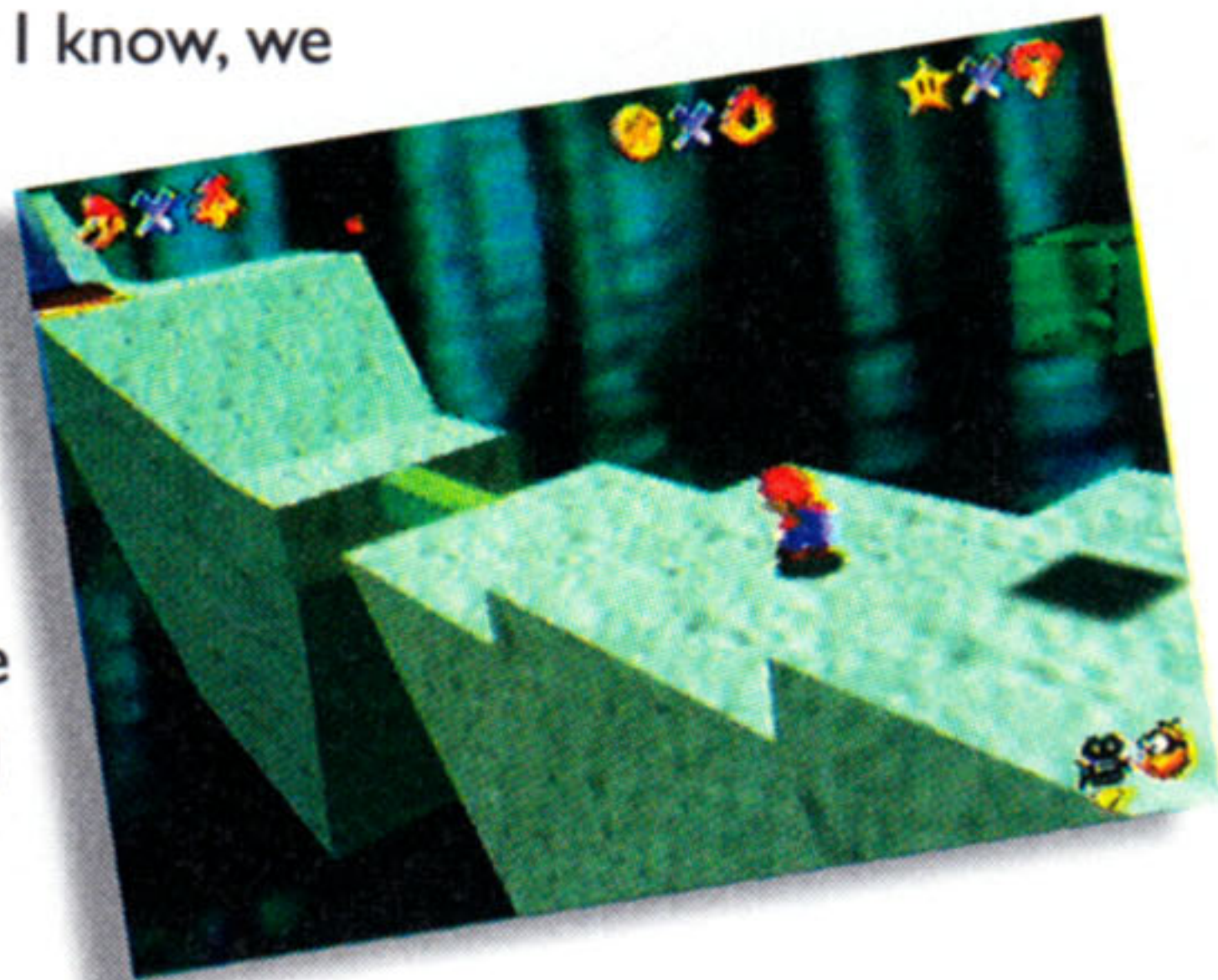
into using the Nichimen software. But don't think for a second that this brand-new outfit was set to target America blindly. With a powerful sales team in place, as well as Kobayashi's experience with Sony and Nintendo in Japan and Gawboy's background in research and development of Mattel Electronics' hand-held games, Intellivision video games and electronic musical instruments, just about anything was possible.

NGI has a single market focus: interactive entertainment. While Nichimen's competition look to the film industry for supplemented revenue, Nichimen feels the game industry is starving for tools made strictly for games, not just particle-rendered air bubbles coming from submarines (as seen in *Crimson Tide*) or smoke trails from air-to-ground missiles (from the movie *True Lies*). Says Kobayashi, "We're just focusing on the game industry, in our sales, our support and development. It's our company policy. As far as I know, we are the only graphics company just focusing on video games. It's a significant difference from the other companies."

The other half of Nichimen's success to date has been their unwavering commitment to customer support, an element of development tool sales that many companies neglect. Says Barton Gawboy, NGI's director of software, "because we're involved in a number of different areas, we can understand when a customer asks us about something and we already have a general vision or scope of the overall process. We understand the things they need and we can provide them the kind of tools to help match the process." He adds, however, "Of course, it depends on the problem, but our support line can usually give help right away."



▲ Shigeru Miyamoto



Miyamoto Speaks on the Development of Mario 64

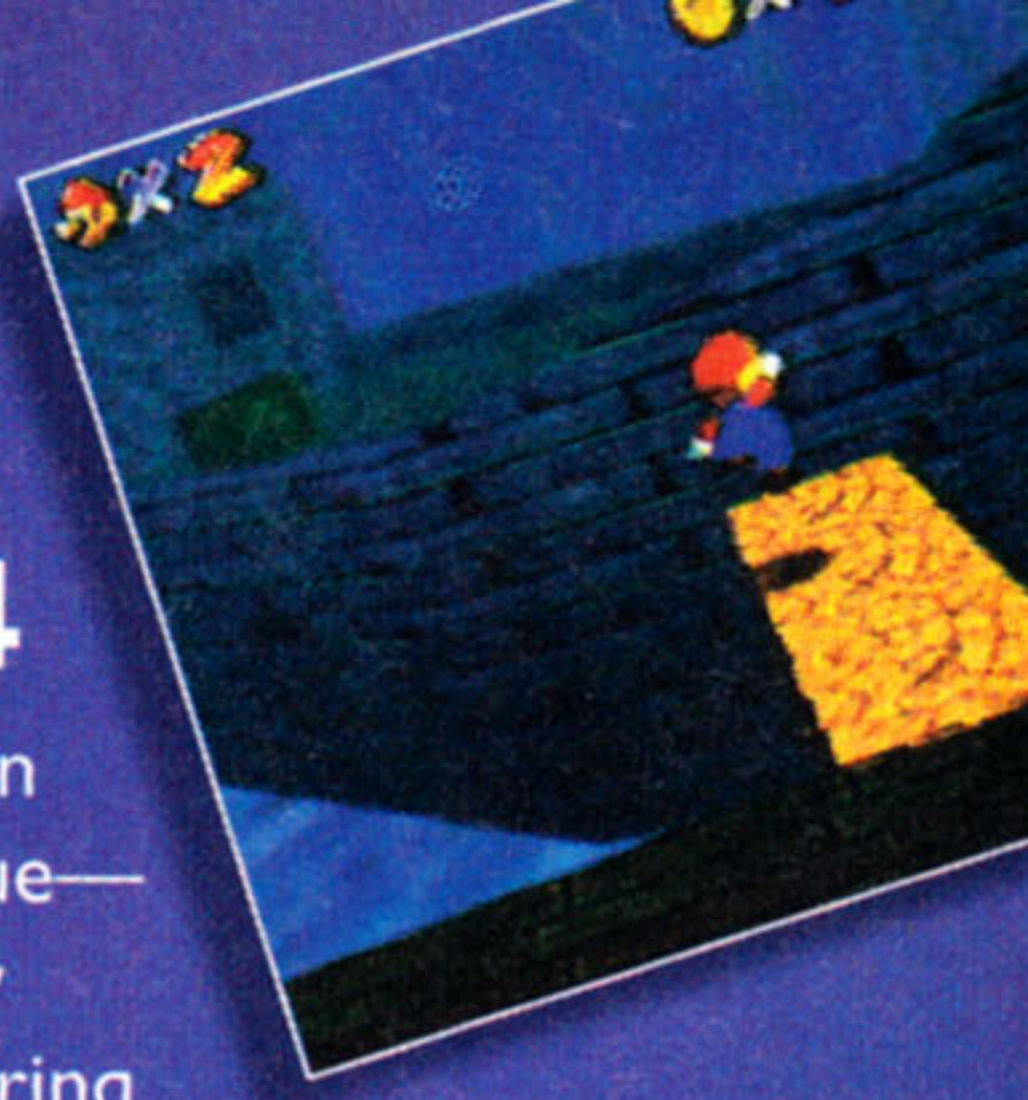
As the master game creator behind Nintendo successes from Donkey Kong to Super Mario to the Legend of Zelda, Pilotwings and F-Zero, Shigeru Miyamoto's name has become synonymous with both the Nintendo product line and the simple word "fun." Though the majority of his games seemingly fit into product niches such as "platform game," "adventure game" or "simulation game," millions of his fans worldwide would be the first to explain that his titles have transcended those genres and become benchmarks by which most other companies' games are now judged. Sega strove for years to find a "Mario" and a "Zelda" before players embraced their Sonic and Phantasy Star games, but even though those titles have given the company considerable recognition value in Western markets, the Japanese (and to some extent hardcore gamers elsewhere) have never latched on to the Sega flagships with quite the same gusto as they have Nintendo's.

Part of the secret to Miyamoto's success has been his acknowledgment that his games are played by gamers of all ages and skill levels. Beginning his question and answer session with the games media, Miyamoto explained that one of his goals with Mario 64 was to make the game fun for not only game enthusiasts but also less experienced players as well. To that end, though some of the game may be easy to play, the real depth will be discovered by players who spend the time to investigate its secrets.

When asked about difficulties in translating Mario's 2-D action into a 3-D world, he noted that the

camera's location was a major issue—since you're now behind Mario during the game rather than looking at him from the side, it's difficult to see all of the obstacles that might be some distance left, right and above. He predicts that players will need to get used to the premise of having a camera to control, but will find it useful once they have mastered the control of the Mario character. On the other hand, he confirmed again that he is indeed working on a Yoshi title which would be largely in 2-D and could appeal to players if there is ever a backlash against 3-D action titles. In addition, he noted that his future efforts would be focused on finishing up Wave Race 64, StarFox and Mario Kart R in addition to getting The Legend of Zelda 64 ready for its Shoshinkai debut. Mario Team will continue, as it has in the past, to work on concepts for a Super Mario 64 sequel, which Miyamoto predicts is still at least a year and a half away.

On the development side, half of the 40-person Mario Team was devoted to working on tools and code support for the creative designs that were being put together. Mr. Miyamoto noted that people from Nichimen Graphics were brought in to Nintendo to provide technical support and assistance for both the company internally and third-party licensees facing development delays; this is notable in that programming for any new piece of sophisticated hardware requires specialized knowledge, and it appears as if Nichimen has what it takes to make developers' trains run on time.



Leading Nichimen into the Future

Now that some of the key players in the industry (Electronic Arts, Nintendo, Acclaim, Sega, Sony, Square and Boss) are already working with Nichimen Graphics tools to develop the latest crop of 3-D software, the company is expanding both its market presence and abilities by leaps and bounds. As Mr. Kobayashi put it, "Our mission is to develop good software, so we're constantly increasing the number of people who work for the development teams. Our customer support lines are a really important key to our success, so by keeping good support, we provide a lifeline for our customers."

Part of their expansion includes preparation for a 1997 release of a Windows NT version of N-World—a move which will enable even Pentium-equipped PCs to render high-quality animations and create wireframes for realtime 3-D models, tackling the latest release from Microsoft-owned SoftImage and Autodesk's NT-fueled 3D Studio Max. (SGI-owned Alias/Wavefront has yet to move into the NT market.) Kobayashi offers his own explanation. "I think it really depends on the company. Some developers love the SGI system while others prefer the PC. So, that's our plan—to provide an NT version alongside our existing SGI system by the middle of next year."



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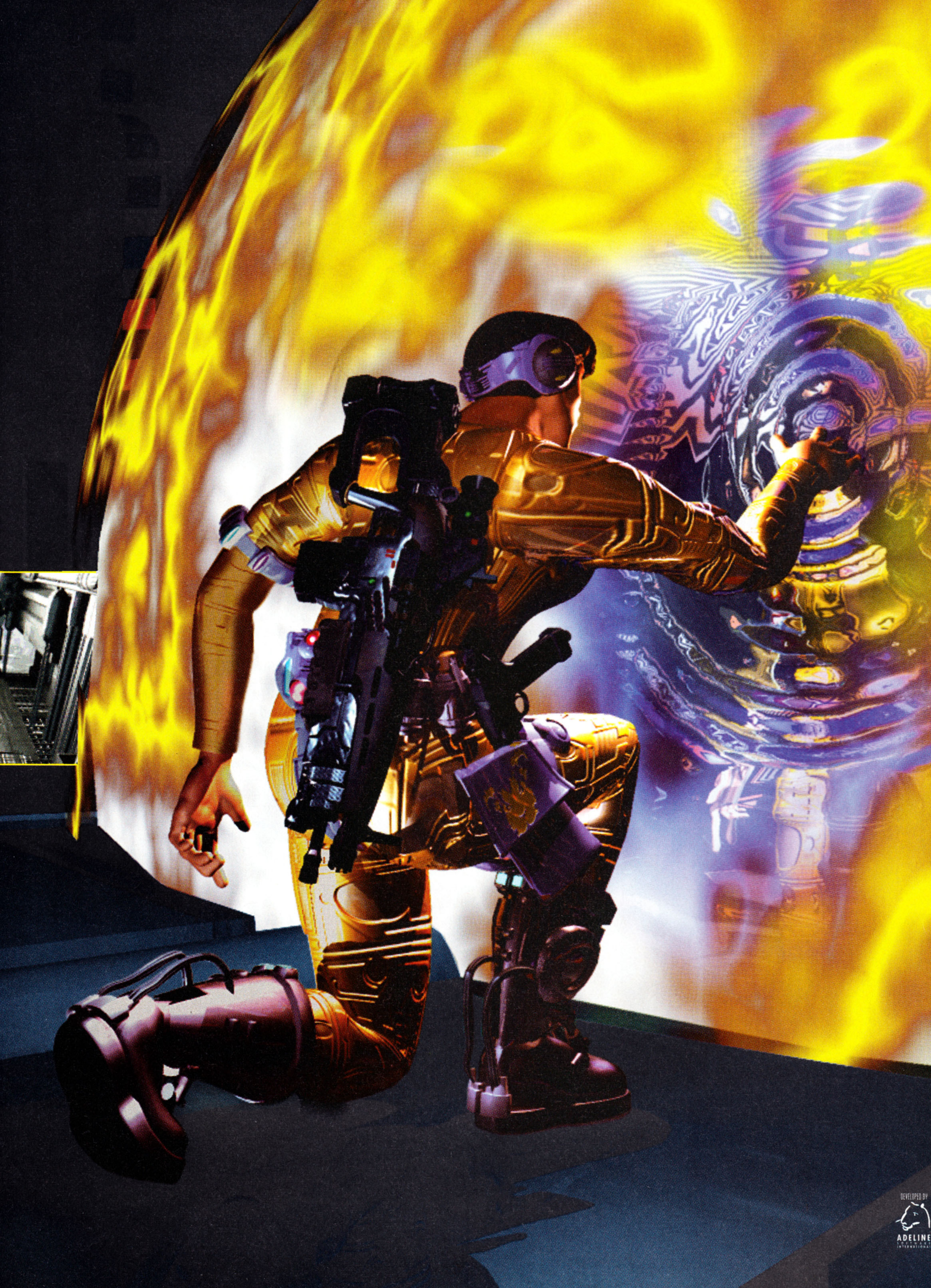


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ADRENALIN IS A RTM OF WIPE[OUT]||
F36HUNDRED ANTI-GRAVITY RACING "IT'S DAMN GOOD!"



Wipe

Few people remember Psygnosis as the company behind *Shadow of the Beast*, *Lemmings* and *FMV shooters*. With attention squarely focused upon their newest games, old guard titles such as *Lemmings 3-D* and *Novastorm* quickly faded into the background.

The futuristic hovercraft racing game *WipeOut* came into prominence primarily because of its exceptional audiovisual designs, the fruit of a combined effort between leading European graphics and music futurists. With its own internal knowledge of what made prerendered graphics special, Psygnosis designed tracks, hovercrafts and background scenery which looked nearly as good in realtime as they would when painstakingly rendered frame by frame on a high-end workstation. They also enlisted the services of logo and graphics specialist firm The Designers Republic in an effort to give the icons, fonts and displays a suitably realistic but futuristic tone, and brought in a handful of leading techno bands to provide some of the game's fitting synthesized music as a backdrop for the action.

Yet there were certainly ways that the formula could be tweaked and improved, and when *Intelligent Gamer* sat down with Psygnosis' sequel *WipeOut XL* at E³, 90 percent of our concerns had seemingly been addressed. As fast and fluid as *WipeOut* was, *WipeOut XL* does much more and slows down far less. Where *WipeOut* was occasionally difficult to control, even the early version of *WipeOut XL* is less annoyingly sensitive than its predecessor, despite the fact that the tracks have been given more hills and bumps and that your crafts thus are frequently bouncing all over the place.

As mentioned in our brief E³ preview of the game, *WipeOut XL* is just plain visually astonishing at times, and that fact will no doubt account for much of its popular appeal in the months to come. Spending time with Psygnosis for an in-depth playtest of the game, *IG* noticed that many of the best features added to the game were spot effects rather than radical changes: Previously, the game's hovercraft engines were animated with tiny flickering

flames, perhaps the game's least impressive visual effect. Now, as you and your opponents careen around the track at high speeds, glowing blue lights emanate from the engines of the crafts, remaining as a blur in the air long enough to allow both you and your opponents to see each others' flightpaths from a distance. Launching one missile has an impressive pyrotechnic effect where sparks fly from the rocket's engine as it glides through the air, and when projectiles connect with their targets, brilliant white circular pulses of light briefly illuminate the sky. Locking on with a weapon is now represented graphically with a dynamic spinning square that closes in on a target, leaving red and yellow ghost images behind. Rain falls from the heavens in three dimensions, using the PlayStation's transparency abilities to add realism to the precipitation, and thunderclaps are accompanied by bursts of lightning on the horizon.

The tracks themselves have improved conceptually, as well. Each course has an on-the-fly energy recharging pit lane; one of the playable stages we've seen has a futuristic suspension train running on a track parallel to the course, and others have more difficult turns (near 180s), jumps and obstacles. "Why would you



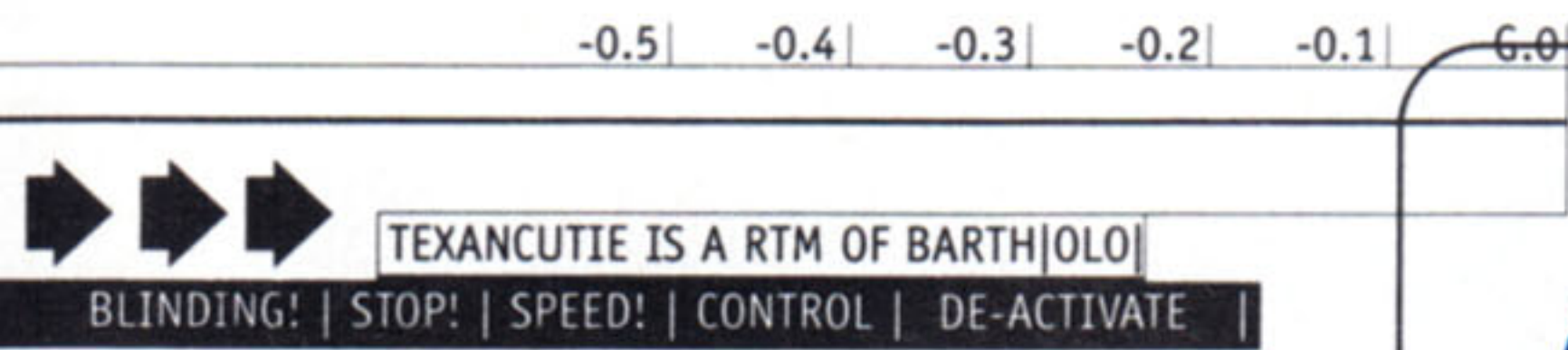
Responding to criticisms that *WipeOut*'s weapons were too similar to one another, *WipeOut XL*'s coders included a variety of new projectiles that vary dramatically in both aesthetic and effect. A widespread triple missile discharges with brilliant flashes.

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PIRANHA IS A RTM OF WIPE[OUT]||XL
F5THOUSAND ANTI-GRAVITY RACING "IT'S THE BEST!"



► From Revolution to Evolution



WIPEOUT XL

need a pit lane?" you ask, remembering WipeOut's simple combination of acceleration, air braking and weapon discharging. This time, your craft can actually be destroyed after sustaining multiple explosive hits, so you can recharge your energy by driving through the pit lane and picking up power in F-Zero fashion. By the same token, your opponents can also be destroyed, and since 12 crafts now begin the race rather than WipeOut's eight, you can perhaps cut the number of competitors down to six or seven by the end of a three-lap race.

Arcade-like elements now play a greater part in the game's design—instead of simply racing around the track until someone wins the race, you run out of time until you coast through a series of checkpoints to increase the digits remaining on your on-screen clock. Unlike WipeOut, where you were restricted to holding and using one weapon, you can now build up a collection of weapons and cycle through them to choose the best for a given situation. If you decide, hypothetically, to use your widespread triple missile attack, you can switch to it, launch, and then quickly shift to a Quake weapon which literally causes the entire surface of the track to ripple and sparking flames to fly through ships in your path.

Psygnosis' use of The Designers Republic continues to be both noteworthy and impressive: Logos for teams and in-game icons have the same sort of Japan-inspired futuristic design that helped to make the first game so attractive, and Psygnosis this time has taken it upon themselves to design menus and screens which not only better feature the DR artwork but go beyond what players have seen before. Menus which formerly just featured text and rotating 3-D logos are now designed to look like integrated moving chunks of metal, sliding on screen from opposite directions and causing sparks to fly as left component meets right. As a track is loading, a small progress bar at the bottom of the screen glimmers with sparks as it fills, proving that a little bit of extra gloss can often be all that is necessary to make even a "Please Wait" screen seem attractive.

Vehicle design has also changed for the better in WipeOut XL: Some crafts are long and narrow, others have twin noses and others largely resemble the ships from WipeOut. As expected, the various ship designs affect their handling characteristics and speeds, and the game's hidden Piranha team—much like the Lamborghini in Ridge Racer—whips through courses even faster than any of its adversaries.

Nick Burcombe, WipeOut's lead designer and creative wizard devised the original concepts of WipeOut in tandem with Jim Bowers, Psygnosis' senior artist. The idea was inspired from a number of movies, including the high-tech Japanese animated cartoons *Akira* and *Appleseed*, and the action sequences of *Top Gun* and *Days of Thunder*. Their goal was to create a futuristic 3-D racing experience combining Jim's sense of aesthetic with Nick's track designs—Burcombe designed all the tracks, which were drawn out with pencil and notepad before their translation into flat wire-frames, and he was also responsible for where the corners and elevations would be as well as where the jumps would be placed.

In the United Kingdom, WipeOut was a large-scale success for Psygnosis: The driving techno soundtrack was host to major label artists such as Orbital, the Chemical Brothers and Leftfield, not to mention Cold Storage (the pseudonym for Tim Wright, Psygnosis' in-house musical maestro), and the catchy design work of the Designers Republic (see sidebar) helped to give life to a number of related side projects. Disc jockeys at Swiss nightclubs apparently went so crazy over Wright's music that they were pressing 12" records from the WipeOut PlayStation disc; a clothing line and soundtrack have also helped to push sales of the game even further in the UK while helping to build up demand for the sequel, WipeOut XL.

While the game still did extremely well in the U.S., there were a few unfortunate problems. With the exception of Tim Wright's brilliant tunes, licensing problems prevented the other artists from appearing on the U.S. version of the game. Psygnosis even had to change the packaging of both the PlayStation and PC versions after several retailers and distributors complained that the Designers Republic metallic and symbolic imagery wouldn't make the game attractive enough for average consumers. The issue was later solved with more colorful slipcovers over the packages.



▲ The single most noticeable change from WipeOut to WipeOut XL is the latter's inclusion of truly incredible special effects. Explosions are pulses of white light. Anti-grav racers leave behind traces of brilliant blue energy. Weapons lock-on with spiraling LED flashes.

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PANDALUVN IS A RTM OF RALLY[LEE]
NO TIME FOR THE CHOCOLATE, SO BRING ON THE REST



New menu screens slide together from three pieces (top, bottom and center).



Bringing tomorrow here today?

"If you can't get around the track without touching the sides then you really are a complete imbecile. ...if you can make it around the track at the higher speeds without touching the sides, then you're inhuman. It's a good range and the ships are more controllable."

— Christopher Roberts
WipeOut XL Design Team

A look at the last few months of IG's Hot Top Ten will quickly tell you how much of a success Psygnosis' futuristic racing game WipeOut became: Since its release, it has remained steadily in our Top Ten list of favorites—something that has translated well at the retail level.

Similarly, a scan of several Internet-based video game news-groups also gives clear testimony as to what the online community feels about this unique title. One individual raved that "having a PlayStation and not playing WipeOut is like having a car and not going for fuel." Looking deeper, however, that message was quickly followed up by a massive thread:

"I personally can't stand the game," said one writer. "The graphics don't seem all that great to me. Didn't much like the pop-up either. The lack of sound effects when you're racing was annoying as well. Not to mention the sluggish controller response..." Another expressed more base emotions: "I think it sucks. I want to be able to destroy those goddamn racers. Twisted Metal is a MUCH better game." Judging by the fact that even history's most successful games have received user complaints, Psygnosis might well have opted to entirely ignore the nay-sayers and go their own way on a sequel. Not so with the creators of

the original game at Psygnosis' Liverpool, UK-based headquarters, who poured over the comments and complaints before proceeding on the sequel.

IG spoke with Christopher Roberts and Nick Burcombe, both on the XL design team, as well as Mark Day, Psygnosis' public relations liaison to discuss the new game and what has been done to address the complaints a number of people had about the original game.

IG: Let's get an obvious question out of the way: When did Psygnosis start working on Wipeout XL considering the rampant success of the original game?

CHRIS: Jan. 2 was the official start date on this project, right at the start of the new year.

IG: Unlike the original WipeOut, you've decided the sequel is quite a bit easier for beginners, right?

CHRIS: Well, there's more of a broad spectrum on the difficulty settings. The game starts off extremely easy and gets progressively harder. Actually, when you start the game, there are three different settings that you can play on. It's not like the first game where you were forced to start it up to play until you got to Rapier. This time we have three different

speeds from the beginning so anyone can come in at whatever level they want. And yes, we've got faster levels later on, for when people get the hang of it. The game's concept still remains; it's not a million miles from the original.

IG: We've seen plenty of very positive and negative messages posted on the Internet in regard to WipeOut. How many "the game is too impossible to play" remarks did Psygnosis receive?

CHRIS: Definitely lots. The slowest track we've got now, Vector, is so easy that if you can't get around the track without touching the sides then you really are a complete imbecile. But the opposite holds true: If you can make it around the track at the higher speeds without touching the sides, then you're inhuman. It's a good range and the ships are a lot more controllable.

IG: What makes them more controllable from the original game?

CHRIS: Well, compared to what we had before, the game is really nice to control and is a lot more tactile and responsive. I find myself flickering with the air brakes and the direction buttons more fluidly as well. I'm not a great fan of these sort of racing games but

A sequel by any other name...

WipeOut XL is the second "final" name for the sequel to last year's WipeOut, and one specifically selected for U.S. audiences. A play on both acceleration and "extra large," Psygnosis reportedly considered WipeOut XS "excessive" but decided against it because of its dual meaning "extra small," and nixed the European title WipeOut 2097 because it was supposedly overly sophisticated for the U.S. market.





Thunder Truck Rally

Thunder Truck Rally is one of Psygnosis' other vehicle simulation titles for 1996, this time focusing on what we would have to assume to be a very American subject: Where Destruction Derby focused on the appeal of "multiple car pile-ups," Monster Truck Rally is set to be one-half arena Bigfoot-style car crushing and one-half Baha-inspired off-road racing. Demonstrations shown to date focus upon your standard mud pit arena complete with junked cars to roll over and crush, and simply spotlight the PlayStation's ability to place high-quality textures on a number of polygons at once. The other noticeable graphical bonus is a sweet little lens flare effect—what you see when the sun or another light source shines in a manner that casts circles of light in a straight line that shifts with the viewer's position.

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▶▶ THE HONKY IS A RTM OF INT[GAMER]||
THE BLUM-MAN'S BETTER THAN CHEESE ON YER CHEST



I like this one. It's like football games, I don't like them but there's a couple I really don't mind playing. This version of WipeOut is nice and just feels right compared to the first one. As far as I'm concerned, it's in a different league. The first one was really sluggish and I ended up getting frustrated with it quickly. But I think that's because I've been working on this one for so long that I was expecting the first one to play in the same manner.

IG: Did Psygnosis respond to feedback from fans of the first game by creating this version?

CHRIS: Sure, we took a serious look at what people had to say. In fact, we had a little list circulating of all the major gripes that people had, the major things that we could look at changing. I know we got a lot of complaints about certain elements in the first one, like a lack of rewards at the end of races. Over 90 percent of the feedback got dumped straight on

Nick's desk. Nick gets the stuff and he tells us what to change. He's sort of got editorial control when it comes to that department.

IG: Let's talk about the game itself. We've heard about six to eight new circuits, does this include a couple hidden ones?

CHRIS: We all felt that some hidden factors were really important, so yes, there are several hidden tracks in the game. Some are in Venom and Rapier, which are accessible from the start. We also have Phantom, which is sort of like how Rapier was on the first game, but Phantom is much faster though; I guess you could say it's twice the speed of the original Rapier. Because the ships are much more controllable this time around, though, I can't play it on any other speed.

IG: Some of the early press releases and articles written on XL indicate the game will only have 12 ships to compete against.



▶ Nighttime racing has never looked so good on a home console. Detailed bridges and moving suspended transports give levels an arcade-like flavor, and improved iconography (note the redesigned power-up logos at each picture's center) adds some color to the top of each screen. Will you be able to find the rain code?

At E³ we were told that there's a total of 15 ships. What happened to add three more?

CHRIS: Basically, if you play any track at the lowest three speeds, you'll only get 12 ships on the track at the same time. At Phantom level, the game goes up to 15 ships but... (pausing) I really can't say the reason why. Suffice it to say that there's a very good reason why three more ships have been added to the Phantom level.

IG: Can you tell us how the energy bar works?

CHRIS: Simple really. If you get hit by a weapon, your energy goes down. If you hit a ship or get hit by a ship or hit a wall, your energy also goes down. Basically, if you get into any collision scenario you lose energy, which you can replenish in a pit lane similar to Nintendo's F-Zero. Obviously, the pit lane is a little bit of a longer route than following the main track. The added difficulty of actu-

ally getting in and out of the pit lanes isn't all that bad at the slower speeds but when you get up to Phantom, it's sort of necessarily more tricky. Enemy ships also explode after you take out their energy, but they can also go into the pit lane, which is mildly irritating especially when you've got some geezer down to almost no energy and then he just veers off into the pit.

IG: If you go through the pit lane slower, does your energy get more of a boost? If you blast through the pit, you may not get as much?

CHRIS: Correct, the pit lane is adjusted for different racing classes so that when you fly through at Phantom you get the same back as when you fly through at Vector. Just getting in and out of the pit lane at Phantom is hard enough.

IG: What about the weapons in the game? The track rippler weapon is really amazing. Who came up with that one?

CHRIS: I did actually. That one really thwacks everything. It's called Quake and it's extremely simple to program and implement, ▶▶



▶ A brand-new industrial stage features all of the wonderfully rounded edges one would pray for in a WipeOut sequel, plus a racing surface that hardly resembles dirty asphalt.



Destruction Derby 2

Mentioned in our E3 coverage, Psygnosis is returning to the Destruction Derby with an improved graphics engine and a set of user-suggested changes that may well make the sequel even better than its predecessor. Last year's game restricted car smashing to simple 360-degree spins—Destruction Derby 2's more accurate car suspensions and polygon handling make it possible for your car and opponents to bounce up and down, flip over and take damage in places you might never have thought possible. Widened roads, huge hills with car-vaulting jumps, tens of cars on screen without slowdown and Daytona USA-style track designs make even the early revision of DD2 look more like an arcade title than one for a home console.

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DeNDO HAGER LIKES SPICY BEEF|STIX|
IF U WAN' BUST A RHYME, YOU CAN BE OUR 1ST GUEST



"Aside from Tim's new tracks, you can expect new songs from Future Sound of London, Chemical Brothers and three other tracks from...drum and bass artists." —Nick Burcombe



Crafts no longer come only in wide and long variants: Some ships have twin noses. Highlights of this stage include large billboards and the warm yellow and orange tones that came to grace this issue's cover.

really. I put it in almost four or five months ago but I can't remember what inspired me to do it. I guess it just seemed like a cool idea at the time.

IG: What about the other weapons?

CHRIS: We've got the rockets and the missiles which were similar to the first one, except they now follow the track. Also, you fire three rockets at once now instead of one...giving you a better chance of hitting things. We've been discussing adding a rear-firing missile, so you get your forward targeting as well as a signal saying you've locked on to a ship behind you, so you can fire backward.

IG: Does this mean a separate view as well?

CHRIS: No, no, no...it's just a little signal that you just respond to by pressing a button on the pad. Instead of firing forward, it goes out the back, making the game a lot more versatile. But I'm not 100 percent sure if it's staying in or not though. It may become a hidden weapon actually.

We've got a smart bomb, which is there for comedy effect more than everything because it makes a really cool sound when you launch it, and then it just explodes

with a pretty powerful radius. The plasma bomb has what I call "little fairies with little trails after them" flying down the track. It's a weapon that's extremely hard to hit with but it destroys a ship in one go. It's a big, streaky, starry, flashy thing. The weapon actually has a bit of a delay with it when you fire it.

IG: How so?

CHRIS: Well, when you press the fire button, you'll see a little counter on the screen. Once you've pressed it, you can't stop it from firing. You've got to sort of try and aim it during those few seconds and if you hit with it, it will blow up a ship completely. Quite good fun.

IG: What about the power-ups?

CHRIS: Some of the more interesting ones are Turbo and Energy Pack. The energy packs are cool actually, especially if you're really short on energy and you're miles away from a pit lane. It's a pretty handy thing to have. The power-ups are rather intelligent now, not like the irritating ones from the first game. For example, if you were at the back of the race and you pick up a shield, then what's the point of having the shield. The same holds true if you're right up

The Adventures of Lomax in Lemmingland

Though some at Psygnosis have tired of the seemingly endless variety of Lemmings titles that emerge from the company's development teams, they weren't counting on this title—a Lemming-based action platform game with a style reminiscent of Psygnosis' older Flink title and colorful graphical detail that puts Capcom's aged but similar Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts to shame. Multiple layers of parallax scrolling work together with a camera scaling feature which zooms in and out depending on your location, and the now requisite gratuitous scaling and rotation effects make frequent appearances as well.



MAKES A HEART GO UNDER
IT BETTER THAN THE 7th GUEST



at the front and you pick up a missile or you're at the back and you pick up a mine...that sort of thing. All the weapons selections are now based on your position in the race, which should make for a less frustrating game.

IG: So what you're saying is that the power-ups were redesigned in XL for strategic reasons?

CHRIS: It was said that there were far too many weapons in the original game anyway. I think the slightly fewer weapon icons in this version will give gamers the need to employ a bit more strategy. In other words, the effect of the weapons have been toned up but the quantity has been calmed down a little. It makes the game more interesting. Things like the plasma ball—that is a real pain in the ass to hit with but if you do hit with it, you've knocked a ship out completely and it's one less person to race against. Oh, there's also a "weapons off" mode in this game, where no one gets any weapons. It's just the race element because some people felt it would be nice to have that option.

IG: Aside from tweaking up the weapons and gameplay, there are also a number of environmental changes, like the blue streaks from the ships and the monorails that run alongside the track. What brought these about?

CHRIS: As for those streaks, well it was a flash of inspiration from those cool bikes in *Akira*, the movie. They came about from these dodgy little cone things [in *WipeOut*] coming from the back of the ship to look like a flame. Essentially they were a vertex on a model that we had the computer

wiggle about. It looked awful. So we stripped the code out and tried to come up with something else... and that's what was invented. I had to put some flares on the tail of the ship though to cover up the space between the ship and the blue streak. If you look really hard, you will be able to see it a little—it's like you've got this big strip coming off the back of the ship, which the flares almost cover up. As for the addition of scenery and the environment, like I said earlier, basic optimization of the original code allowed us to add all sorts of features. It got to a point though, there were some scenery features that we were discussing that would have been nice to put in, but couldn't be done. It's like the monorail thing, it started as a suggestion and we tried to get as many of those in as possible. We tried to get as much of the animated scenery in as possible, just to get all sorts of things moving.

IG: Any other major or minor changes in the game?

CHRIS: The droid pick up times are much faster now. You no longer have to wait to hover in mid-air while the droid flies over to pick you up when you miss a jump. We felt it wasn't a very sensible idea. So, the droids just discreetly appear above you and grab you fairly immediately. There's a few other things on the droid as well, like getting a turbo start off the droid as you're being dropped down. Unlike the original, you still stand a chance of winning a race if you get picked up by the droid. We also have a ghost ship feature on the time-trial option which basically records your motions allowing you to race against yourself to continually

Tenka (Temporary Title)

Adding a strategic element has become an increasingly used theme nowadays in *Doom* clones, and the soon-to-be-renamed *Tenka* pulls off that premise quite admirably. While improving upon the *Doom* engine by more impressively shading your surroundings, giving you greater freedom of movement (jumping/crouching/squat-running) and using entirely polygon-based enemy characters, *Tenka* puts you into hallways full of gunfire and allows you to figure out how you're supposed to burst into a nearby room to eliminate your would-be assailants. Other strategically placed obstacles (such as ceiling-mounted jets of flame and large physical barriers) force you to be careful when running through rooms, lest you incinerate yourself or miss a sniper hiding behind a ventilation shaft.



Not only can you jump the track in freezing rain, but you can also Quake the track and knock out opponents in the distance (center). A series of checkpoints have been established to pace the racing more like popular arcade racers, integrated smoothly into the refined polygonal background scenery.

improve your lap times. I think it's quite a cool idea.

IG: Musically, who's expected to appear in the game?

NICK: Aside from Tim's new tracks, you can expect new songs from Future Sound of London, Chemical Brothers and three other tracks from various UK-based drum and bass artists. I think one of them may be in a jungle style, but I'm not sure yet.

IG: How did some of UK's top techno artists become involved in the *WipeOut* projects?

Mark: When they were making the first *WipeOut*, an internal demo video was produced with a track from the band Prodigy. I know they wanted to have Prodigy do the first game but several contractual problems couldn't make this happen. So Nick, who's a big techno fan, and someone from the UK marketing office went around to approach several artists who they felt worked best for the game.

IG: Does the game support multiplayer networking?

CHRIS: The game supports the same two-player link option as the first, but you can have two player

with the computer ships on as well.

IG: Do you envision a third *WipeOut*?

CHRIS: I wouldn't mind doing it, personally. I'm sure they will but possibly not on the PlayStation. I don't know. We're getting pretty close to the limits we can achieve with the hardware at the moment. I think if we were to do anything more with this game, we'd probably have to start looking at a different platform.

IG: What's left to do with the game?

CHRIS: Hmm. Jim and Nicky have been putting the opening FMV sequence together for this game and are just editing it together right now. It's absolutely superb, stunning and really really professional. I know Nick and Jim have been working 24 hours a day trying to get it all composited and rendered but wait until you see it, it's amazing. Other than that, the game has just gone Alpha so we'll see what happens when it comes back from the testers. We'll probably add a few more tweaks and things and after that, it will be released.



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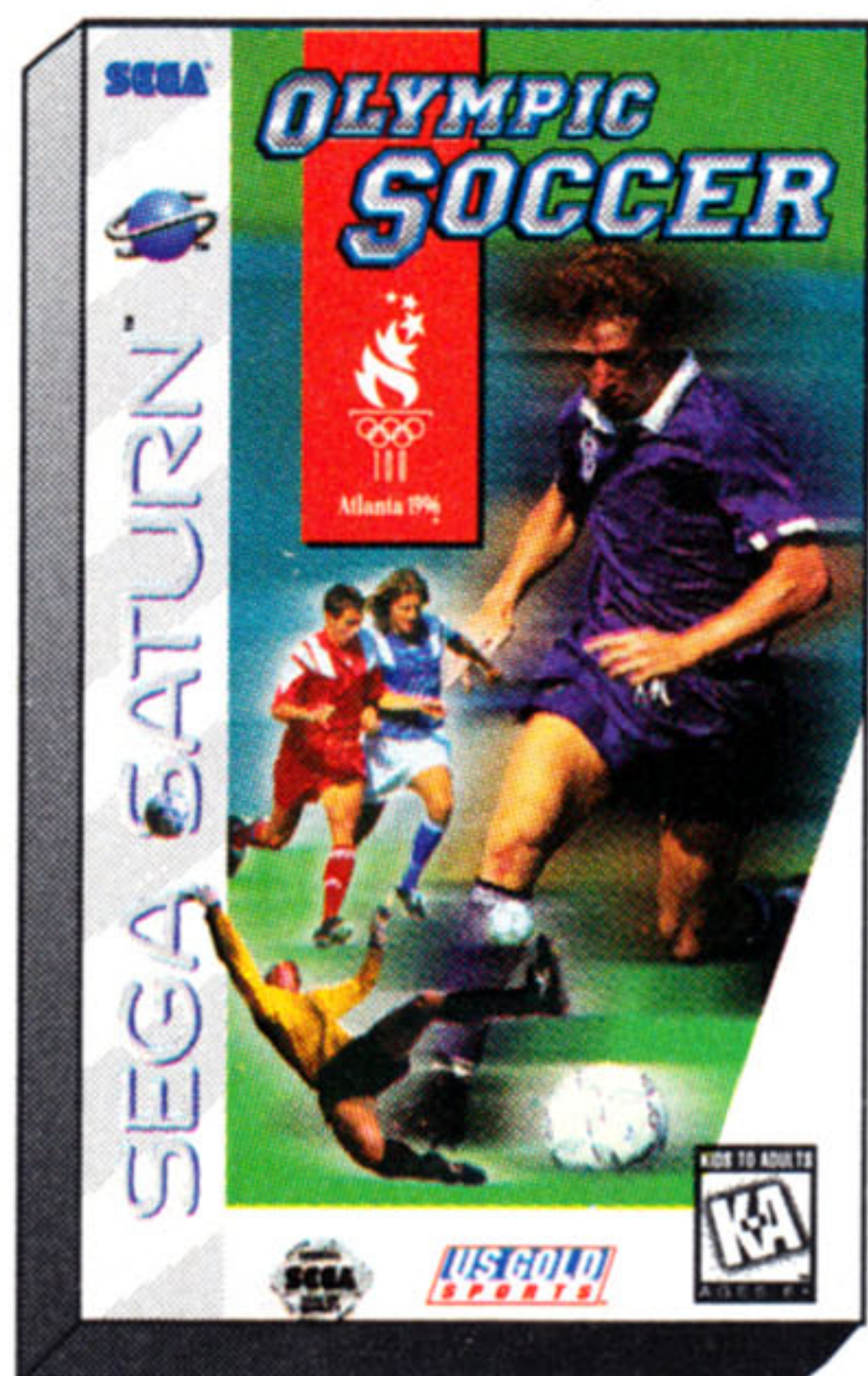
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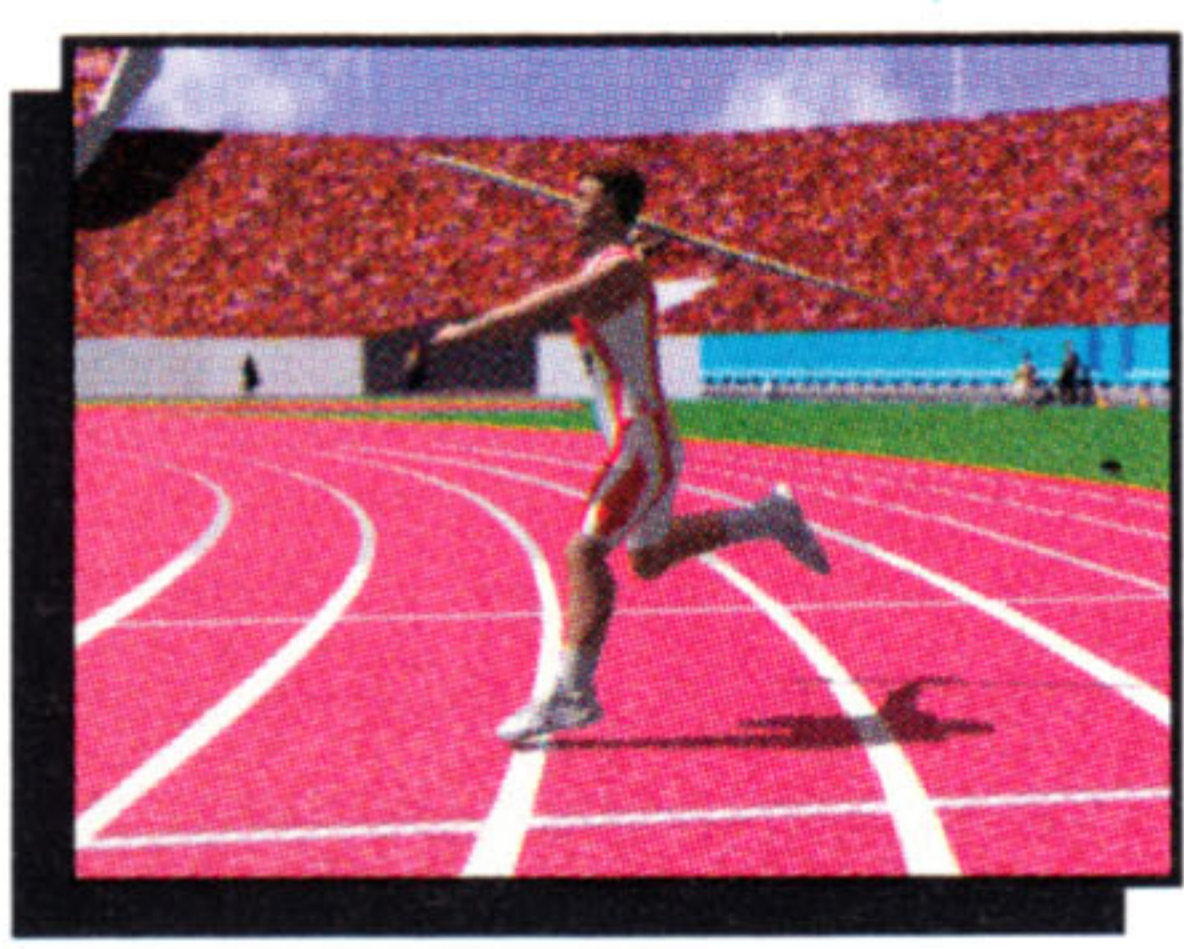


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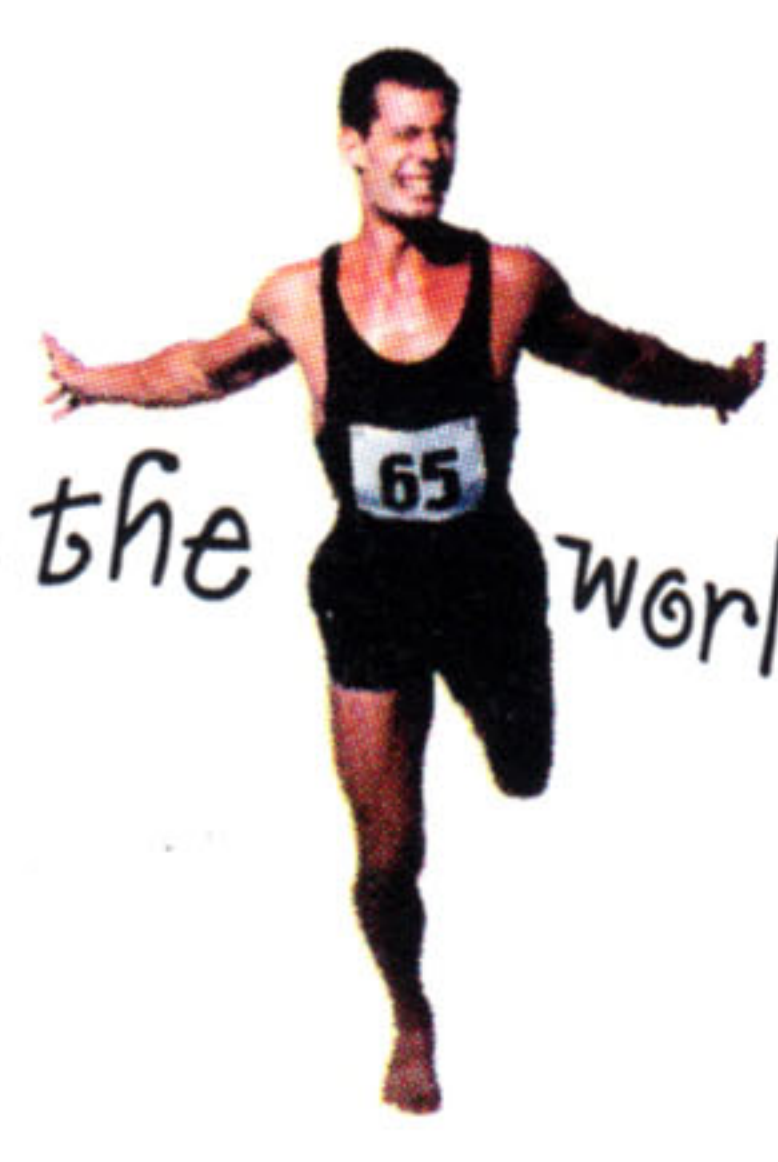


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T O Y

Tokyo

s h o w

IG's Akira Kishimoto dives into the annual Japanese toy show along with 40,000 other lucky people...

Strikers 1945 is a hot overhead shooter in the vein of Capcom's classic 1941/2/3 and 19xx shooters, complete with all of the vintage planes, explosions, battleships and cloud scenes that a hearty soul might expect from an old-fashioned shooter.

The Tokyo Toy Show had its annual showing from June 6-9 at the Makuhari Messe in Chiba, a prefecture next to Tokyo. There was much anticipation about the show after last year's success, and the estimated attendance for this year's event was 160,000 people—most of them members of the general public. Press, retailers and distributors were given the floor for the first two days, while the last two days were made open to the general public for a small charge.

All of the scheduled Sega summer software was on display, in addition to a considerable amount of third-party software. Sega's flagship title for the summer is NiGHTS, which you've already read about in IG, and they'll be selling a special white version of their new 3-D Control Pad so that players can have analog control of the game's characters. For the first time in recent memory, Sega has another hit on their hands without having to rely on their arcade teams. Their other big titles, Virtua

your character off the board a dozen times). Since the game will be on CD, Hudson has also created a new opening with animation that couldn't be done on the previous systems where Bomberman made appearances.

Several key 16-Bit ports will be making their way to the Saturn as well: Ogre Battle and Tactics Ogre will be distributed by Riverhill Soft with some cosmetic changes, but will maintain the same overall flow. A port of the Sega CD RPG Lunar, by Game Arts, has grown into a new project with many new additions, but still retaining the original

Hudson showed their version of Saturn Bomberman, and went public with a Nintendo⁶⁴ version slightly thereafter.

Amidst all this anticipation, however, the reality was not quite so spectacular. In the video game division, there was a poor showing: Sega had a huge booth and was showing their powerful lineup for the summer, but there was no hint of Sony or Nintendo at the show. The biggest developers to attend were Capcom, SNK, Namco and Takara, and as you can see, there were more than a few big companies that did not display their goods at the show.

Sega's booth was flashy and dominated the video game

Cop 2, Virtua Fighter Kids, Fighting Vipers and Dark Savior are previewed elsewhere in this issue.

Another title that was hyped for the Saturn was a new RPG, Rig Lord Saga 2, the sequel to the oft-renamed MicroCabin game Mystaria, which will probably appear in the States now as Blazing Heroes 2. Hudson was there to show their support of the Saturn with Saturn Bomberman: The same great Bomberman gameplay is there, but this time you can enjoy the game with up to nine other friends (or enemies, as the case may be, after they blow

Introducing...Guyferd?

Finally, another game will be able to use Sega's Virtua Cop gun: Hakaida Judgment, a fully polygonal 3-D shooting game starring the hero from a TV series that Sega is funding. They are hoping to break into the market that Bandai has a strangle hold on—the TV heroes that dominate the children's market. As to whether or not they will be successful is yet to be seen. An interesting thing to note is that Capcom is also attempting the same thing with a hero they have developed named Guyferd (right).



Finally—a sequel to one of the most challenging shooters in recent times, Assault Suit Leynos (a.k.a. Target: Earth) 2. A similar side-story sequel was released in Japan as Assault Suit: Valken (Cybernator in the U.S.)



story line. All these new additions have resulted in the game being delayed by over six months, but the results seem to be worth the effort. Thunder Force Gold Packs 1 and 2 from TechnoSoft will pack Thunder Forces 2 and 3 on one disc with Thunder Force 4 and the arcade version on another.

Capcom had an exciting booth for those people waiting for Street Fighter Zero 2 (Street Fighter Alpha 2). For the first time at a show, they had SFZ2 on display for all of the major platforms—PlayStation, Saturn and Super Famicom. It would have been great to hear about an N64 port, but neither Capcom nor anybody else for that matter had any N64 stuff on display even though the release date was only two weeks away. The PS and Saturn version seemed to be faithfully reproduced while the SFC version was surprisingly good. The only problem: The PS controller is hard to use when you have to try to push three buttons at once, and thus my nod goes to the Saturn pad and hence its version for this port.

A game that brings an old Capcom character back with a twist is Nazomakimura

Incredible Toons for the Saturn and PS. The Ghouls and

Ghosts gang appear in a port of the PC game Incredible Toons, with all the characters doubling as parts for a machine.

SNK did not have a lot in the way of new software, but the one big new release they announced was Samurai Spirits: Bushido Retsuden, an RPG starring the company's favorite characters. You can choose from six players—Haoumaru, Nakoruru, Galford, Cham Cham, Tachibana Ukyou and Kibagami Genjuro—to use as your persona in the Samurai Spirits world. Another big title that was a no-show was The King of Fighters '96, scheduled for an August release for the arcades.

Also at the SNK booth was ADK with their new fighter, Ninja Masters. Other titles from Saurus

were Shinoken and Choutetsu Bringaa. Shinoken is a 2-D fighting game that has motion-capture characters with some flashy graphics while Choutetsu

Bringaa is a side-scrolling shooting game with multiple scenarios. After these two titles, SNK had many of their old titles on display with their various ports to the other platforms, including Samurai Shodown 3 for the PS and Fatal Fury 3 for the Saturn.

Namco did not really have anything new on display for the show. They had many monitors running Tekken 2 and a tennis game; apparently they are having a slow summer with their current crop of titles. Now if only Soul Edge was there....

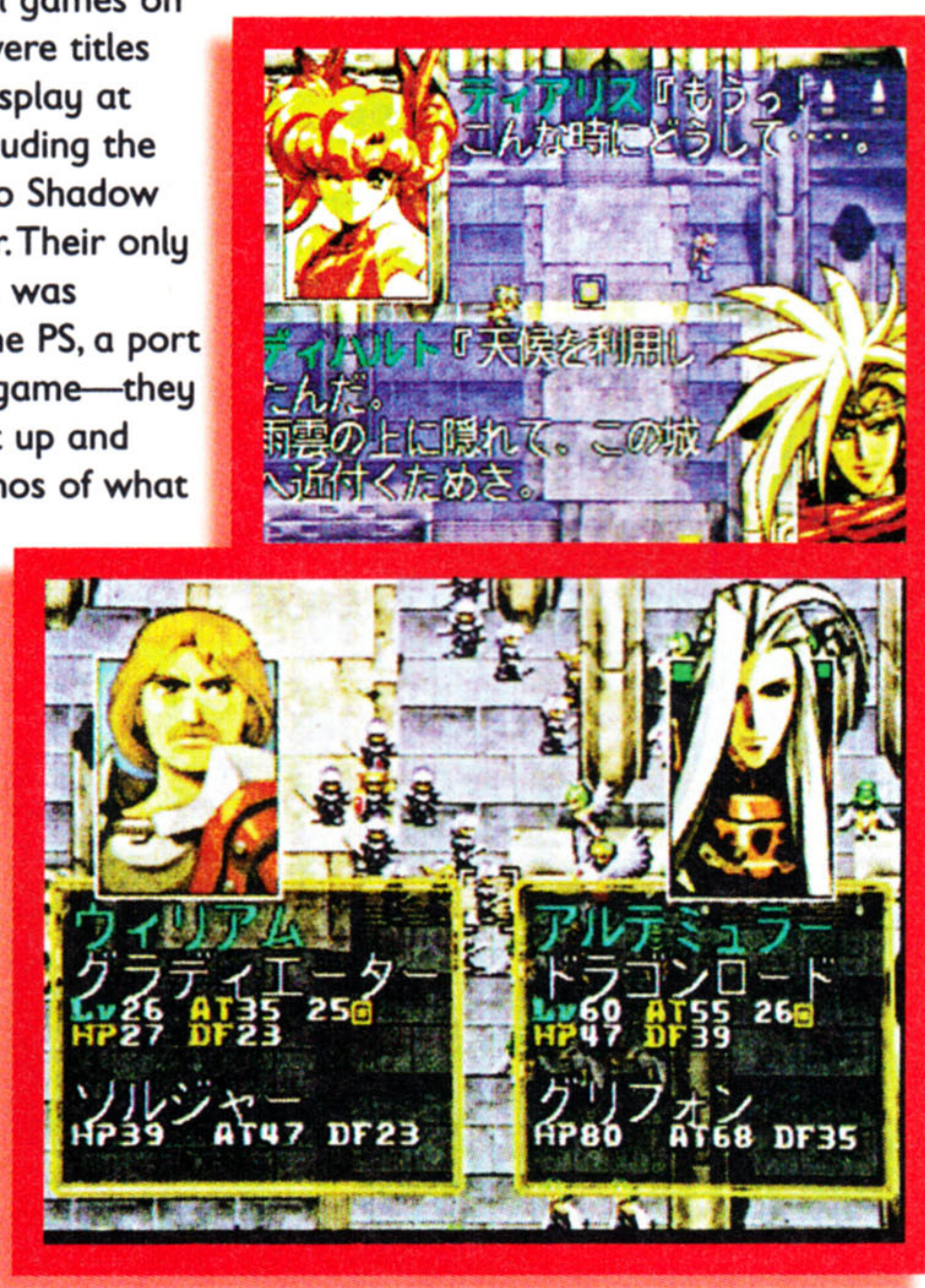
Taito had several games on display, but many were titles that they had on display at previous shows, including the much-delayed Tokyo Shadow and Energy Breaker. Their only new announcement was Psychic Force for the PS, a port of their hit arcade game—they had the arcade unit up and running, but no demos of what

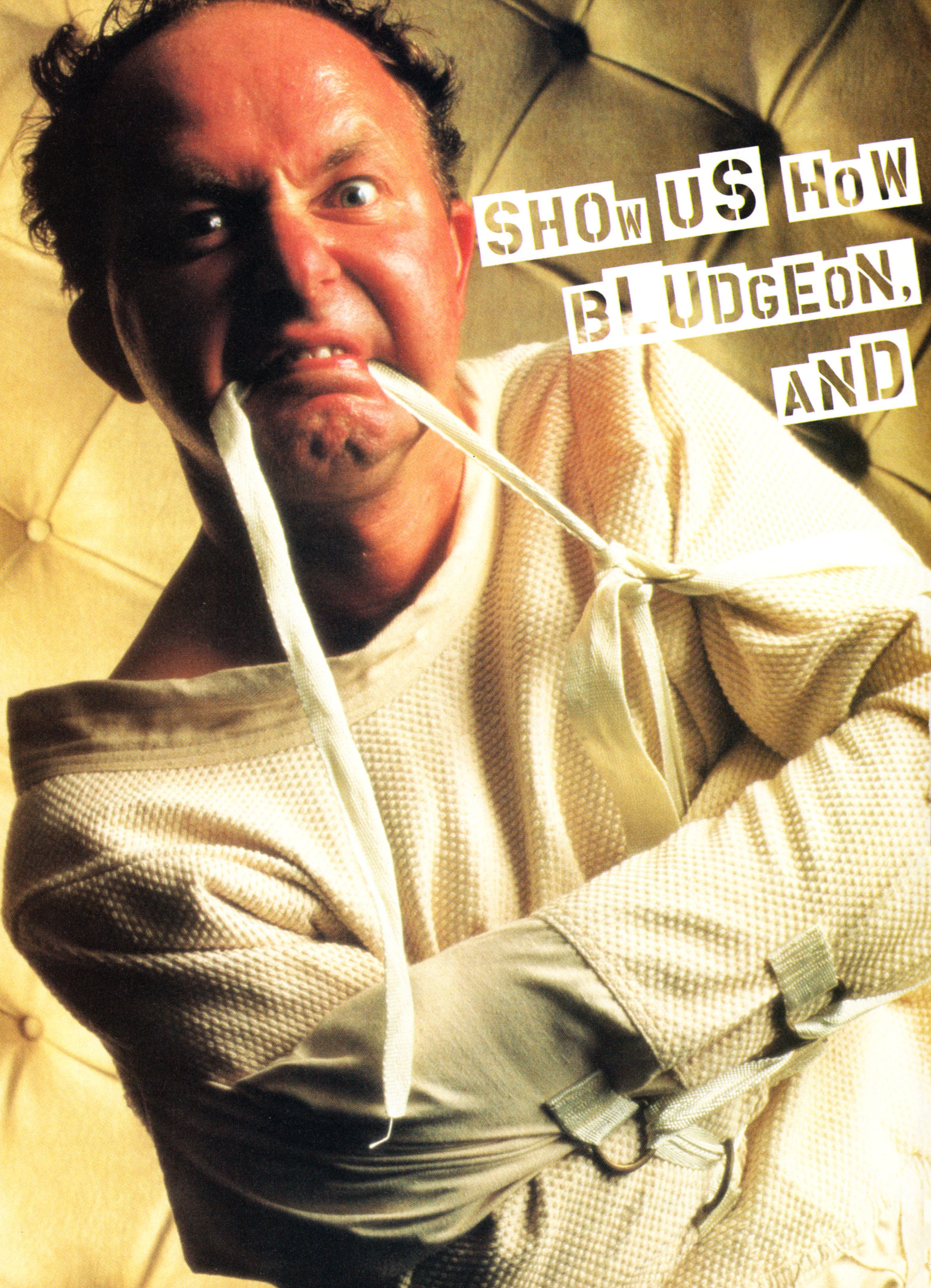
it may look like on the PS.

Masaya's Langrissier 3 and Leynos 2 for the Saturn were personal favorites. Langrissier 3 is back again as a simulation game, however for this installment, the action will take place in realtime—there's no turning back once you've made a move this time. Fans of Target: Earth and Cybernator—two terrific side-scrolling mech action games—will be overjoyed with the true sequel to the series, Leynos 2. The new twist in this installment is that the on-screen proportions will change depending on the weapon or situation; for example, long-range weapons will show more of the field of view while close-range weapons will make it almost seem like a fighting game.



Samurai Spirits: Bushido Retsuden (close left) is SNK's first RPG for the Neo-Geo. Saturn and PS ports have already been announced. Langrissier 3 is the second sequel to the hot strategy-RPG game Warsong, complete with 32-Bit quality high-res art.





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SEPTEMBER

- Body Harvest [Nintendo]
- Cruis'n USA [Nintendo]
- PilotWings 64 [Nintendo]
- Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire [Nintendo]
- Super Mario 64 [Nintendo]
- Tetrisphere [Nintendo]

4TH QUARTER 1996

- Blast Corps [Nintendo]
- Buggie Boogie [Nintendo]
- DOOM 64 [Williams]
- FIFA International Soccer 64 [Electronic Arts]
- GoldenEye 007 [Nintendo]
- Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball [Nintendo]
- Killer Instinct 64 [Nintendo]
- Kirby's Air Ride [Nintendo]
- Mortal Kombat Trilogy [Williams]
- NBA Hang Time [GT Interactive]
- NHL Open Ice [GT Interactive]
- Robotech: Crystal Dreams [Gametek]
- Super Mario Kart R [Nintendo]
- Top Gear Rally [Kemco]
- Top Gun: A New Adventure [Spectrum Holobyte]
- Turok: Dinosaur Hunter [Acclaim]
- Ultra Descent [Interplay]
- War Gods [Williams]
- WaveRace 64 [Nintendo]
- Wayne Gretzky Hockey [Williams]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

- Alien Trilogy [Acclaim]
- Bomberman 64 [Hudson]*
- Creator [Nintendo]*
- Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball [Acclaim]
- Freak Boy [Virgin Interactive]
- Hexen 64 [GT Interactive]*
- Mission: Impossible [Ocean]
- Monster Dunk [Mindscape]
- POD [Ubi Soft]
- Prey [Apogee]
- Quake 64 [GT Interactive]*
- Red Baron [Sierra On-line]
- Robotron X [Williams]
- Silicon Valley [BMG Interactive]*
- Soul Storm [Virtual Hollywood]
- StarFox 64 [Nintendo]
- Tarzan [Gametek]
- The Legend of Zelda 64 [Nintendo-64DD]
- Ultra Combat [GT Interactive]*
- Ultra Descent [Interplay]*

RECENT RELEASES

- Adidas Power Soccer [Psygnosis]
 - Aquanaut's Holiday [Sony CEA]
 - Big Bass World Champ [HOT-B]
 - Beyond the Beyond [Sony CEA]
 - Bogey: Dead 6 [Sony CEA]
 - Carnage Heart [Sony CEA]
 - Cheesy [Ocean]
 - Chronicles of the Sword [Psygnosis]
 - Crime Wave [Eidos]
 - Impact Racing [JVC]
 - Independence Day [FOX Interactive]
 - International Track & Field [Konami]
 - Johnny Bazookatone [Eidos]
 - Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
 - MVP Baseball [Data East]
 - Project: Horned Owl [Sony CEA]
 - Raw Pursuit [Impact Racing]
 - Sentient [Psygnosis]
 - SimCity 2000: Special Edition [Maxis]
 - Star Winder [Mindscape]
 - Steel Harbinger [Mindscape]
 - Storm [American Softworks]
 - The Final Round [Konami]
 - Topps MVP Baseball '96 [Data East]
 - Ultimate MK3 [Williams]
 - Wetlands [New World]
- ## AUGUST 1996
- 3-D Baseball [Crystal Dynamics]
 - Alone in the Dark II [T*HQ]
 - Bedlam [GT Interactive]
 - Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
 - Buster Bros [Capcom]
 - Darknet [American Softworks]
 - Die Hard Trilogy [FOX Interactive]
 - Grand Slam '96 [Virgin]
 - Jumping Flash! 2 [Sony CEA]
 - Major Damage [Capcom]
 - Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
 - Myst [Psygnosis]
 - Namco Museum Vol. 1 [Namco]
 - Project Overkill [Konami]
 - Project: Horned Owl [Sony CE]
 - Robo Pit [T*HQ]
 - Rocket Jockey [Rocket Science Games]
 - Shredfest [Electronic Arts]
 - Strike Point [American Technos]
 - Team 57 Goman [Coconuts]
 - Tecmo Golf [Tecmo]
 - The Adventures of Lomax in Lemmingland [Psygnosis]*
 - Time Commando [Activision]
 - VR Pool [Interplay]
- ## SEPTEMBER 1996
- 4X4 Gears & Guts [American Softworks]
 - Bubsy 3-D [Accolade]
 - Crash Bandicoot [Sony CEA]
 - Darknet [American Softworks]
 - FIFA Soccer '97 [Electronic Arts]
 - Final DOOM [Williams]

- Fox Hunt [Capcom]
 - Lethal Enforcers 1&2 [Konami]
 - Madden NFL 97 [Electronic Arts]
 - Mortal Kombat Trilogy [Williams]
 - MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
 - Namco Museum Vol. 2 [Namco]
 - Nascar [Sierra On-Line]
 - Power Pinball [Bandai Multimedia]
 - Powerslave [Playmates]
 - Revelations [Atlus]
 - Ridge Racer Revolution [Namco]
 - Soviet Strike [Electronic Arts]
 - Syndicate Wars [Electronic Arts]
 - Tecmo Stackers [Tecmo]
 - Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
 - Tekken 2 [Namco]
 - Time Commando [Activision]
 - Viper [Ocean]
 - Werewolf: The Apocalypse [Capcom]
 - World Martial Arts Corp. [Bandai Multimedia]
- ## OCTOBER 1996
- BallBlazer [LucasArts]
 - Black Dawn [Virgin]
 - Command & Conquer [Virgin]
 - Cyber Gladiators [Sierra On-Line]
 - Deadly Skies [JVC]
 - Destruction Derby 2 [Psygnosis]
 - Dream Team Basketball [Eidos]
 - Grid Runner [Virgin]
 - Herc's Adventures [LucasArts]
 - Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
 - HyperBlade [Activision]
 - Incredible Hulk [Eidos]
 - Major Damage [Capcom]
 - MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
 - NBA Hang Time [GT Interactive]
 - NHL Open Ice [GT Interactive]
 - Oblivion [Eidos]
 - Onside Soccer II [American Technos]
 - Rebel Moon [GT Interactive]
 - Street Fighter Alpha 2 [Capcom]
 - Street Racer [UBI Soft]
 - Top Gun [Spectrum Holobyte]
 - WipeOut XL [Psygnosis]
- ## 4TH QUARTER 1996
- 2 Xtreme [Sony CEA]
 - Alien Striker [Atlus]
 - Andretti Racing '97 [Electronic Arts]
 - Area 51 [Williams]
 - Athanos [Psygnosis]
 - Batman Forever: The Arcade Game [Konami]
 - Battlestations [Electronic Arts]
 - Blast Chamber [Activision]
 - Broken Helix [Konami]
 - Burning Road [Playmates]
 - Castle of the Damned [Tecmo]
 - Contra: Legacy of War [Konami]
 - Crypt Killer [Konami]
 - Dark Forces [LucasArts]
 - Deathdrome [Viacom New Media]
 - Discworld II: Missing Presumed...!? [Psygnosis]
 - Disruptor [Universal Interactive]
 - Epidemic [Sony CEA]
 - Fade to Black [Electronic Arts]
 - Fatal Fury Real Bout [Sony CE]
 - Floating Runner [T*HQ]
 - Ganymede [Rocket Science Games]
 - Hexen [GT Interactive]
 - Iron & Blood: Ravenloft [Acclaim]
 - Island of Dr. Moreau [Psygnosis]
 - Jack Nicklaus Golf [Accolade]
 - Jet Moto [Sony CEA]

playstation

new releases

* - Working Title

K-1 Super Kick Boxer [T*HQ]
King's Field II [Ascii]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
Mickey Thompson Virt Moto X [Playmates]
Monster Rancher [Tecmo]
Monster Truck Rally [Psygnosis]
MTV's Aeon Flux [Viacom New Media]
MTV's Slamscape [Viacom New Media]
NBA Jam Extreme [Acclaim]
NBA In The Zone 2 [Konami]
NCAA GameBreaker [Sony CEA]
Near Death [Atlus]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
NFL GameDay '97 [Sony CEA]
NHL '97 [Electronic Arts]
NHL Face Off '97 [Sony CEA]
Pandemonium [Crystal Dynamics]
Peak Performance [Atlus]
Perfect Weapon [American Softworks]
PGA Tour '97 [Electronic Arts]
Power Piggs [Titus]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Rebel Assault II [LucasArts]
Reloaded [Interplay]
Revelations: Persona [Atlus]
Robotron X [Williams]
Samurai Shodown III: Blades of Blood [Sony CEA]
Shining Sword [American Laser Games]
Soul Edge [Namco]
Spawn [Sony CEA]
Speed King [Konami]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Star Control III [Accolade]
Star Gladiator [Capcom]
Suikoden [Konami]
Tecmo Thoroughbred Derby [Tecmo]
The City of Lost Children [Psygnosis]
The Divide: Enemies Within [Viacom New Media]
The King of Fighters O95 [Sony CEA]
Tobal No. 1 [Sony CEA]
Tomb Raider [Eidos]
Tunnel B-1 [Sony CEA]
Twisted Metal 2: World Tour [Sony CEA]
War Gods [Williams]
WWF: In Your House [Acclaim]

ANNOUNCED TITLES

Air Combat 2 [Namco]*
Aliens Vs. Predator [FOX Interactive]
Breath of Fire III [Capcom]
Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Final Fantasy IV [Square]
Ghost in the Shell [T*HQ]
Kumite: The Fighter's Edge [Konami]
Major League Soccer [BMG Interactive]
Namco Museum Vol. 3 [Namco]
Pitfall 3-D [Activision]
Quake [GT Interactive]
Raven Project [Mindscape]
Rayman II [UBI Soft]
Scorcher [Scavenger]
Sentient [Psygnosis]
Spider [BMG Interactive]
Surreal [American Softworks]
Tenka [Psygnosis]*
Terminus [Scavenger]
Ten Pin Alley [American Softworks]
Warhammer [Mindscape]
World Championship Wrestling [T*HQ]
Zero Divide 2 [ZOOM]
Zork Nemesis [Activision]



RECENT RELEASES

Amok [GT Interactive]
Destruction Derby [Sega of America]
Golden Axe: The Duel [Sega of America]
Impact Racing [JVC]
Independence Day [FOX Interactive]
Johnny Bazookatone [Eidos]
Raw Pursuit [JVC]
Scorcher [GT Interactive]
Shockwave Assault [Electronic Arts]
The Legend of Oasis [Sega of America]
Topps MVP Baseball '96 [Data East]
Varuna's Forces [JVC]

AUGUST 1996

3-D Baseball [Crystal Dynamics]
Alone in the Dark II [T*HQ]
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain [Crystal Dynamics]
Buster Bros. Collection [Capcom]
Catfight [Atlantean Interactive]
Die Hard Trilogy [FOX Interactive]
Grand Slam '96 [Virgin]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
Major Damage [Capcom]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
NHL Open Ice [GT Interactive]
NIGHTS (Into Dreams...) [Sega of America]
Robo Pit [T*HQ]
Storm [American Softworks]
Water World [Ocean]

SEPTEMBER 1996

4 X 4 Gears & Guts [American Softworks]
Arcade's Greatest Hits [Williams]
Bubsy 3-D [Accolade]
Darknet [American Softworks]
Dark Rift [Vic Tokai]
Dead or Alive [Tecmo]
Dragon Force [Working Designs]
FIFA Soccer '97 [EA Sports]
Fox Hunt [Capcom]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Highway 2000 [Natsumi]
Iron & Blood [Take 2]
Jewels of the Oracle [Sun Soft]
Lethal Enforcers 1&2 [Konami]
Madden NFL 97 [Electronic Arts]
MVP College Football '96 [Data East]
NFL Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
PGA Tour '97 [Electronic Arts]
Powerslave [Playmates]
Rayman 2 [UBI Soft]
Space Hulk [Electronic Arts]
S.T.O.R.M. [American Softworks]
Tecmo Stackers [Tecmo]
Tecmo Super Bowl [Tecmo]
Werewolf: The Apocalypse [Capcom]
X-Men 3-D [Saturn]

OCTOBER 1996

Area 51 [Williams]

Big Bass World Champ [HOT-B]
Blast Chamber [Activision]
Command & Conquer [Virgin]
Deadly Skies [JVC]
Doom [GT Interactive]
Dream Team Basketball [Eidos]
Grand Theft Auto [BMG Interactive]
Grid Runner [Virgin]
Heart of Darkness [Virgin]
Herc's Adventures [LucasArts]
Hyper 3-D Pinball [Virgin]
HyperBlade [Activision]
Incredible Hulk [Eidos]
Magic Knight Rayearth [Working Designs]
Marvel Super Heroes [Capcom]
Natsume Pinball [Natsume]
Oblivion [Eidos]
Street Racer [UBI Soft]
Strife [Velocity]

4TH QUARTER 1996

Area 51 [Williams]
Armed [Interplay]
Battlestations [Electronic Arts]
Broken Helix [Konami]
Bubsy 3D [Accolade]
Bug Too! [Sega of America]
Contra: Legacy of War [Konami]
Crypt Killer [Konami]
Daytona USA: Championship Circuit Edition [Sega of America]
Deathdrome [Viacom New Media]
Descent [Interplay]
Fighting Vipers [Sega of America]
Jack Nicklaus Golf [Accolade]
Legends Football '97 [Accolade]
Loaded [Interplay]
Manx TT: Super Bike [Sega of America]
Mega Man 8 [Capcom]
Mega Man X4 [Capcom]
MLBPA Bottom of the 9th [Konami]
Mr. Bones [Sega of America]
NFL '97 [Sega of America]
NFL Full Contact [Konami]
NHL '97 [Electronic Arts]
Policenauts [Konami]
Project Overkill [Konami]
Shredfest [Electronic Arts]
Sonic X-Treme [Sega of America]
Soviet Strike [Electronic Arts]
Spot Goes to Hollywood [Virgin]
Street Fighter Alpha 2 [Capcom]
The Lost Vikings 2 [Interplay]
The Sacred Pools [Sega of America]
Three Dirty Dwarves [Sega of America]
Tomb Raider [Eidos Interactive]
Virtua Cop 2 [Sega of America]
Virtual On: Cyber Troopers [Sega of America]
VR Basketball '96 [Interplay]
VR Football '96 [Interplay]
Worldwide Soccer II [Sega of America]

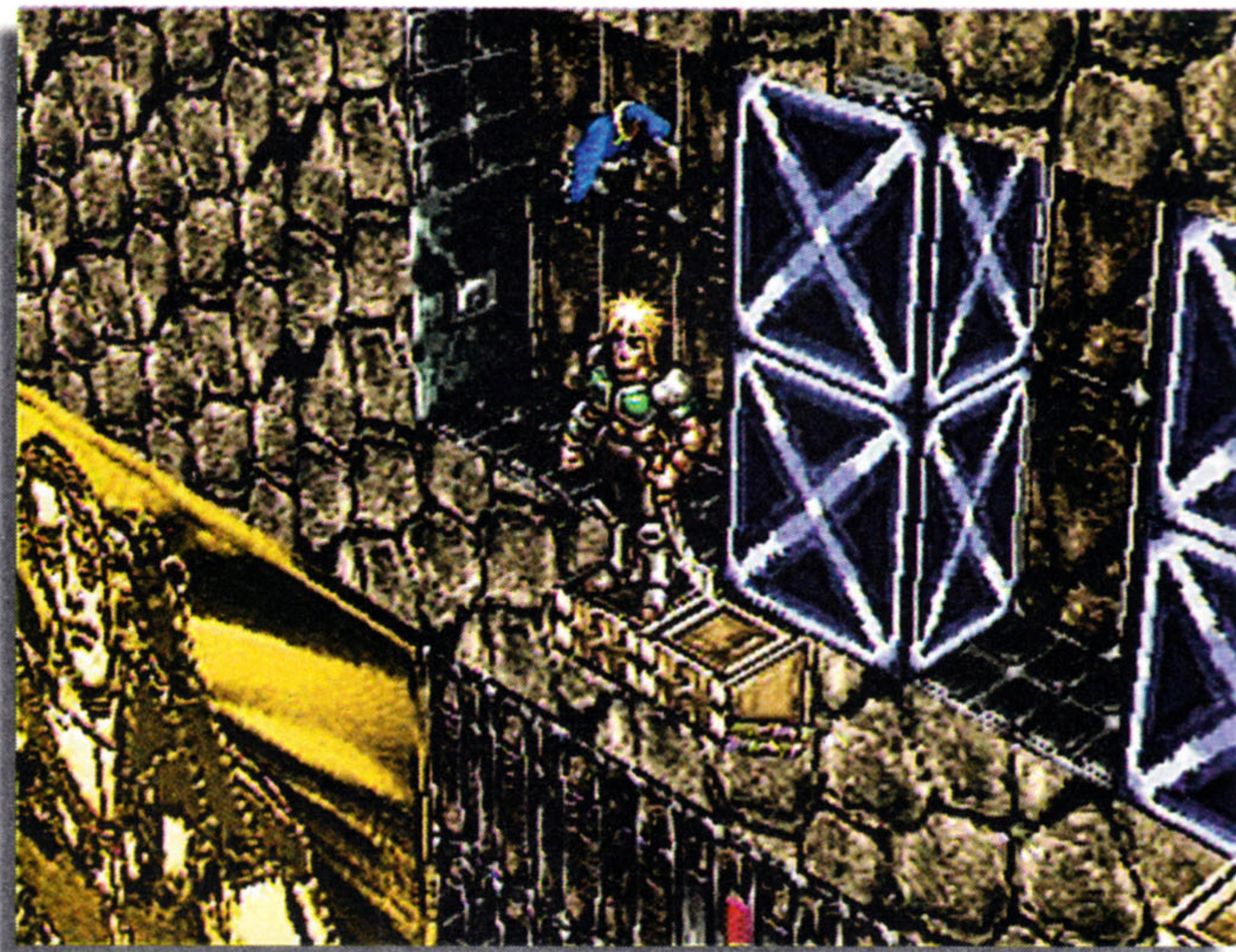
ANNOUNCED TITLES

Castlevania: The Bloodletting [Konami]
Criticom 2 [Vic Tokai]
DOOM [GT Interactive]
Hard Boiled [GTE]
Hexen [GT Interactive]
Kumite: The Fighter's Edge [Konami]
LUNAR: Director's Cut [Working Designs]
Pitfall 3-D [Activision]
Revelations: Devil Summoner [Atlus]
Tempest 2000 [Interplay]
Tetris Plus [Jaleco]
TNN Outdoors Bass Tournament '97 [American Softworks]

This list is compiled from various sources including company releases and retail store guides. As such, all titles and dates are subject to change.

▶ Climax's original Genesis masterpiece *LandStalker* was the first game of its kind to utilize the 3/4 overhead view in an Action-RPG setting. *Dark Savior* takes the genre one step further.

Dark Savior



Climax puts the finishing touches on the world's most anticipated Saturn RPG title

Publisher: Sega of America

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Climax

Release: 4th Quarter '96

At first glance, *Dark Savior* might appear to be little more than a Saturn update of Climax's own 16-Bit Mega Drive/Genesis masterpiece *LandStalker*. Not that many people would complain about that—*LandStalker* is still one of the best Action-RPGs of all time, and will definitely be remembered as a high point in the Genesis' existence (a remake would be welcome indeed)—but to anyone who will look beyond screenshots, it quickly becomes clear that this is no remake. *Dark Savior* stakes out new ground in graphics, gameplay, replayability and story, making it one of the most original and promising games of the 32-Bit generation.

In *Dark Savior* you assume the role of bounty hunter Ryu-ya, escorting his latest capture, the infamous killer and shape-shifter 'Villain' (yes, that's his real name, believe it or not), to a maximum security island prison known as Jayler's Island. Villain soon breaks out of his cell and escapes, and the hunt to capture him begins. Your quest soon becomes much more complicated, as you chase Villain to the island prison, populated with seedy lowlifes and criminals that you yourself may have put there in jail years ago. At the same time, trouble seems to be brewing on the island, both with the mysterious warden Kurtligen and with an underground prisoner resistance movement. As the plot progresses and all these story lines intertwine, you begin to question what everyone's true motives are and just who the real criminal is.

Escorting you on your mission is Jack, a unique bird-like creature (not unlike Nigel's winged compan-

ion from *LandStalker*) who works for the bounty hunter's guild. It is his job to watch over you and report his information back to headquarters—sort of a combination of spy and Boss at the same time. Needless to say the two of you don't always get along. You gain experience points in the form of money that Jack pays you for capturing or killing wanted criminals, which you can then use to buy increased stats and other

in *Dark Savior* are simple enough—dash, sword and jump are your major options, although you can also pick up and throw items, climb trees, throw switches and perform other actions during certain parts of the game, again similar to *LandStalker*.

Although there are some minor graphical glitches and periodic moments of slowdown in the preview version we received, *Dark Savior* is already visually stunning,

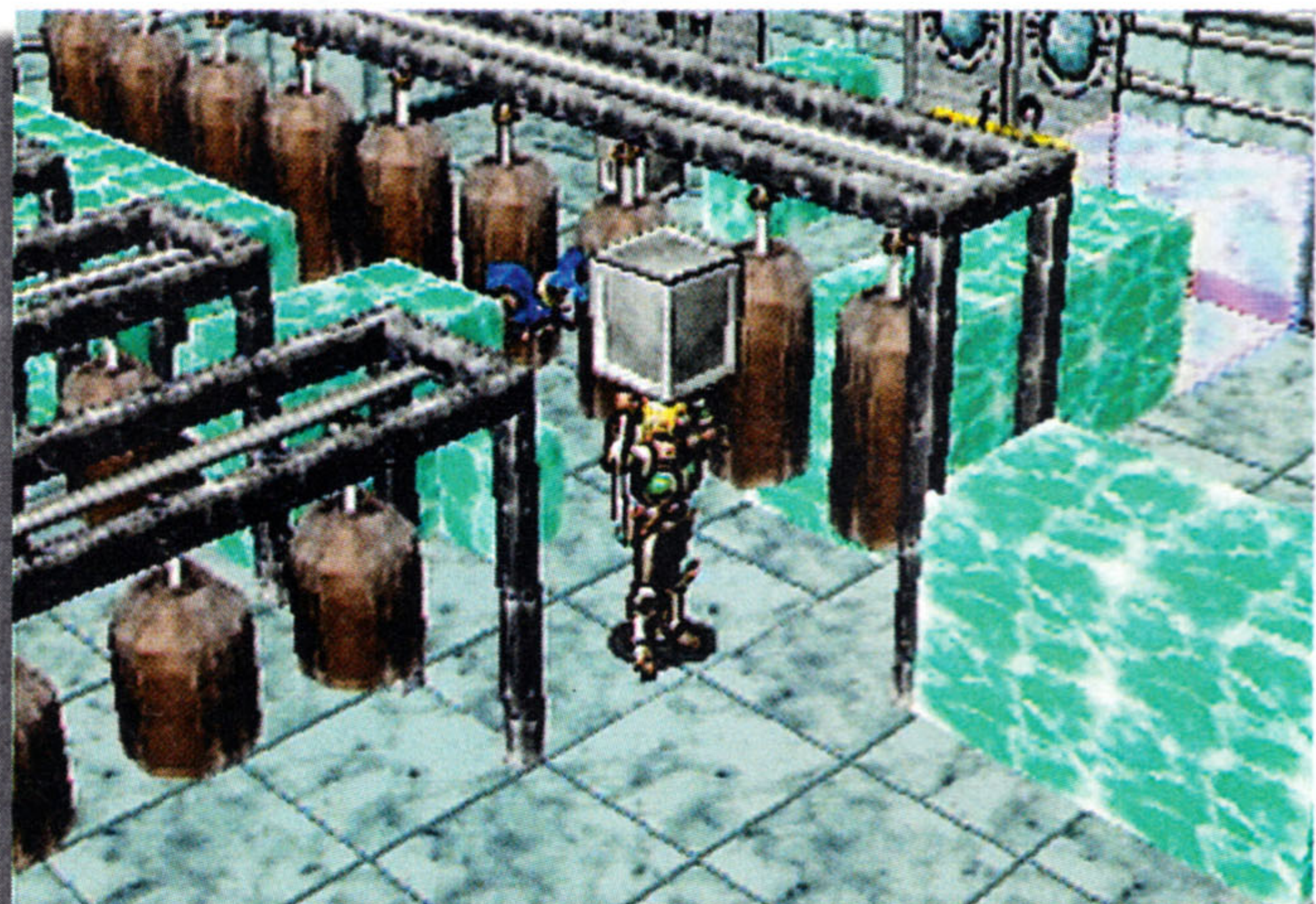
Dark Savior stakes out new ground in graphics, gameplay, replayability, and story.

items from him. As far as the island goes, currency is true prison fare—you buy and sell with cigarettes, booze and girly magazines hidden throughout the game. Obviously, this aspect of the game may be changed before final release—as will all of the foul language used in the Japanese version of the game. The controls

even in its early form. All of the characters in the game are two-dimensional bitmaps while the backgrounds are fully three-dimensional. The beautiful texture mapping that covers up all of the backgrounds and 3-D objects in the game does exactly what the programmers wanted it to do—it makes you forget that you are



▶ With the ability to adjust camera angles, you can view normally obscured areas.



▶ The manipulation of objects is an essential factor to success in *Dark Savior*. Your character can pick up objects, destroy obstacles (such as bricks and ice) with a weapon and use fallen scaffolds to cross over gaping holes. There's a lot to do...

looking at polygons and helps meld the 2-D characters in with the 3-D atmosphere. The graphics are detailed and crisp, and, impressively, are never overused. When you consider that the game never uses any more than 16 colors on screen at once (which, according to Climax, was done to keep the frame rate up), the visuals in Dark Savior are all the more impressive. Careful color choices and skillful texture-map creation will ultimately pay off for Climax.

Combat promises to be very interesting in Dark Savior, as it fuses one-on-one fighting into an Action-RPG-oriented setting. Upon entering into combat, the game

When you consider that the game never uses more than 16 colors at once, the visuals become all the more impressive.

displays the two warriors in the standard 'VS' shot, and then zooms in for a best two out of three contest. In the early version of Dark Savior that we previewed, the moves available during combat were pretty much the same throughout the game—dash, attack, jump attack—with the enemy usually doing the same. It controls like a standard 2-D fighter—push back to block, attack just after your opponent misses, etc., but obviously the overhead 3/4 viewpoint makes it seem less like a fighter and more like an interactive RPG battle scene. Right now it lacks the variety and control of a good fighting game, but Climax has much more planned



▲ The title screen and portions of the opening intro utilize the Saturn's impressive-looking hi-res mode.

Shinya Nishigaki on Climax

As one of Japan's smaller but more noteworthy third-party developers, Climax hardly gets the overseas attention they deserve. As they enter into the hectic final months of their latest project, Dark Savior for the Saturn, IG sat down amidst the instant ramen and futons of their small Shinjuku office to try and change that. Although most of the staff was recouping from an all-night work session that didn't end until eight in the morning, a half hour of sleep was apparently enough for Shinya Nishigaki—producer, public relations and planning manager for Climax—who was more than happy to take time out to talk with IG.

IG: Can you tell us a little about yourself and give us some background on Climax?

SN: My name is Shinya Nishigaki, I'm a producer for Climax. Climax was founded in 1990 by Kan Naito—he was chief programmer of Dragon Quest 3 and 4 and is quite famous in Japan. Our first game was Shining in the Darkness, then LandStalker—both for the Mega Drive. Next was Lady Stalker for the Super Famicom, and now we're working on Dark Savior for the Saturn. We are a small company—we only have about 20 employees, made up of programmers, graphic artists and game designers—so we do contract out some work. Although we are small, having Mr. Naito as a programmer and as our president keeps us on the cutting edge, and many top programmers come to us so they can work under him.

IG: What kind of games do you like and what kinds of games do you try to make at Climax?

SN: Well, Mr. Naito is 29 now, so he grew up watching the movies of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, which are a huge influence on his games. He tries to give his games the feeling of a movie, using dynamic camera angles and cut scenes for example, to draw the player into the game and give the game a style of its own.

As a child he enjoyed playing with toy robots, which led to his love of 3-D—where the player can manipulate and 'pose' objects in the game just as he would with his toys. He is also an amateur race car driver and enjoys car racing.



▲ Climax's Shinya Nishigaki, one of the producers of Dark Savior.

IG: Ah, so that explains all the Daytona USA stuff around the office?

SN: (laughs) yes. Actually driving and programming share a lot of parallels for Mr. Naito. In both you try to get the most performance you can out of your machine. A good race car driver is precise and anticipates what's coming up, just like a good programmer. In fact, the first game he made, at age 15 while still in high school, was a racing game. He did the whole game—graphics, sound, everything—all by himself. (Ed. Note: The game is known as Car Race, for the MSX.)

IG: What made you choose the Saturn as the platform for your first 32-Bit game?

SN: Well, we have had a relationship with Sega for years...the Mega Drive was very much a programmer's machine, techies loved the control they had with the 68000

chip, and as Mr. Naito was a programmer starting his own company, he was attracted to it over the Super Famicom. Because we already had the working relationship with Sega, we received a lot of information on the Saturn quickly, before we knew much about the PlayStation, which is mainly why we went with the Saturn.

IG: How do you like the Saturn hardware? Have you been able to achieve the performance you expected?

SN: Well, there are problems—especially with polygons, but hardware specs mean little to Mr. Naito. He will work around any problems with the specs...for example, if the graphic routines given in the library are too slow, he will make his own from the ground up in assembly—in this way he always makes the machine his own, so the hardware doesn't matter so much. The Saturn has two CPUs, but most games only use one of them—even Virtua Fighter 2—while Dark Savior uses both. The second CPU does a lot of things you can't see, like speeding up load times and such. We really have used everything we could to get around any problems the hardware might have given us. The one hardware limitation that really matters to us is the amount of RAM, and that's where you really need to be creative—how you can use and maximize that RAM best.



▲ Mr. Nishigaki proudly shows off the Climax offices after a long night of intense work, loaded with development materials and miscellaneous paperwork.

for this aspect of the game, including adding the ability to learn special moves as you progress through the game and, most interestingly, being able to capture monsters and use them later in combat. These captured opponents will have their own strengths and weaknesses, so some strategy will have to be used in picking a fighter—for example, using a water monster to combat a fire-soldier would be a wise choice, but not all choices are going to match up that conveniently. Capturing these monsters is not easy either, as you'll have to attack your opponent in a special way to capture them instead of killing them. Because combat is

Combat is more of a rarity, but it is more fun, and since it's so infrequent, it doesn't become an annoyance.

such an involved process and is so much more complicated than usual, you don't have a lot of enemies running all over the screens like you normally would in your typical Action-RPG. Combat is more of a rarity, but at the same time it is more fun and involving and since it's so infrequent, it doesn't become an annoyance.

Given the lack of combat, the emphasis in Dark Savior is instead placed on reflexes and puzzle solving. The game almost takes on a sort of "platform-ish" feel at times, as the player must make long series of precise jumps onto moving logs, across sliding blades or over deep chasms—places where Mario or Sonic might feel right at

home. Although some of these jumping contests are quite long and somewhat difficult and you always start all the way back at the beginning of the scene when you fall or miss a jump, the quick and accurate controls keep it from becoming too frustrating. Observing the position of your shadow also proves invaluable for landing safely on some of the more difficult jumps. The puzzles and traps mix up the action, so you're never doing anything with your hands for too long before you need to begin using your head.

Dark Savior has your standard 'move the box' and 'flip the switch' puzzles, but also has an impressive

amount of interaction between the player and the three-dimensional world he is in. For example, in one room where much of the floor is burning, you can knock over huge supporting columns with your sword, then run across them to escape harm. For another puzzle you must control a cargo loader and ride a crate to the exit.

Critics of 3/4 overhead isometric view games such as LandStalker and Equinox often complain that the games use the perspective itself as a puzzle—you can't tell by the view exactly where a platform is, for example, and finding out how to jump to it becomes the challenge. This might be fine for a platformer or straight



▲ Fighting scenes in Dark Savior take place in a new 3/4 overhead view, leaving more of the actual gameplay to the puzzle aspects and problem-solving techniques that make the game so enjoyable.

action game, but many frustrated gamers felt this was a cheap tactic in an Action-RPG; they didn't want to be held up in their quest by levels that take advantage of the weaknesses of the game's awkward perspective.

This is where the 3-D backgrounds in Dark Savior prove to be much more than a gimmick. The game normally runs in the standard three-quarter overhead view, but when holding the left shoulder button down, the directional pad can be used to swivel or tilt the camera on the fly. You can even zoom in, zoom out or pan slightly in



▲ While the shading and colors of the characters and in-game artwork are not an incredible step beyond those in the Genesis LandStalker, the ability to manipulate the scenes in three dimensions truly sets Dark Savior apart from its older brethren.

In a brilliant move, Climax has already made Dark Savior compatible with Sega's analog 3-D Control Pad.

any direction with the right shoulder button. And in a brilliant move, Climax has already made Dark Savior compatible with Sega's spiffy new 3-D "Multi-Controller" (known as the 3-D Analog Control Pad in the U.S.), so you can use the analog thumbstick to adjust the camera view, and control your character at the same time with the standard directional pad. Not quite sure where that floating bridge is? Zoom in and spin the

camera around so you can line yourself up with it, or zoom out and try to find an alternative path. Think something might be hiding behind that bookcase? Spin the camera around to find an exit or maybe a necessary item. Not only does this minimize frustration, but the fact that you can change your view on the go puts a new and exciting spin on gameplay and makes the graphics all the more impressive.



▲ We were fortunate enough to snag an early English version of the game at the E3 show in Los Angeles in May. Naturally, the text wasn't even close to being fine-tuned, but Sega of America does plan to have the game out here by December.

None of the music in Dark Savior runs off of the CD, but the soundtrack serves the game well nonetheless. The music is mostly pulsing beats and thundering drums that add drama and urgency to the game, although occasionally you can hear a catchy upbeat or quirky tune. There's a lot of music in the game as well; no one song plays for too many areas, and all of it is well-orchestrated and well-suited to what is happening in the game.

Replay value is already assured with the 'Parallel Scenario System' Dark Savior uses. Basically, the story splits in one of three or four directions during the game, changing everything—what your mission is, who will be the final Boss, who your friends are, etc. These are not just minor subplots that will vary—the entire plot will shift from story to story. Climax wants Dark Savior to be a game that players can enjoy the second and third time through as much as the first time. Not many games have offered that kind of lasting power before.

All of the important aspects for a quality Action-RPG have begun to take shape in Dark Savior—great graphics, fresh and engaging gameplay and a new concept in storytelling that should have the player hooked even after finishing the game. There should be some very happy Saturn owners come the holidays if Dark Savior can reach its potential—and it appears to be already well on the road to doing just that. Look forward to a full review in *IG* in the coming months when the game is ready for final U.S. release.

ig



The Parallel Scenario System mixes multiple story lines into one big package for great replay value.

Testing new Dark waters

IG: On to Dark Savior. The story sounds like quite a complex plot....

SN: (smiles) In Japan there are already so many hero-saves-the-princess games and plain fantasy settings that we decided there are enough of them and we did something new. We wanted to take the story a step further, to evolve, to break out of the mold everyone seems to be stuck in.

As for the overall feel of the story, both LandStalker and LadyStalker had a lot of humor in them, which we wanted to carry over, but we also wanted to inject a sense of tension and drama. We wanted to give the feeling like in the old TV show *The Fugitive*—lots of suspense and a sense of urgency. So we thought, how can we do this? We can't make a new story every week like a TV series, as this is an interactive game. So, we came up with the Parallel Scenario System.

IG: Could you explain what this Parallel Scenario System is and how it works?

SN: We asked people who played LandStalker for comments and suggestions, and many of them told us that it would have been great to have another story somewhere in the game so they could play it through again and keep it new and exciting.

There are three or four different scenarios you can find in Dark Savior. As the game begins, you are chasing after the escaped criminal on a ship. Dark Savior has been made in a way that your first time playing through you probably will not catch him. But as you learn the controls and get better at the game, your second or third time through the game you might catch him, or catch him at different times—this will change the story.

So it's more the actual game player who is gaining experience, and opening doors to different scenarios as his or her skill at the game increases. This is one of the points we are really excited about in Dark Savior—that it's YOUR ability that affects the story.

IG: How do the various scenarios differ? Different endings?

SN: Not just different endings—these are completely different

story lines...the whole point of the game changes depending on the scenario. All the scenarios split up after the opening scene on the ship. Smaller sub-plots may split off from events later in each scenario, but the main story is decided in the first half hour or so—the whole rest of the game can be different in many ways. The way all the characters interact with each other is different—almost everything changes. It was not easy to do. (laughs)

IG: Who was the story written by?

SN: The scenario was written by Toshio Terada. He has written for many 'golden time' (prime-time) TV shows. He has also worked with the music composer, Hiroshi Kondou, before on movies and we thought they'd make a great team for this project.

IG: Many people complained about the perspective in LandStalker, that it was often hard to tell exactly where a block was to jump on. Was this the reason behind giving the player the ability to control the view in Dark Savior?

SN: Yes, changing the perspective lets you know where things are in relation to your character, and also can help reveal secrets or items. It also goes back to that feeling of a movie, because you can zoom in or out or pan around like a movie camera.

IG: Dark Savior is a combination of 2-D and 3-D graphics; what led to this choice?

SN: As I mentioned before, we are a small company, and doing both 3-D maps and 3-D characters would have just been too much for our people. Maybe if we narrowed the scope of the game down and eliminated many of the maps we could have had time for 3-D characters, but many companies have used 3-D characters on 2-D backgrounds, so we wanted to try it the other way around. Who knows, maybe someday we can do both.

IG: Dark Savior was previously scheduled for a March release, then May, now not until the fall. What has caused these delays?

SN: Well, we are a small company, and this is quite an ambitious

game; it seems we underestimated the time it would take us to accomplish what we set out to do. Also, Mr. Naito has an artist's temperament...he wants to have a hand in everything because he wants to make sure everything is done to his level, and adheres to his vision. This is great for quality, but bad for time. (smiles)

IG: Will there be any differences in the Japanese and U.S. versions of Dark Savior?

SN: The U.S. version will be more difficult, I know that. There are also a few different ending themes to the game that are sung in Japanese...I'm not sure what will happen with those.

IG: Do you have any plans to work on any other systems, like the PlayStation or the Nintendo64?

SN: Well, we are certainly open to making games on other platforms, but nothing definite right now. We have talked with Nintendo, but our focus now is just to get Dark Savior finished. I do think our next title will probably be on the Saturn as well.

IG: First with LandStalker, then LadyStalker, and now Dark Savior, Climax has come to be known for Act/RPGs. Are there any plans for other types of games in the future?

SN: We would like to do a CG movie/adventure-type game, with more movie-like elements than we can use right now.

IG: When you say movie/adventure game, do you mean something like Resident Evil, which has movie elements but is still very much a controllable game, or something like D, where the player takes a more passive role?

SN: Definitely more like Resident Evil, something very interactive. We want to increase the drama, to get the player involved and feeling along with the game like they would with a great movie. We want to give the players a unique experience that only Climax can deliver.



▶ Tomb Raider's heroine looks at least as good as any of the characters in Resident Evil, and the fully 3-D backgrounds look roughly four times as impressive.

Tomb Raider



Eidos and Core help to start the 3-D realtime action revolution with guns drawn and ready

Publisher: Eidos

Platform: Saturn/PS/PC

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Core Design

Release: 3rd Quarter '96

Let's just pretend for a moment that the pictures you're seeing here are nothing more than a technology demonstration of what competent programmers can squeeze out of either the PlayStation or Saturn. What you're looking at would be graphics largely similar to those in Capcom's recent Resident Evil—a texture-mapped polygonal player character and similarly textured polygonal enemies, in this case roaming bears and dogs—save that literally every thing you see in these pictures (including backgrounds) moves in realtime 3-D.

What does that mean? Unlike RE, where all of the backgrounds

shapely, sporting a tight T-shirt, high-cut Banana Republic explorer's shorts, tied-up long reddish-brown hair, and oh, yes, a pair of automatic 9 mm pistols strapped to her thighs. Best yet, she looks even better in motion than she does in still pictures, and she loves to whip the guns from her hips, point them in different directions and unload hundreds of rounds of ammunition into wild animals. In an age of politically correct vegetarianism and pooh-pooed animal hunting, Tomb Raider's female lead looks ready to make herself a steak for dinner by personally blowing away the cow and rubbing the wood together to start a fire.

Mario 64, it takes on the difficult task of giving you freedom to explore 3-D worlds and somehow finds the right balance between action, exploration and (most importantly) fun. Unlike Mario 64, which gives you a character with plenty of moves and the occasional ability to power up with new items, Tomb Raider's main character has an initially limited repertoire but can find and use a greater variety of world-changing items. Your buttons initially allow you to run, jump, swim, grab ledges with your hands, take baby steps for more precise action, draw your guns, fire them off and access your collection of items. Dark rooms can be illuminated with the flashlight, dynamite can help you blow through walls, and there's even a little Game Boy-type portable game you can use (in the version we've tested, it has Pong on its screen). Other items include sunglasses, a diary, and randomly scattered bags of cash left in some of the levels' rooms.

Some of these concepts have been tried and proved successful in 2-D—it's their 3-D implementation which is both tricky and worthy of praise. Some have said that the Saturn is a weak 3-D machine, but Tomb Raider manages to prove otherwise in a number of ways:

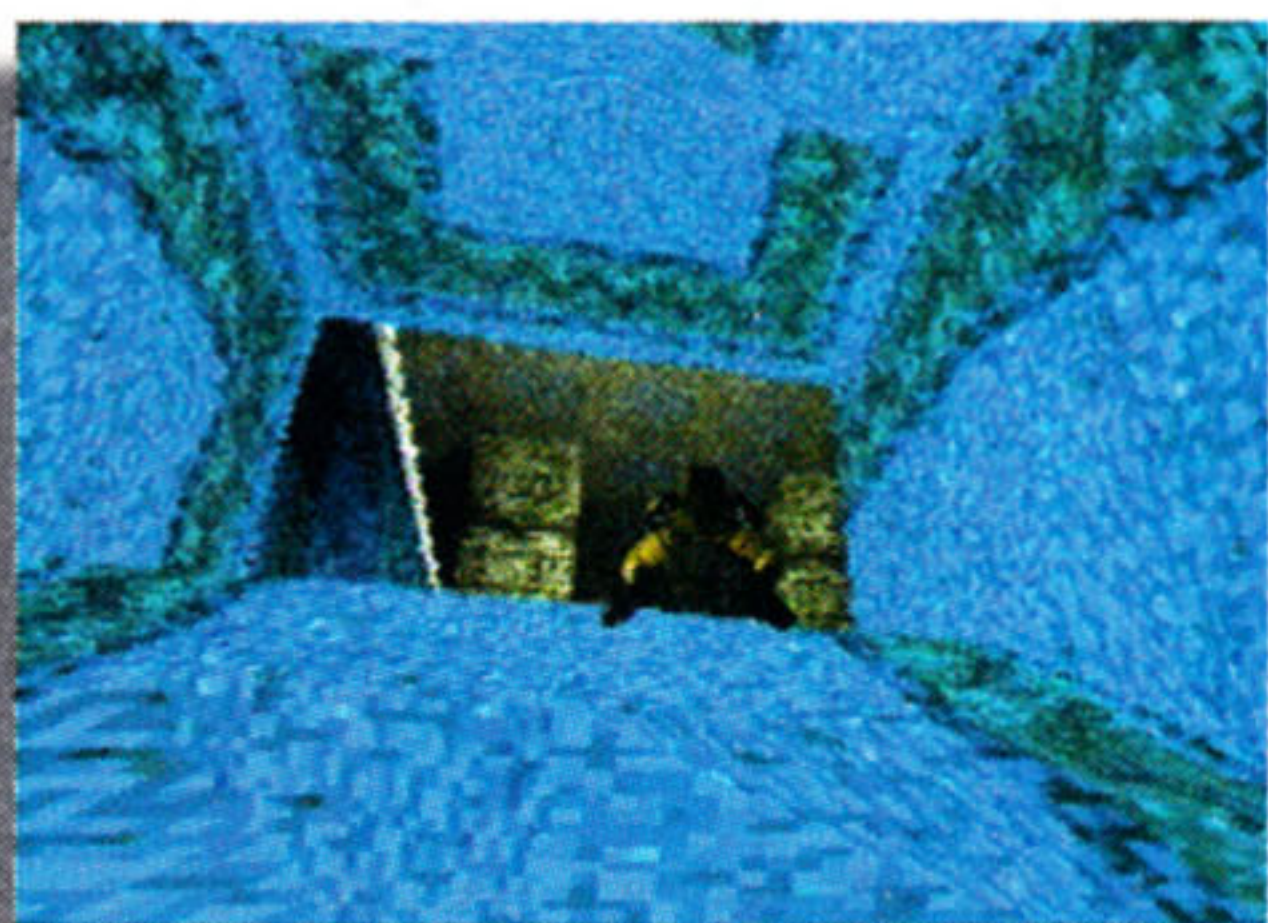
Tomb Raider adjusts every inch of the scenery to move in proper perspective, and, oh, how beautiful the scenes are.

were flat pictures loaded off of the disc and you were forced to view the scenes from fixed perspectives, Core Design and Eidos Interactive's Tomb Raider adjusts every inch of the scenery to move in proper perspective. And oh, how beautiful the scenes are: Having played Nintendo's Super Mario 64 and many other games that allow you to explore non-linear 3-D worlds, the frequently cynical IG was simply astonished that even this early version of Tomb Raider could technically surpass 85-95 percent of the titles shown at E³ for the Nintendo 64, PlayStation and Saturn.

Walking through the ruins of an ancient temple, Tomb Raider's female heroine is the computer-generated wet dream of thousands of college-aged men across the world: thin but athletic and

As an alternative to Indiana Jones, who might use his whip or count on luck to keep himself alive through huge leaps of faith, the versatile lady has a variety of jumping and exploring moves which include backflips, long jumps, ledge grabbing, butterfly swimming and precise inch-by-inch footwork. After a leap, she's kneeling on the ground briefly recovering, and as you put the controller down when she's in a pool, she treads water. Like Indy, she's on a quest for a little bit of fame and some nifty treasures, and there's more to her repertoire than just gunplay; you need to think a bit before you proceed, lest you get smacked in the face with a big stone wall.

There are many action games coming out in the latter half of 1996, but Tomb Raider deserves extra consideration: Like Super

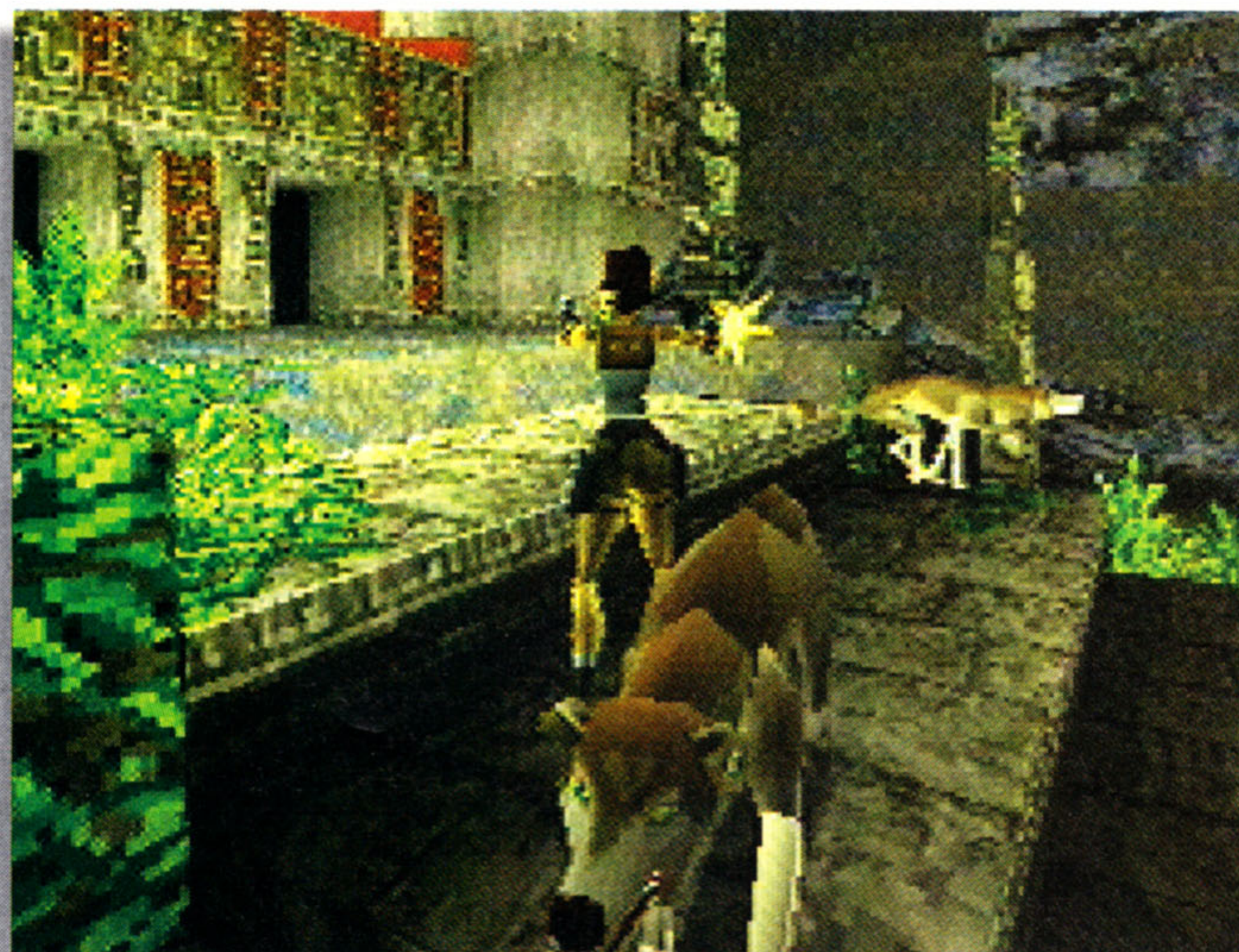


Underwater scenes are the second best we've seen (behind Super Mario 64)—note the multiple paths to take (above) and your imminent arrival above sea level.



▶ Cornered in one of the game's elaborate action-puzzle scenes, she keeps her hands close to her pistols in preparation for an unexpected foe.

Multitiered rooms offer you greater freedom of movement than you've ever known before. While the bear (below) roams stables, you can climb up and take him from above.



Vicious bears and dogs come to life just as vividly as did the enemies in Capcom's PlayStation outing Resident Evil, but in Tomb Raider, all of the background scenery is moving in three dimensions as well, a far more processor-intensive graphical challenge than the early 1990s PC-style coding in RE. The result of

Thankfully, Tomb Raider isn't just a technology demo—it's an exciting and playable adventure and exploration title which shows the world what 32-Bit game hardware should be doing in 1996. The early scenes we've played through have a bit of the dramatic flair necessary to make any adventure game suitably intriguing, including

We were astonished that even an early version of Core's game could technically surpass 85-90% of others.

Core Design's engine design is that the realtime-rendered background objects don't look as rounded and smooth as the pre-rendered flat backdrops did in RE, but they're always moving and providing you the best possible view of the action.

Though the action is generally similar to that in Doom, there's something to be said for allowing you to see your character.

one part where you run through what looks like a cave until you see statues fading in on the horizon, then a set of steps, then the mouth of a huge several-floored and multidoored temple—running through one door, you find a maze of hallways, and another, a gauntlet of huge swinging blades. Other portions include gorgeous and expansive underwater jaunts reminiscent of the huge fluid areas of Super Mario 64, and 3-D puzzles

The glory and fear of exploring Tomb Raider's 3-D worlds is evident in these two pictures: You discover temples full of treasure and rooms filled with hungry wild animals.

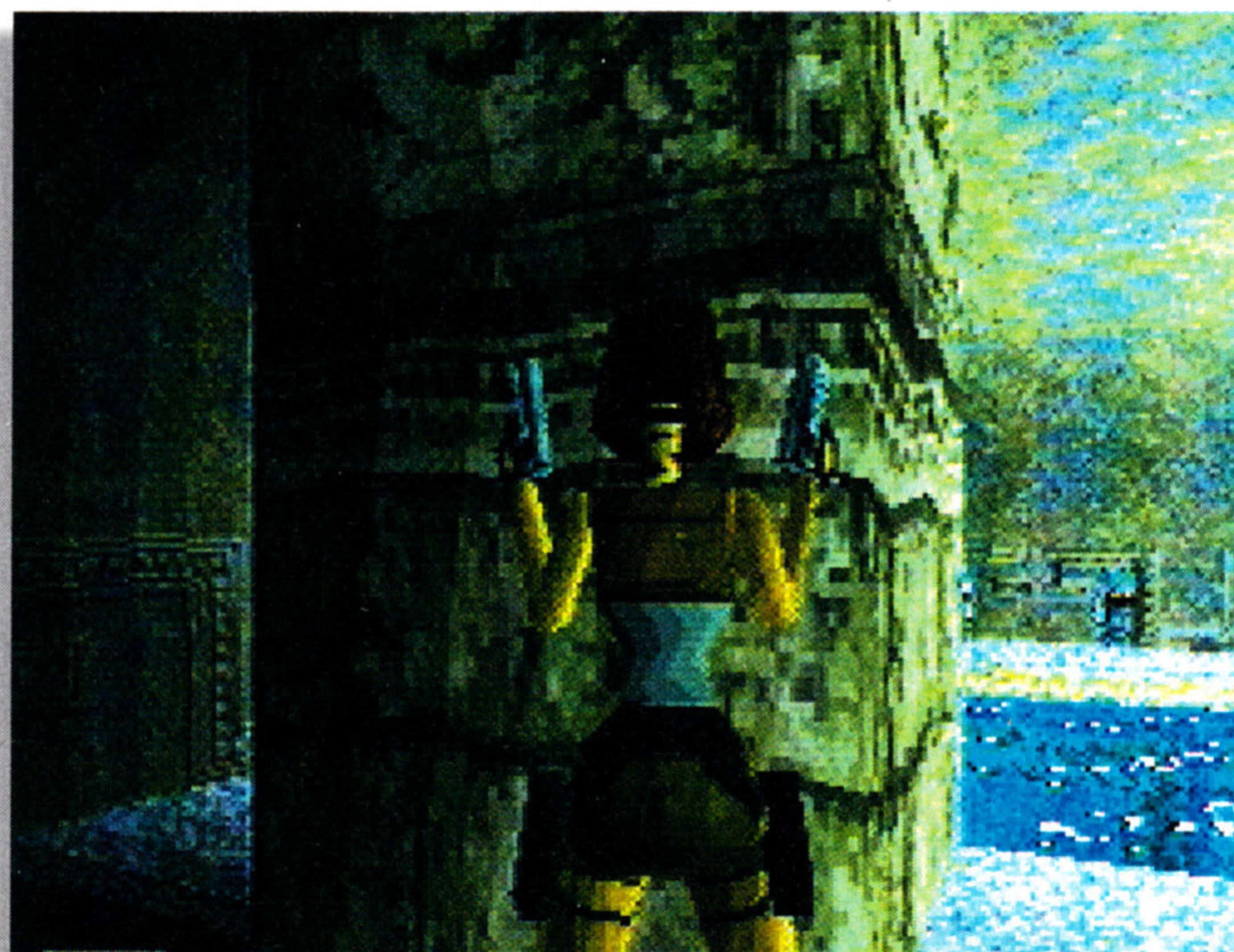
which challenge you to navigate platforms or use dynamite to blow walls apart.

Though the incomplete demo we've played through still has tiny glitches here and there, we're certain that the final version of Tomb Raider is going to be among 1996's most exciting titles. Kudos to Core and Eidos for showing the world how great PlayStation and Saturn action titles can look.



Tomb Raider PC 3DFX

The 3DFX Tomb Raider's demonstration content is precisely the same as its PlayStation and Saturn equivalent, save the fact that it utilizes the 3DFX's superior graphics features to improve the video quality. Goodbye, rough edges and pixelization...



▶ Medieval artwork offers the ambience of past centuries with the pleasant interface of the best the 1990s have to offer.



Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny

Westwood takes their friendly PC RPG and adds more than a touch of pure wickedness

Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment

Platform: PC/PlayStation

Format: Triple CD-ROM

Developer: Westwood Studios

Release: 4th Quarter '96

As far back as the glory days of the 286, Westwood Studios has distinguished itself from its PC-developing peers. After developing *Eye of the Beholder 1* and *2*, Westwood Studios was already a hot coding house.

Shortly after the release of *Eye of the Beholder 2*, Virgin Interactive Entertainment stepped in and acquired Westwood, perhaps the wisest purchase in Virgin's history. Following the acquisition, Westwood Studios wowed PC role-players with *Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos*, the game that was what the abysmal *Eye of the Beholder 3* should have been. Following the success of the first game, Westwood is finally putting the finishing touches on the sequel, *Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny*, after nearly three years of development. From moment one, *Guardians of Destiny* will feel completely different than the previous title. Taking on a much darker tone than the heroics of the first

game, players guide Luther, son of the original's villainess, Scotia, on a self-serving quest to rid himself of the bothersome and uncontrollable powers of metamorphosis inherited from his haggard mother. In his quest, Luther will not only gain control of his powers but use them to face an evil greater than anything the lands have ever seen. *Guardians of Destiny* features an involving story, no matter how the

interaction with the game's characters is his form. Luther's initially random shapeshifts can render him in one of two non-human forms: The first transforms Luther into a nimble lizard and makes him resistant to magic attacks, but lacking in both the giving and taking of physical damage, while the second form, a brutish ogre, is vulnerable to magic but as strong and tough as an ox.

Guardians of Destiny features an involving story, no matter how the player chooses to progress through it.

player chooses to progress through it—players are given the freedom to terrorize the game's inhabitants, all of which will affect the in-game characters' perception of Luther, simultaneously opening up and closing off new paths through the game for the player to explore. Another factor that comes into play regarding Luther's

Combined with the large supply of weaponry and 80 spells, Luther is a one-man army. Magic plays a key role in the game, as a number of the elaborate spells are more than simple offensive or defensive spells, often times coming into play within the game's many puzzles and traps, similar to the first *Lands of Lore*.

Since the project began, *Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny* has undergone a complete makeover. Originally planned as a step-based role-playing game similar to Interplay's *Stonekeep*, *Guardians of Destiny* has been retooled to work within a 3-D world with sprite-based characters a la *Doom*. Despite this change, significant measures have been taken to keep the game from becoming another *Doom* clone. Spell and inventory management uses a mouse-based interface similar to the original game's, this time with hidden pop-up menus, giving players a full-screen view of the game's world. While not technically up to *Quake's* generation of 3-D shooters, *Guardians of Destiny* does make significant technical strides



▶ Prerendered enemy and conceptual environment art show off Westwood's superior rendering abilities—could the skeletal beast above look a bit more threatening?



IG Speaks with Jeff Fillhaber

Lead Designer on Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny

IG: RPGs have always held but a niche market on the console platforms, and with the mainstreaming of the PC, RPGs are heading toward a similar niche. Because of this, how do you see Westwood's commitment to the RPG in the future?

JEFF: We've had a long history of producing well-received RPG games. One of our commitments to the industry is to continue to produce RPGs of a high caliber. We definitely intend to continue the Lands of Lore series beyond number two. I can't say anything more beyond that, but we are definitely continuing the series.

IG: Lands of Lore 2's story and setting is a 180-degree turn from the previous games, employing a much darker tone. Why was this change made to an already successful formula?

JEFF: I'd have to say that that's from my input on the project. Lands of Lore 1 could be defined as "heroic fantasy," and while that's enjoyable, my personal bent is toward darker fantasy. I read many dark fantasy books such as the Amber series, and that definitely came out in Lands of Lore 2.

IG: How exactly does the non-linearity of Lands of Lore 2 work, and how does that affect gameplay?

JEFF: Lands of Lore 2's story and gameplay aren't necessarily a completely straight line. First of all, the game has multiple subplots. We made a point to make the game's story branch out in a sensible way, but not to the point of confusion. We want people to go back and try the different paths, but be able to get back to the main "spine" of the story if they wanted to.

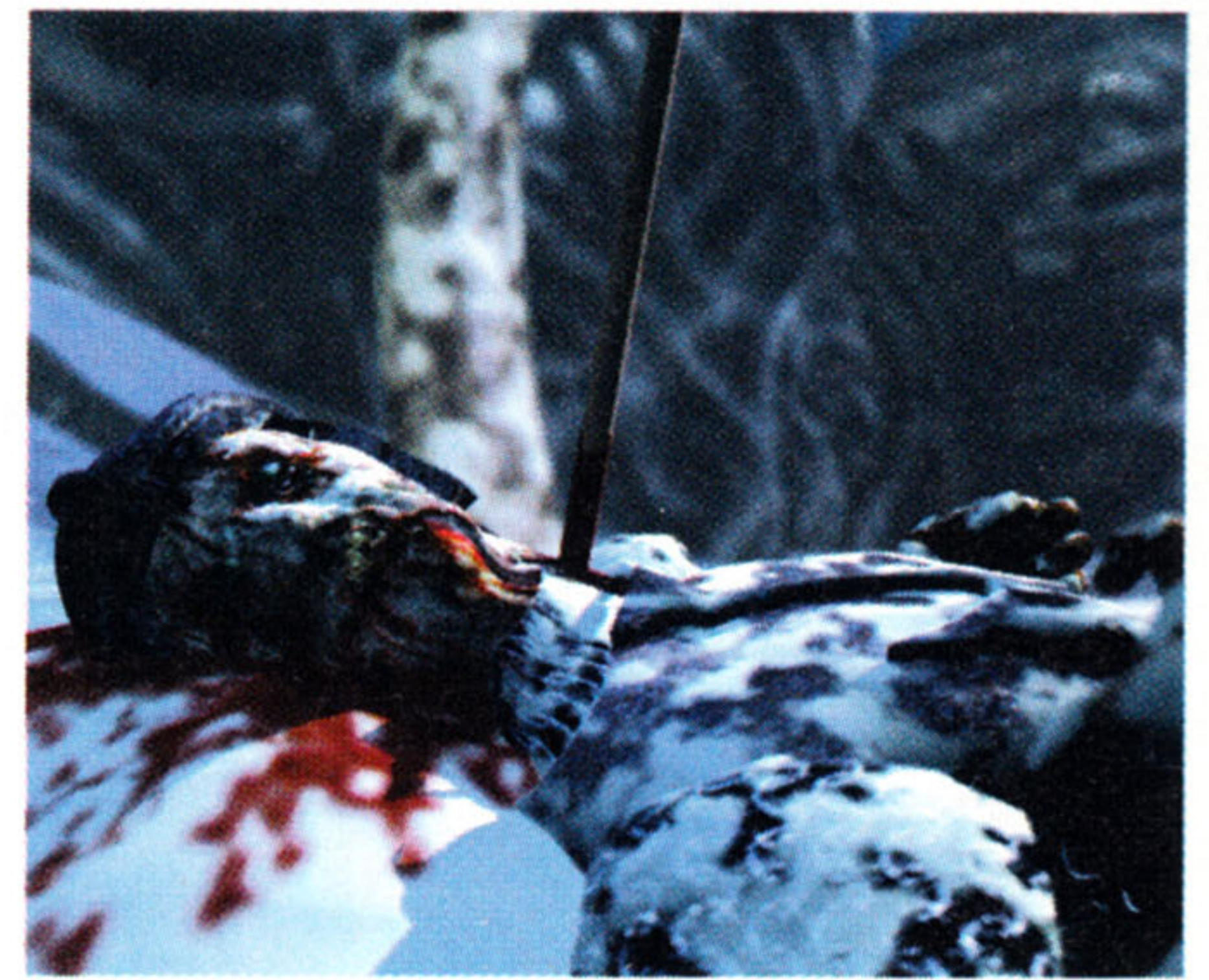
The other thing, which I think is the most exciting thing, is that we're not forcing you to be the good guy. If you wanted to, you could go kill the old woman in the weapons shop or blow up the chief's hut and we'll still let you move forward and complete the game. As a result, the game will unfold in completely different ways. The division isn't absolute meaning that no one action will determine if you are "good" or "bad." That's determined based on your actions throughout the entire game.

IG: Lands of Lore 2 has been in development for some time now, due to a complete design overhaul. Why was this overhaul necessary?

JEFF: We looked at the rest of the industry and the way things were going, and we thought step-based engines like Lands of Lore 1 had had their time, and it was time to move on. We found you could accomplish a lot more with a full 3-D engine, and started again from the ground up. We're incredibly pleased with the results, and we think the consumer will find the game worth the wait.

IG: What things did you want to incorporate into the 3-D engine to make it more suited for an RPG as opposed to another Doom game?

JEFF: I'm a table-top gamer at heart. The thing that makes an RPG exciting, on table-top or computer, is when the game draws you in, whether it's through the storyteller at the end of the table or the images on the screen. Because of that, we wanted to pull the player in in a very strong fashion with our 3-D engine, so we added a complex lighting system, dynamic audio and Westwood's trademark artwork. We did our best to bring all of these things together to give the player as close to "full immersion"



▲ Mmm, lookin' tasty..! Come on, do you really think there's an adequate way to describe this screen shot other than to say that it's downright gruesome? Well, it looks pretty cool, too...

as we could without a HMD and the current hardware.

IG: Lands of Lore 1 was a very team-oriented RPG. Why the move to the single character RPG, and was the game always single character, or was this a change that came with the 3-D engine?

JEFF: From the very beginning, I was an advocate of the single character. I think RPGs work best when the storyteller knows the character he's creating his game for. I found it a lot easier once we pushed it through to write dialogue and craft a story around one character, because we weren't writing to some generic, out-there character—we were writing to Luther. Every character will be speaking directly to him, not to a team of adventurers. Of course, there's that moment of connection between the player and the character this way, but that's the case with any good book or film and it makes the story as hard-hitting and exciting as it possibly can be.

ig

beyond Apogee's Duke Nukem 3D. Projected to run smoothly in 640x400 resolution even on lower-end Pentium computers, Guardians of Destiny features thousands of frames of animation for the usually choppy animated in-game characters and monsters, showing a level of animation previously unseen in a 3-D game. The 3-D itself is equally impressive, showing off texture mapping, moving walls and terrain and an advanced lighting system, allowing light from flickering torches and fireballs to play off surroundings. Guardians of Destiny will also feature high resolution cinematics combining Westwood's traditionally excellent rendering with blue-screened actors. Audio is also used extensively in Guardians of Destiny to enhance the dark mood of the

game. The soundtrack, written by New Age composer David Arkenstone and supplemented by Westwood's own Frank Klepacki, combines digital and MIDI music, giving Guardians of Destiny the unique ability to change the tone of the music to fit Luther's perceived mood.

While not the most technically proficient of games, Guardians of Destiny promises to use graphics and sound in a way that will redefine Westwood's already benchmark standards, but retain what gamers truly crave—a game with replayability, substance and plenty of unique twists. Another Virgin hit? We'd bet on it.

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▲ This rotund fellow is just looking for a fight, and the strapping lad in the distance brought along a natty bow and a quiver full of arrows. Take back your words if you've said that the British don't know how to have fun...

▶ Much of Crash's action takes place from a perspective behind and above the title character, a position which frequently makes for haphazard jumps but allows you a broad view.

Crash Bandicoot



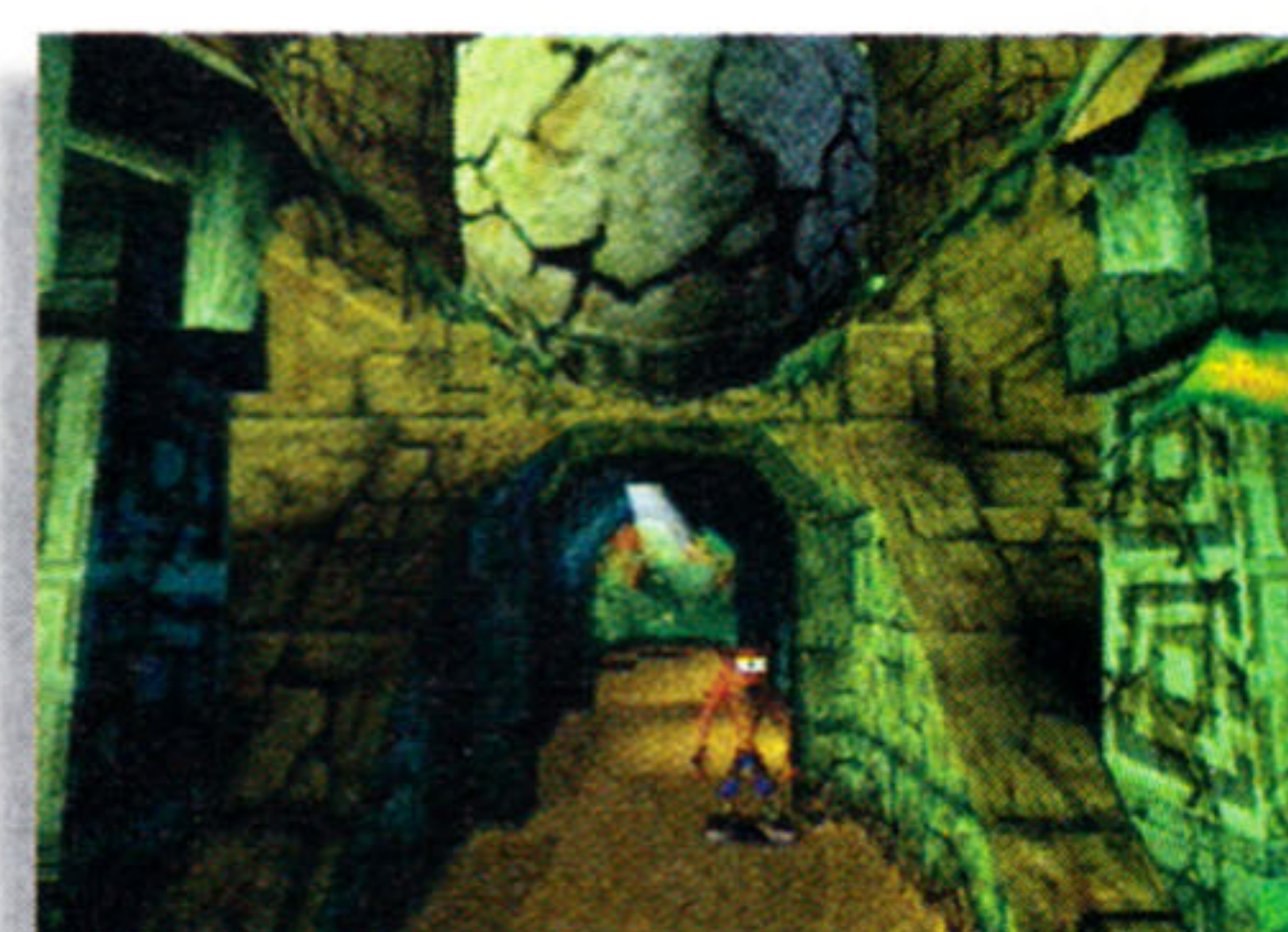
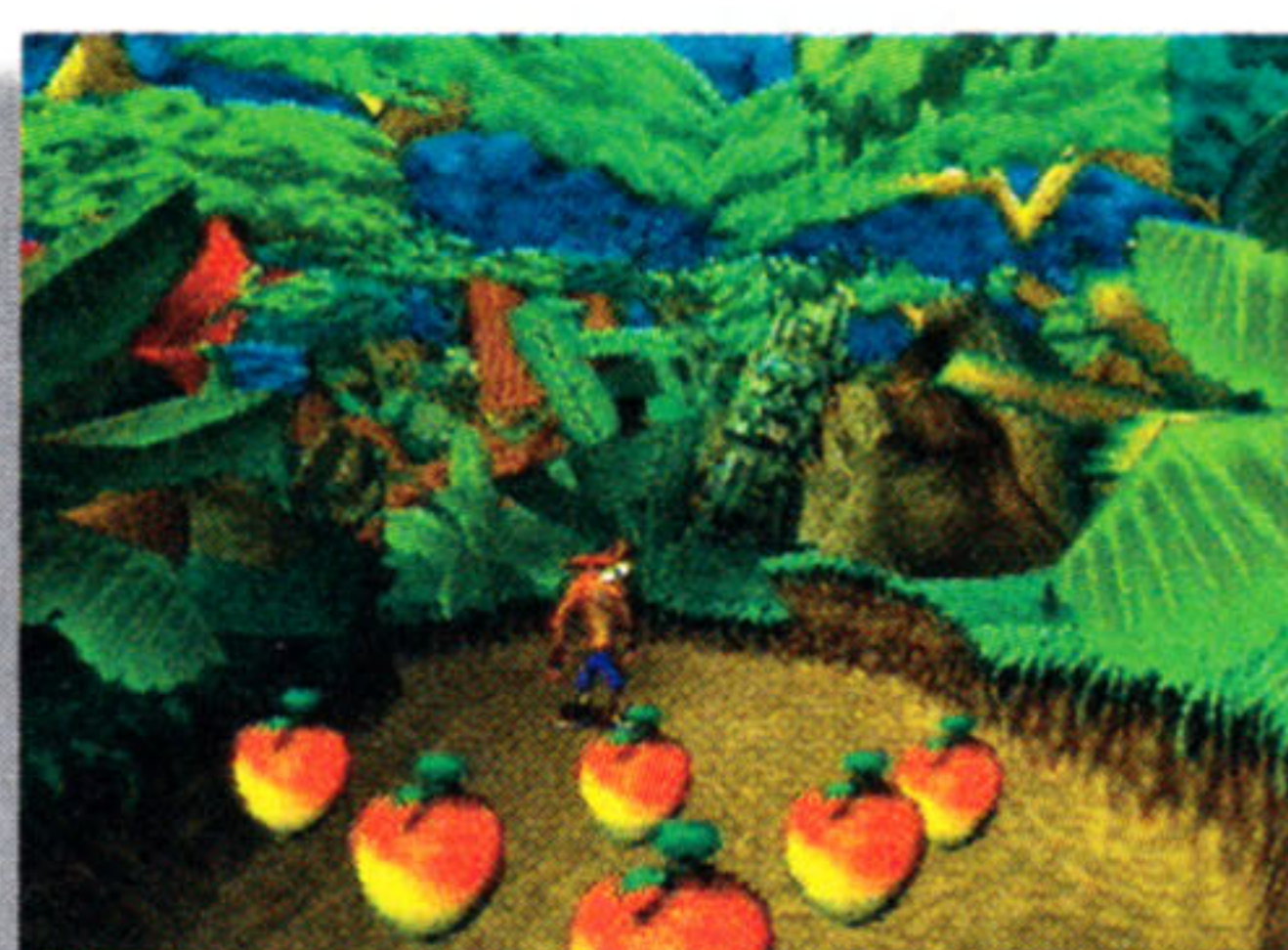
Sony enters the challenging world of mascot-based action platformers with a loud crash

When we first heard that Naughty Dog (famed creators of the 3DO hit *Way of the Warrior*) were creating a new game for the PlayStation called *Crash Bandicoot*, we wondered just what the company was up to. After mixed results with *Way*, a game that half succeeded in combining all of the features from every popular fighter into one title, we sincerely hoped that their new creation would instantly shatter old perceptions of the small development team now headquartered at Universal Interactive Studios, Inc.

Avoiding the motion capturing, digitizing, FMV and rock music of their brief past, Naughty Dog has been able to prove one thing beyond any doubt—that a 3-D game can still retain the look and feel of the cartoon-styled platform games that were once so common. Indeed, it was at this year's E³ that platform games made their long-awaited comeback as console prices were slashed and the industry's target demographic was broadened.

Crash got the short end of the stick at E³, though. While the booths next door to Sony drew larger audiences and the talk of the show, CB's lukewarm reception shouldn't have come as a surprise since the competitors' hit mascots utilized not only new hardware or new controllers but the company's star developers, Yuji Naka (of *Sonic* fame) and Shigeru Miyamoto as well. This didn't prevent Sony from pushing *Crash* as their flagship title, though, in spite of the crowd's greater interest in Sony's more inviting sports bar.

It seems unfair, then, that *Crash Bandicoot* would be subjected to comparison to these brighter



▶ Reversing the camera's perspective, this stage has Crash running toward you, gathering fruit before he finds himself running away from several menacing boulders. Naughty Dog's engine always keeps the textures smooth.

stars, not only because of their creators, but because the products were never directly comparable to begin with. While each involves a company's mascot character in the increasingly ambiguous category of platform games, all similarities end here.

What separates the three most are the player's perspective and the degree of exploration allowed.

As far as perspectives go, Naughty Dog didn't seem comfortable betting all their chips on one horse, so each level of the game rotates into a different perspective.

In the first stage, Crash washes up on the beach of a small island and then wanders down a beaten jungle path in an overhead and behind perspective similar to most modern racing games and even

What separates Mario, NiGHTS and Crash are the player's perspective and the degree of exploration allowed.



▶ In this segment, the camera tracks Crash from a distant side view as he runs and jumps on wooden platforms. The perspective shifts appropriately as he moves.

Publisher: Sony CEA

Platform: PlayStation

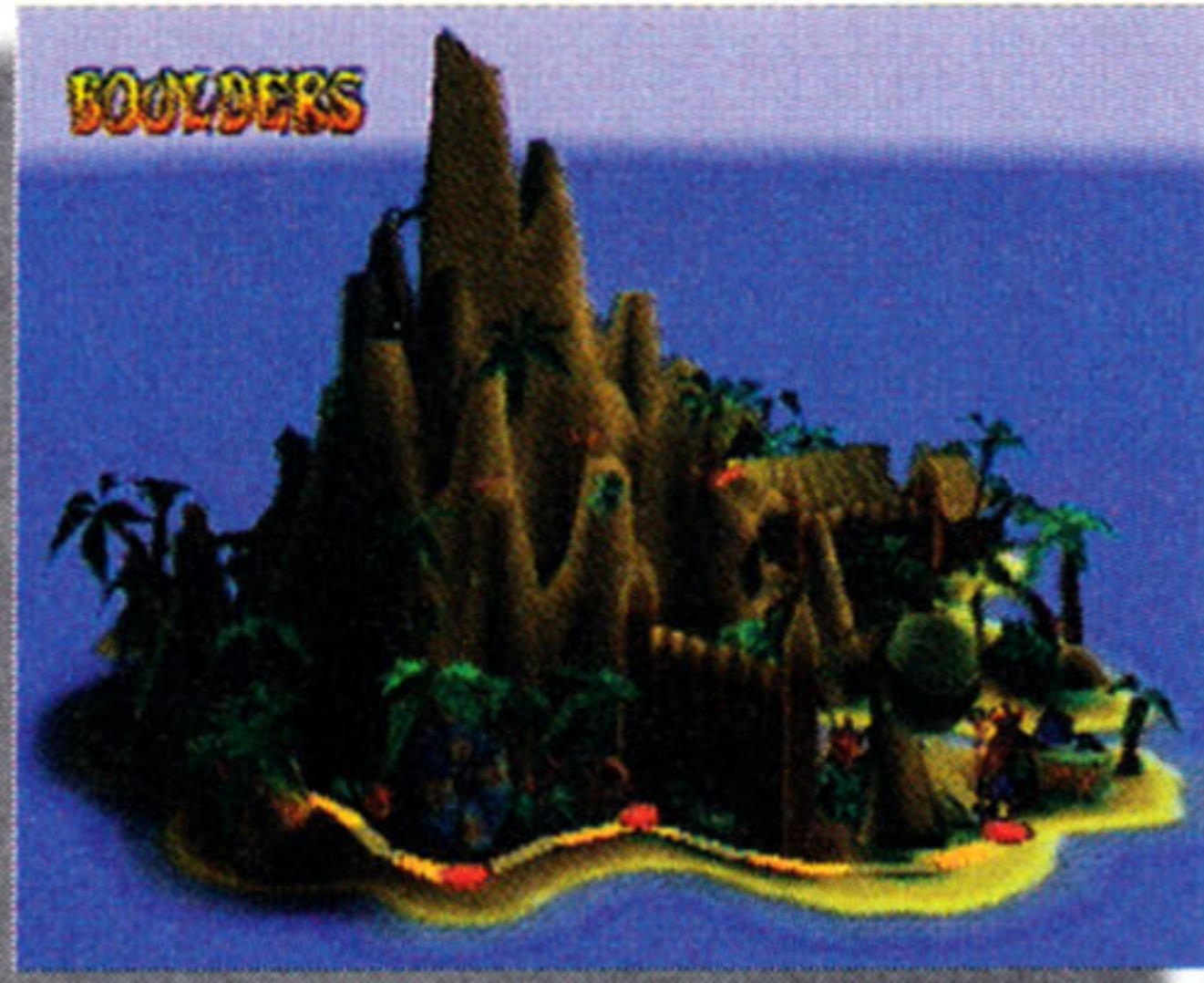
Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Naughty Dog

Release: September 9th



▶ Bonus stages allow Crash to maneuver through a set of traps to gather more fruit and reach a save point located at the end.



Naughty Dog gets style points for making everything in the game look so convincingly three-dimensional, including these moving map scenes.

more similar to the SNES game, *Tazmania*. It seems more than coincidence, then, that after the Looney Tunes-inspired theme music fades from the Title Screen, that the player is met immediately with play mechanics that also resemble *Tazmania*—specifically, walking forward, jumping and spinning like a top. We might thank Producer David Siller, formerly a creative mind behind Sunsoft's Looney Tunes titles, for the inspiration.

Unlike *Taz*, though, there's no time element involved in this game, which frees the player to enjoy the lush jungle scenery at a more leisurely pace. This doesn't seem like such a bad idea at first, since Crash is a graphical powerhouse with 100 percent realtime graphics running at a constant 30 frames per second, thankfully impressing the player with plenty of distinct texturemaps and clever shading. As the player strolls down this

beaten path lined with totem poles and greenery, the objective is primarily to arrive intact at the other end after having collected as much "wumpa fruit" as possible. As should be expected, gathering 100 of these peach-like fruits results in an extra life, and other items such as check points and shield-like masks lay about in crates waiting for Crash to consume them.

After two levels of this path stage, the camera pulls back and the player is able to control Crash onto a wooden ledge where a more traditional platform game is revealed. Spiked poles and beautiful flames are spread along the level as a 3-D backdrop scrolls behind as in *Clockwork Knight*.

The most unique stage seems to be the one that follows, which is much like the path of the first level, only the player must direct the bandicoot toward the camera as huge boulders drop and follow like in the famous *Indiana Jones* sequence. Pits found in previous levels become more of an obstacle here, as collecting items and failing to leap small fences will often get the bandicoot flattened by the pursuing boulders before making it to the next cave, where a short

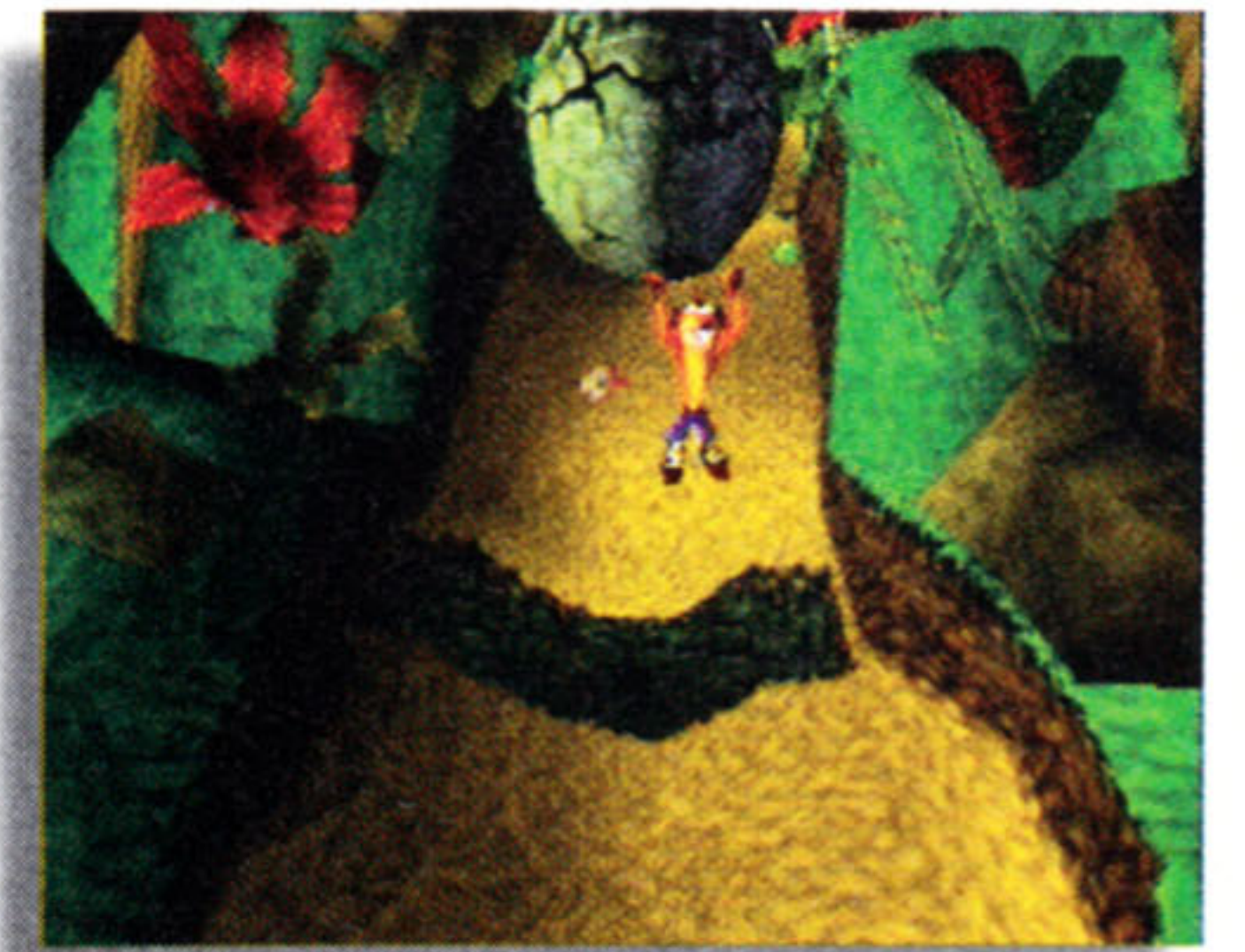
notice that he or she is actually climbing up waterfalls in a level appropriately called *Upstream*.

It's peculiar then that the next level, placed about two thirds of the way through the first island, is a Boss level. With 35 levels and only six Bosses, it would seem more fitting that the Bosses be saved for the finale. The Boss is symbolic, though, as a marker after which level themes begin to repeat themselves. Each time around, new textures fill the screen, new enemies begin to appear and old enemies are made tougher by receiving new abilities, but the basic gameplay remains largely unchanged making the primary motivation for further play the new visuals.

It would be difficult for anything in the game to compete with these fantastic graphics, but the music seems to have not made much of an attempt to do so. Rather, it provides a soft background which combines well with the chirping



Vivid colors and the seemingly rounded edges of objects stand out immediately in Crash's levels—more so than *NIGHTS* but less than *Mario*, the worlds seem pixel-free.



In scenes such as these, the fixed camera view often makes you wonder whether you're going to survive your next big jump.

Without that elusive and unidentifiable spark that transforms a character into an icon, Crash is an improved Bubsy.

breath of relief can be taken.

The next stage is easily the game's highest point visually. It's another path-based forward level, but this time the player walks along fallen trees, floating leaves and toadstools that sit in the most exquisitely presented water ever seen. As fish leap and dive from the stream, the player begins to

of birds and the occasional noises from elephants and other jungle creatures to form an atmospheric lullaby. In contrast, the sound effects are all wonderfully implemented with great results from the satisfying crate-busting to the rolling and sliding obstacles that pan seamlessly across the soundstage.

However spellbinding the game's graphics and sound effects might be, something less tangible remains as a flaw. Maybe it's something as simple as the awkward way the save system works and that the save card isn't currently accessible in this early version of the game. Like the Bosses, the save icons are spread through the early parts of the island, leaving a gap toward the end of the island where the save is most needed. Perhaps the problem is worse, though—it could be the way that each level is so pattern-based that even an amateur can pass through the obstacles quickly after only a few tries and that having done so leaves the game as a repetitive walk-through.

Crash Bandicoot isn't just the

name of the game, it's a mascot and someone the player is asked to identify with. This is a concept only a few animation studios and even fewer game designers have ever gotten right. Without that unidentifiable spark that transforms a character into an icon, Crash leaves the impression that the next generation has finally arrived and it has brought us another Bubsy.

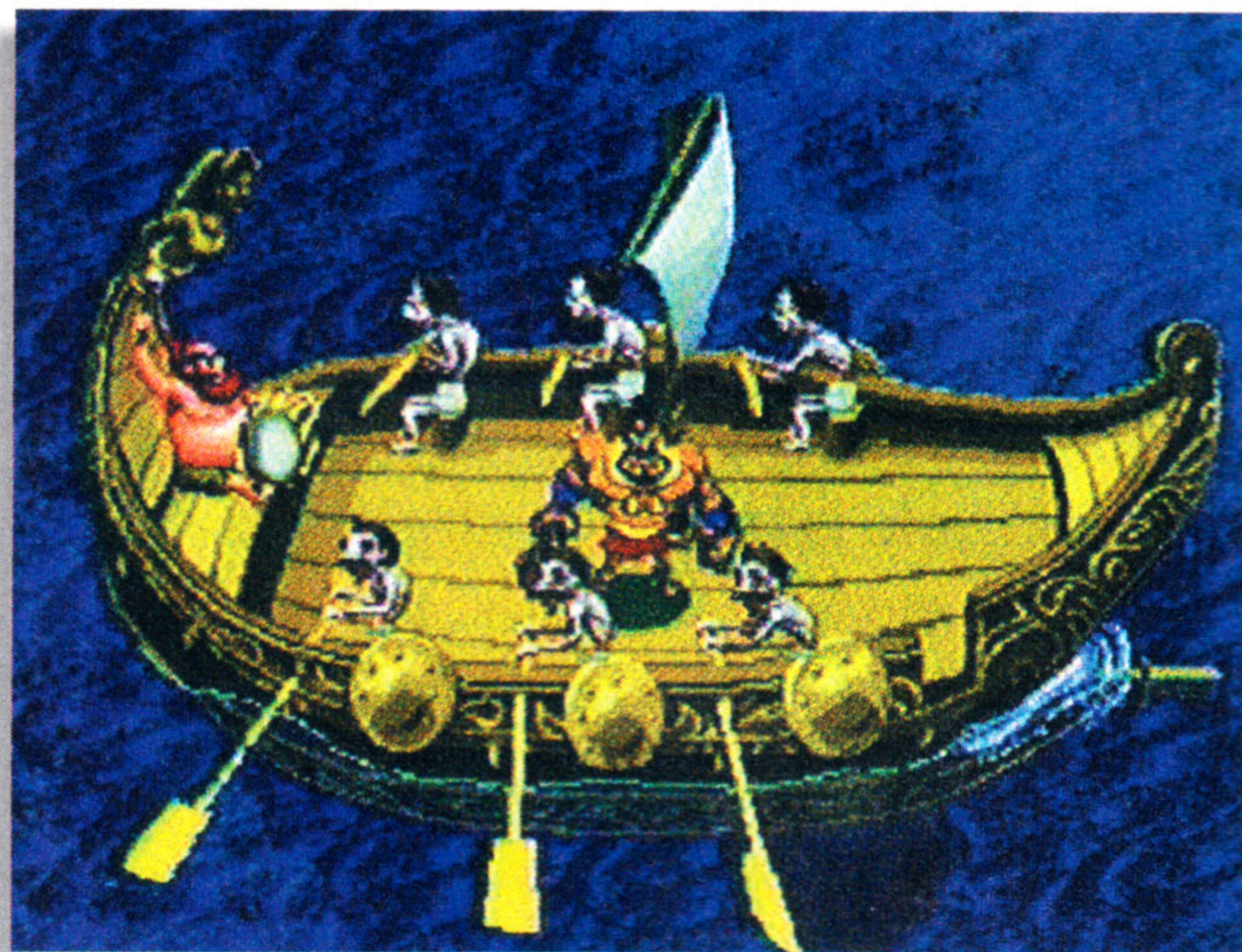
It's difficult to imagine that this title is far enough away from development that any major changes would occur and yet still allow Sony to make their anniversary Sept. 9 launch date, but as fans of platform games, IG can only hope that the final touches to *Crash Bandicoot* will bring it the elusive quality that made *Mario* and *Sonic* into superstars. But then, should we expect that an orange rat could ever compete with a certain little blue hedgehog and an Italian plumber, anyway?

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The traps aren't particularly challenging, but they are pretty deadly if you get hit. Large spiked rods suddenly jut out of the floors and ceilings of this stage, and later enemy characters wander around pointlessly waiting to be thwacked.

▶ Straying considerably from their earlier point-and-click adventure games, LucasArts decided to go with a more console-style combination of interactive sprites and backgrounds.



Herc's Adventures

LucasArts goes back to early civilization for a humorous take on Greek mythology

Publisher: LucasArts

Platform: Saturn/PS

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: LucasArts

Release: 4th Quarter '96



▶ Animated cinema scenes bring ancient mythology to the Saturday-morning cartoon level, giving players extra sultry women and quality cow humor.

In addition to its ever-present *Star Wars* licenses, LucasArts is well known for its long line of strange and humorous adventure games, including such classics as *Maniac Mansion*, *Zac McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders*, and *Monkey Island*. In some ways, their latest game fits right into this tradition, but many aspects of its gameplay are distinct enough from previous LucasArts titles to make it clear that *Herc's Adventures* is not simply another addition to the formidable stable of LucasArts adventure games, but is rather a new style for the company.

Throughout *Herc's Adventures*, you play one of three human characters attempting to rescue the Greek goddess Persephone. Similarities to previous Lucas efforts begin with the fact that *Herc's Adventures* is a puzzle-oriented adventure game with large doses of off-beat humor; it's essentially a running spoof of Greek mythology. Differences arise in the method of implementation—the art is designed to look much like a cartoon, and, in addition to the exploration and puzzles found in more traditional adventures, there is a large emphasis on action.

The game itself is played from an overhead view, although fully animated cutscenes are liberally interspersed throughout to help further the plot. *Herc's* play area is one large world which may be navigated without any artificial level restrictions, though there is a definite natural progression through the 40 different areas which are present in the game world. Much of the progress in the game is made by completing the various puzzles which crop up rather frequently, although having to defeat a particular creature in



▶ Action elements play a significant role in *Herc's Adventures*—you'll fight enemies and explore the world, gathering items and solving puzzles.

order to continue onward is certainly not out of the question. *Herc's Adventures* combines elements of action games, adventures and RPGs, though both of the latter aspects (and particularly the last one) are incorporated in a rather understated manner so as to avoid intimidating gamers who don't like extremely complex RPGs or devilishly hard adventures.

The action element is present throughout, with creatures attacking you at every turn. These

Cassandra makes a brief, humorous cameo where she successfully predicts a series of improbable disasters.

creatures may be fended off in a variety of different ways; each has its own weapons, special weapons (from freeze attacks to lightning bolts) can be found at various points in the game, most objects may be picked up and thrown (including houses and enemies), and it is even possible to summon animal familiars to assist you in your quest—how often do you get a chance to be defended by a small swarm of frogs? You have a hit point meter which is diminished when (surprise) you are hit, and a strength meter which diminishes when you are running or carrying

large objects around.

Adventure elements include frequent puzzles and ever-present exploration, including simple searches for objects to quests given to you personally by the various gods you'll run into as you play. Exploration is mostly accomplished by walking around maze-like areas, but is by no means simple: There are areas where you swim, some places you can only get to by catapult(!) and others that take place on a boat.

Finally, the ability to modify character abilities provides the main RPG element in the game. Hit points may be increased, and your strength meter may be improved so that it drains less rapidly. These improvements sometimes become accomplishments simply by finding the appropriate power-ups, but it is often necessary to buy them from friendly merchants you run into with reasonable frequency. Weapons and special items can be acquired in the same way.

However, the feel of the game is determined as much by the animation and plot as by the play mechanics. Cartoonish graphics and a wealth of humor keep the atmosphere very much at spoof level, and all of the Greeks make appearances, from various gods to the Minotaur, Hydra, Harpies and Medusa. Even Cassandra makes a brief and humorous cameo, successfully predicting a series of improbable disasters (death by pizza: Next week on *Geraldo*).

As offbeat as it might seem, *Herc's* is great fun and will be ready by the end of 1996.

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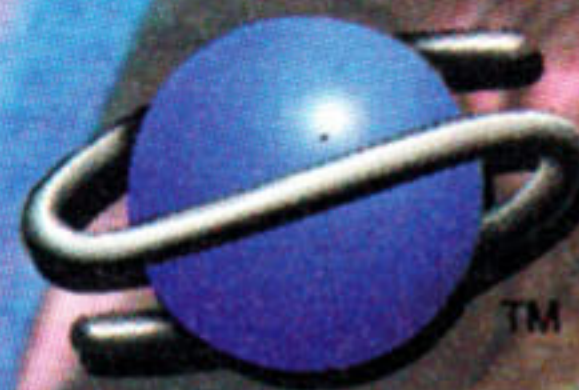
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▶ You run around and jump on the floor, using platforms and objects to help you reach a glowing orb. Then you rotate the room and escape.



Blast Chamber

Activision drops the bomb on PlayStation gamers with an addictive new action puzzler

Publisher: Activision

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: ATD

Release: Fall '96

Imagine that you're stuck in a cramped little room in the shape of a metal cube. Pretend that the room contains several combustible radioactive substances, and that you're forced to carry them from one point to another while navigating through multiple trap doors, pits, narrow catwalks, spiraling staircases and moving platforms. If this didn't sound crazy enough, the chaotic little room twists on a central axis, spilling its contents from wall to floor wildly as if the room were one big demonic washing machine on a sporadic spin cycle. If this sounds appealing to you, welcome to Blast Chamber, Activision's creatively wild and dangerous puzzle game.

The simple object of Blast Chamber is to control a man inside of the cubed death traps in missions to locate and carry a glowing energy orb back to a predetermined spot within each level before a time limit expires. Accomplishing this feat requires as much puzzle-solving ability as it does hand-eye coordination; there are the general obstacles that can be avoided by any action game veteran—falling objects, opening pits, tricky jumps and random bursts of flames—but the real challenge is to mentally conceive of how a room must be rotated to achieve your goal.

Each of the hundreds of levels in Blast Chamber is perfectly box-like in configuration, with the four outer surfaces being used during gameplay. Within the levels are special floor tiles (denoted by glowing arrows) which will immediately rotate the room 90 degrees to the left or right.

When a room is turned, the result can be entirely unexpected: Objects that were formerly on the floor—moving with the sway of gravity as the floor becomes your

left or right wall—are suddenly thrust onto the new floor surface, where they tumble haphazardly near or into the stage's traps. Bolted-down staircases, trap doors and other amenities stay put, but may be rendered useable or unusable, harmful or harmless entirely relative to what position they have been rotated to. For instance, a previously inaccessible staircase which leads to the energy orb



▶ Sometimes, you might not want to touch the walls once they've rotated to become your new floor...

Within the levels are special floor tiles (glowing arrows) which can rotate the room 90 degrees to the left or right.

could become a stairway to heaven once it's finally rotated to the proper position. Of course, levels aren't as easy as that might make it sound, but that's a general example of how the mechanics of the game work.

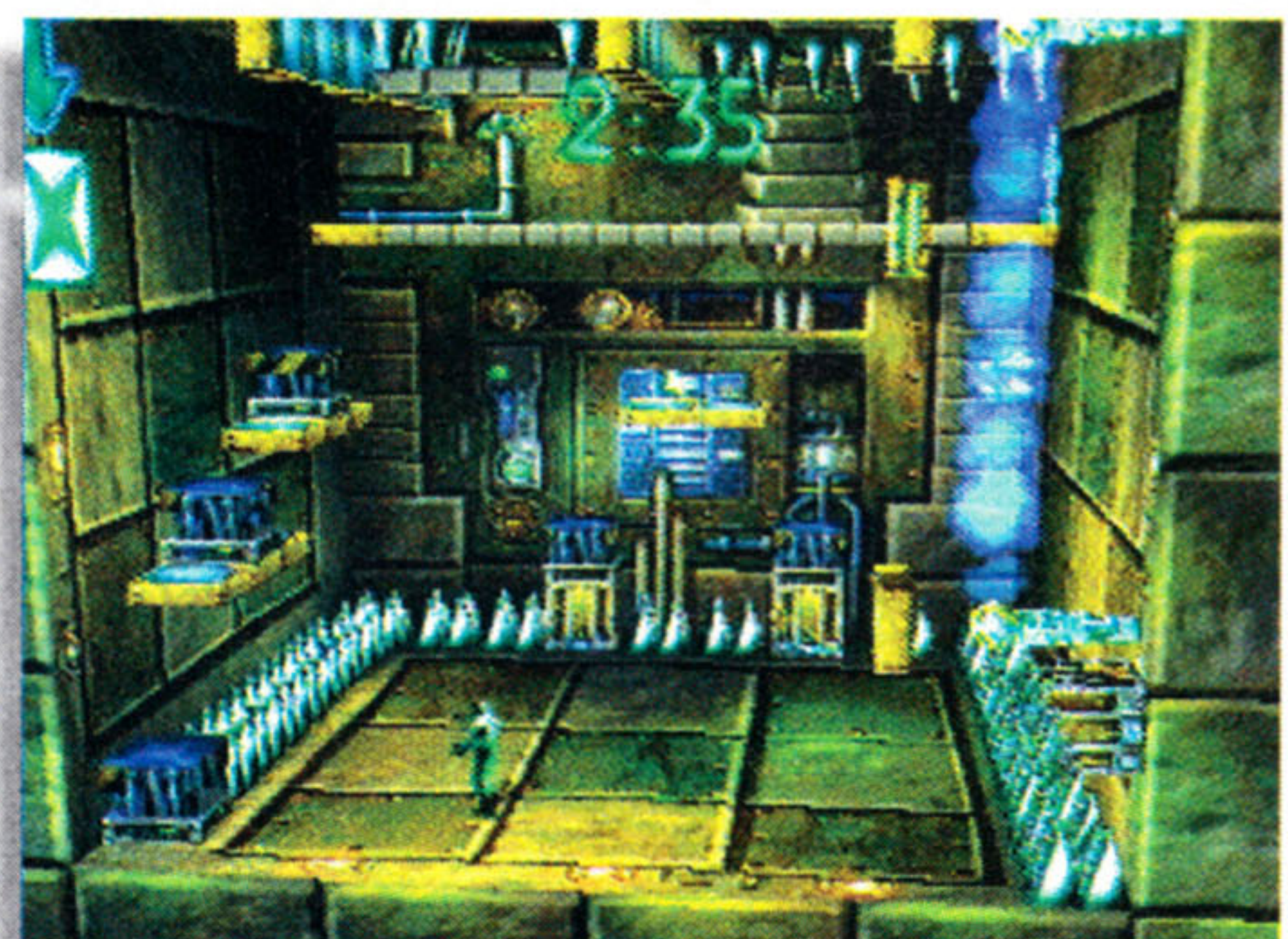
Blast Chamber allows up to four people to play simultaneously, a mode which radically changes the goal of the game. Instead of trying to solve puzzles and finish the levels, your object is to die as few times as possible in a certain time period. Four people try to retrieve the orb simultaneously, and each player has his own goal—reaching a specifically colored floor tile while holding the orb, which will extend the time you have left before dying in the chamber. If you put the orb in your opponent's goal, he or she will begin to slowly burst into flames. A variety of other physical actions are there to be executed (such as punching and

stealing) in attempts to knock the orb away from your opponent, and you can also rotate the room to make your opponents simultaneously fall flat on their faces. With all of this mayhem, the intensity and fun levels are constantly high.

It's refreshing to see that Activision has finally made a new puzzle game that doesn't have Shanghai written anywhere on it. Loaded with potential, Blast Chamber is one of the most unique and challenging games to hit a console system in a long time.



▶ Your character has full 3-D freedom of motion on the floor, and can then spin around the entire room on its central axis to convert a wall into a new floor.



▶ In this stage, you might use the springboards (bottom left) to jump upward, avoiding the spikes and landing safely on platforms. Gas effects provide atmosphere.

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LEARN OR DIE!

▶ Pai and Jeffry face off in a simplified yet colorful rendition of Pai's stage. Though Jeffry might be only three feet tall, he still packs a mighty punch.



Virtua Fighter Kids

A little younger and a little easier to control, Sega's Virtua Fighters come to fight again

Publisher: Sega

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Sega/AM2

Release: Third Quarter '96

Virtua Fighter Kids seems like a very strange concept at first; four-foot-tall versions of the Virtua Fighter characters pummeling each other with all of the brutality of their older siblings. This dichotomy prompted Sega of America to do a double take: Would releasing a game featuring cute little kids beating the crud out of each other give gamers the wrong idea? After displaying both VF Kids and the new Sonic fighting game at E³, however, Sega has decided to bring this game to these shores.

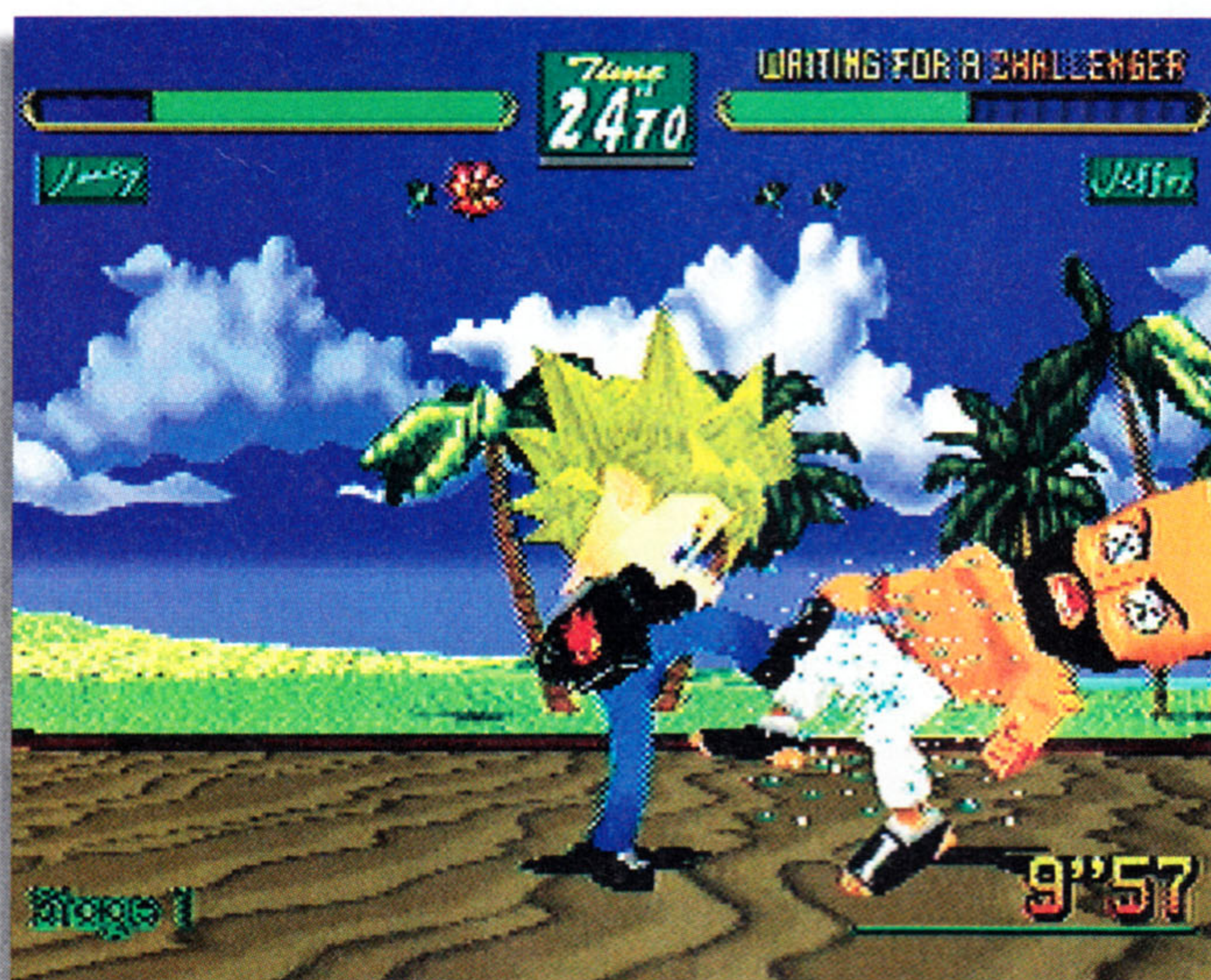
As an arcade game, VFK was not one of Sega's more ambitious titles. Powered by the ST-V board, which is essentially a Saturn with ROM for the game code, Virtua Fighter Kids is a logical choice for a Saturn port. The version of the

game we previewed did not have all of the options implemented, although there are large boxes marked "secret" on the main menu, suggesting that Sega will add a score of new features to the game, similar to Namco's treatment of Tekken 2 for the PlayStation.

The game features a full-motion video introduction starring the Virtua Fighter characters sparring alongside their short and stubby cousins. Some incredible cruelty is in there, with Jacky beat-knuckling his tiny self (it



▶ Just when we thought that we had seen it all, we watched VFK's opening video and saw each of the game's supposedly noble fighters (with the exception of Shun) trading punches with kids.



▶ Though the general motifs have remained the same, cartoon-style influences have replaced Virtua Fighter 2's more realistic depictions of characters and environments. Note the anime-influenced clouds, character eyes and body proportions.

The "kids" version allows for a simplified special move scheme where special moves come out unexpectedly.

appears the little guy took his sunglasses!), although most of it is fairly humorous, like Kage's little alter ego poking him in the face after tapping him on the shoulder.

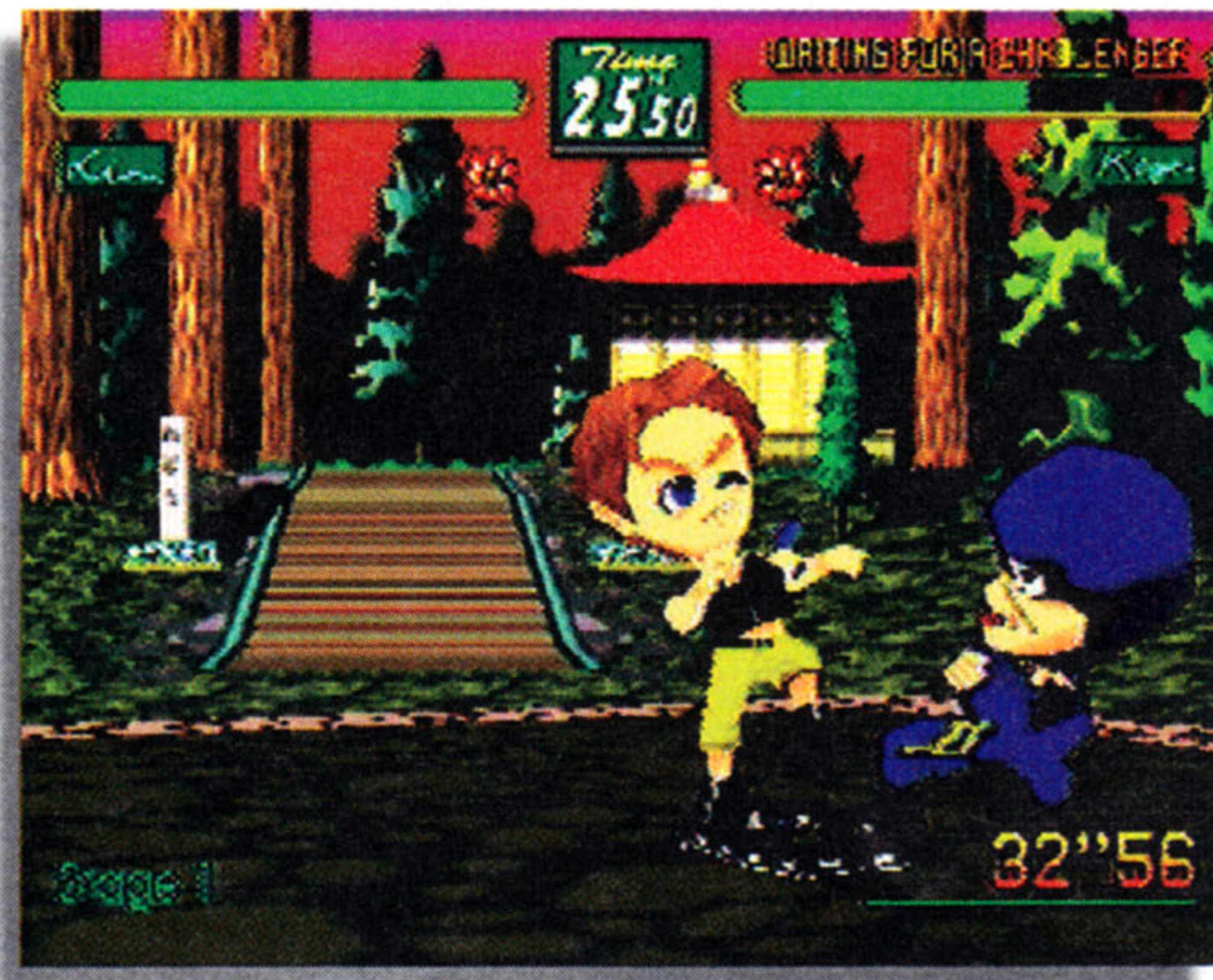
So, what are the gameplay differences between Virtua Fighter Kids and Virtua Fighter 2? In general, "floating" combos are easier to perform now, since characters bounce higher when hit. The full answer to that question, however, depends on whether or not you pick the "normal" or "kids" version of each character. Both versions are short and have big heads, but the "kids" version allows for a simplified special move scheme, where seeming random special moves come out with every button press,

making it easier for beginners to get into the game. This ease of use has a price, however; a skilled player will lose some direct control over his or her character.

As an example, take Akira's knee move. Normally, this move is



▶ Each of the game's 10 playable characters are here, albeit a bit smaller, as is the once-mighty Dural.



impossible for all but a true Virtua Fighter expert to perform; the motion is guard and kick together, releasing guard 1/60th of a second after both buttons are pressed. In "Kids" Mode, Akira's knee will come out after certain moves, for example, performing a side kick (down-forward and kick) and then hitting kick a second time will usually trigger the knee, making

when players land certain moves, like Sarah's punch-punch-punch-kickflip combo. The net result is a more dynamic feel, since the camera does more than just move around to keep the two pugilists on screen at the same time.

All of the music in Virtua Fighter Kids has been redone, with, logically enough, a more child-like feel. Most notably different is Jeffrey's stage

Everything has been redrawn in a charming pastel color scheme; Akira's horse is now a smiling purple pony.

combos much easier to perform.

Graphically, Virtua Fighter Kids is not a ground-breaking step above its predecessor. It still features flat backgrounds to accompany its high-res characters, although some transparent textures have been added. Everything has been redrawn, however, in a charming pastel color scheme. For example, the statue of a horse in Akira's stage has been replaced by a smiling purple pony. The facial expressions of the characters are also worth noting, and are quite humorous: Characters grimace when they get hit, and their eyes will go wide with surprise when they are picked up for a throw.

There are other graphical differences, like the inclusion of Tekken-style hit sparks which appear when one character lands a solid blow upon another. Sega has also added a Fighting Vipers-style triple replay which occurs

music, which has become a down-tempo reggae tune that more closely matches his stage. Voices are almost unbearably cute; they consist of the same voices as Virtua Fighter 2, only pitched up a couple of octaves. Purists will be happy to note that the "pish!" heavy blow sound has been brought back from the arcade game.

Another interesting tidbit is the inclusion of advertising in the Japanese version, with ads from tea to sports drinks emblazoned on the characters' arenas. The version we looked at had no hint of advertising, suggesting that only in the Japanese version will Jacky be holding a can of Java Tea in triumph.

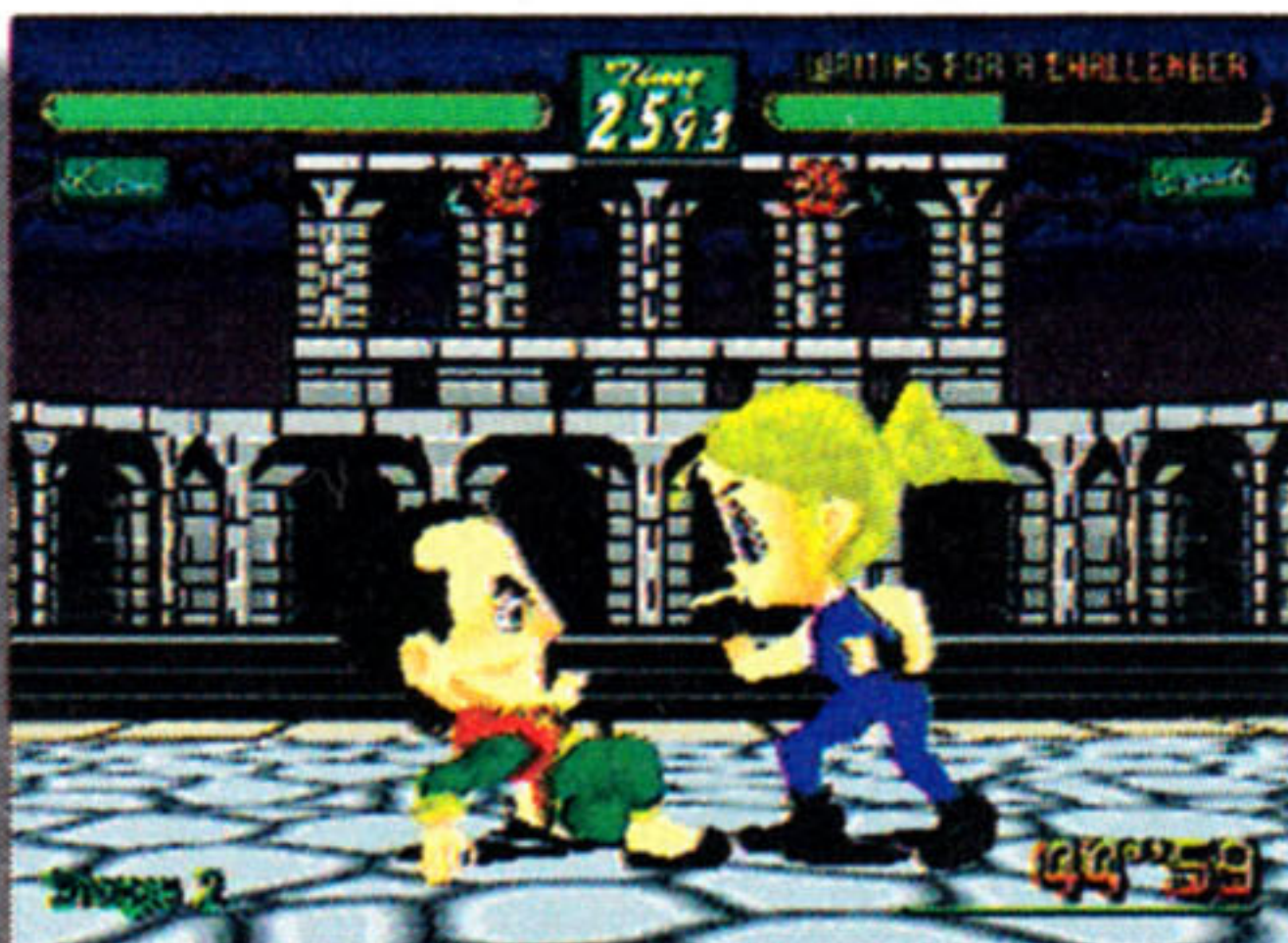
All in all, Virtua Fighter Kids is an interesting addition to the

Though the graphics are cartoony, the programmers did spend the requisite time to redraw the background artwork to make the most of the Saturn's limitations.

Virtua Fighter line of games, despite its similarity to Virtua Fighter 2. Those who bought VF2 and weren't floored by it, however, probably won't be terribly interested in Virtua Fighter Kids. While there are significant gameplay differences, it's probable that the changes in Normal Mode may be too subtle for most people to notice. Still, at 60 percent completion, the game shows significant promise. Let's hope that Sega throws in some extra modes that will help differentiate the game.



Using the game's simplified "kids" control, even younger and less experienced players can look like Virtua Fighter pros.



In Normal Mode, Virtua Fighter Kids feels nearly identical to Virtua Fighter 2, and all of the old characters retain their distinctive attacks and counter-attacks. As the arcade game and home version both use Saturn technology, VFK is a perfect port.

As was the case with Virtua Fighter 2 for the Saturn, backgrounds have been flattened and 3-D is limited.



Sega's PC VFR Port

The latest in Sega console ports to the PC, Virtua Fighter Remix is quite a surprise, as a previous PC incarnation required the nVidia NV1-powered Diamond Edge 3D card to run. This new version requires no acceleration, and its minimum system requirements are quite steep, with a Pentium 90 with 16MB of RAM as a baseline setup.

The game is essentially the same as the Saturn version, with a similar polygon count and look. The textures can be toggled for those who prefer the classic flat-shaded look (or if the computer is not fast enough to shift the textured versions of the characters). In the 60 percent version previewed, the game had the same AI as the Saturn version, and was easy to control, even with the keyboard.

The rest of the graphics are also fully scalable, with two Resolution Modes and multiple options to adjust the frame rate, including an option which will set the game to run as smooth or as quickly as possible. In its High-res Mode, the game looks even better than the Saturn version, as the textures look very sharp on a 640x480 screen. On a Pentium 133, the game ran at approximately 20fps with all details enabled in Hi-res Mode, and greater than 30 fps when the resolution was dropped.

All in all, it appears that Virtua Fighter Remix PC is a very close port, which is impressive considering it requires no hardware acceleration. Sega plans other ports to the PC from the Saturn, with titles including Daytona USA and Virtua City P.D. (Virtua Cop).

▶ During the fight, you have little actual control over your character—when you match up and eliminate blocks, the character will throw a punch or do a special move automatically.



Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo

Capcom tackles the puzzle genre with an intentional parody of their best-known fighters

If there's one thing that Capcom has been known for for the last five years or so, it has been their continuous output of one-on-one 2-D fighting games. Using the same CPS2 hardware that powers the latest Capcom beat-'em-ups, Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo leverages Capcom's popular fighting game characters from their Street Fighter and Darkstalkers series, and mixes them up with puzzle-style gameplay that plays like a refined version of Sega's Baku Baku. This is a very different game for Capcom, especially of late, since the last few titles they've released that could be called "puzzle games" have been Buster Bros. and the little-seen early '90s arcade game Three Wonders, which featured a Pengo variant called Don't Pull.

You choose from eight different characters: four from Street Fighter, and four from Darkstalkers. Your character choice makes a difference, determining the pattern of blocks that fall on your opponent's playfield.

Once the game begins, colored blocks begin falling from the top of the playfield, and any blocks of the same color that are placed in a rectangular pattern will fuse together to form a power gem. To clear the blocks from your playfield, the colored blocks must be matched with similarly colored stars, which causes all adjacent blocks of that color to disappear and appear on your opponent's screen as interference blocks in the "attack pattern" of your character. Power gems count more than normal blocks, which encourages players to build large power gems in an attempt to create a strong offensive arsenal. There is some defense in this game, however, as



▶ Initial glances might lead you to believe that the game plays like Sega's Columns, but Capcom has evolved the concept further with countdown blocks, morphing crystals and combo attacks, not to mention the occasional fireball or dragon punch.

any blocks you send over to your opponent while interference blocks are looming over your head will subtract from the number about to fall on your playfield.

One of the most significant features that separates SPF2T from similar games is the concept of the interference blocks. They cannot be matched with the normal

adjacent to them vanish.

When a power gem is eliminated (sending a flood of interference blocks to the other playfield), your character will perform a special move on his or her opponent, or a Super Combo if the offensive strike is powerful enough. Characters have different facial expressions depending on their

Colored blocks must be matched with similarly colored stars, which causes all close matching blocks to disappear.

blocks, at least, not right away. On each interference block is a number that decreases after every move; when the counter zeroes, they change into normal blocks, allowing clever players to use them to create a sort of "time-bomb" attack. Interference blocks are not invulnerable, however; they will disappear if any normal blocks

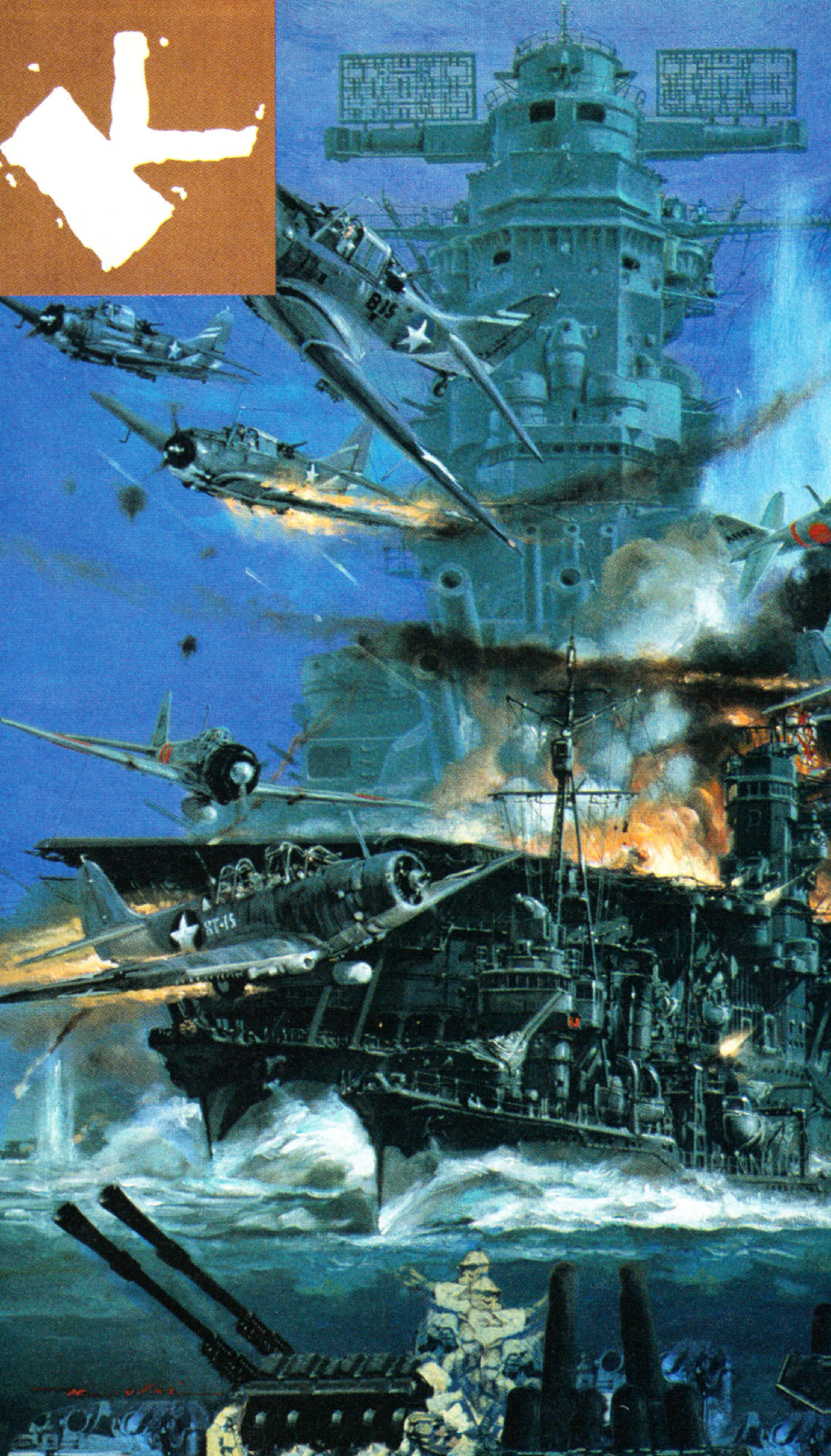
situation, and will taunt their opponent once each round if the start button is pushed.

Currently, the game is on test with no release date set or even confirmed. We'll just have to hope that either Capcom decides to release this game here, or that it does well enough in Japan to merit a home version.

- Publisher:** Capcom
- Platform:** Arcade
- Format:** CPS2 Hardware
- Developer:** Capcom
- Release:** Undetermined



▶ Characters from both Night Warriors and Street Fighter Alpha 2 can be chosen as on-screen personas for players.



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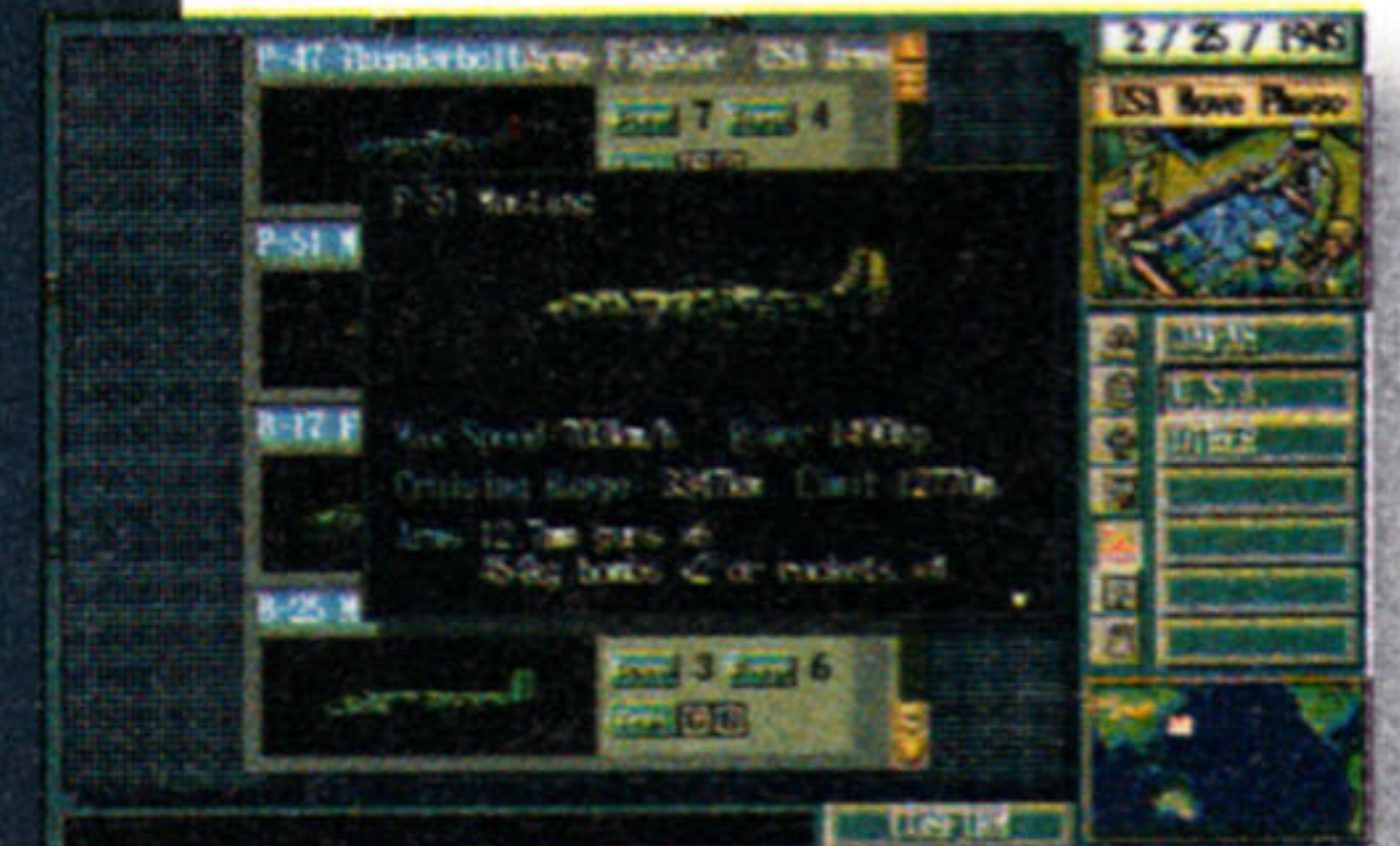
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Burning Road

Funsoft comes from nowhere to create a Daytona USA-style racer for the PlayStation

Publisher: Playmates

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Funsoft

Release: 3rd Quarter '96

How close is Playmates' new racing game Burning Road in concept to last year's most successful racing games? Let's just say that if only Capcom had been successful in its suit against Data East for duplicating the general Street Fighter II formula in Fighter's History, Burning Road would never have looked like it does.

Take some of the more standard cars from Twisted Metal; throw in the best parts of the tracks and backgrounds from Daytona USA and Sega Rally Championship; add in the race helicopter and polygonal airplanes from Ridge Racer, and you're almost done. For a little extra oomph, toss in a splash of elemental (rain/snow) effects and the hanging objects from the rear-view mirror of Sega's Rad Mobile (Gale

As there are a number of PS owners who love Daytona and Sega Rally, this title is an almost ideal alternative.

Racer) driving title. Then, come up with music and audio effects that are close to blatant rip-offs of Daytona USA, even down to the bizarre phrase "Decided Like This" from the options screens and the singing of the title (in this case, "Burning Road") throughout the game.

If it sounds like we're being hard on Burning Road, forgive us—we have to be fair to the people who originally conceived of most of these elements before we tell you how great they look in this new

▶ The least derivative parts of Burning Road involve water (both on the ground and in the air) and exotic car designs, which will still remind some of Rad Mobile and Twisted Metal.



▶ Some of the little details add personality to Burning Road's heavily cloned format, while others are simply taken from other titles. The displays and traffic meter come from Daytona and other racers, while the trophy icon and columns are new.



▶ Snow scenes are somewhat unique to the genre, featuring realistic snowflakes, gorgeous mountainous scenery and flybys by low-flying planes.

game. As there are certainly a number of PlayStation owners out there who enjoyed Daytona USA or Sega Rally in the arcades and have no ability to plunk down the cash for a Saturn, Burning Road seems like an almost ideal alternative—it has most of the look of Sega's best racing games and even less of the annoying frame rate and pop-up problems that especially plagued Daytona. In fact, Burning Road's most impressive feature is its exceptionally smooth graphics engine: The frame rate, quality of textures and complexity of the backgrounds is similar enough to the arcade version of Daytona to keep players visually enthralled across three neat tracks, and the rain and snow effects add even more of an aesthetic kick to the mix. BR's tracks are littered with objects, as well, which slow your car down if you ram into them at high speeds.

If there's one flaw in the early

version of Burning Road we've tested, it's that the gameplay lacks the long-term depth and challenging control that make a title worth owning—right now, all three tracks feel a lot like the beginner track on Daytona, and there aren't as many cars on any given track, either. We're anxious to play a final version, however, as what we've seen to date is definitely an arcade-quality experience...if perhaps a somewhat familiar one.

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▶ A drive through the spires of a bridge will no doubt remind many of the second track of Daytona USA.

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▶ In the first pictures released of the Saturn version of *Fighting Vipers*, all of the essential elements are in place: reasonable-looking characters, 3-D cage graphics and flat backgrounds.

Fighting Vipers

Sega readies AM2's latest arcade fighter for release on the Sega Saturn

Publisher: Sega of America

Platform: Sega Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Sega AM2

Release: Third Quarter '96



Just as Capcom discovered after reinventing the one-on-one fighting genre with *Street Fighter II*, Sega's AM2 design unit quickly found that they couldn't just use every one of their new fighting game ideas in another *Virtua Fighter* title. Enter *Fighting Vipers*, a game which at one point was being called "*Virtua Fighter 2.5*" by some ill-informed observers, as indeed the title's aesthetic concepts take a step beyond Sega's previous premier fighter, but are only loosely related to Sega's sequel plans for the *Virtua Fighter* series.

Chief among the additions to the VF formula are interactive backgrounds and body armor, which get damaged.

Chief among the additions to the VF formula are interactive backgrounds—in this case, simple boxed fences and walls—which allow your character to come off of the walls and ram his or her opponents off of some hard surfaces. After a few solid hits against a wall, your opponent will take a nasty fall as the surface shatters outward and the more distant background is exposed. In one stage of the arcade game, a plane takes off and flies over the arena, casting a shadow over the ring, but no one is certain yet whether that sort of background effect will survive the Saturn translation.

Another difference between *Fighting Vipers* and the VF games is the former title's inclusion of body armor, protective clothing worn by the in-game fighters until they absorb a few solid punches. One of the game's dramatic effects is the shattering of this armor off of the combatants' bodies, leaving bare

skin exposed to be damaged. As might be fairly assumed, armor on any of the VF characters would look gaudy, which leaves you to wonder what the *Vipers* look like.

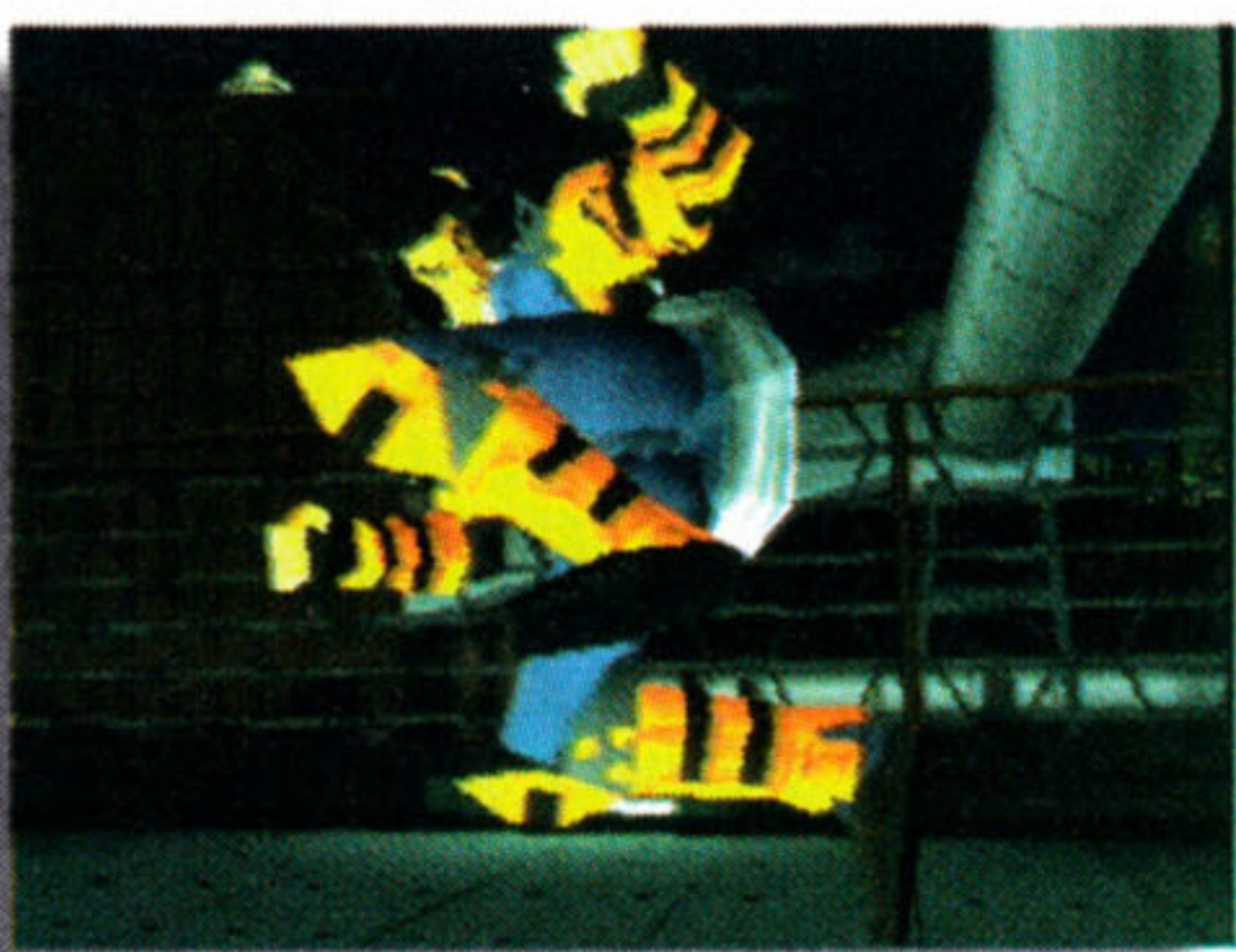
They're a motley crew, for sure. Dressed like cast members of a mid-1980s B-movie (or Captain Freedom from Schwarzenegger's *The Running Man*), the eight playable fighters in *Fighting Vipers* are a bit off-center and are armed with either hand-to-hand combat skills or less-than-traditional weaponry, including one brawler's skateboard and another's electric guitar. The game's female charac-

fact, they're often pretty weak-looking by comparison, but the game's content is much more Generation X than the decidedly high-minded VF martial arts action.

As a Saturn translation, *Fighting Vipers* fares reasonably well. The armor and background wall effects have been preserved, albeit somewhat less impressive than their arcade equivalents (at the moment, only two of a cage's walls show at a given time, for example), and the distant background art has been predictably flattened to remove some of the polygon processing pressure on the Saturn graphics chips. On the whole, however, *Fighting Vipers* indeed attempts more visually than did the home translation of *Virtua Fighter 2*, and even if the characters are weirder looking, Sega's pushing the hardware more than before.

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▶ Unlike *Virtua Fighter* and its sequel, *Fighting Vipers*' characters wear all sorts of odd clothes and implements. Note the rollerblades and protective padding.



▶ More so than was the case with *Virtua Fighter 2*, Sega is aiming to closely approximate the arcade game's graphics with 3-D effects.



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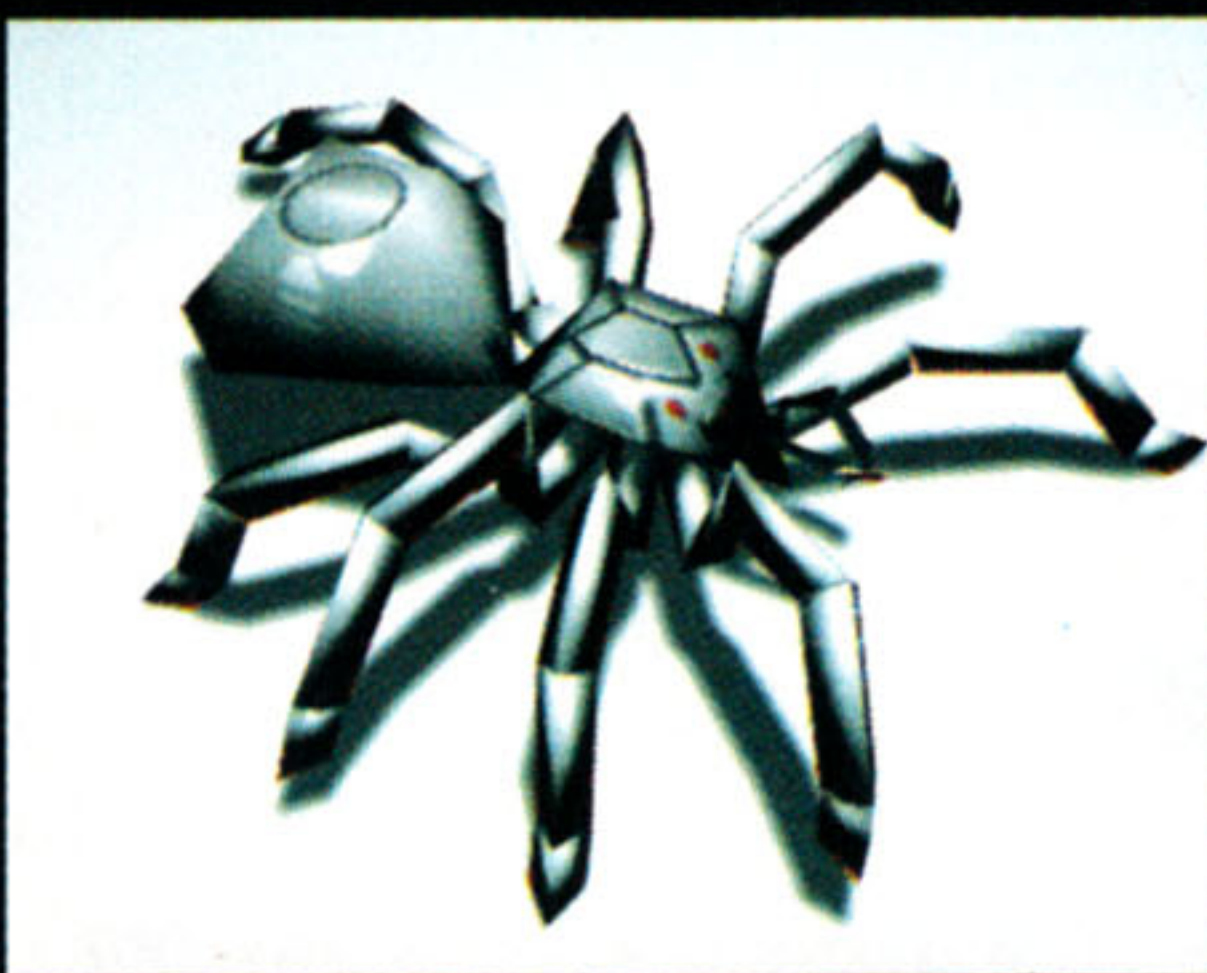
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Catch a demo at SIGGRAPH
Booth #1130

▶ While many will quickly pass *Disruptor* off as "just another Doom clone," a good second look reveals a much deeper game with an even better engine than *Doom* itself.



Disruptor

Once ready to become 3DO's "killer app," Universal's new 3-D blaster goes to Sony

Publisher: Universal Interactive

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Insomniac

Release: 4th Quarter '96

Some time ago, the 3DO Company was said to be excited about a little-known development team named Seven and a Doom clone that was going to be their "killer app." The game was supposedly being readied for both the original "Opera" 3DO and the company's forthcoming M2.

When 3DO's fortunes declined and the M2's release became more distant, Seven's title was ported to Sony's PlayStation. Unlike *Doom*, with its pseudo-3-D engine, *Disruptor* is powered by a truly polygonal graphics engine which allows multilevel design. The game runs at a smooth 30 fps and features both extensive Gouraud shading and a convincing fog effect to mask pop-up in the distance.

In terms of gameplay, *Disruptor* is not wholly innovative, but does put a satisfying twist on the standard 3-D run-and-shoot genre. The difference lies in the psionic weapon system that the player must master, which must be managed with the standard projectile-based weapons systems. While the psionics are very powerful, they require recharging, which can be accomplished by blasting enemies with the psionic drain weapon. Unfortunately, the psionic drain does very little physical damage, so it is often very dangerous to attempt to recharge your psionic power, after all, that big sentry robot will simply keep blasting at you while you plink away at him. So the question is, should you waste the bad guy outright, attempt to recharge your psionics, or use up some more of your psionics and nuke him in one shot? In our limited play time, we felt the best option was to attempt to both charge the psionics and shoot them with the standard

gun—provided, of course, that there aren't too many enemies to dispatch. Those situations are when the psionics are essential, as one psionic weapon will kill most enemies in one shot, and another psionic tool heals your character, which is completely indispensable.

The final game will consist of 13 relatively large levels, with changes in environment in each level. Each new level will feature a new enemy never before seen on previous levels, and the level design will be less

to follow you, and take potshots at you through windows. Some enemies are programmed to fire one shot at you and hightail it out of there, which tempts the player to follow him into an ambush. One playable mission was a training simulation featuring "hostage" drones which the player has to avoid shooting, as they are programmed to chase the player and detonate if they are pegged.

Disruptor will take advantage of Universal's Hollywood connections,

A truly polygonal graphics engine enables the designers to create better-than-Doom quality 3-D scenarios.

mazelike, as the player will generally know which direction to go in to meet his mission objectives. As mentioned previously, the levels are completely 3-D, which means that that building you see out the window is not a flat 2-D bitmap. Characters, however, are done *Doom*-style, using 2-D sprites with multiple frames of animation.

Another interesting feature is the AI in the game, which will feature enemies that will open doors

as it will feature level concepts designed by Catherine Hardwicke, who was the production designer for *Tombstone* and *Tank Girl*, as well as music and sound effects done by other Hollywood veterans. Full-motion video intermissions will be inserted when appropriate, and the video clips are being produced in cooperation with the MCA Television Entertainment division.

Curiously missing from the features list of *Disruptor* is the lack of a link capability, an omission which hurt the lasting power of a similar game, LucasArts' *Dark Forces*. However, a sufficient quantity of interesting features have been included, making this title one to watch, even for those jaded gamers who have had their fill of *Doom* and their ilk.



▶ Unlike other first-person shooters which recycle their textures, every level of *Disruptor* has a completely new visual style.



▶ Amazing visuals and special effects make for a truly unique atmosphere—using a true polygonal engine, all sorts of shapes inconceivable in *Doom* are possible.

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▶ The indoor motocross action is only one part of VMX's appeal—the courses are full of hills, bumps, and yes, plenty of mud.

VMX Racing

The first 32-Bit title from Studio E races out from the starting line with fast, colorful graphics

Publisher: Playmates

Platform: Saturn/PS/PC

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Studio E

Release: 3rd Quarter '96



▶ Lush trees and mountains enable the programmers to put more polygons into a given spot rather than spreading the polygons thin on a wide-open indoor track.

It's no great coincidence that there haven't been any successes amongst the few motocross racing games that have been released over the last few years—they've all been poorly executed and/or easily forgettable. There was nothing compelling for the average player about racing a motorcycle over a number of dirt tracks, especially when the sluggish graphics updating made the screen seem as if it was constantly jittering, and this is an inherent problem with many motocross titles: Because you're racing in open arenas with small hills and no huge land barriers, the programmers are forced to let you see a huge expanse of track, unlike Ridge Racer or Daytona USA where you can barely see the course beyond your next turn.

As a result of their visual complexity, such 3-D first- or third-person motocross titles were never attempted on 16-Bit systems without extra graphics processors—Dirt Trax FX required a SNES Super FX chip and Sega's Motocross Championship was a 32X game. Today, with the 32-Bit PlayStation coming into its own as a mainstream game machine, Studio E and Playmates are trying to put some smoother visual spins on the old motocross concept. (Saturn and PC versions are planned, as well.)

Each of VMX Racing's motorcycles and riders is a fully polygonal object, and the courses are comprised of a combination of polygons and flat sprites. Thankfully, rather than locking away the action inside closed stadiums and showing you track after track full of muddy hills and bleachers, VMX lets you race both indoors and out, with bumpy courses in picturesque locales such



▶ The frame rate in the indoor courses is adequate and the graphics are nicely presented, but the clutter of bikes (right) often confuses the player in the early version we've played.

as Hawaii, the Pacific Northwest, Mexico and California. Though the PlayStation's considerable math hardware makes it easy to generate fast visuals, tall mountains and trees outdoors provide the programmers with some extra breathing room to focus on generating more smooth close-up artwork in front of you. After seeing six of the eight standard

on your own which way you should go on a seemingly divergent course. We've screwed up badly at key course obstacles, such as a canyon jump lacking any sort of bridge—hey, real motocross bikers don't plummet to their deaths, do they?—and run into dead ends at what appears to be your choice of course paths. On the bright side, we were generally

Motorcycles, riders and backgrounds are built from polygons, giving VMX more 3-D than other motocross titles.

courses, we're anxious to check out some of the game's hidden bonus tracks—one is even supposed to take place in zero gravity on the moon.

At 70 percent at the time of this preview, VMX is fast—too fast, on occasion—and the controls definitely need to be tightened up a bit before release. When you take control of your bike, you'll find different camera views, two different accelerator buttons and the ability to do some realistic racing stunts. In our early version, we found it easy to oversteer, moderately challenging to find your bike in Third-person mode amidst the pack of other racers, and frequently difficult to understand

quite impressed with the backgrounds and vehicles, not to mention the realistic sound effects and rock-style background music. Especially considering the home and arcade popularity of more linear motorcycle racing titles such as Road Rash, Super Hang-On and Manx T.T., Playmates could have a major hit on their hands if the small rough edges are smoothed out prior to release. Little refinements here and there could make the final version of VMX Racing the first real standout title in the motocross category, which is as close to an "off-rails" motor racing experience as players are going to get for some time.



▶ PowerSlave's weapons are a cross between those in Heretic, Duke Nukem and Doom; you get pistols, machine guns, grenades, staffs, rings and flamethrowers.

PowerSlave

As Saturn owners most likely haven't put their hands on Hexen or Heretic quite yet, Playmates and Lobotomy Software's terrific version of PowerSlave is set to become the first Doom-style 3-D fantasy action title for home consoles. *IG* was very happy to see that it was something more than just a slow, boring clone of a now clichéd game.

In much the same way as Psygnosis' Tenka evolves Doom a bit for the PlayStation and more directly uses Sony's hardware, PowerSlave shows Saturn owners that their machine can do a more than commendable job with 3-D graphics as well. In the fastest and most impressive 3-D Doom engine we've seen yet for the Saturn, PowerSlave puts you in control of an explorer armed with a jump, the ability to easily look straight up and down, a full-screen transparent overhead map and a wide variety of neat weapons.

While wandering through 28 stages in the Egyptian Karnak Valley, you'll encounter animal, humanoid and mystical enemies which range in size and threat



▶ Light-source shading is perhaps the single most impressive visual effect in PowerSlave—here, an enemy at the end of a hallway throws blue energy balls at you, illuminating the entire hallway with moving purple light.

Seeing everything move in such fluid 3-D is the main PowerSlave highlight, but the unique design was another.

from spider to alien creature to demon god, and you'll have the opportunity to obliterate them with a pistol, machine gun, Egyptian staff, flamethrower, power ring, power gloves and glowing magical cobra staff. Weapon

effects are half Duke Nukem 3D and half Heretic, impressive in both concept and implementation, and the levels have a decidedly ancient look and feel. Thankfully, unlike many console 3-D titles, in this game you can walk up staircases and ride elevators just as you would in Doom, and there are other areas

that can only be accessed through special jumps and additional exploration.

Seeing everything move in such fluid 3-D was *IG*'s main highlight, but the enemy characters and gameplay were others. Egyptian statues morph into forgotten sorts of humanoid monsters, and you're forced to try to shoot vicious, clawing cat women who melt into the ground and teleport someplace else to attack you. Though the comparison might at first seem a bit abstract, fans of the movie *Stargate* will find a lot to like in PowerSlave, as will fans of the Doom premise who have gotten burned by a number of lesser derivative games. Like Duke 3D, PowerSlave elevates the premise and comes off successfully as a consequence.

Lobotomy's first big title scores a surprising direct hit with great special effects and ideas

Publisher: Playmates

Platform: Saturn/PS/PC

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Lobotomy

Release: 3rd Quarter '96



▶ Statues inside of one temple can suddenly come to life and attack you...unless you set them on fire with your rather powerful flamethrower.



▶ Good portions of PowerSlave take place in both outdoor and indoor environments. Unlike many similar titles, Lobotomy's game lets you really feel like you're exploring a world.



▶ Over 10 years after the release of BallBlazer, one of LucasArts' first titles, BallBlazer Champions takes futuristic sports to the next level.



BallBlazer Champions

Lucas' classic returns from the dawn of computer games, complete with a new design

Publisher: LucasArts

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Factor 5

Release: Fall '96

Released in 1985, BallBlazer was a major hit for LucasArts on the Atari 800 and Commodore 64 home computers. With fast-moving addictive gameplay and what was at the time a rather novel split-screen two-player mode, BallBlazer's simple get-the-ball-in-the-goal gameplay proved to have the right balance to get gamers' attention and hold it. More than 10 years later, LucasArts has decided that the time is right to take advantage of the power of a new generation of consoles to bring BallBlazer back onto the gaming scene in a fully updated 3-D-rendered PlayStation title. BallBlazer Champions attempts to include everything one would expect in a modern game while retaining the feel and addictive gameplay of the original.

Developers Factor 5 have gone about doing this by keeping the basic play mechanics almost intact while completely revamping the aesthetics, and adding depth to the gameplay through new, three-dimensional arenas, new power-ups, weapons and different rotofoils you can choose from and modify as you please. The graphics have been completely redone in 3-D, with lighting and transparency effects used well where appropriate. The arenas, rotofoils and weapons are all polygonal objects rendered with Gouraud shading and texture-mapping. An indicator points toward the ball, or if you are currently holding the ball, points toward the goal. Four views allow you to play from a first-person perspective or from rear views of varying distance. Two-player play takes place in the now-standard split-screen mode, one of the most memorable features from the original BallBlazer game.

At its most basic, the gameplay consists of moving the ball toward the goal and firing it in. Buttons are used to launch the ball, give a short turbo boost or turn automatically to face the ball. One aspect of the gameplay which makes things more interesting is the incorporation of a power meter. When the meter is not being drained, it recharges automatically, but turbo boost, auto-turning toward the ball, and even just holding on to the ball all drain power. When your power runs out, your ship can only move extremely slow, and cannot launch the ball for more than short distances. As a result, it is nearly

LucasArts has decided that the time is right to bring BallBlazer back onto the gaming scene.

impossible to be successful simply by holding on to the ball as you move—it is necessary to keep launching it out in front of you so that it doesn't drain your power.

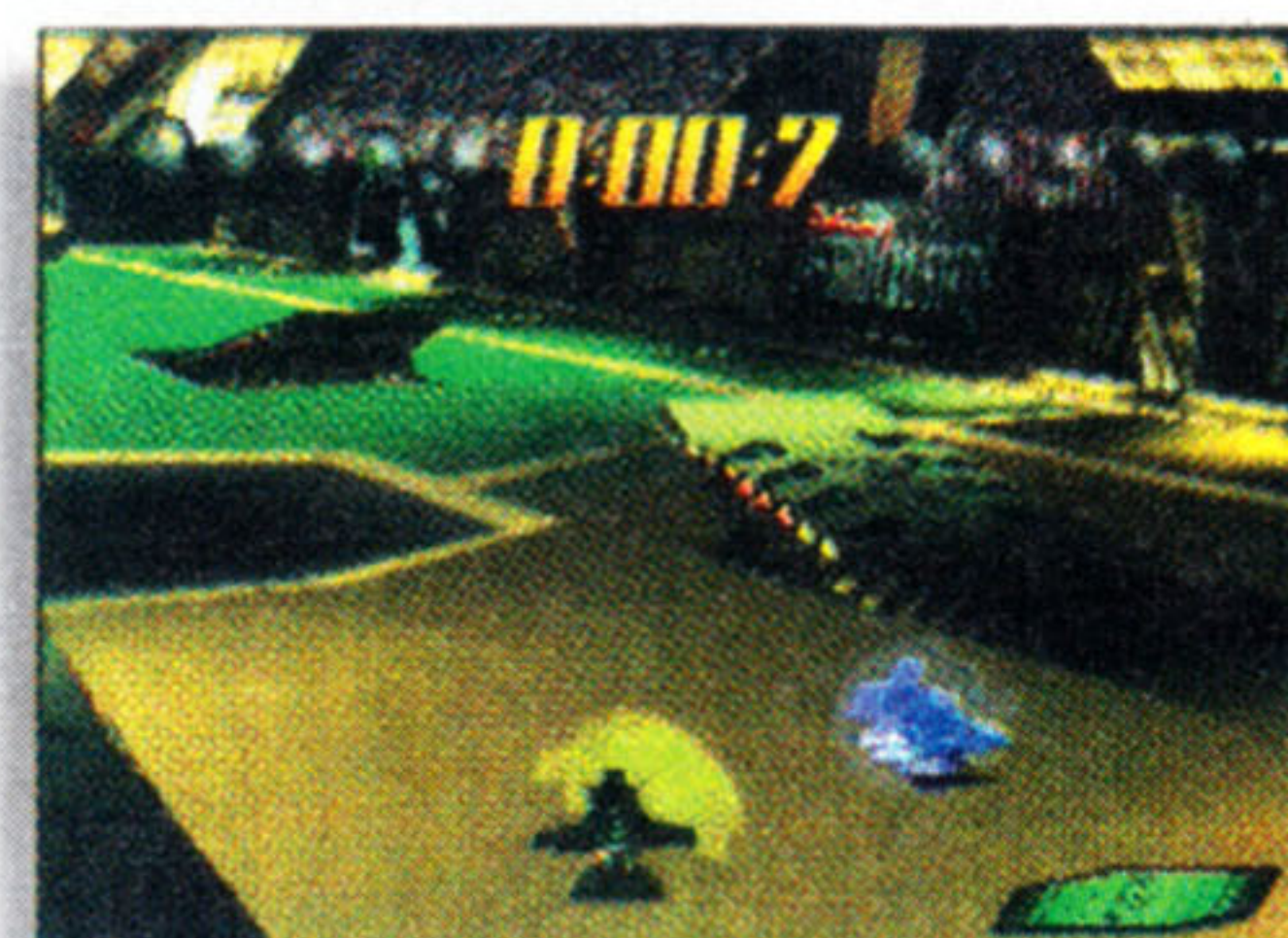
The addition of weapons also adds variety to the gameplay. Weapons include dumb missiles, homing missiles, guns and a sort of oil slick. The effects are generally a combination of draining power and knocking away the ball, although the oil slick behaves as one would expect, causing anyone who runs into it to spin out. Various obstacles have been added as well, including ramps which actually allow you to jump, and special strips, one of which keeps you powered up while you're on it, and the other of which drains your power. A wide variety of 3-D

arenas also spices up the gameplay, with different types of arenas offering different shapes, obstacles and types of goals. There are four types of arenas, from a stadium model which is mostly flat and, unsurprisingly, feels very much like you're playing inside a stadium, to a type of arena with bridges that cross over the playing area, actually creating multiple levels across which to maneuver. There are 12 arenas available for basic play. Goals also vary, from the generic type which stand just a bit in front of the edge of the arena to one which is actually embedded in the arena wall to one which moves back and forth in front of the wall, and has to be hit from behind (making it necessary to bounce shots off the arena wall).

BallBlazer Champions is both a little something old and a little something new, but it's definitely worth checking out in 1996.



▶ Everything in the game has been rendered in 3-D, using the PlayStation's effects such as Gouraud shading and transparencies.



▶ The two-player mode gets fast and furious, with the various weapons causing the other rotofoils to lose power, control or the ball itself.

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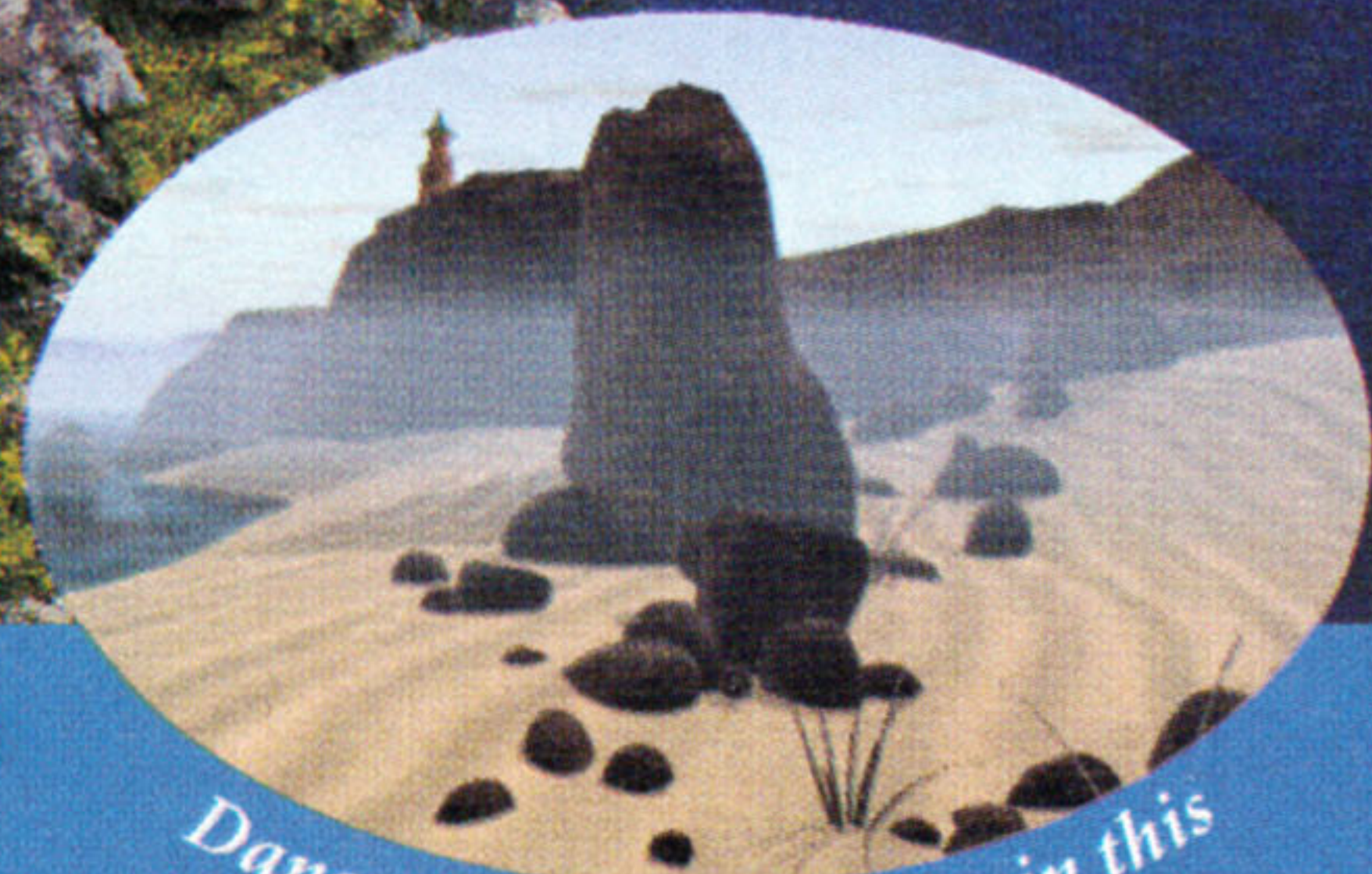
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Three Dirty Dwarves

SegaSoft succeeds in redefining the walk-and-punch genre with a multi-player cartoon

Publisher: SegaSoft

Platform: Sega Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: SegaSoft

Release: 3rd Quarter '96

There's something really weird about SegaSoft that we didn't fully realize back when we profiled the company in *IG's Fusion* issue 10—they like to tackle seemingly impossible tasks that most companies wouldn't jab with a 10-foot spear.

Truth be told, *Intelligent Gamer* has been thoroughly bored with the walk-and-punch genre for the last few years, as everything after *Final Fight* seemed like little more than a slightly different and/or decidedly inferior clone. Not so with *Three Dirty Dwarves*, and trust us, if this was more of the same bland "hold down the punch button" trash, we would have turned it off very quickly. Instead, it's been entirely worthwhile to play through each of the game's hand-drawn cartoony levels and learn the ins and outs of its bizarre heroes and enemies, all of which (in an age of much rendering and precise pixel drawing) look as if they

were half inspired by *Yoshi's Island* and half by nasty experiences with crack pipes. How else could you explain the existence of a trio of fantasy comic dwarves who run through the Bronx wearing sporting goods and blasting playgrounds with shotguns, baseball bats and bowling balls?

Your controls are simple: One

short-distance weapon (smacking enemies with your gun's butt, hitting them with bowling pins or a ball, or cracking them with the aforementioned baseball bat), a jump button allows you to catch some air and another button activates a limited-use team attack.

As your dwarves travel together, you can toggle between characters

If this was more of the same bland "hold down the punch button" trash, we'd have turned it off very quickly.

button fires your long-distance (unlimited use) weapon, the ease of use of which depends on the dwarf you're controlling. The shotgun just unloads quickly, but pitching bowling balls takes a moment and hitting baseballs forces you to actually connect your bat with one or more of a handful of projectiles you loft into the air. Another button uses your

at will—this would make the game a cinch if you had full lifebars, but SegaSoft instead has opted to make the game challenging by taking a dwarf temporarily out of action whenever he gets hit by an enemy. Sitting on the ground dazed, a defeated dwarf can be brought back into activity by simply walking up to him and smacking him upside the head; if all three dwarves are

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From scene to scene, you'll use both short-range attacks and long-distance ones (such as rolling bowling balls, smacking baseballs or firing your shotgun) to take out enemies.



down at once, the game is over. As a consequence, keeping all of your men alive simultaneously through all of the challenges is the game's major goal, and SegaSoft keeps the action fun and presentation interesting by throwing a variety of activities at you and continuously spooling new graphics off of the CD. Moreover, the music is energy-packed Eastern European techno, which helps to keep the action exciting and adrenaline pumping, and the sound effects are quite adequate for the genre.

In standard stages, you might have to knock playground horses off of their springs so as to get extra jumping power to reach hidden power-ups—one of the dwarves will mount a horse and rock back and forth as his partners are trying to fight. Dodging falling girders in a stage under assembly, you have to survive and defeat attacks from huge *Aliens*-style mechanized construction suits, not

to mention weird ladies carrying wrapping tape, and naked martial artists whose private areas are strategically covered with moving black bars. Boss encounters are similarly unusual but entertaining: In one stage, you literally attack the physical structure of a parody of Gold's Gym, avoiding barbells and running around as its muscle-bound inhabitants pick up the building and run around with it. You come at another building in a wrecking ball, smashing 10 sections of the front before exposing a huge dragon whose fiery breath is desperately in need of extinguishing.

In absolute terms, *Three Dirty Dwarves* is a frequently challenging and constantly entertaining game which appeals as much to the player's need for visceral action and relief as it does to the eyes and ears. Despite the fact that the artistic style is decidedly quirky and as over-the-top car-

toony as anything we've ever seen—a real contrast to the scores of walk-and-punch titles which attempted to portray their tough urban environments with accurate use of shading and proportions—SegaSoft and Appalooza have managed to produce a game which not only plays differently from any of its competitors but also has its own unique aesthetic style. One feature we're still waiting to hear about is rumored support for Sega's NetLink modem—players might be able to link up and fight together over the telephone lines, a first for this genre.

Having delivered on their promise to revolutionize walk-and-punch titles, SegaSoft's next goal is to do the same with the bastardized full-motion video format in their upcoming title, *The Sacred Pools*. We're anxious to see the results.



In one inventive section of the game, the dwarves ride a wrecking ball in an attempt to smash all of the windows and reveal the dragon hiding inside.

HEROES II

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THE SUCCESSION WARS



Virtua Cop 2

AM2's latest port brings high-speed gun chases home

Publisher: Sega of America

Platform: Saturn

Release: December '96



Gun games have historically been maligned by the gaming press, as they tend to be exercises in rote memorization. Few can argue, though, that pointing a bright orange pistol at the screen and blowing away polygonal bad guys isn't relaxing after a stressful day. If you think that gun games are simple, boring point-and-shoot affairs, Virtua Cop 2 probably won't appeal to you.

As in the first game, the object is to shoot the bad guys (conveniently framed by new fluorescent targeting crosshairs) before they get you first. You start off with a standard six-shot revolver, which can be reloaded by shooting off-screen.

Special weapons are available, though you lose them if you're hit.

What sets Virtua Cop 2 apart from its prequel is the pacing of the game. While the first largely felt like a glorified shooting gallery, with hordes of bad guys popping out from behind crates and support pillars, Virtua Cop 2 is set up to be much more cinematic, like an action movie. In the first level alone, you respond to an alarm at a jewelry store, and it's up to you to rescue the hostages and pursue the robbers. Hostages, much like in other games like Lethal Enforcers, will cost you one life point if you accidentally peg one, so it doesn't necessarily pay to be overly trigger-happy.

After pursuing the burglars through the back door of the store, you get in your car for an exciting car chase scenario through Virtua City, with pedestrians scattering as they scramble out of the way of your speeding vehicle while you blast away at several pesky cars and vans.

Another major addition to Virtua Cop 2 are the multiple paths through each level, giving the game much more replay value than the original VC, which had one linear path to

follow and villains popping up from the same places every game. In addition, the Saturn version will include a new level not found in the coin-op.

Graphically, new segments such as the car chase are handled very well, although there is some slowdown that probably won't be present in the final version. The version previewed is only 30 percent complete and only has part of the first level playable. One disappointment, however, is the reduction in frame rate from 60 fps on the Model 2-powered arcade game to approximately 30 fps for the Saturn version.

While the game was very unfinished, it looks like Sega will deliver yet another winner come December.



One of the main enhancements over the first VC is a more cinematic feel. In part of the first stage, you ride in a car for an exciting chase scene.

Madden NFL 97

EA returns with their answer to Sony's GameDay

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Platform: PlayStation

Release: September '96



Improving radically on their 16-Bit Madden football engine, Electronic Arts decided to go with a Fox TV-style screen format.

After the embarrassing yet noble scrapping of their much-hyped 32-Bit Madden 96 and NHL 96 games, Electronic Arts' most important release this year could quite possibly be the PlayStation version of Madden NFL 97.

Following a hands-on play-test of Madden 97, IG is ready to concede that the immense amount of extra time afforded to the EA Sports crew has indeed been well spent. Madden's game engine has been totally redesigned, including standard-setting, fluidly animated prerendered sprites (as opposed to realtime polygons) to create the football players on field. While some might fault EA for staying with sprite-based characters, they've proved that the technique can pay off tremendously with the

impressive Triple Play 97, and their use of a 3-D field is substantially similar to Sony's previous work on GameDay.

Numerous other graphical changes will grace the PlayStation version of Madden. Players will have the choice of several selectable field cameras, although the main camera vantage point will be very close to the elevated angle used in previous Madden offerings. EA will also continue their "Virtual Stadium" theme in Madden 97 by re-creating every football stadium in the NFL. Rendered and filmed scenes will appear before, during and after the game, as well.

The graphics aren't the only features that will be enhanced—there are numerous improvements to the gameplay. Some are very obvious, others not as apparent—most notable are the "create-a-player" feature which allows you to edit players or make one from scratch, and the extensive databases of statistics available. Some of the hidden upgrades will be the result of special attention being given to the computer AI of the game. Defensively, Madden will be much smarter, correcting some of the few flaws that have been lurking in past offerings.



Madden's new multiple perspectives will remind players of other 16- and 32-Bit football titles, but the gameplay is still based on EA's original formula: solid computer AI and multiplayer options.

With Madden facing its fiercest competition in years from two pending Sony football releases, it appears that EA Sports has stepped up to the challenge. The next few months will answer the question of whether or not EA can reclaim their football crown.



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Mystery Word Grid

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P	I	N	C	H	
	R				
S					

WORD LIST and LETTER CODE chart

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 BREAKZ PUNCHS SPRAYC TURBOV
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CLIP AND MAIL

▶ The main character Leon must search the land to find the six elemental spirits needed to become the new Spirit King. In his way is the evil Agito and a prophet named Myra.

The Legend of Oasis



Sega and Ancient combine to deliver one of the best action-RPGs since A Link to the Past

Publisher: Sega of America

Platform: Sega Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Ancient

Release: Now Available

When Sega introduced Beyond Oasis for the Genesis in 1994, many gamers were impressed by the graphics (above-average for Genesis), music (also above-average by Genesis standards), and the "sort-of-deep-but-just-not-challenging-enough" gameplay. Now the sequel is here for the Saturn, and it seems as if any and all problems or faults from the original Beyond Oasis have been erased. Gamers who have been waiting for the quintessential 32-Bit action-RPG need wait no longer. Your game has arrived.

The story, as outlined in our Legend of Oasis preview in IG2, is quite similar to the story in Beyond Oasis. The overall quest is similar, and the objective is basically the

struggling to keep track of which switches you pulled, which torches you've lit and which obstacles you've still got to find a way around. The one thing most RPGers strive for the most (but seldom see) is great challenge, and The Legend of Oasis is packed with it.

Leon has a variety of moves and special maneuvers that can be put to use during the game. He has the ability to run, crouch, roll, lay flat and do all sorts of acrobatic attacks depending on which weapon he has equipped. In addition, each weapon has special attacks that you need to figure out, and later in the game, when you obtain elemental scrolls, you can use the spirits you have found to power up your weapons. The entire process is somewhat

as it plays, until it reaches a fantastic high point where the music is blaring and the mood is totally enthralling.

Let's face it, there aren't enough action-RPGs out there as it is, let alone good ones. The Legend of Oasis is easily the most impressive 32-Bit role-playing game to date, and certainly one of Sega's best ever. The one aspect of Legend of Oasis that keeps it from getting an A+ overall (and boy was it a tough decision) is the fact that the story just isn't nearly as involving as a game like, say, Final Fantasy III. Otherwise, expect to spend many hours enjoying all LoO has to offer. Hopefully, good sales will encourage Sega to bring over more RPGs of this caliber.



▶ The fully hand-drawn graphics are full of color and style, and each area looks surprisingly realistic. It just goes to show that you don't need polygons to have a good time.

The Legend of Oasis is easily the most impressive 32-Bit role-playing game to date, and one of Sega's best ever.

same. The main character, Leon, must search the land to acquire the six elemental spirits and defeat the evil force that is threatening the land. Fairly generic? Yes. So why is this game so great? Is it the graphics? The music? The story? All contribute in one way or another, but the ultimate factor here is the gameplay. Not since Zelda III has an Action-RPG provided so much depth and creativity in the gameplay. Each area takes a good amount of time to get through, and while there is a ton of action involved, you're not going to get anywhere in this game without using your brain. From the outset of the game, where you push a boulder here or flip a switch there, the ingenuity in each area's design creeps steadily higher stage by stage until you find yourself

detailed, and adds to the game's already high appeal.

As described in last month's preview, the hand-drawn graphics and animation are top-notch. The soundtrack is of very high quality, with numerous orchestrated tunes and a great pitch that starts off slow and then builds momentum



▶ Boss battles are impressive to watch, but patterns are for the most part easy to learn; none of the boss encounters are overly difficult.

GRAPHICS:

- + Some of the best hand-drawn graphics to date, with great use of color.
- + Very impressive character animation.

SOUNDS:

- + One of Yuzo's better soundtracks.
- + Fantastic sound effects throughout.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Ingenious stage design and layout.
- + Finally, a challenging 32-bit Action-RPG.

LASTING POWER:

- + A good long quest is always welcome in this type of game...
- +/- But admittedly, most of the time is spent going back and forth, looking for ways to advance in each area.

A

A

A+

A-

A

OVERALL

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED



Still pictures of Olympic Summer Games' events are reasonable, but the characters look a mite choppy in motion. The high jump event is among the best-looking in the game.

Olympic Summer Games

Eidos Interactive strikes again with an Olympic title, but unlike Konami's International Track & Field, Olympic Summer Games isn't a sensory knockout, but it plays pretty well.

OSG offers a break to the button-smashing trend through the introduction of a new selectable rhythm control which allows the user to compete in a more skillful way. When in this mode, a pointer will move up and down the energy bar, and changing the direction of the bar as close to each end as possible will result in a faster athlete.

Eidos goes even further than just adding a new control scheme to pump more appeal into the mix. In two events, the 400 meter dash and the 100 meter swim, a stamina bar must be taken into account in order for your player to remain competitive. When it comes to weightlifting, it's not just a button smash to lift the bar, but rather a three-step process must be done in order to get the bar in the air.

Fifteen events make up OSG, including (but not limited to) the usual track and field events, fencing, swimming, a variety of shooting contests, fencing and

weightlifting. After seeing the lush and gorgeously rendered CG opening animation, the last thing you would expect is a below-average graphical showing, but you might be surprised. Due in large part to the absence of any texture mapping on the actual athletes (textures are present in the stadium and the surrounding areas in which you will compete), the basic look of each person resembles an origami piece rather than a life-like human. Compared to the highly detailed textures and

vaulting over the bar (and the camera is zoomed-in), the animation suddenly becomes dreadful—the athlete looks more like a man falling off of a 10-story building than someone who is trying with all their might to clear a tiny bar. While you might think isolating this incident is nitpicking, it's not because of the entirely uneven quality of the animation.

Audio-wise, OSG again brings an extremely varied bag to the table. Crowd sounds and all the sound effects are crisp, clean and

Gameplay and the overall fun factor are where OSG shines through with its brightest colors; graphics are just okay.

large number of polygons present in Konami's International Track & Field, OSG's lower polygon count and Gouraud shading are no match. And while the stadiums do indeed have texture mapping, polygon glitching and a large case of the "jaggies" just adds to the disappointment.

Not everything is disappointing, however: When the camera is panning, the animation looks much better than when it's zoomed-in. Take, for instance, the pole vault: When sprinting down the runway, the animation is lifelike and generally above average, but when

clear but unfortunately the announcer has a stale and very robotic-like voice which repeats all too often.

You may be thinking now that OSG is a complete disaster, but you can't judge a game completely on aesthetics. Gameplay and the overall fun factor are where OSG shines through with its brightest colors. Playing with a number of buddies is downright competitive and the computer's AI, in most events at least, is surprisingly strong.

The glaring imperfection in OSG's gameplay, which is not entirely the developers' fault, is the fact that too many of the events are similar—the gameplay needed to become more revolutionary rather than just a revamped Track & Field. Gameplay in OSG is the premier quality of the game, but the overall package would have been more impressive if we hadn't seen most of these things a number of years ago and done better in International Track & Field.

Scoring highly for variety, Eidos misses the visual high-water mark set by Konami

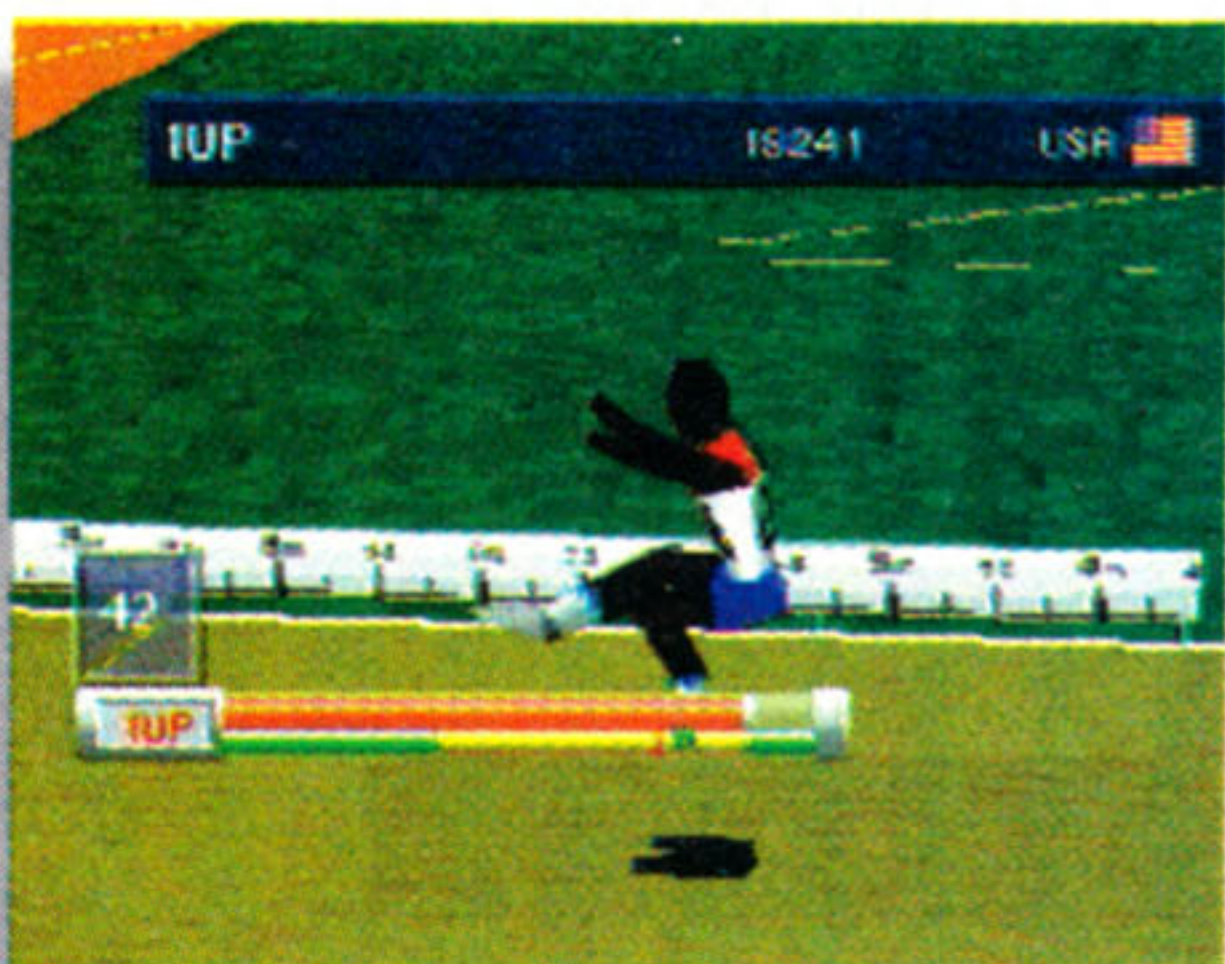
Publisher: Eidos Interactive

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Silicon Dreams

Release: Now



From event to event, Olympic Summer Games' motion-captured athletes are spotlighted in zoomed-in camera angles and sweeping panning motions. Diversity is one of OSG's highlights, though the events often feel very similar.



GRAPHICS:

- + Opening CG animation is of extreme length and very well executed.
- Athletes look downright silly with their Gouraud shading and no textures.

SOUNDS:

- + A heavy dose of stadium ambiance does its job.
- Announcer is simply put...pathetic.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Competitive and downright fun to play.
- We played a scaled-down version of this before, haven't we?

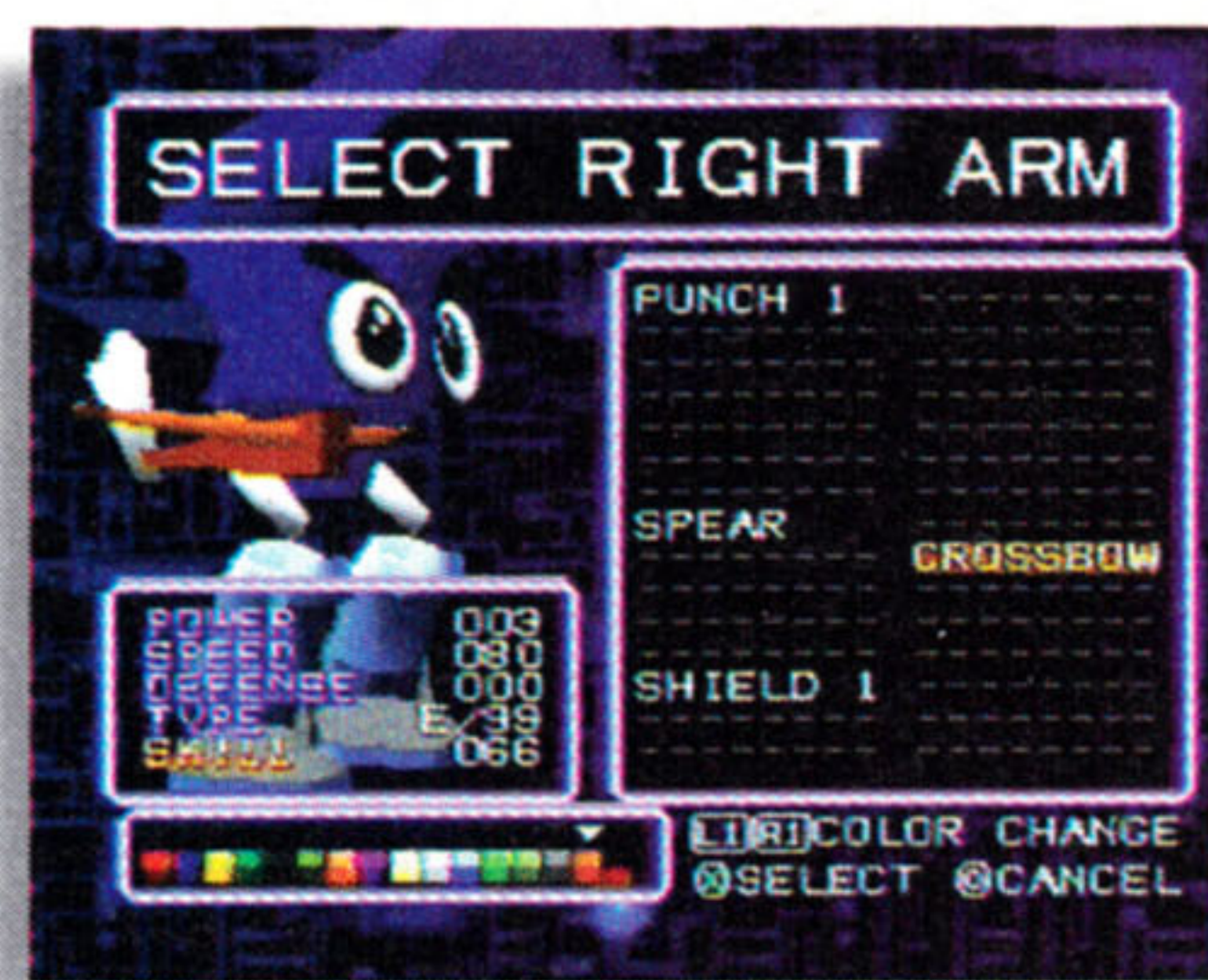
LASTING POWER:

- +/- 15 events is a decent amount but too many of them have similarities.
- +/- In the Olympic mode, it's too easy to fly through everything.

OVERALL

AVERAGE





Robo Pit

With one great game available for the PlayStation, T*HQ tries for another 32-Bit hit

Publisher: T*HQ/Kokopeli

Platform: Saturn/PS

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Altron

Release: Now Available

A more appropriate title for Kokopeli and T*HQ's Robo Pit might be "Rock 'Em Sock 'Em, Build 'Em Then Break 'Em Robot Derby," as it's a polygonal version of all the battlin' robots games of the past.

Best described as a combination of Jumping Flash! and CyberSled, Robo Pit drops two robots into futuristic fighting arenas and lets you create the fighters using various parts—heads, torsos and weaponry. There are hundreds of combinations that you can create.

Mixing polygons with Japanese-style anime designs, the characters can look like anything from robotic rabbits to fish-shaped creatures. Opponents in the One-player

Once you've figured out the combinations of parts and what their attacks are, each opponent can be taken out easily, and worse yet, the enemies have weak patterns of attack. It's easy to attack then retreat when your opponent's energy bar is full just to watch it release a special attack far out of your range.

During your climb in the rankings, you'll find Special Robots that have unique weapons and are surprisingly harder than any robot ranked higher than them. Beat them and you get special weapons that you'll probably never even use—but now they're selectable by your robot. One of the best features of the game is that you gain weaponry, and the potential

After assembling your robot from a collection of parts, you slug it out with an opponent in a large virtual arena complete with traps and spaced-out hazards.

robots or gain weapons during Vs. play, making the game surprisingly monotonous.

Robo Pit is an average game, that has a decent two-player matchup, and while it's easy to pick up and play and the control is very easy to get used to, it's a lot like CyberSled—too shallow and repetitive. Compared to some of T*HQ's previous efforts—with the notable exception of their superb and as yet unmatched In the Hunt conversion—this is an okay title that had a lot more promise than delivery.

A number of things could have been done to improve the game; there was a lot more promise than delivery here.

mode are a hundred mixtures of the game's arsenal of parts, but though they look different, they largely behave the same. Each player/computer-controlled robot has a life bar at the top of the screen. Next to it there's a special energy bar that can unleash a special attack when full. Unfortunately there are only four special attacks in the game, and they're determined by which part you chose for the lower half of your 'bot.

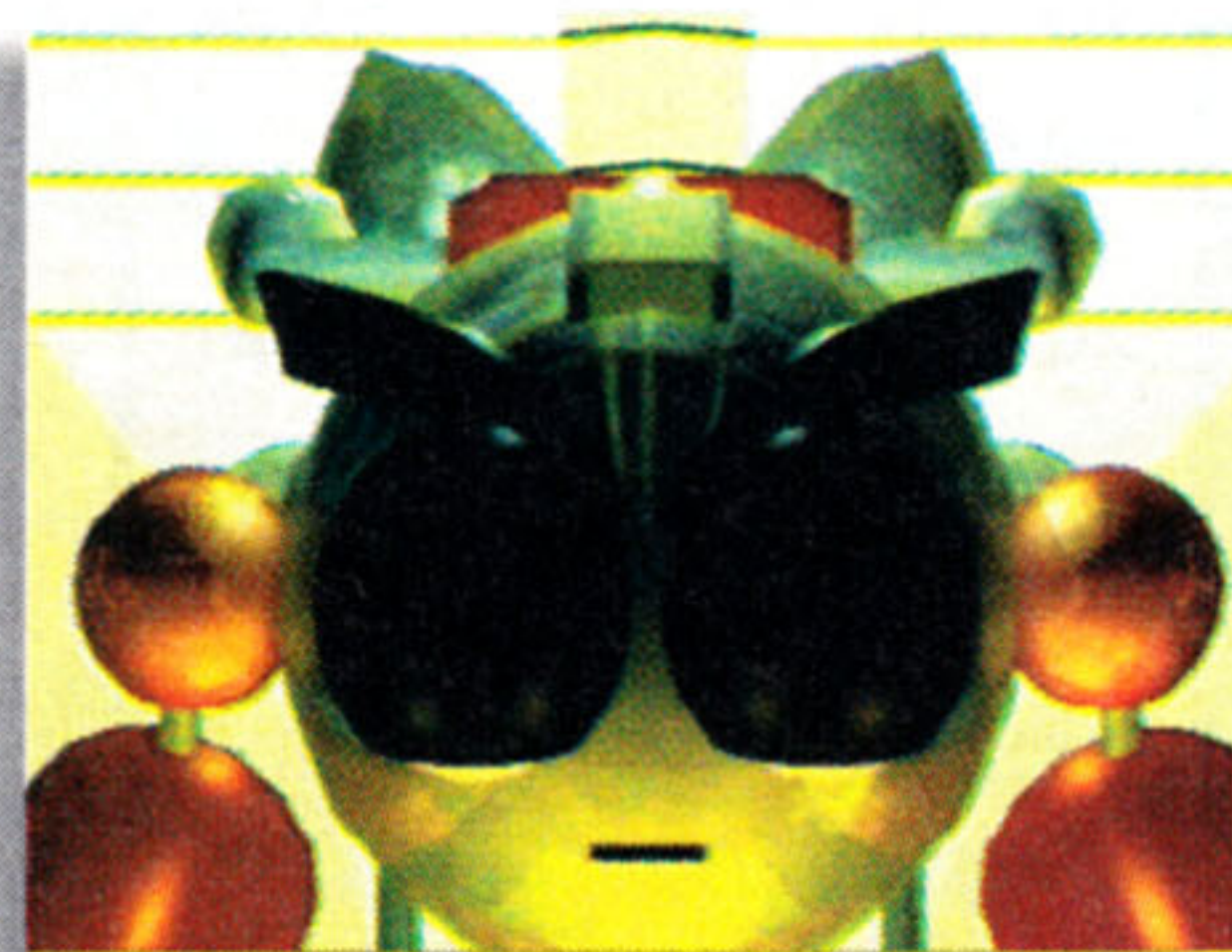
The graphics are fluid, but not spectacular, and the effects are the standard fare of explosions and a barely comprehensible announcer. Background music is decent, but nothing you'll remember or hum to yourself later.

In the one-player game, you work your way up to the top of a 100-robot contest, and the gameplay quickly becomes repetitive.

strength of that weaponry, by beating opponents.

A number of things could have been done to improve the one player game. Having 100 opponents doesn't matter if they are all easy to beat. Fewer matchups, ascending in difficulty, would have been a lot better, especially considering that later enemies and weapons aren't substantially better than their predecessors. Many of the 30 weapons you gain are exactly the same one at various powers.

The two-player option is where Robo Pit makes the most impact. Compared to other popular group play games, it's only average, but it's still a blast to blow away your friends on a virtual playfield. The screen is split down the middle, just like the Two-player Mode in Ace Combat, but there's no handicap and no way to power up your



An introductory full-motion video sequence prepares you for some exciting robotic gladiatorial combat, but the game itself is CyberSled-esque in execution—a bit drab.

GRAPHICS:

- + Nice cartoony robots and lots of variety in each of the opponents.
- Not enough variety in the arenas.

SOUND:

- + Decent music plays in the background during fights, good SFX.
- Music gets repetitive.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Fun as a one-player game, but shines in 2P Mode
- Sometimes speed can outweigh strategy.

LASTING POWER:

- + More enjoyable for a significant period of time in multiplayer mode.
- The one player game may get boring after a while, despite the variety in robot construction.

OVERALL

AVERAGE

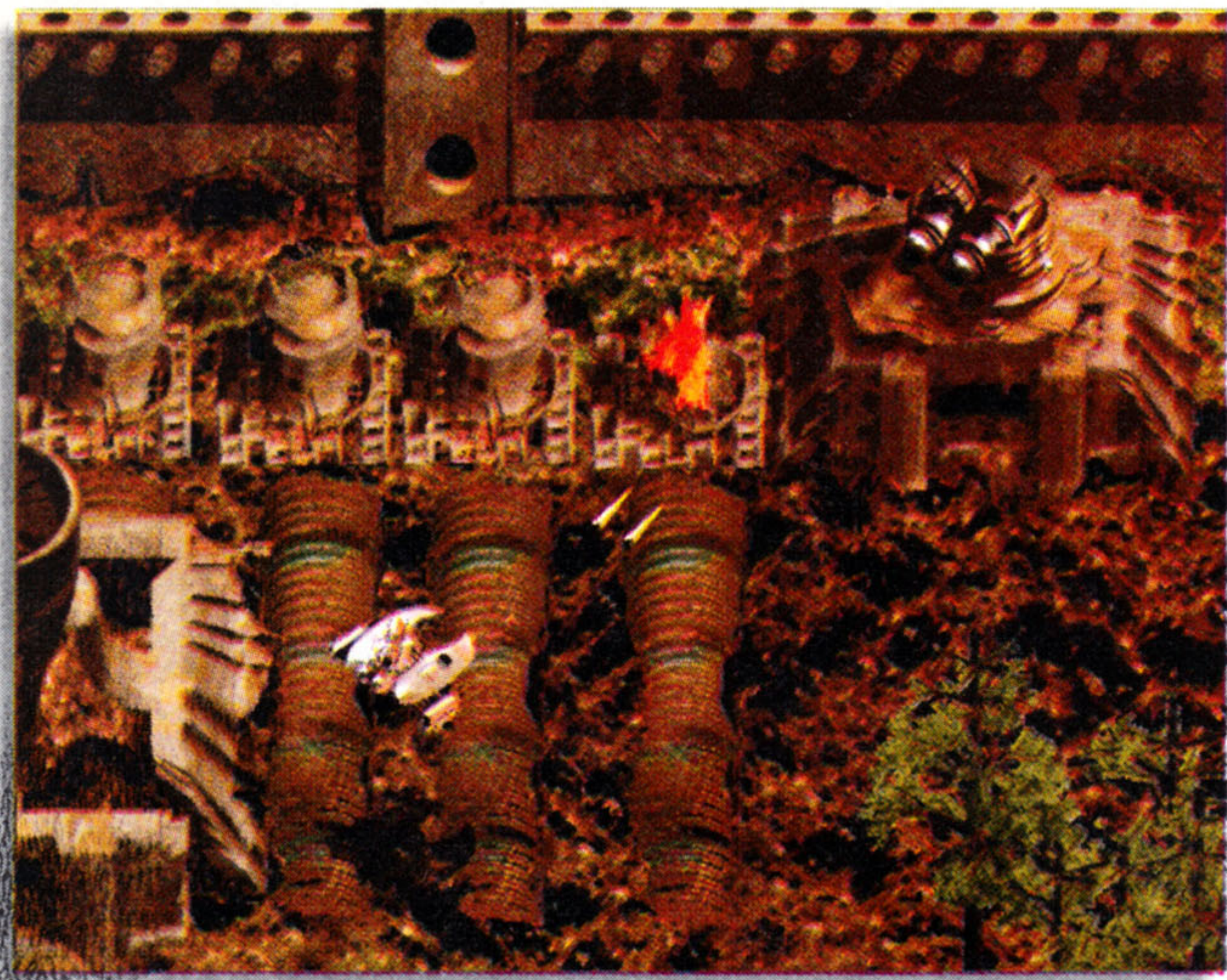
B

C

C+

B

C+



When 3-D shooters become a dime a dozen, we ironically find ourselves interested in playing the same 2-D shooters the market shunned a few years ago.

Fire Fight

There are enough 3-D titles bombarding the market now that we can occasionally crave 2-D shooters (free of polygons) to satisfy a primal gaming urge. To our shock and disbelief, one such game has not appeared on a console system, but rather debuts first on Win95 PCs.

To get right to the point, Fire Fight's game concept is neither remotely ground breaking nor original. In fact, the game engine and mechanics are virtually identical to Electronic Arts' popular line of Strike titles. Regardless, there are usually a few well-executed clones of proven game formulas, and Fire Fight is certainly one of them.

Fire Fight's gameplay takes place on variously sized isometric futuristic battlefields filled with sprite-based ground tar-

gets and fast-moving enemies. The player's spaceship is free to travel within the boundaries of each level while trying to complete various tasks and mission objectives.

Orders are barked audibly from a command station that guides you through each stage, and the errands that must be completed include transporting soldiers from one place to another, destroying enemy bases and search-and-rescue missions. Most of the missions are pretty straightforward, telling you exactly where to go and when, although some "off-road" exploring can reward you with finding shortcuts and secret areas within the map.

Most of the action consists of blasting your way through layers of defenses while managing your weapons.

Whatever the mission may be, most of the action consists of blasting your way through layers of defenses while conserving and managing your various weapons. Although the game is basically a mindless shooter, you do have to make sure that you choose which weapons wisely according to what you want to destroy. Unless you conserve your ammo in several key spots, you might as well waste your breath insulting the hordes of enemy ships into submission. Your ship's standard firepower is comprised of six different weapons consisting of guided missiles, powerful cannons and Vulcan guns.

Fortunately, you possess all of the weapons from the beginning of the game, and your task is to constantly find ammo to feed all of them. Extra items can also be picked up and stored for later use, such as cloaking devices, shield replenishers and powerful EM

pulse bombs with a blast radius the size of Utah.

Graphically, Fire Fight is one of the best in the action genre for the PC. Some highlights include beautiful and diverse battlefields laden with multiple layers of parallax scrolling that look even more impressive in the optional High-resolution Mode. The landscapes are somewhat interactive, including many non-essential areas that can be damaged, burned or destroyed, all apart from the enemy structures which explode in huge fits of fire and debris. The audio is less impressive, featuring mediocre music and small tidbits of digitized speech. It is adequate enough for



Sprite-based objects and highly detailed background terrain combine to make a more realistic-looking 2-D shooter than was attempted in previous years.

Console-style shooting action comes to the PC in Epic's new twist on the Strike series

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Platform: Windows 95

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Epic MegaGames

Release: Now Available

GRAPHICS:

- + Well-detailed high-resolution graphics.
- + Excellent parallax scrolling.

SOUNDS:

- A better job could have been done with the audio, particularly the music.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Nothing revolutionary for console players here, but highly entertaining for PC gamers nonetheless.

LASTING POWER:

- + Modem and network options make this action game last longer than most.

A-

A-

A-

B+

B+

OVERALL

RECOMMENDED



▶ Many missions involve defending various civilian transport jets from hostile aircraft. The trick is not to fly into the planes you need to protect, though...

Bogey: Dead 6



Following Namco's lead, Sony and Asmik take to the skies with an arcade-style sim

If you've been anxiously awaiting a sequel to Air Combat, then Bogey: Dead 6 is probably about as close to one as you'll get until Namco releases their official follow-up in the future. Bogey: Dead 6 is, quite bluntly, another one of the action-based console variety of "flight simulators" that we have all become accustomed to in recent years; the basic formula usually incorporates some realistic flight dynamics with large doses of over-the-top, adrenaline-pumping action—a formula that Asmik's new simulation executes rather well.

The game concept may sound



▶ Players have a choice of missions for varying amounts of cash, which opens the door to flying faster and deadlier airplanes than the default "brick with wings" F4E Phantom.



Publisher: Sony CEA

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Asmik

Release: 3rd Quarter '96

isn't meant to be. How unrealistic? Well, your mission payload is adjustable, allowing you to carry over 60 missiles in your inventory depending on the type that you

fair, however, since there are usually at least 20 of them in any given mission and only one of you. If you are real lucky, you might be provided with a token incompetent wingman or two.

Despite all of the numerous lapses in realism, Bogey: Dead 6 is an entertaining title. The dogfights often become intense, and slight strategic elements add to all of the fun. The game isn't very difficult, but it can become intense with the triple threat of enemy targets, your plane's fuel consumption and an artificial level time limit all

Bogey: Dead 6 is another action-oriented "flight simulator" that we have all become accustomed to.

familiar to other offerings in this genre: Earn money and points by completing various tasks which can be chosen through a series of mission trees. In these "trees" you have somewhat of a limited selection of the type of missions that you want to fly, even though you eventually have to beat them all to finish the game. Missions consist of escort sorties, air combat and ground attacks. The missions are somewhat amusing, containing questionably realistic scenarios—one mission, for example, reads "Safeguard the Royal Family." In this excursion, you must take off of a carrier, eliminate hordes of airplanes, then destroy the source, which happens to be a full-fledged carrier battle fleet. Did we mention that there is also a time limit, or that the royal family isn't important enough to send more than one plane to protect them?

Now obviously, Bogey: Dead 6 isn't remotely realistic, but it really

choose. Your plane can also take a ridiculous number of missile hits, even though enemy planes go down with just one of the buggers making contact. It's probably only



▶ Rendered cinematic cut-scenes feature plenty of advanced particle effects and impressive attention to realistic details, including the textures and motions of planes.



▶ Graphically, Bogey: Dead 6 is a step up from Namco's Air Combat, with nicely shaded and textured scenery and enemies.

working in tandem to turn your plane into a messy splotch on the scenery below. Occasionally, though, the game seems almost unfair, as an enemy plane will come out of nowhere to collide with you, ending the mission prematurely.

In flight simulations such as this, the importance of creating convincingly realistic graphics is paramount. *Bogey* excels in providing an immersive environment by displaying excellent Gouraud-shaded, 3-D polygonal models of aircraft and structures while using texture-mapped 3-D terrain. Several nice touches were also included, such as transparent smoke effects that billow out of

▶ Although the pyrotechnics get blocky at close range, *Bogey: Dead 6* has some very nice translucent smoke trails and satisfying explosion effects.

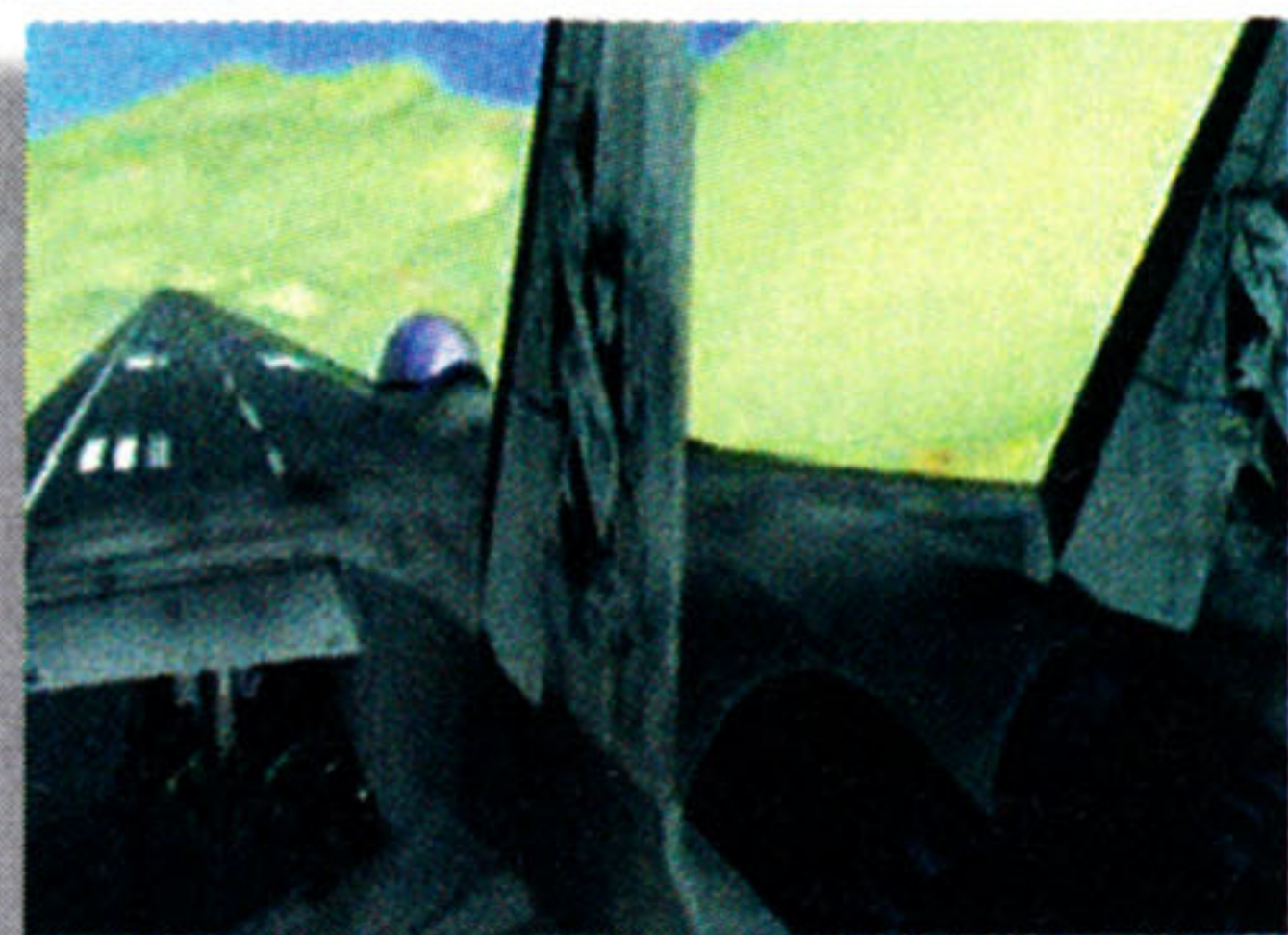
damaged targets and wonderful explosions that send aircraft tumbling to their fate. Regrettably, no option exists to hide the cockpit, which causes the playfield to feel somewhat claustrophobic, as well as robbing the player of some of his "situational awareness." Players can, however, zoom in on the screen which further narrows the field of vision. At the very least, though, it allows for a closer look at the impressive airplane models.

Audio is adequate, with slightly cheesy Top Gun-style synth rock comprising much of the score. Voices are repetitious and border on annoying after a few hours of play.

There should be a really huge asterisk placed right next to this review and its scores, however. *Bogey: Dead 6* was not as playable a game with the standard joy pad as it became when we got ahold of



which does not allow the plane to roll upside-down, the game approaches unplayability with the stock controller. With the analog stick, however, your plane becomes a versatile killing machine, using one stick for throttle and afterburner while using the other as the control



▶ The rendered opening is punctuated by a very stiff-sounding pilot radioing for clearance to take off. Doesn't anyone say "over" any more?

Bogey was not as playable a game with the standard joy pad as with Sony's brand-new analog joystick.

Sony's brand-new and recommended dual analog joystick. Without this gem of a controller, *Bogey* was far too prone to oversteering, and to say that the control was a burden would be a gross understatement. In fact, when using the simplified control scheme

stick, weapons selector and trigger.

Despite some of its flaws, *Bogey: Dead 6* is a good action game in the guise of a flight simulator. Unfortunately, you'll need a specialized controller to enjoy Asmik's latest creation.



▶ Before every mission, you are briefed by a monotone announcer who offers advice via video link.

Sony Locks On with Dual Analog Joystick



Sony's new dual analog controller is a work of art at considerable expense. The base of the controller is sturdy, and its considerable weight keeps the bulky unit firmly in place with the aid of optional suction cups. Remaining control housing is made of very durable plastic with gear shift-style rubber encasing the joint between the joysticks and the base.

On the top right of the base of the joystick is a switch which allows the controller to work as either an analog or digital device. On the top left are the Select and Start buttons. Easily visible is

the mammoth bank of buttons placed between the joysticks, which not only allow the player easy access to firepower but also accommodate left- and right-handed gamers.

The highlights of this controller are definitely the distinctively different dual joysticks, however. Clearly designed with flight simulators in mind, the left joystick has the same button configuration as the right joystick, minus the "hat" switch.

Each button has its default name marked on it, with the left joystick's four buttons all defined as the PS controller's L and R buttons.

The right controller houses all of the "shape" buttons. X and O grace the front left and right of the controller respectively, with Square at the same low bottom position as R2. The main characteristic of the right controller is the "hat" switch placed between the X and O buttons, which works as a four-directional button in the shape of a cone.

Is the controller worth it? As always, it depends on how many games utilize its analog capabilities. Used as a basic digital joystick, the design is noble, but you're probably better off using a classic arcade-style controller to play the likes of *Tekken 2* or *Toshinden*. As an analog controller with the ability to double as a digital one, Sony's controller will be very tough to beat.

GRAPHICS:

- + Excellent 3-D moving at a fast framerate.
- + Nice graphical touches like transparent smoke add to the game.

SOUNDS:

- Uninspired speech and sounds get annoying.
- Music is typical for the genre and unimpressive.

GAMEPLAY:

- + With the analog joystick, the game plays well.
- Without an analog controller, forget it.

LASTING POWER:

- Not very hard despite the odds stacked against you.
- + Two-player link feature could prolong B:D6's life.

B+

C-

B

C

OVERALL

RECOMMENDED

B

▶ Shots on goal as well as long passes can be guided right or left with the "English" option. Olympic Soccer has a good amount of such controls to keep gameplay interesting.



Olympic Soccer

Eidos again jumps on the Olympic hype bandwagon with their newest sports release

Publisher: Eidos

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Silicon Dreams

Release: 2nd Quarter '96

Soccer fans need not lose any sleep over the availability of 32-Bit soccer games this fall. With the recent releases of VR Soccer, Victory Goal, Adidas Power Soccer and several others, it's almost as if soccer is becoming the world's most popular electronic game. Eidos (spawned from the union of U.S. Gold and Domark) has made a timely deposit in the soccer simulation market, taking advantage of the excitement the Olympics generates.

All hype aside, Olympic Soccer is up against some pretty heavy competition in the soccer arena. In fact, it was just last month that we sang the praises of Victory Goal '96, reveling in its intense realism and great gameplay. (We still think that

because of the excitement it generated. Arcade-like action facilitates quick, unrealistic but entertaining, character movement enabling players to sprint the length of the field in record times, not to mention performing amazingly long kicks with impressive english to sneak the ball into the goal. Scoring in the game is not as intensely hard as it is with some of the other soccer games on the market. Beginning players need not master every move available to enjoy the game. But when the time comes, several impressive maneuvers including diving headers, bicycle kicks, slide tackles and massive power kicks come in pretty handy.

The game music can best be described as a driving "techno" style. In-game sound effects, while

challenge modes are included. Up to four people can play at one time against each other or as a team.

All the elements are in place in Olympic Soccer but the question is whether they are successful as a whole. They are successful as an "arcadish" quick learning curve type of game. The casual soccer fan will appreciate the ease of play, supermanesque moves and witty commentary. Purists will take note of the small detractions such as the odd stadium graphics, unrealistic player movements and a few small glitches in the field graphics. Hopefully the purists won't limit themselves to completely realistic simulations; they may overlook decent games like this one.



▶ Top: Up-close and personal receiving a yellow card, the players look quite unnatural and triangular. Below: With the camera pulled back the action looks much more natural.

All hype aside, Olympic Soccer is up against some pretty heavy competition in the soccer arena.

we had played the best soccer game ever.) As it turns out, Victory Goal '96 is still the soccer king as far as we're concerned, but Eidos' Olympic Soccer delivers in several important categories and is worthy of a decent spot in the lineup of new soccer games.

If it's intensely realistic graphics you seek, look a little further than here. While the detailed, texture-mapped polygonal players are well done and move fluidly at 24 fps, there are better-looking soccer games to be found (case in point VG'96). But graphics don't tell the tale, it's gameplay and artificial intelligence that make up the meat of any quality game.

While Olympic Soccer didn't knock us out with its looks, we found that the game grew on us the longer we played it, mainly

not numerous, are effective and realistic. The announcer is quite a witty fellow to boot.

Eidos covered all the bases in the options department. Thirty-two international teams, six stadiums, weather options, language toggle, multiple camera angles and three game modes; arcade, Olympic and



▶ Automatic player control works quite nicely with the game's AI switching to the player closest to the ball without a glitch. Helpful arrows enclose the player guiding them to the right goal.

GRAPHICS:

- + High frame rate allows fluid player movements.
- Tight camera angles reveal the blocky shapes of the players.

SOUNDS:

- + Commentary and crowd noise are right on track with the real thing.
- +/- Sound effects are not that plentiful.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Characters respond well to most of the controls.
- Some controls not as effective as others.

LASTING POWER:

- + The game will last a while due to its high entertainment level.
- Soccer purists may not be as impressed with the game as others.

C+

B+

A

B

OVERALL

RECOMMENDED

B



◀ Though Close Combat has a very unique artificial intelligence engine at its core, the graphics are sub-par for this day and age. Just how long was this game in development?

Close Combat

Until now, the psychological effects of war have been explored by every entertainment medium save interactive games. Though mental stress isn't exactly the most entertaining or glorious aspect of playing a war game, it is an entirely realistic component of war.

Close Combat by Microsoft ambitiously attempts to create a war simulation so realistic that it even incorporates psychological factors; not only do you have to worry about a soldier's body, but now you also have to worry about what is going on in his head. You don't have to be Sigmund Freud to figure out the mechanics of this: If your infantry is caught in a merciless cross fire with most of the brigade laying in shambles, the remaining survivors may run off

(go AWOL). When they go AWOL, they refuse any order that you may give them, effectively rendering them useless. Other soldiers may not entirely lose their heads, but their sense of self-preservation may begin to override your commands. Instead of charging that hill which will undoubtedly become his grave, that particular soldier may find security huddled behind a brick wall instead.

So how do you keep control of your men? Well, winning battles always tends to keep morale high, but moreover, keeping your men out of horrible, hopeless situations should help, even if you're close to losing the battle. Not every soldier is a fearless Rambo.

Aside from the brain banter,

buildings and depots. To do this you must quickly decide where to move men and vehicles, how to provide cover fire, what is the best angle of attack, and where different units of armor (ranging in the hundreds) will be most effective. In addition, you must check each unit's resources and status. Of course, each type of unit will have different weapons, while vehicles contain various system components that may get damaged or inoperative...such as their drivers. Status monitors will denote if a soldier is hit, panicking or just plain afraid. It's quite a chore to manage, but that's all part of the simulation.

The execution of the realtime game engine is where the problem

After redefining the AI side of war sims, Microsoft gets shell-shocked on the graphics

Publisher: Microsoft

Platform: Windows 95

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Microsoft

Release: Summer '96

Close Combat ambitiously attempts to create a war simulation so realistic that it even incorporates psychology.



Unlike previous war simulations, Close Combat actually factors in the personal interests of your troops, making them consider whether it's best to fight or run.

Close Combat doubles as a strategically realistic simulation. The formula is a bit different from most simulations of this type, taking a "realtime" approach opposed to moving units on a grid with a turn-based system of movement. Switching to this method makes gameplay a bit more intense, forcing gamers to think on the move rather than between turns.

The goal in Close Combat is to engage in missions that take place in World War II. You can play as either the Allies or the Germans, and to complete each mission, you must take over several "victory areas" which are dispersed throughout the battlefield. Some missions require you to take a certain hill, whereas others may force you to take over several

lies. With realtime gameplay, the graphics play a more important role than in most war simulations, and here, Close Combat fails miserably. The aesthetics of the game look like they date back to the late '80s, with relatively few colors coupled with slow and choppy animation. With so much work that has gone into the AI of this title, it would make sense to at least pay some attention to the look of the game, if only so that it weren't so displeasing.

Close Combat is a great strategic game steeped in some of the worst graphics seen in a war game in some time. If you don't mind looking at a visually poor game while engaged in strategic battle—and, to be fair, many people don't—by all means give this title a shot.

GRAPHICS:

- War games aren't usually known for their graphics, but there's no excuse for this.

SOUNDS:

- Nothing pleasant, nothing derogatory to report here, sir!

GAMEPLAY:

+ Some revolutionary, psychological AI is the saving face of this game.
+ Great strategic simulation, despite its flaws.

LASTING POWER:

+ Network play helps extend the replay value in addition to an adequate amount of missions.

D-

C

B+

B+

B-

OVERALL

AVERAGE

▶ If anything, Horned Owl's greatest asset is its set of complex and fully polygonal 3-D backgrounds, which zoom, pan and rotate as you progress from level to level.

Horned Owl



After promising diverse PS games, Sony targets an endangered species: first-person shooters

Publisher: Sony CEA

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: NOVIC

Release: Now Available



▶ Dusting off sprite-based enemies in a 32-Bit shooting gallery? Yes; Horned Owl combines polygonal backgrounds with sprite-based characters and flat displays.

Following some controversy over the release of their SNES and Genesis Justifier six-shooter some years ago, Konami's Japanese light gun will be arriving in North America under the Enforcer brand-name. The North American version is currently planned to be fluorescent green in color, and will be compatible with upcoming PS titles Crypt Killers, Lethal Enforcers 1 and 2, as well as Time Crisis, amongst others.

First-person gun peripheral shooters have done pretty well in arcades and homes for years, but few of them have either taken a market by storm or radically strayed from an aging formula: Pick up gun, point at screen and pick off moving targets. Some gun shooters add machine gun play to the mix, allowing the player to pepper the screen with gunfire, and others require conservative use of ammo.

Sony's Project: Horned Owl most definitely belongs to the machine gun school of shooters: You're taking pulse rifle shots at robots in urban indoor and outdoor settings, and there's no need to be careful in using ammunition: The screen is constantly being filled with new targets. Moreover,

Unlike many similar titles, you'll notice the delay between firing a shot and connecting to an enemy's armor, a design concept which has its advantages and disadvantages; like most other shooters nowadays, you have a limited-use second weapon which causes damage to a number of things on screen at once. There aren't any weapon power-ups to change the nature of the shooting action, but there are other compensatory features. By holding down your Fire button, you charge up a blast of energy which uses up more than half of your ammunition in one buckshot blast. Reloading your gun is as simple as pointing your gun off the screen and shooting; mouse and joystick options are also available to gun-free players.

eye-popping. Hand-drawn anime sequences created by famed animator Masumune Shirow are interesting but seem a mite out of place in a game so heavily dependent on polygonal graphics—at least they bothered to include them. Like the visuals, the audio is solid but not terrific; full of voices, music and effects that add reasonably to the ambience.

Taken as a whole, Project: Horned Owl is a definite step above 16-Bit games of its type but is not quite on the same level as last year's Sega hit Virtua Cop. PlayStation owners itching for gunplay may well find this game to be satisfactory for now, but better things will most certainly be forthcoming in the near future.



Horned Owl does a pretty good job of keeping you active; you're deposited in a level with one gun and a mission.

if you try to play the game at a more casual Virtua Cop pace (take six shots, reload, repeat), you'll quickly feel overwhelmed and probably wind up losing the game.

As the first game of its kind for the PlayStation, Horned Owl does a pretty good job of keeping the player active. Choosing between two police officers in robotic suits, you (and a friend) are walked through a story shown prior to each stage in cartoon-quality Japanese anime sequences, and are then deposited in the middle of a polygon-based level with one gun and a mission. In one level, you'll move through a city and take out enemies who fly out from buildings and stand guard on roadways, and in another, you'll move through an airport under attack, killing robots which use civilians as shields.

Technically, the game is pretty good, not incredible. All of the characters are somewhat blandly animated flat sprites rather than polygons—one way Horned Owl is noticeably less impressive than Virtua Cop visually—and the texture-mapped polygonal cities are reasonably believable but not



▶ Gritty futuristic urban artwork takes you indoors and outdoors for confrontations with robotic foes. The enemies will rarely blow you away.

GRAPHICS:

- + Polygonal backgrounds move fluidly and cinematically.
- Sprite-based characters are bland and often become blocky.

SOUNDS:

- + Solid voice acting and nicely scripted dialogue.
- +/- Music and sound effects are fine but not very memorable.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Despite the lack of power-ups, the gameplay remains fun and intense.
- + Shot timing offers a solid challenge for most.

LASTING POWER:

- + Six missions are each reasonably long and interesting.
- No multiple paths, one full play through the game sees it all.

OVERALL

RECOMMENDED

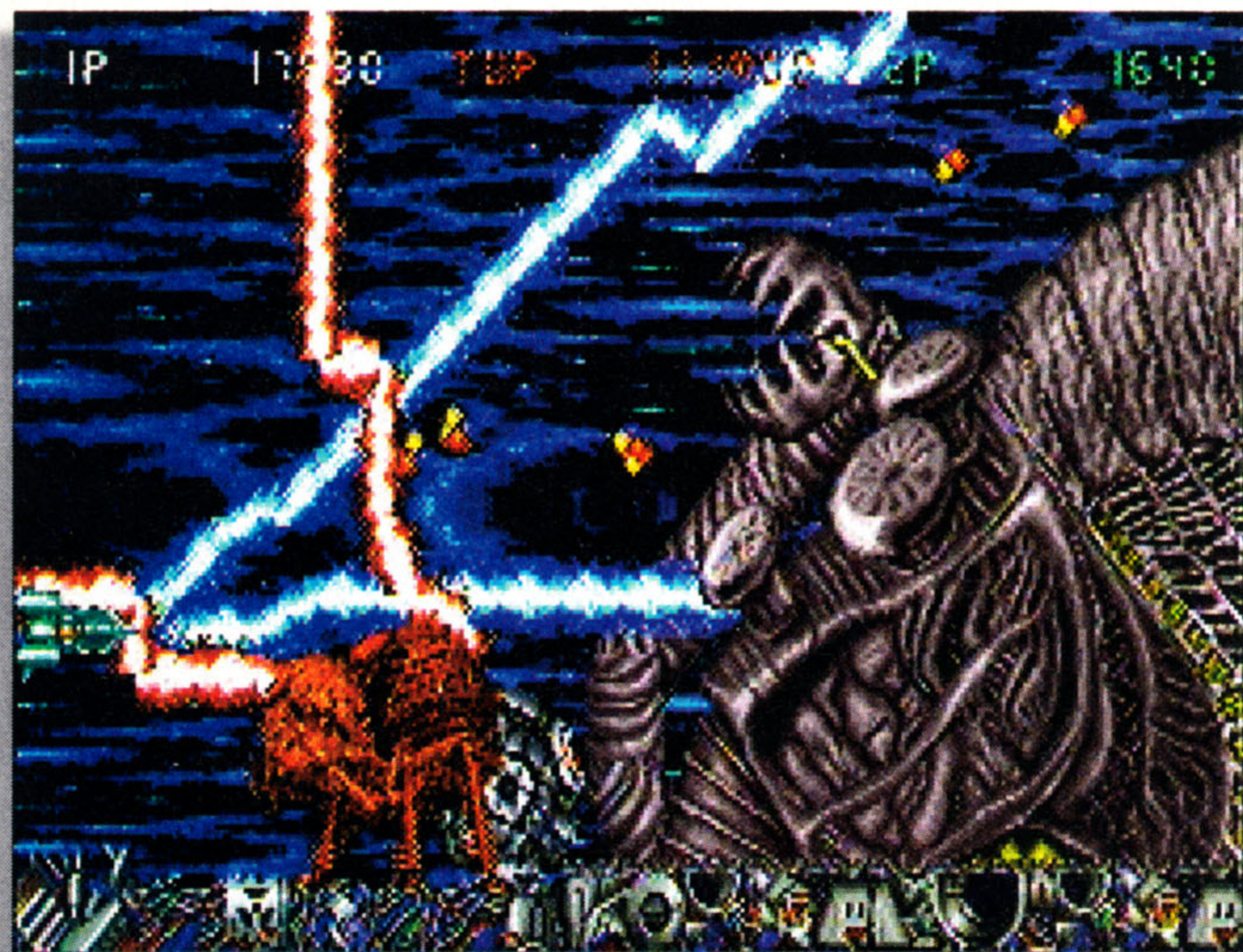
B

B

B+

B

B



▶ The Black Fly has a multilaser blast reminiscent of the classic arcade and Genesis shooter Truxton, and huge bosses which may remind some of alien Darius ships.

Metal Black

Historically, arcade games have always been more advanced than their home counterparts. Now, however, the gap between home and arcade has closed dramatically. However, in the late '80s and early '90s, many games came out that simply could not have been done justice on either the Genesis or Super Nintendo. Metal Black is one of those games that has slipped through the cracks; an intense two-player shoot-'em-up that pulls no punches and boasted very cool special effects, considering the era in which it was released.

The big question is, as it is with most translations of aging arcade games, "Has it grown old gracefully?" Surprisingly, despite the

complete lack of polygons in the game (with the exception of the wireframe ship in the intro), Metal Black still holds its own against more modern 2-D shooting games, with its extensive use of sprite and background scaling to provide the illusion of depth.

Metal Black was originally released to Japanese arcades by Taito in 1992, as the sequel to one of their earlier shooters, Gun Frontier. The game features a unique power-up system; players must collect molecules of a floating isotope, called "Newalone" to power up their ship. Once a

considering that all of the characters are flat sprites being scaled to lend them the appearance of 3-D, and the bonus levels are a very unique concept.

Sound in this game is trademark Zuntata (Taito's sound team), featuring the original arcade music, which seems to have been based around a combination FM and PCM synthesizer. Unlike many translations of older arcade games, however, Metal Black lacks an "arranged" soundtrack. This omission is minor, however, considering the high quality of the original in-game music.

Ving's cult classic Japanese arcade shooter finally receives a perfect home translation

Publisher: Ving

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Ving

Release: Available Now (Japan)

Surprisingly, despite the complete lack of polygons, Metal Black holds its own against more modern 2-D shooters.



▶ Side-scrolling levels alternate with pseudo 3-D first-person stages; impressive missile discharges rip into enemy ships that frequently seem too close to avoid.

sufficient supply of Newalone is stored within the ship, it can be released as a powerful burst of energy by pressing the "beam" button. Of course, after discharging all of the Newalone via the beam, the overall ship's firepower drains back to stock levels, meaning that each burst from the beam is very costly. This provides an element of strategy: Is it better to use up all of the Newalone by firing one concentrated burst into the Boss, or would it be better to hold off, instead firing powered-up normal shots into the heart of the beast (while dodging its shots)?

The game generally follows the tried-and-true side-scroller formula, with a few levels featuring vertical motion. The levels are broken up by two pseudo-3-D bonus levels, where the player must target alien ships and fire a volley of air-to-air missiles once a lock has been achieved. The effects on these levels are very good,

Difficulty is about right, with the game requiring some practice to beat on any level more difficult than "easy." One problem is its relative length, however; the game follows the arcade formula, which means that it can be beaten in roughly half an hour once you are familiar with the game. The six levels are of reasonable length however, and do feature some fairly intense Boss encounters, many of which will attempt to grab molecules of Newalone to blast you out of the skies!

Once the game has been mastered, however, there is little else; on one level slightly disappointing, but perfectly understandable since Ving's mission was clearly to translate the arcade games as faithfully as possible. As such, it certainly does what it was intended to do, and is a reasonable addition to any shooter fan's library.

GRAPHICS:

- + Very good graphics for its era. Lots of pseudo 3-D.
- Despite graceful aging, it's not up to '96 standards.

SOUNDS:

- + Very good Zuntata music.
- Surprisingly, no arranged music; a minor nitpick.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Solid shooter action, with innovative power-ups.
- A distinct lack of variety in the power-up system.

LASTING POWER:

- Once you finish it, you've seen it all.
- + The game is challenging, however, with multiple difficulty settings.

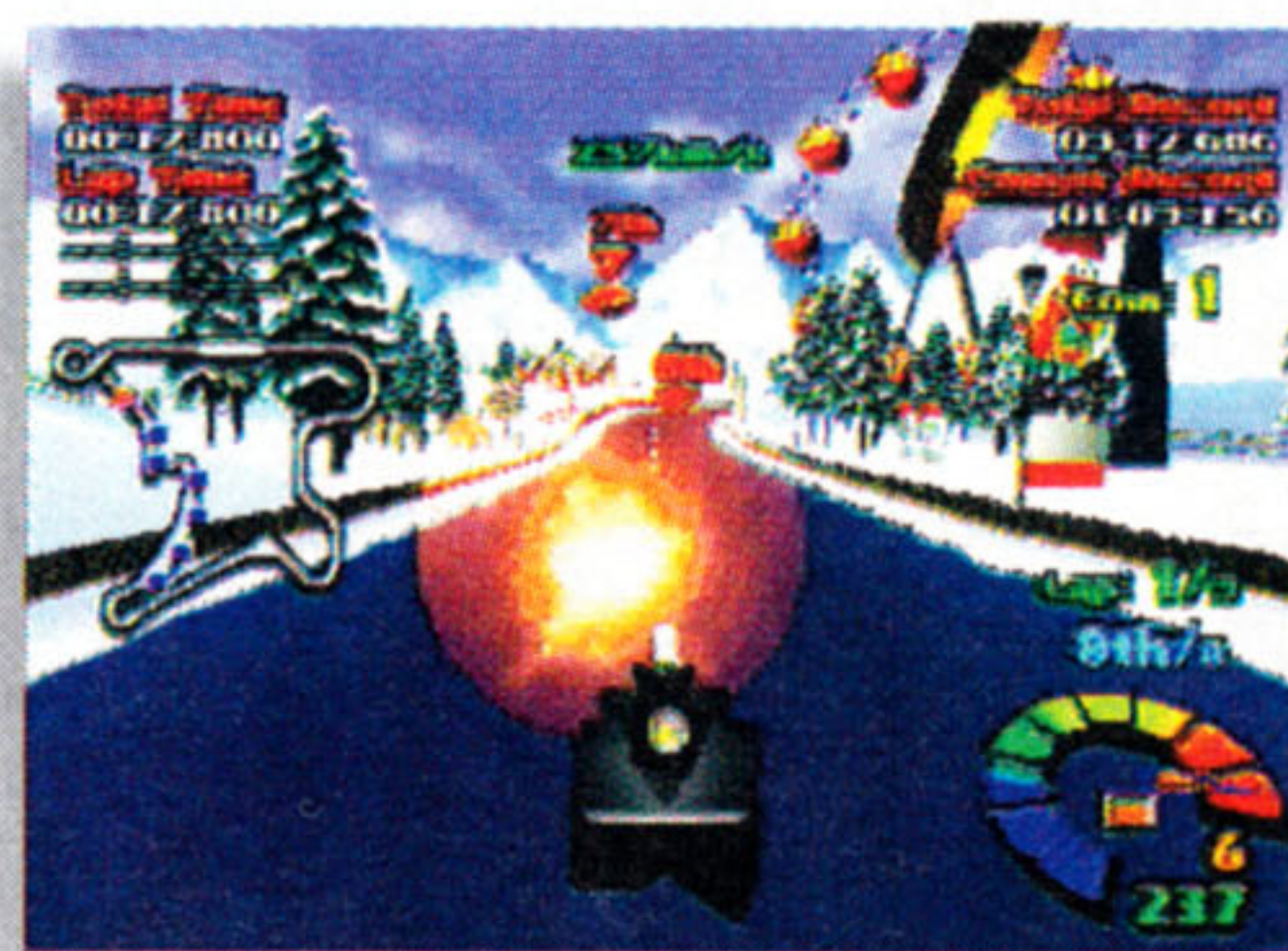
OVERALL

B+

RECOMMENDED



▶ Certain stages are inaccessible when you first turn on the game—to access them, you need to come in first place in each of the various difficulty levels to open up more tracks and cars.



Motor Toon Grand Prix 2

Though Sony has Ridge Racer and WipeOut, a solid cartoony racer couldn't hurt in '96

Publisher: Sony CEA

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Double CD-ROM

Developer: Sony CEI

Release: Now (Japan)

Most of the time, Japanese companies decide to increase their profits by releasing their best games—and even some of their mediocre ones—in the North American marketplace. On rare occasions, they instead decide to hold back a title when something more easily marketed is produced by developers in Europe or the U.S., and such has been the case with Sony's Motor Toon Grand Prix racing games. Distinctively cartoony and Japanese in design, the MTGP games are a dramatic contrast to the underground futuristic European feel of WipeOut and the streamlined modern realism of Ridge Racer, but the original Motor Toon title was different in another important way: It didn't play very well, and it was an easy decision to leave the title to fester in Asian markets while sure-fire Namco and Psygnosis racers drove sales of PlayStation hardware through the roof.

In the case of Motor Toon Grand Prix, there were mixed feelings from gamers about Sony's decision to hold back on the state-



▶ Motor Toon 2 borrows heavily from Nintendo's Super Mario Kart, not only in the look and feel but in the gameplay department as well. Driving over the small "\$" blocks in the road allows you to grab coins, good for chances at the weapon wheel.

to actually playing Motor Toon however, the appeal wore thin rather quickly, as a lack of technique and mediocre control combined to severely hamper the gameplay and lasting value of the game.

Now, almost two years later,

Additional features include new (and improved) tracks, two-player linkability, hidden two-player modes and compatibility with Namco's analog control pad, the neGcon. Once you begin playing, the object of the game is similar to WipeOut; you must earn the most points over five courses of play by finishing as high as possible in each individual race. Finishing first nets you 10 points, second six points and so on, and in order to win the

Cartoony and Japanese in design, the MTGP games are a dramatic contrast to the underground feel of WipeOut.

side release of the game. Looking back, it was probably a wise decision, but it didn't hold well with many gamers because of the major hype the game was receiving from the various game magazines both here and in Japan. For one, the game had very nice graphics (for a first-generation PlayStation title, anyway), and the bouncy, cartoony look of the game appealed to many due to its unique nature. When it came down

Sony is back with a sequel to Motor Toon, titled appropriately enough, Motor Toon Grand Prix 2, and the results are surprising. The game begins with an impressive animated intro that frequently switches between various camera perspectives of in-game action and rendered scenes introducing the quirky characters from the game. All of the characters from the original MTGP are back, as well as three new characters.



▶ The broad range of colors used in Motor Toon 2 add to the overall cartoony feel of the game. Each stage is full of bright, vivid visuals.



▶ What would any good racer be without driving scenes at night? Right from the get-go (the first stage takes place at night) Motor Toon 2 offers action after-dark.



Many of the PlayStation's special visual effects are put to good use in *Motor Toon 2*. Transparent roads and highly realistic smoke effects abound. Hippies take note—this is YOUR kind of game.

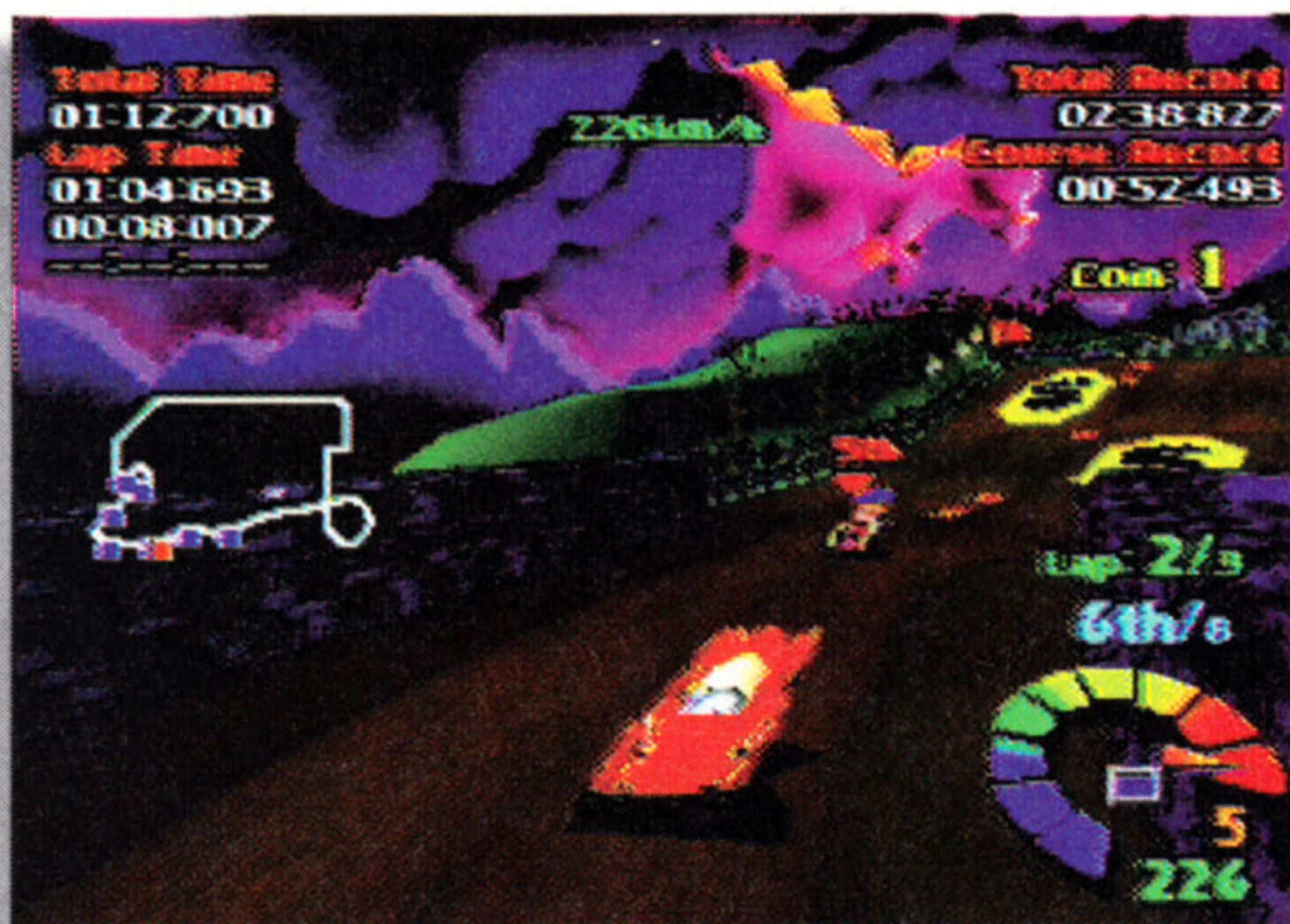
first place crown you need to end up with the most points overall after the five races.

The most noticeable improvement over the original *Motor Toon* is undoubtedly the most important as well. The gameplay has been given a major overhaul, and the control has been fine-tuned to near-perfection. There are various difficulty levels in the game, and multiple viewpoints are available during play. Each character

controls differently, and each has their own advantages and disadvantages. The inclusion of weapons adds a great level of depth and strategy to the fun, and the way it's done is much like Nintendo's *Super Mario Kart*—driving over icons on the course nets you coins that can be used to spin a wheel that ultimately decides which weapon you receive. There are a variety of weapons as well, and some of the effects produced are quite nice. Handling is much better now, and the use of the infamous drift technique is ever so important for many of the racers. With an analog controller, the control is even more refined. Various two-player link modes are available, including special hidden modes like a linkable ripoff of the classic electronic board game, *Battleship*.

Graphically, *MTGP2* improves upon its predecessor, although the improvements aren't too major. The flicker and pop-up are a lot less noticeable—polygon breakup is almost non-existent—and the textures are more detailed. There are some very nice effects here and there, including transparent roads and dazzling '60s/hippie-style sky effects. Animation is superb, although the vehicles are less "bouncy" than they were in the original *MTGP*.

The soundtrack in *Motor Toon Grand Prix 2* is fitting, and some of the music is rather enjoyable to listen to. The intro has the *Motor Toon* theme song, complete with lyrics (in English, no less), and most of the musical score fits the game's wacky theme quite well. Sound effects are very cartoony in origin, with loud revving engines and way over-exaggerated crash and weapon sounds. If getting the game to sound as far-out as its overall atmosphere would suggest, then the designers did a great job. As far as



Avoiding giant roulette table balls, swaying ceiling axes, and broken bridges are just a sampling of the wacky scenarios you'll find yourself in in *Motor Toon 2*. Each stage has a unique twist, from the Haunted Castle to the Gulliver House, and all come to life in some way to try to slow you down.



Motor Toon Grand Prix 2 introduces new vehicles to the already whacked-out bunch of racers from the original game. From the *WipeOut*-styled Raptor & Raptor to the slow-to-start Billy the Tough (shown here), each character has a unique look.

replayability is concerned, *Motor Toon Grand Prix 2* scores big-time. To begin with, the jewel case comes packaged with not one, but two copies of the game—making it immediately possible to link up with a friend. The second copy relies on the first to play however,

The jewel case comes with two copies of the game—making it immediately possible to link.

so it can't be used to play alone; without the master disc, it's virtually useless. Regardless, though—this makes for a great value. In addition, thanks to the multitude of options and difficulty levels, etc., the game can be enjoyed over a long period of time without losing much of its original appeal. Finally, there are hidden "Goodies" that can only be accessed after scoring first place overall in the various difficulty levels of the game. The first two open up the remaining tracks and characters that weren't originally



Drifting around turns requires a lot more technique than the average racer. Control and gameplay is vastly improved from the first *Motor Toon*.

available at the start, and others include special two-player games and hidden options.

All in all, *Motor Toon Grand Prix 2* is a major improvement over the original game, with numerous gameplay enhancements and aesthetic upgrades. Highly recommended to anyone who is into racing games or even simple multiplayer enjoyment, *Motor Toon 2* will surely go down as one of the hottest import games of 1996, and with Sony's recent announcement that the game would be released in the U.S. in December, it may end up being one of the best games here as well.



GRAPHICS:

- + Great use of colors and impressive animation.
- + Special effects are quite nice, and are a joy to watch.

B+

SOUNDS:

- + Interesting soundtrack fits the game nicely.
- +/- Sound effects are fitting as well, although nothing revolutionary.

B+

GAMEPLAY:

- + Cars handle well and have varying degrees of control.
- + The game is just plain fun. What more do you need?

A

LASTING POWER:

- + Plenty of options and incentives to keep playing.
- + Multiple two-player modes, regular and hidden.

A

OVERALL

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

A-

▶ Customary to each Namco Museum game is a fully rendered animated intro depicting the characters from the game. The P-Man just never looked so good...

Namco Museum Vol. 3



Namco's latest compilation brings back such classics as Ms. Pac-Man and Dig Dug

Publisher: Namco

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Namco

Release: Now (Japan)

While U.S. gamers will be getting their first taste of the Namco Museum collections this August, Japanese gamers will already be enjoying the third edition of the series, Namco Museum Volume 3. Using the same formula employed by the other volumes in the series, Namco Museum Volume 3 features six arcade-perfect ports of some of the best of Namco's back catalog. American gamers will be familiar with the majority of the included titles, but two of the games—Phozon and The Tower of Druaga—will likely be new to most, as they never came out on these shores.

All of the games are from the 1979 to 1984 era, which means that they may not be the most aesthetically appealing titles compared to more modern fare. Namco makes up for the fact that no "remixed" versions of the game are available, however, by including an extensive 3-D museum to explore between games. Upon entering the museum, you are greeted by a receptionist before moving on to the main lobby which contains doorways to each of the various game-related exhibits in the museum. Each room is themed after one of the games on the CD, and contains loads of antique licensed paraphernalia pertaining to that game: from T-shirts to ice cream pops to dancing Pac-people (you'll have to just trust us on that last one). Each individual item can be clicked on to reveal a close-up shot, as well as a description and some history of the item and in some cases, video or animation clips pertaining to the object at hand. Overall, the displays are quite comprehensive, but admittedly some are a lot more interesting than others.



▶ Each game in the Namco Museum is 100 percent identical code taken straight from the arcade version, barring some small license-related changes.

Pac-Man's museum, for instance, is a polygonal model of the first part of the side-scrolling title Pac Land, complete with a little Pac hut and billowing chimney. Galaxian's museum begins as a dark, boring room with a small arcade machine in the corner. But when the lights suddenly start to turn on, you find yourself in a huge starship hangar in the midst of launch preparations. Druaga takes you into a medieval scene where a huge tower is being menaced by the game's main boss, and Phozon

some game concept sketches and some other interesting reads. Once you're tired of the Library, you can head over to the Namco Theater, complete with running videos of the intro, pixel-perfect close-ups of the characters of every game on the disc and sound and music tests for all the games. Looking through the theater seats, you'll be able to spot some infamous Namco characters, including Mappy, the driver from Pole Position and the entire Pac-Family! Naturally, there are plenty more interesting finds

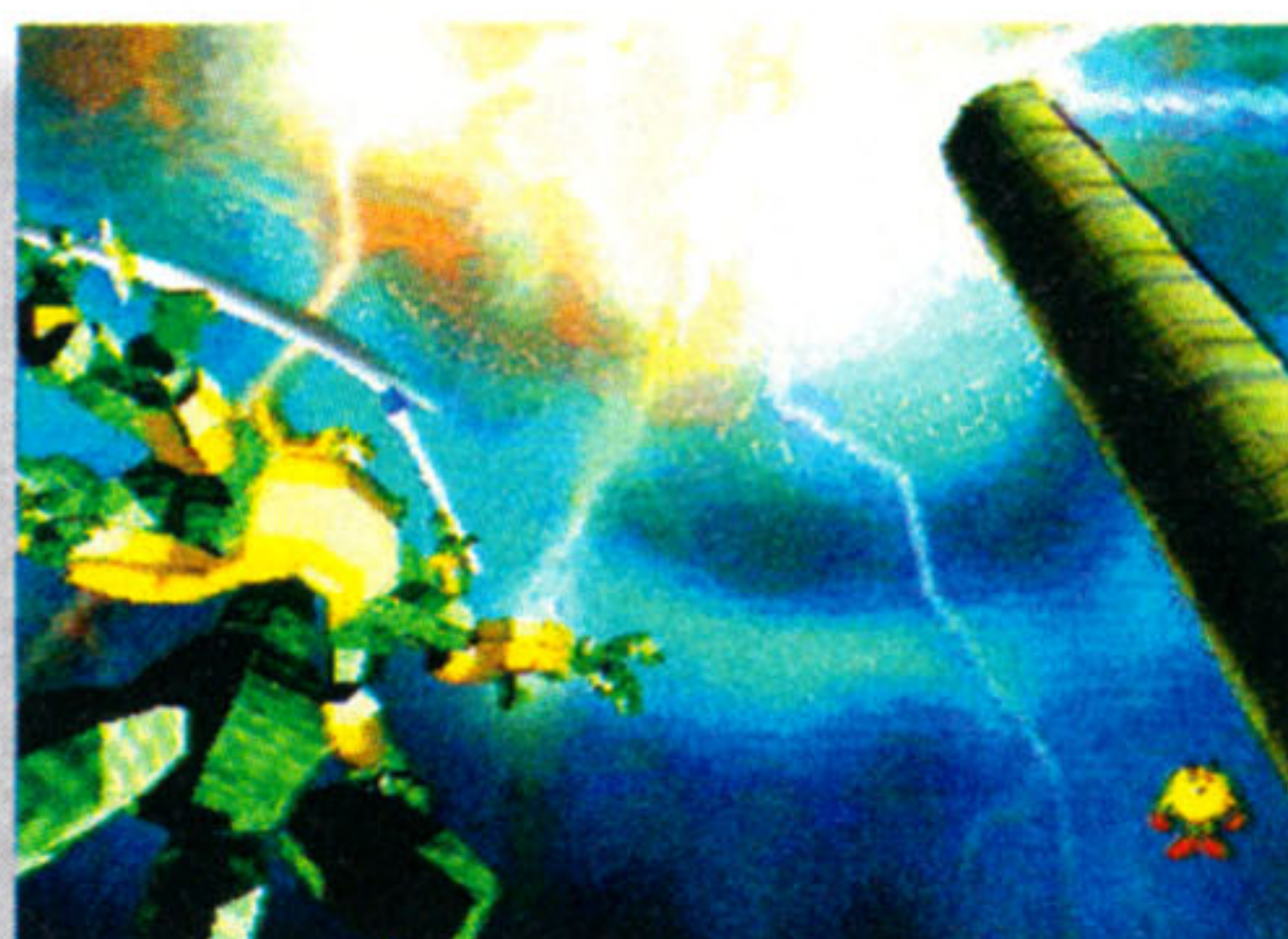
The most noticeable difference between this disc and the other two is the addition of a new menu system.

puts you in the center of an atomic research lab. Dig Dug and Pole Position similarly attempt to immerse you in realtime polygonal environments, all of which is just a pretty way of giving you access to the games themselves.

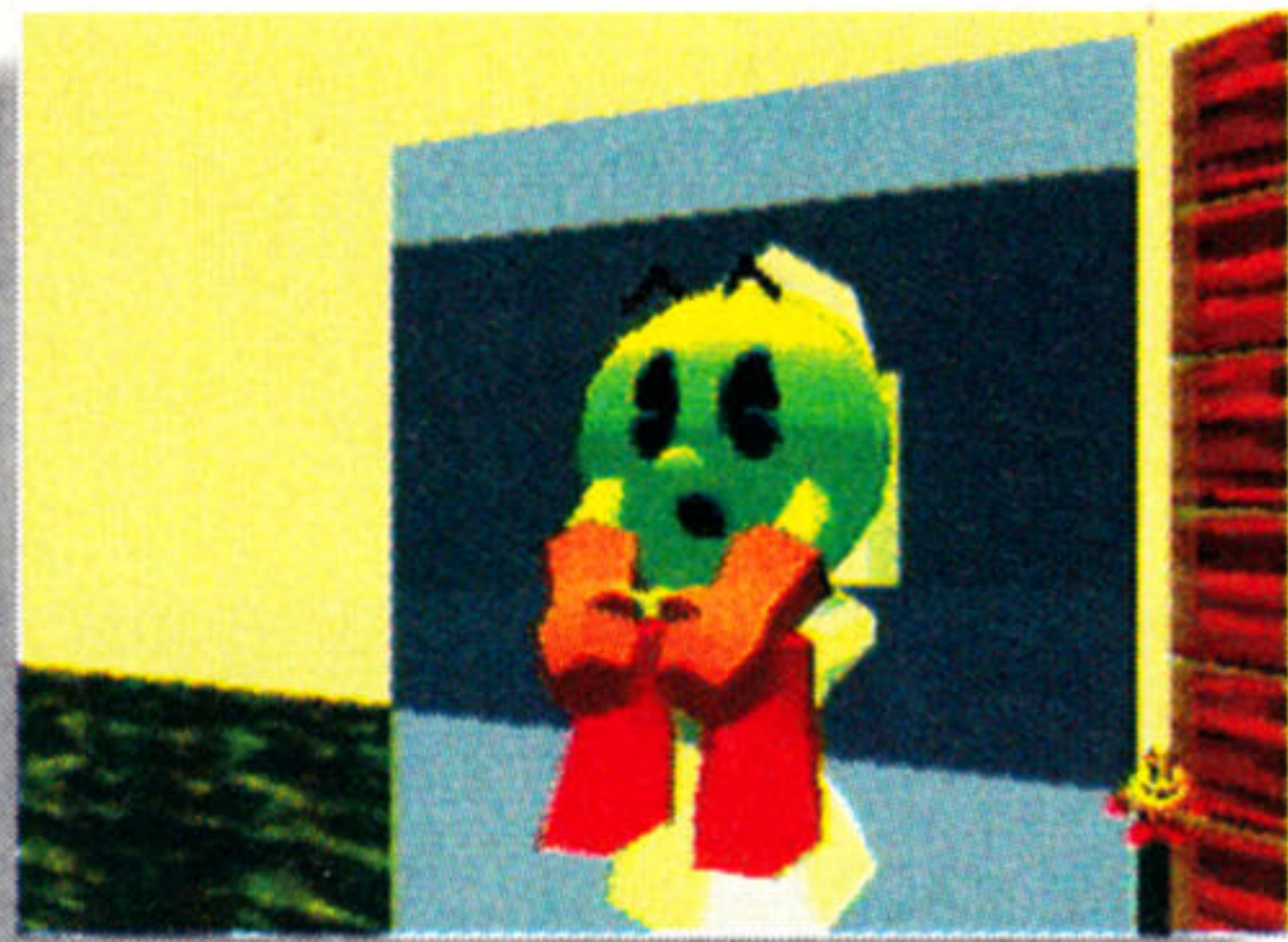
After spending countless hours travelling through the different game exhibits, you can head down to two separate sections of the museum: the Library and the Theater. Inside the Library there are huge shelves packed with books and walls full of long-lost artifacts, including back issues of Namco's early-'80s magazine, NG,

throughout the museum, if you just look hard enough.

Once in the games (which replicate the arcade originals so exactly that the power-on RAM test clutters the screen for the first few seconds), the most noticeable difference between this compilation and the other two in the series is the addition of a new streamlined menu system which allows the player to adjust difficulty, number of men and various other options. Contrast this to the previous two games which had a relatively clunky DIP switch interface (but still arcade exact; until recently, most arcade games still used DIP switches to set game options) to set the operator variables. Add in a much-needed "reset game" option, and you have a much more streamlined system than before. Control with the standard gamepad is smooth, as you might expect, with the exception of Pole Position II which nearly demands the use of a NeGcon or similar analog controller for accurate steering.



▶ Some of the individual museums look a lot better than others. This is a real-time scene from the Tower of Druaga.



Hunting around the museum will take you to some quirky scenes, the best of which is this one: Catch Pac-Man on the throne. Now we know where all those pellets go...

The vast majority of the games in this collection are vertical games (which means that the monitor is mounted in the cabinet sideways, so that it is longer vertically than horizontally), meaning that on some games like Dig Dug, the screen will either scroll vertically or the characters are reduced in resolution to fit the screen, as in Ms. Pac-Man. However, arcade purists need not fret; Namco has thoughtfully included a vertical monitor mode for those so interested in preserving the arcade experience that they are willing to risk damage to their television set by turning it on its side. (Realistically, though, most TVs survive the process, so long as the set is turned off for 20 minutes or so before being powered up in its new orientation. IG will not be responsible for any televisions broken in this manner, however.)

Are the games still fun to play? Absolutely. Most people will remember Dig Dug, Pole Position II, Ms. Pac-Man and Galaxian. If you liked them way back when, you'll like them now...perhaps even more considering that you'll realize how simple and elegant the level and game designs were. For the uninitiated, Phozon is a blast—considering how conceptually devoid most games of its generation were, Phozon is simple and would be a good game for teaching young players about chemistry and molecular properties.

The Tower of Druaga, on the other hand, is just plain weird. Though it was a big hit in Japan, this arcade-style RPG is neither visually impressive nor much fun to play. As you wander around the

mazes gathering keys and weapons, you might just find yourself consulting the paper list of items and objects Namco kindly saw fit to provide in the Japanese jewel case. After that, you'll probably put down the list and go read a book, because the book will be a lot more mentally stimulating than Druaga for sure.

Despite Druaga's weakness—and who knows, Namco of America might decide to replace it with another game for the States?—the rest of the package is beautifully assembled. This volume is much more consistent than the others, which tended to be uneven in quality. All of the games have their own unique charm, even if you weren't raised on them, and the added bonus of a virtual museum with very extensive virtual space to explore truly justifies the price of admission. (If you're a real fan of any of those arcade titles, this will likely be the only chance you'll get to see photos of the development area and sketches of the characters, which not surprisingly look better than the characters in the game.) Hopefully, the first volume will be successful enough here to prompt Namco of America to bring the remaining volumes here in a timely fashion, and we're anxious to see what titles the next two discs will include.



GRAPHICS:

- The games themselves came out ages ago. What did you expect?
- + Museum graphics are nicely done.

SOUNDS:

- +/- Nothing like good old-fashioned blips and beeps. Right?
- Museum music is fairly simple.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Art there none better than Ms. Pac-Man?
- + Seriously, these games are FUN. Well, except Druaga...

LASTING POWER:

- + Definitely a long-lasting title. Games are for the most part "timeless."
- + Probably the best volume in the series thus far.

C-

D

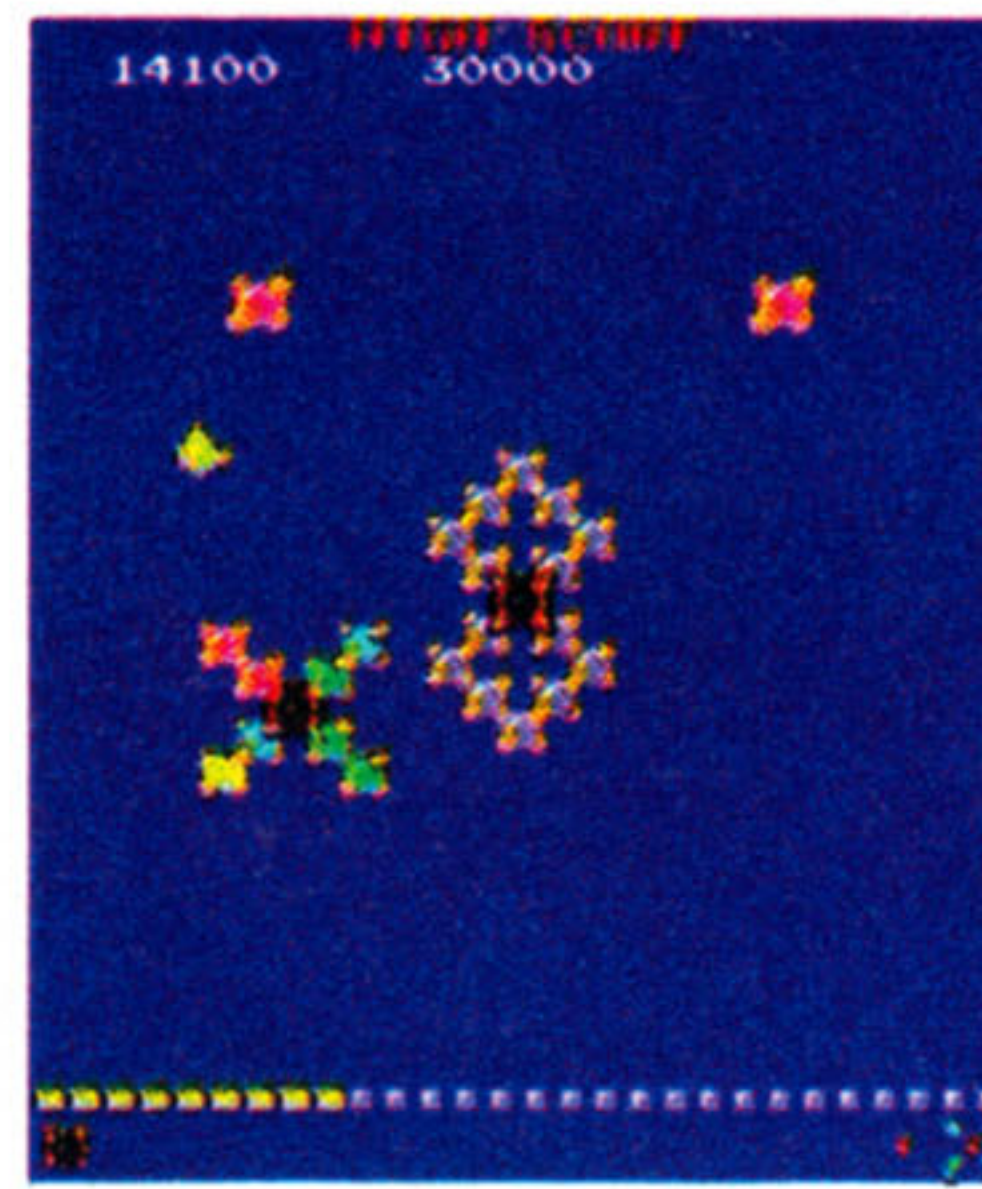
A

A-

B+

OVERALL RECOMMENDED

The Games of Vol. 3



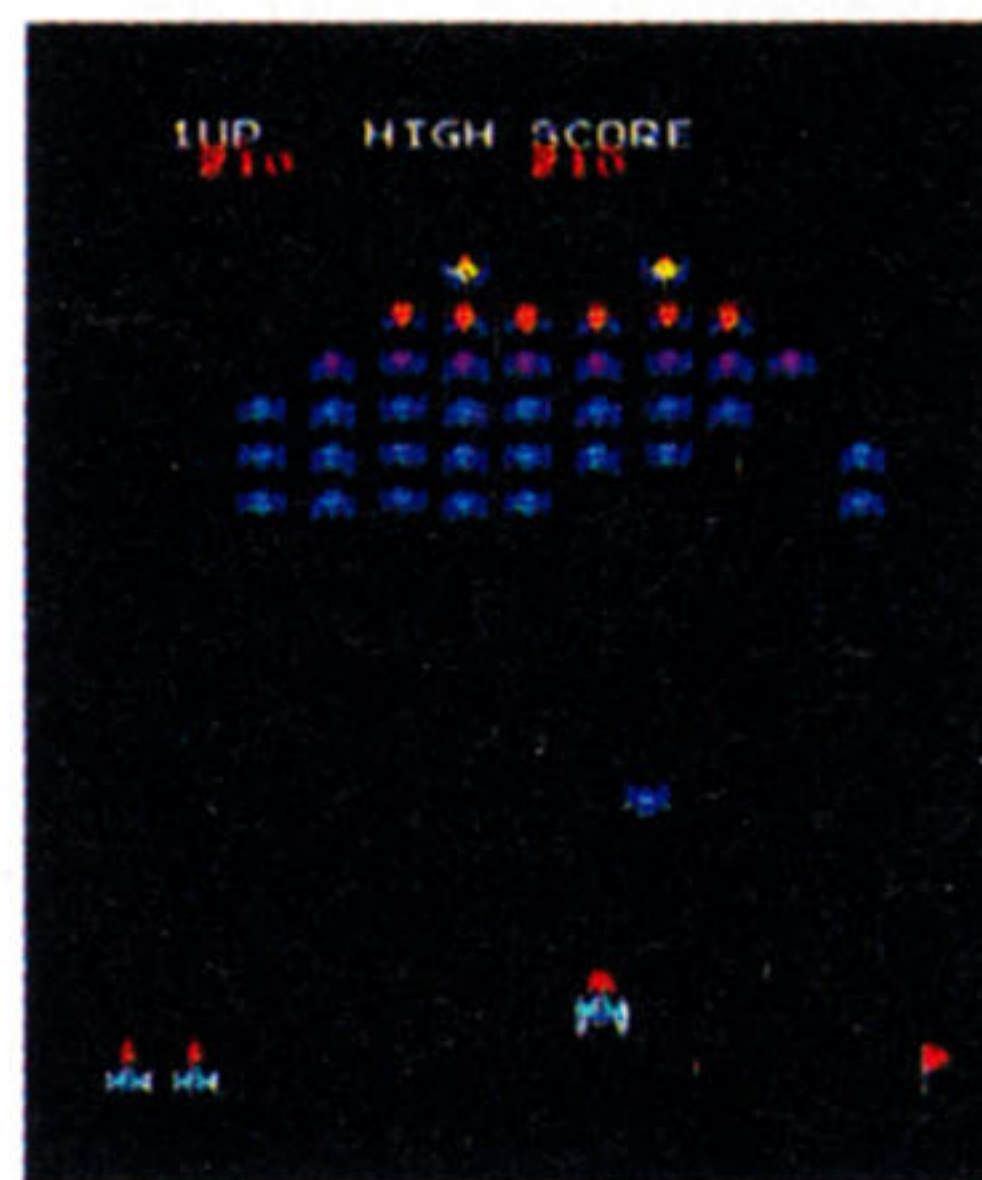
Phozon: Phozon plays more like a modern game than a 1983-era game, due to its clever action-puzzle play mechanics. Never released in the U.S., Phozon is a truly unique design based around the premise that the player must collect atoms to create the correct molecule for each level while avoiding a hostile cluster of energy particles. Borrowing from Galaga, the game presents players with "Challenging Stages" every few levels.



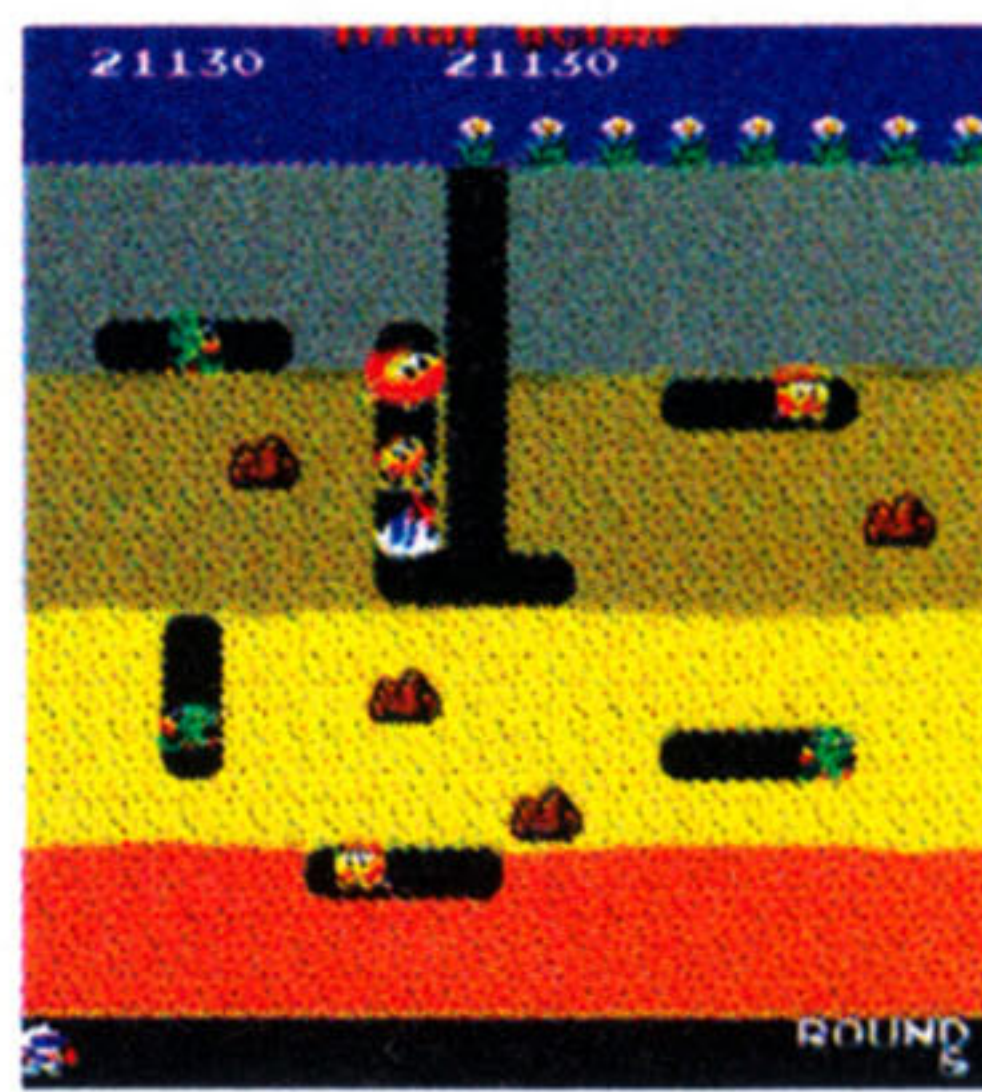
Ms. Pac-Man: Ms. Pac-Man is an anomaly on the disc, as the game never officially came out in Japan. Released as both dedicated units and as conversion kits for existing Pac-Man machines, Ms. Pac-Man addressed many of the arcade operators' concerns about the original, as players who memorized the ghost's patterns could literally play forever. Ms. Pac-Man featured random ghost movement, creating a game that still makes money even today.



The Tower of Druaga: Released in 1984, the Tower of Druaga was never released here in America. The object of the game is to navigate a maze, finding new weapons and keys to open the door to the next level. Overall, the game evokes memories of Stern's Tutankham, although the game is not nearly as fast-paced. Druaga proved to be quite popular in Japan, even spawning board games and an enhanced port to the PC Engine several years later.



Galaxian: One of Namco's first games, Galaxian was released in 1979 and was almost certainly heavily inspired by Taito's Space Invaders. The differences were significant, however, as Galaxian was a color game and the enemies not only shot at you, but also attempted to ram you as they dove out of formation. The U.S. release was handled by Midway Manufacturing, who also distributed Space Invaders.



Dig Dug: Dig Dug was a typically atypical game for the era. Starring Dig Dug, a little blue man in a space suit armed with nothing more than a shovel and an air pump, Dig Dug was picked up for U.S. release by Atari, who was one of Namco's partners at the time. A large part of the game's appeal are the delightfully cute characters, including the not-so-frightening enemies, Pooka and Fygar.



Pole Position II: The sequel to 1982's Pole Position, Pole Position II improved on the best racing game of the era by adding three new tracks and new collision effects. Purists may note, however, that the original's Suzuka and Fuji Speedway tracks have been replaced by the basically similar "Wonder Track" and the "Namco Speedway," presumably for licensing reasons. Pole Position II, just like its predecessor, was released here by Atari.

Pole Position II can be played with the standard pad or Namco's neGcon.

▶ One of the unexpected benefits of using the Saturn to duplicate a three-monitor arcade game is the hardware's ability to zoom out to show you all of the original art.

Darius II



Taito's classic 16-Bit shooter re-emerges on the 32-Bit Saturn with impressive results

Publisher: Taito

Platform: Saturn

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Taito

Release: Now (Japan)

The original Darius had two very distinctive features which immediately set it apart from the rest of the shooter pack: One was its dynamic soundtrack and the other was its widescreen display, achieved through the use of multiple CRTs and mirrors. In Japan, the game was received warmly enough to warrant a sequel running in a similar widescreen cabinet, which came out in 1989. Despite its popularity in Japan, the game saw limited or no release in the U.S., and most gamers' first exposure to Darius II was on the Genesis, where it was renamed Sagaia for U.S. release.

While the numerous home versions for both the Genesis/Mega Drive and PC Engine did an admirable job in attempting to duplicate the feel of the arcade game, none of them could replicate the widescreen aspect ratio of the arcade game. Darius II for

controller to control the aspect ratio, with the Full-screen Mode zooming tightly around the player's ship, providing a slightly claustrophobic feel.

The game is unchanged from the arcade original: Graphics were very impressive for a 1989 arcade game, but look rather dated for a 32-Bit Saturn title, with only one layer of parallax with some line scrolling in the background. Bosses are moderately impressive, with some clever design elements, and most of them do fill the screen at moderate to high zoom levels. Audio is identical to the arcade, replicating the original's outstanding music via Redbook audio.

Gameplay is straightforward shooting action, with the player's craft firing a combination of bullets, lasers and bombs. Power-ups for the various weapons can be obtained by downing formations of certain enemies, which will strengthen the aforementioned

game, only seven need to be completed in order to see an ending.

The weakest part of Darius II's gameplay is the power-up system, which can lead to interminable frustration. If the player is killed, all power-ups are lost, which makes the game nearly impossible on higher levels. Overall difficulty is above average as well, with even the easiest difficulty level providing ample challenge.

Fans of the Darius series should definitely consider checking this game out. Although the game offers few enhancements from the aging original, what's there is typical of the zeitgeist of that era: solid shooting action. Those expecting a graphical tour-de-force, however, will walk away disappointed.



Combining Gradius with the TNN Bass Tournament of Champions gets you the Darius series—all the fish you can shoot at, plus all of the excitement of a top-notch shooter.

Darius II for the Saturn is the first translation that successfully duplicates the aspect ratio of the arcade game.

the Saturn is the first translation of Darius that successfully duplicates the aspect ratio of the game through the clever use of scaling.

As you might expect, if you were to display the entire three-screen wide image on a standard TV, the actual characters would be very small, with large black bars filling the majority of the screen. While this perspective is the best for seeing what lies ahead and behind your ship, dodging bullets becomes very tricky when the projectiles are a few pixels wide. The solution to the problem is the use of the L and R buttons on the top of the

weapons as well as provide a much-needed shield from time to time. Unlike its sequel, Darius Gaiden, the player's craft is not equipped with screen-clearing weaponry; however, there is the occasional bomb sitting on the ground, which—when detonated by the player's weaponry—performs the same function as the vortex bombs in Gaiden. After defeating each Boss, a Level Select Screen allows the player to choose the next play field, much the way the different paths were selected in Sega's Outrun. This means that although there are 28 levels in the

GRAPHICS:

- + Good graphics for a 1980s era game.
- Not up to snuff with more recent efforts.

SOUND:

- + Very strong soundtrack, courtesy of Zuntata.
- No arranged music option.

GAMEPLAY:

- + Solid shooting action.
- Low chance of survival once the power-ups are lost.

LASTING POWER:

- + Multiple endings encourage repeat plays.
- + This game is HARD.

B-

A-

B

B+

OVERALL

RECOMMENDED

B



1 The friendly bald gent on the right informs you that you're about to fight the first Boss (left), a friendly cyborg whose groin is covered by a giant metal ball full of explosives.

Choaniki: Great Brother

In the first issue of *Intelligent Gamer*, we started up this little section (formerly titled Kusoge Gallery; consult a dictionary) with the intention of spotlighting the most bizarre imported titles we could find each month or whenever we thought we had found a real stinker. Needless to say, we were pretty blown away by issue one's *Kitchen Stadium Tour*, which probably would have won the "weirdest concept in history" award outright, but then we saw a Japanese preview tape with the even weirder *Cat The Ripper*. (Yes, a full look at that murderous Japanese feline will be forthcoming.) Imagine our surprise to receive the side-scrolling shooter *Choaniki* ("Great Brother"): *Kyukyokumutekigingasaikyootoko*—that's the actual name—a game so weird that our foreign correspondent sent the disc our way without even asking whether we wanted to see it.

You know that the game is starting off on a weird note when you see dancing cut-out dolls fighting for screen time with almost naked muscle-bound men in the opening full-motion video sequence, and by that point, you'll hardly be surprised when a full-screen rose blooms and peaceful

music begins to play behind the images of two bald, flexing body builders. Before the opening has finished, you'll also get to see a number of hearts, big red lipstick kisses and a sunflower filled with the face of a smiling strongman.

Sure, we'll admit that we've seen games start off with weird FMV cinemas and become serious pretty quickly during gameplay. *Choaniki* stays weird. Very weird. The entire first part of the game is a goofy take on most shooters, placing you in control of a huge spinning Japanese Conan-type

We've seen games that start off with weird FMV cinemas and quickly become serious. Choaniki stays weird.

with a shiny bull helmet on. Rather than restricting his weapon power or confronting him with deadly enemy forces, he emits large blasts of blue energy which are many times the size of the intentionally tiny and horribly drawn on-screen enemies, and there's no real point to the stage except to make you groan at how ridiculous the whole premise is. If for some reason he actually gets injured, he grabs his smoking crotch and falls to the earth, where the game's other characters surround him and wonder what went wrong.

After that section has ended, you move on to the truly bizarre stuff. Some might remember Masaya, developers of *Cybernator* and *Langrissler*, additionally as the creators of an obscure saturation-era Genesis shooter named *Wings of Wor*: The game was challenging but filled with unusually colored artwork and disgustingly gaunt alien enemy characters. In the post-*Mortal Kombat* era of

character digitization, *Choaniki* continues *Wings of Wor*'s style but fills every stage of the game with flowers, digitized images of men clad only in Speedos, randomly appearing floating eggplants, flying severed heads and eight-legged men who dispense weapon power-ups. Your character is either a oddly dressed man who dog paddles through every level, guarded by two barely dressed bald guys, or a moderately angelic woman who flies through the stages with two children clothed in halos and white dresses.

Boss confrontations push the envelope. The first is a cybernetically enhanced almost nude guy who flips up his leg at you, and the second is a bunch of Speedo men who jump onto each other and form a human pyramid. Later Bosses have you fighting mutating snails, the Speedo men running around hamster-like on spinning bladed devices, and row boats full of—you guessed it—guys in tight underpants. This all might seem pretty crazy, but consider that *Choaniki* is actually the sequel to a highly ranked Japanese TurboGrafx-16 Super CD game—fans actually requested that a second game of this type be made, and NCS/Masaya agreed.

We've seen 1,000 import games with box markings indicating that they're "For Japan Only;" *Choaniki* is the first game where we'll just nod our heads and accept it.

Japan's NCS says goodbye, conventional characters, hello, men in tights

Publisher: NCS

Platform: PlayStation

Format: Single CD-ROM

Developer: Masaya

Release: Now (Japan)

2 Choaniki's opening sequence spotlights the joys of flowers, Play Doh figurines, and many dancing youths. Unless NAMBLA calls Sony, we doubt that there will be a U.S. release.



3 In the prologue to the real action, the game's muscle-bound god gets shot down (grabbing his crotch) by a fleet of intentionally microscopic invaders.

Q Does WMS' intended purchase of Atari include any licensing rights to current Jaguar technology or any previously planned "future Jaguar technology" (i.e. Jaguar 2)? Also, has there been any interest from any gaming-related hardware manufacturer in obtaining the rights to Jaguar technology and has Atari's apparent abandonment of the Jaguar also cancelled the cross-licensing agreement that they had with Sega?

Gregory Walker
Saginaw, MI

P.S. Is there any chance that one of my all-time arcade favorites, N.A.R.C. will show up on a future Williams Arcade's Greatest Hits compilation CD for any of the 32-/64-Bit systems or PCs?

A When he founded Atari, Nolan Bushnell never expected that the company would be bought out years later and divided into two separate corporations: Atari Corporation produces all of the home Atari cartridge consoles from the VCS (2600) to the Lynx and Jaguar, as well as all of Atari's home computers from the 400 to the Falcons. Atari Games—which was previously a coin-op division only—owns the vast majority of the Atari- and Time Warner Interactive-published arcade properties, including such titles as Hydra, STUN Runner, Primal Rage, Area 88 and Wayne Gretzky and the NHLPA All-Stars Hockey.



Williams Entertainment's recent purchase of Atari Games has little to do with Atari Corporation's Jaguar game console, but allows WMS access to classic Atari titles.

WMS purchased Atari Games—*a.k.a.* Time Warner Interactive—and thus acquired a host of impressive arcade titles and almost nothing related to the home console and computer maker Atari Corporation. Almost nothing? Well, the Area 51 arcade board is based on what was known as the CoJag technology, an enhanced (faster) version of the Jaguar console designed for arcade purposes, so theoretically WMS could do something more with that hardware. Will they? Don't hold your breath. Most arcade machine makers prefer either their own custom hardware or standardized chips developed by companies such as SNK (Neo-Geo MVS), Sony (PS-compatible) and Sega (Titan, Model 2), with Matsushita/3DO's M2 starting to pick up support as well. If WMS decides to use another company's technology, it probably wouldn't be Atari's.

To answer your other questions, the Jaguar is unlikely to receive an infusion of support from a company other than Atari any time soon. If history repeats itself, left-over Jaguar motherboards will be stripped from their plastic shells and used in Sears' ink ribbon selectors (NEC TurboGrafx) or dumped in a huge landfill never to be seen again (Atari 2600 cartridges). Sega released an Atari arcade classics compilation cartridge for the Genesis and Game Gear containing three not-so-hot aged Atari properties, namely Centipede, Missile Command and Pong, and you probably shouldn't expect to see Atari Corporation releasing a Sega combo cartridge—or anything else, quite frankly—for the Jaguar in the near future.

Williams is planning on exploiting their connection with Atari Games for home compilation purposes, however, and will likely release CDs containing many of Atari's hot arcade titles from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s. Is NARC coming? It's not in the company's current plans, but as the nostalgia factor begins to play in the marketplace, you could expect to see a port sometime in the future.



A Peter Meredith inquires about game screen shots used in magazines such as Intelligent Gamer, asking why Psygnosis' Formula One title pictures looked consistently "OK" while Internet-downloaded shots were "clearer." This photo, among others, was provided to magazines on disks straight from Psygnosis.

Q I have this insatiable desire for game info—I scour the newsstands for all the magazines, I search the Web 'til my local system administrator kicks me off for the night or Yahoo starts to glow. So I have this question: Why do the screen pictures in all the magazines not quite match up with the clarity of images I download off the Web or the ones produced by either my PlayStation or my Saturn on my TV? They usually range from "totally crappy" to "OK," but they never look really great. Case in point (though it's one of the OK cases) is everyone's pictorial coverage of F-1—the screen shots I've downloaded are clearer.

Peter Meredith
Silver City, NM

A There are several means by which magazines obtain their game screen shots: direct video feeds into computers, video feeds into camcorders, direct screen dumps into RAM, camcorder recording off of television screens or monitors, still photography off of TVs or monitors and receipt of finished pictures from the publisher or developer. Let's run through them in order: Many times, magazines are sent advance copies of games from which screen captures can be made, and the magazines' staffs connect the game machine's video cables directly to a Macintosh or PC video capture board (such as a Snappy). Direct video feeds from A/V cables are pretty sharp, as are S-Video and RGB images. Alternatively, some magazines will attend trade shows or special events where games are being

shown, and will directly connect their cameras to the game machines using Hi-8 or other high-end digital video tapes. The taped footage is then fed into the aforementioned video-capture board and screenshots are made. Images coming directly from the game or a video tape of the game are generally what you see in magazines.

Especially in the PC world (but occasionally in the console gaming arena, as well), direct screen dumps can be made by having a game spit out its content directly into RAM or free hard disk space—using built-in Windows 95 or Mac OS screen-grabbing commands will do this, and the image replicates perfectly. The other extreme is when images are grabbed by a video or still camera from a moving television screen—most of the time, the screenshots produced tend to be too dark, too bright or blurry, if not skewed on unusual angles and/or missing one side of the screen's original image.

When publishers or developers realize that people want to see their game in magazines but cannot send out preview copies and fear the low quality of screenshots coming off of televisions at trade shows, they send out floppy disks or CD-ROMs full of TIFF or JPEG screenshots that can be published in magazines. On occasion, pictures will also be provided as slides, in a transparency format (colored inks on a transparent plastic sheet) or glossy photographic sheets, all of which are scanned into computers. The differences between all of the capture formats mentioned above are primarily in the images' sharpness and alignment—one last factor to

bear in mind is color balancing, which needs to be adjusted manually by a magazine's art and production staff so that trees and grass look lush and green, pools of water are glimmering blue and fires rage in reds and yellows.

Can you tell the difference between most of these different capturing and scanning formats? Sometimes. Just for your reference, all of the F-1 pictures that have appeared in magazines to date were provided on CD-ROMs by Psygnosis, most of the Super Mario 64 screenshots prior to E³ were scanned in from glossy photographic sheets or taken from video provided by Nintendo, and all of the recent Tekken 2 pictures have been captured with a video board directly from the actual game.

Q. I have a multiple-part question that I was hoping that you could answer about the Nintendo⁶⁴.

1. I have heard that Namco has announced that it will be a developer for the N⁶⁴ and its first games will be *Dirt Dash* and *Rave Racer*. Is there a *Tekken 3* or a *Tekken 64* in store for us?



A. Will Namco develop *Rave Racer* for the Nintendo⁶⁴? They haven't announced any official plans yet to develop titles for the new Nintendo hardware, but they are bringing *Rave Racer* directly to Windows 95 PCs equipped with PowerVR chipsets, and will be bringing a new *Tekken* to arcades in the future.

2. I've heard that the N⁶⁴ will be released for \$200 and will include *Mario 64* and a controller. True?

3. Will Nintendo release a CD drive later to support even more powerful games?

Anonymous
via the Internet

A. In order: Namco has not made a formal announcement yet about its N⁶⁴ developer status as of this printing. Unofficially, representatives of the company have confirmed that they will be working on N⁶⁴ titles, including a racing arcade translation which has been thought to be *Ace Driver* or *Ace Driver 2: Victory Lap*, and not a prime Namco title such as *Rave Racer*. We'll have to wait and see.

The N⁶⁴ is set to launch at a price of \$249.99 including one controller and (gasp!) no Mario. As we mentioned in our previous issue, the price is higher than expected primarily because Nintendo will not be able to meet demand for the new machines and thus feels no need to lower the price—they'll sell out of everything they have at the \$249.99 level if they can deliver the goods before

the holidays. *Mario 64* will cost \$69.99 above the system price.

Nintendo continues to disavow interest in and plans for a CD-ROM peripheral for the Nintendo⁶⁴. Based on their track record, we have no reason to doubt their present resolve for using the upcoming N64DD writable disk drive as their exclusive alternative storage medium, but we somehow feel that proprietary disk manufacturing costs and low installed N64DD user bases will discourage some developers from even releasing software for the peripheral. We'll have to wait and see.

Q. I am a game player who is thinking about getting a new 32-Bit system. I have played cartridge games all of my life and I wanted to know which is better: systems that run on CDs or those that run on cartridges. I know that CDs are very good because they take up less space, they provide better pictures and sounds, and games are less likely to freeze up. But they also get scratched, and if the system gets knocked, it could make the screen jump. Also, you can't save to CD games unless you have memory cards. That's what I've heard about CD games; I don't know if it's true, though, so which is better—CDs or cartridges and why?

Jermaine L. Gomez
Missouri City, Texas

A. Before answering your question, we have to point out that what really matters is the game, not the format, and thus unless you're comparing the same game on two mediums, the question is somewhat moot—buy a system for the games that you want and can afford. Some of your information on CD technology is off, but here's a brief list of the benefits and consequences of using cartridges or CDs. Compact discs cost less to manufacture than cartridges (\$1 versus \$20+), so companies can sell their CD games cheaper; compact discs require you to take time to load every level's data,



A. Jermaine Gomez wonders which format is inherently superior—CDs or cartridges. As long as we're not using *Night Trap* as a benchmark...

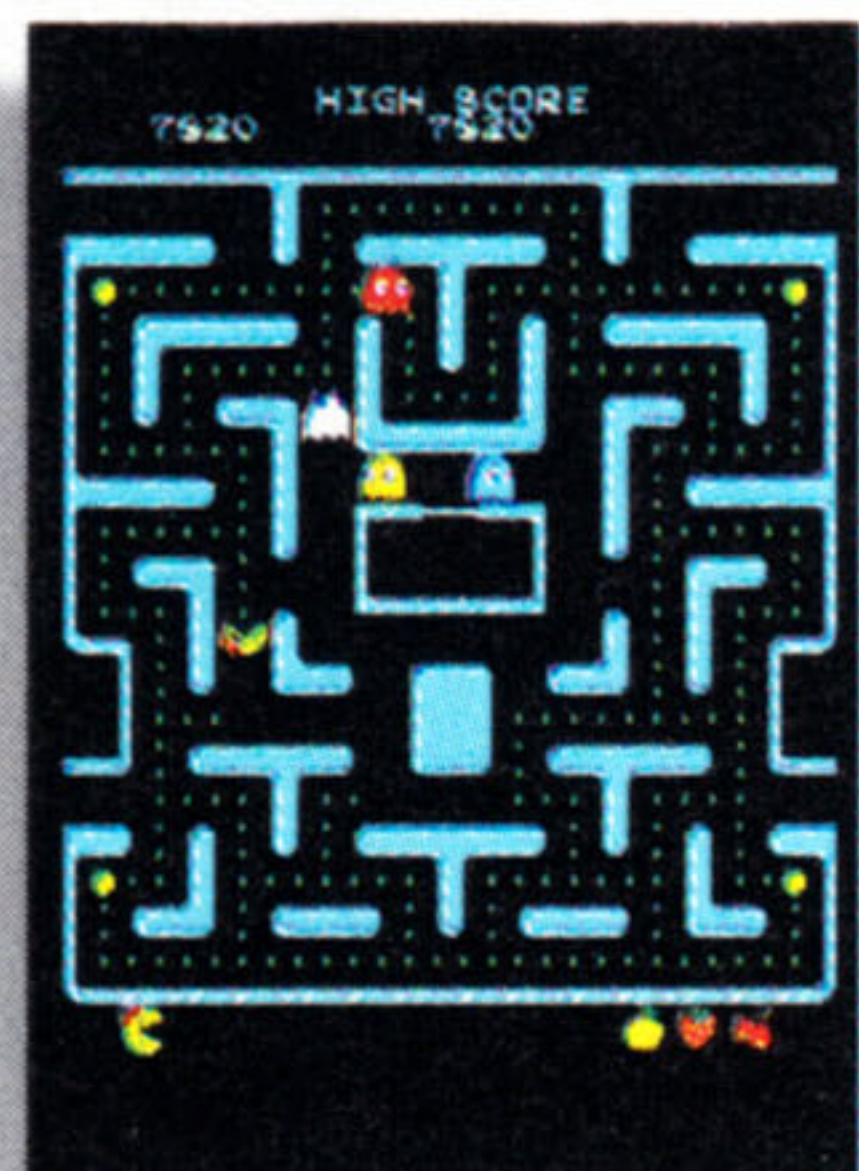
whereas cartridges provide nearly instant access to any part of a game; and compact discs have more memory than cartridges (most of the time, over 30 times as much) and can therefore store movies and pre-recorded music easier. Compact discs are more easily scratched, require a somewhat expensive component (the CD-ROM reading mechanism) for playback, and indeed do require special cards or devices to store saved games. Cartridges, on the other hand, allow you to include inexpensive upgrade chips (i.e. SNES Super FX, NES MMC chips) and game-specific backup RAM. Which is better? Well, if we had to choose between carts and CDs, we would probably choose CDs only because they're cheaper and store more, but you can't yet beat the speed of a cartridge or its ability to add cheap chips and save RAM.



Send your questions to:
IG Queries

by e-mail at iglee@aol.com,
subject line: *Communications*

or by mail at
1920 Highland Avenue
Suite 222, Lombard, IL 60148



▲ Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man are Namco's biggest games ever. Topping the successes of those titles will be quite a challenge.



Namco's Masaya Nakamura

Namco's library reads like the highlights of the entire video game industry. During the "Golden Age" of video games, Namco ruled the roost with games like Pac-Man, Galaga and Make Trax. In recent years, the company has revived its industry leadership with such arcade titles as Alpine Racer, Ridge Racer and Tekken.

namco

But Namco's legacy does not stop there. One of the world's leading entertainment companies, Namco owns one of the largest arcade chains in the United States. The company has even created a chain of Disney-like theme parks with locations in Japan and Europe. Namco's Wonder Egg theme parks are so compact that families can spend an entire day enjoying rides and games in a theme park that is only a little larger than two square acres.

At the heart of this electronic empire is Masaya Nakamura, a former naval engineer who started Namco as a kiddie ride company with two partners and \$3,000 of capital. In the 40 years that have passed since Nakamura founded his company, Namco has grown into an international power. In fact, Nakamura's office is littered with pictures of powerful acquaintances such as the late Francois Mitterand, former president of France.





Namco's Beginnings:

When Namco was founded in 1955, the company consisted of a couple of used rides and a strong entrepreneurial spirit. "I purchased two second-hand horse rides and talked a department store into allowing me to set them up in a garden on their roof. I operated the machines myself, refurbished the machines myself, and polished and cleaned them every day," says Nakamura, who proudly states that he even "welcomed the mothers of the children as they came for the rides."

Hard work and persistence helped Nakamura to expand his company, but the next big step in Namco's history came in the form of an alliance with Atari, the first company to successfully market a coin-operated video game. In 1973, Atari founded a Japanese marketing operation but discovered that working through established Japanese companies was more productive than trying to create its own channels.

"My relationship with Nolan Bushnell [founder of Atari and father of coin-operated video games] goes back to the days of Atari Japan. Nolan Bushnell developed several games: Pong, Breakout and several derivatives of Pong," says Nakamura. "For various reasons, including poor maintenance and selection of inappropriate locations, Atari Japan was not really doing well. They wanted to dispose of the

"I operated the machines myself, refurbished the machines myself, and polished and cleaned them every day." —Masaya Nakamura

operation, and that's when we started discussions about buying out Atari Japan."

While Namco's early success testifies to Nakamura's hard work, his company's real success took on a life of its own shortly after the purchase of Atari's Japanese operation. Around that time, Atari's engineers developed the ultimate Pong-derivative. It was a vertical Pong game in which players used their ball and paddle to destroy rows of bricks along the top of the screen. The game was called Breakout and it became an immediate hit in Japan. As the only Japanese company with a license to distribute the game, Namco became a major entertainment company in Japan.

"Breakout was a wonderful game and I gave it a very high evaluation. Through Atari Japan, we had the sales rights to the property in Japan, and we were doing quite well with it," Nakamura remembers.

▶ The arcade game Prop-Cycle demonstrates Namco's commitment to new and unique game design.



▶ Galaxian put Namco on the map with its impressive improvement over the more primitive shooter game Space Invaders.

The success was not to last. Another manufacturer started distributing counterfeit Breakout machines. "Their game was called Borokukuishi [the Japanese translation for Breakout], and it was just about a literal translation." When Nakamura discovered that the counterfeiters had more games on the market than Namco, he knew that action had to be taken.

Bushnell and Nakamura remember Namco's first steps to secure the market very differently. According to Bushnell, Nakamura began manufacturing Breakout on his own, without warning Atari executives. He says that Breakout machines appeared around Japan in quantities that far outweighed the number of machines Atari had shipped over.

Nakamura remembers the event quite differently. "Hide Nakajima [the number two man at Atari Japan] and I went to see Nolan Bushnell one morning to lodge a very strong claim against the copies and to ask for his assistance. Unfortunately when we met him, it was the morning after apparently a very long party on the part of Nolan Bushnell. He very obviously had a hangover and was in no physical condition to concentrate on our very serious claim."

"He took it very lightly. For sake of self-defense in terms of business, we decided to start manufacturing the games ourselves." Namco began manufacturing Breakout machines on its own rather than purchasing them from Atari.

Nakamura is very uncomfortable with the accusation that he may have pirated Breakout. He describes himself as a lifelong defender of property rights. "I have worked long and hard to protect international property rights. I've appeared before the Japanese government and done many things as the chairman of Namco and as the president of JAMMA to further the cause of intellectual property rights."

"I guess you could say that this incident was instrumental in my undertaking the fight against copies. As far as I'm concerned, the elimination of the piracy is the only way for an industry of this nature to grow."

Namco Goes International

Namco began to acquire an international reputation with the release of Galaxian, a game which Nakamura remembers with pride. "Galaxian was a substantial improvement over the Invaders [Space Invader] game. As you will recall, the attacks in the Invaders game came straight up and down. In Galaxian they came from every direction. And the Invaders game was black and white. Galaxian was in color."

Namco's next major hit, Pac-Man, became the most celebrated video game in history. Released in 1980 and marketed in the United States by Midway, Pac-Man came to symbolize the video game industry. To illustrate how important this game became, it may be pointed out that many analysts believe that the fall of home video games in 1983 was partially due to disappointment with the Pac-Man cartridge for the Atari 2600.

"I did not imagine that Pac-Man would be an international hit of the magnitude that it was and is to date," admits Nakamura.

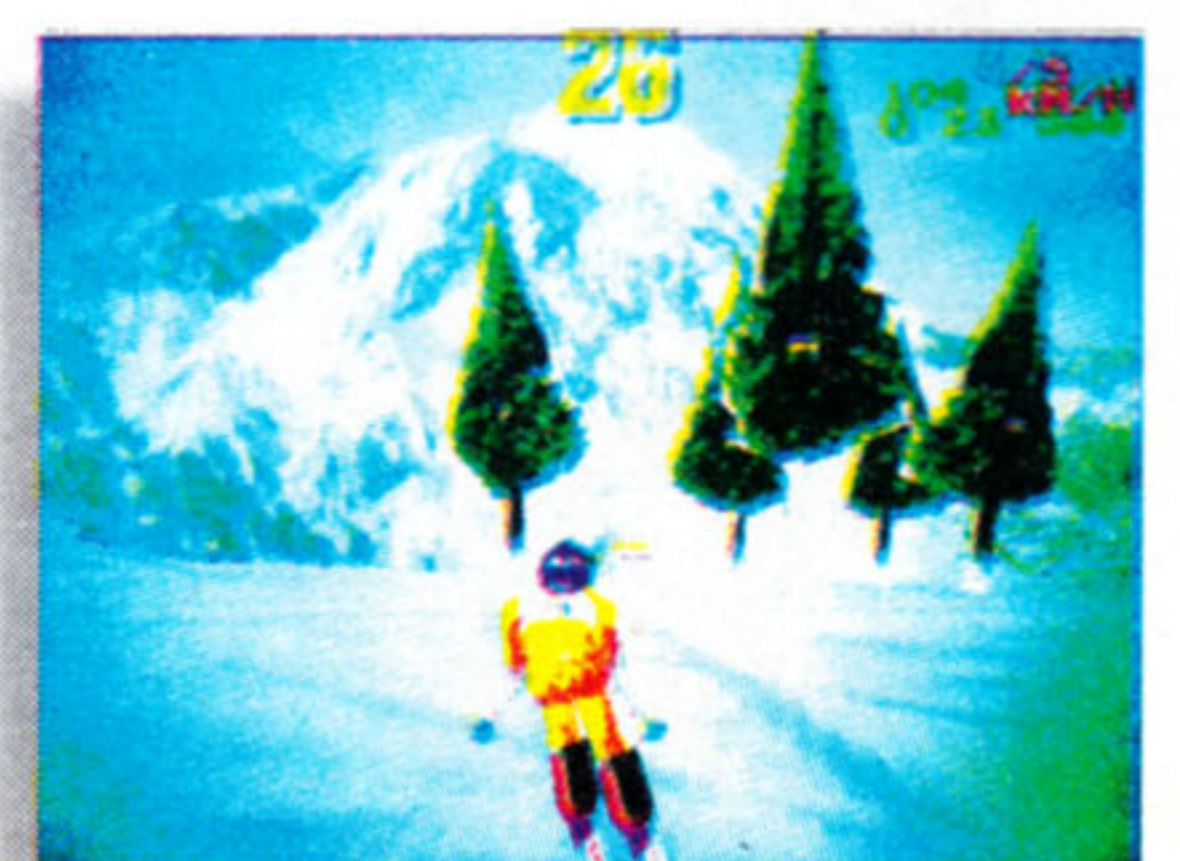
It has been reported that Moru Iwatani, the man who designed Pac-Man, quit making games in disgust after he was only given a \$3500 bonus for the game. In truth, Iwatani still works for Namco. "He's a very important member of our R & D group," says Nakamura. "He's the general manager."

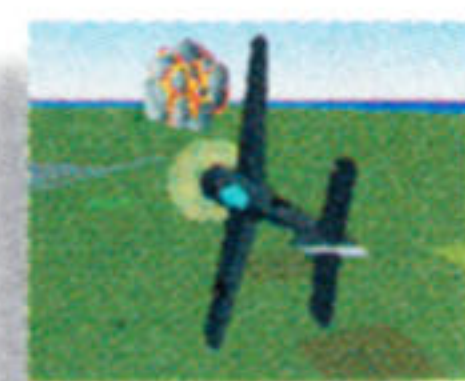
As for the story about only giving Iwatani a \$3500 bonus, Nakamura is not sure he received any bonus at all. "Maybe he received some bonus but nothing really to write home about. This is the way we do things in Japan."

While Namco has consistently been a leader in coin-operated arcade games over the years, the company virtually disappeared from the home market. In recent years Namco has exploded in the arcade and home markets with new and technologically impressive games. Alpine Racer and more recently Alpine Surfer have brought new realism to sports games by realistically combining interactive skies and snowboards with large-screen video games. On the home market, Tekken and Ridge Racer both played significant roles in Sony's launch of the PlayStation.

According to Nakamura, his company has evolved from the amusement business to the entertainment business—meaning that they have added value to their games by creating richer experiences. He quotes the philosopher Andre Marlow who predicted that the 21st century would be a time of increased spirituality. According to Nakamura, Namco has a place in that new era.

▶ Alpine Racer has done quite well in the arcades due to its innovative design and concept.





Air Warrior

Air Battles Rage Across
the Online Services

by Brian Osserman



Although not as visually impressive as other flight sims, Air Warrior succeeds at what it does: It provides an intense, realistic multiplayer aerial experience.

Online gaming is rapidly becoming more popular, with software such as Kali and IHHD allowing internet users to play games such as Doom, Descent and Command & Conquer, designed for networks and direct modem connections, across the Internet

instead. Air Warrior provides a somewhat different approach to online gaming; it is a flight simulator actually designed for play across the Internet. Users of commercial online services such as America Online, CompuServe, Delphi and GEnie can join in the fun, playing Air Warrior with and against one another.

At first glance, Air Warrior appears to be a simple, rather undistinguished flight simulator.

The graphics are extremely simplistic flat polygons, and plane technology is restricted to what was available during the Korean War. There are none of the highly advanced missiles and targeting systems available in today's aircraft.

Rather, weapon selection is restricted to machine guns and bombs. However, even a quick attempt to actually play the game will bring out some of its depth; there are more than 25 different airplanes available to choose from, including a variety of fighters, bombers and jets from World War I all the way through the Korean War. Furthermore, the different planes aren't simply window-dressing; each one has been implemented as realistically as possible, so each has its strengths and weaknesses, with



variable characteristics ranging from turning radius to airspeed to weaponry to durability under fire. While the realism level is variable, it is possible to set Air Warrior so that your plane behaves very much the same as it would in real life.

However, the real depth of Air Warrior is in its nearly unrestricted networking capabilities. Players on a given online service can choose one of a number of arenas to play in, with each arena accommodating an unprecedented number of people; up to 90 can play together at once on America Online. Players choose one of three countries to represent, then choose an airstrip from which to take off and finally which aircraft to use from those that are available at the chosen airstrip. In addition to the relatively straightforward fighters and bombers, it is possible to play as a ground vehicle on anti-aircraft duty or as the gunner for someone else's bomber.

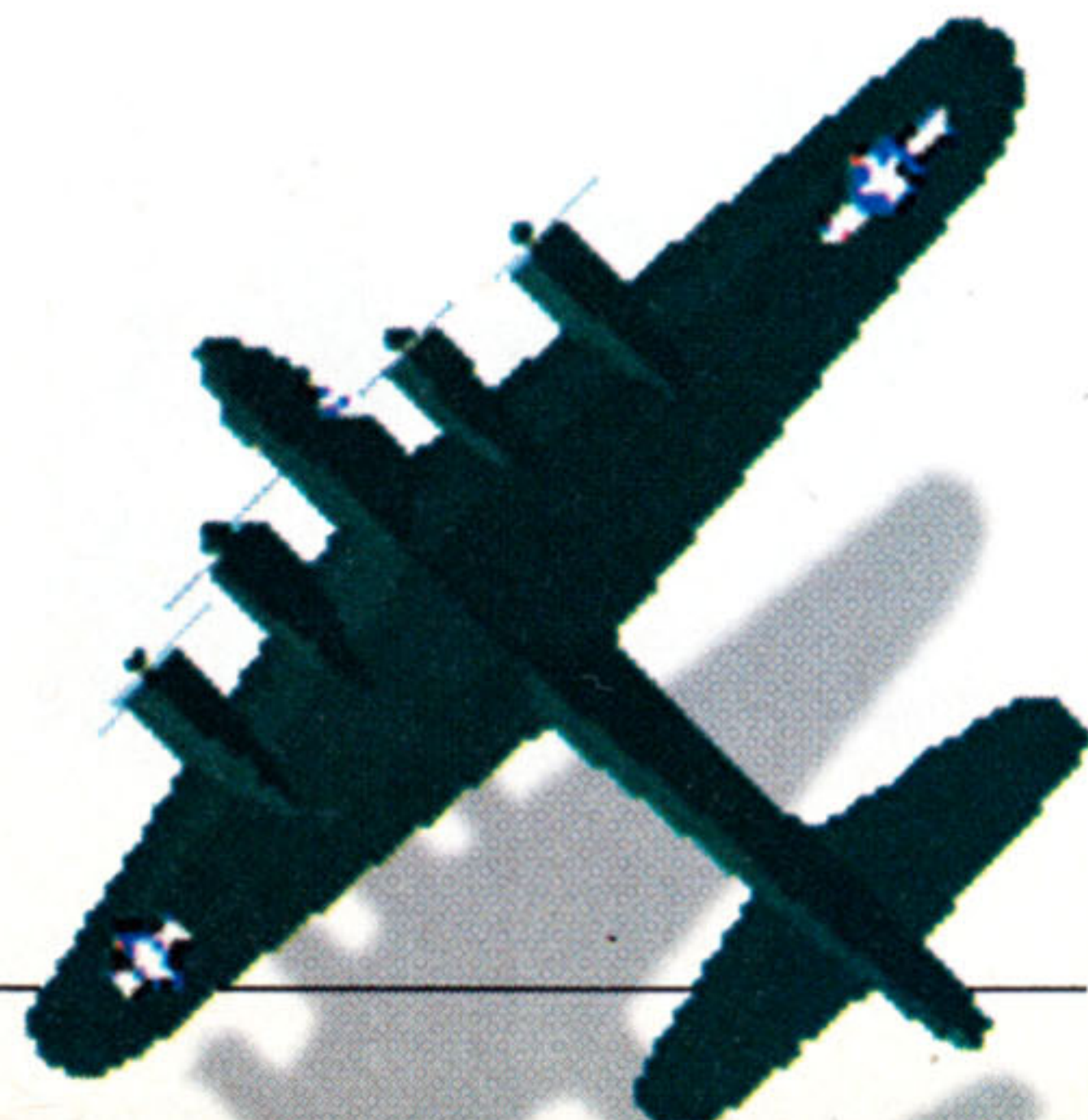
Gameplay is relatively simple, but it is the very lack of restrictions that keeps it simple that also lends it depth. Because there are very few artificial restrictions on what may be done, players are free to organize whatever sort of play they desire. Planes from one's own country are friendlies, and attacking them is very heavily discouraged. However, beyond this, strategy is pretty much completely up in the air. A player may choose to go on a solo fighter

against fighter mission, or perhaps defend against marauding bombers. Alternatively, going on a bombing run is perfectly feasible, although at

this point coordination is a good idea; recruitment of either human gunmen or a fighter escort can increase your chances of success (and survival) considerably.

Given the amount of time many players spend flying with each other, perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that a number of Air Warrior squadrons have started to pop up. These are simply groups of people who have decided that they enjoy flying together enough to coordinate times to do so. There is also an IHHD ladder to keep track of the best head-to-head dog-fighters. The Kesmai home page (<http://www.kesmai.com/>) has quite a bit of information on how to get Air Warrior up and running, while a rather comprehensive and quite informative FAQ is available at <http://www.ozmail.com.au/~dond/faq.html>.

As online gaming becomes more popular, games like Air Warrior will become less unusual, and games with more mass appeal than flight simulators will appear to attempt to capture the very available market. That a flight simulator such as Air Warrior has been as successful as it is impressive, and other companies have certainly taken note. id software's Quake has built-in support for playing across the Internet, and Origin hopes to take the RPG world by storm with its upcoming Ultima Online. In the meantime, Air Warrior provides flight sim fans with the unique ability to play with massive networked battles against human opponents.



5200

Atari seized the home video gaming lead with its Atari 2600 in 1978, and when the following year saw the introduction of the Mattel Intellivision and 1982 brought the ColecoVision, Atari began to sweat

Atari's



Atari's 5200 was an oversized console, even for its time. Roughly the size of a VCR, the 5200 had a small compartment behind the cartridge slot that could hold two joysticks.

sions rather than monitors to display their graphics. In essence, then, the 5200 console was an Atari computer minus the keyboard, and thus virtually identical code could be written for the computers and the 5200, speeding translation time and yielding impressive games in the process.

The original Atari 2600 had only 4K of RAM memory which could be doubled to 8K with a software/hardware programming trick called bank switching. By comparison, the 5200 boasted 16K of RAM, and instead of the small amount of screen RAM found in Atari's first programmable, its "super system" had 8K.

Described as revolutionary at the time, the 5200 controller combined four firing buttons with an analog joystick. The player had two handy buttons in easy reach whether they were left- or right-handed, and there was a numeric keypad on the bottom half of the

hand unit. Somewhat surprisingly, the controllers proved to be a bad idea. They didn't self-center, which made them a disaster for most games—move the stick to the left and it stays to the left. The buttons and keypad

felt odd and seemed redundant, and gamers' distaste for the feel of the controllers may well have contributed to Nintendo's decision to keep their controller simple.

Software consisted mostly of proven hits in crisp new editions that underscored the 5200's improved visual capabilities, but players weren't looking for slightly better ports of last year's hits—they wanted innovative games that capitalized on the improved console. Instead, they got Pac-Man,

Galaxian and Space Invaders, plus a handful of Coleco-style Nintendo arcade ports (Popeye and Mario Brothers were among them). Sure, the ports of Qix and Vanguard were better than any previously seen in the home console market, but they just didn't generate the necessary excitement.

Atari didn't realize that though the 5200 was a giant step beyond the 2600, it wasn't much better than the ColecoVision: Even Atari 2600 owners who didn't bite

on the Mattel or Coleco machines knew about them from numerous comparisons in print and electronic media. Low-priced,

game-oriented computers like the Commodore 64 also damaged the 5200. They weren't that much more expensive, and they could do so much more. The lower price for disk-based software didn't help Atari, either. Gamers were expecting a lot from the second-generation Atari console, and it just wasn't as far ahead of existing hardware as consumers expected. Their disappointment led to the flat-lining of the console in less than 18 months.

As electronic gaming watches the Saturn, PlayStation and now Nintendo⁶⁴ struggle to break into the mass-market in the United States, it is hard not to remember the stillborn 5200. Wouldn't it be tremendously ironic if video gamers 10 years from now looked at today's 32- and 64-Bit consoles and thought of them as the dying breaths of aging corporate giants?

- Arnie Katz



Atari's "revolutionary" 5200 controllers were never to be used again with their other console designs. Complete with an analog joystick and numeric keypad, controllers didn't self-center.

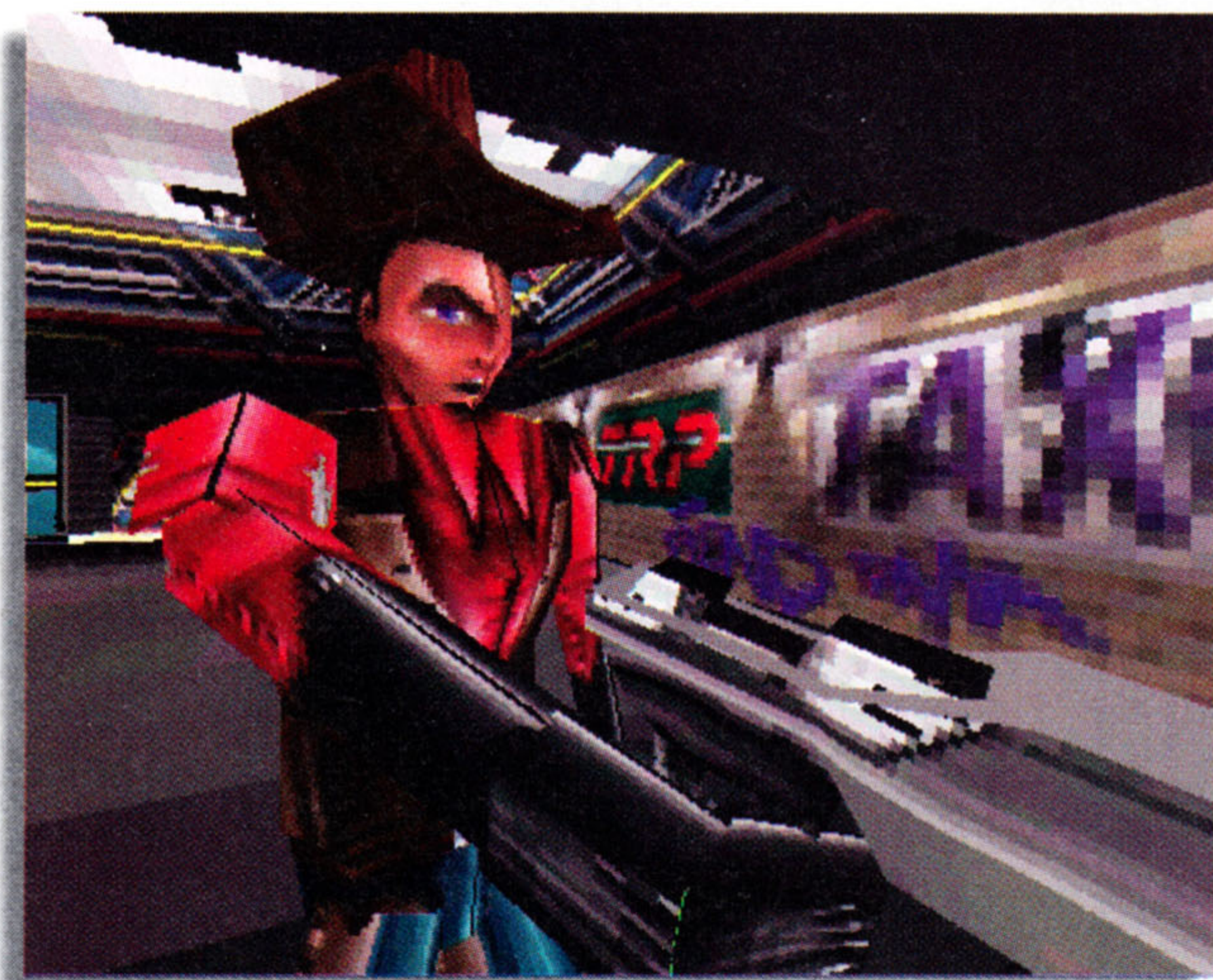
One of Atari's pricey peripherals was this Trac Ball controller—it wasn't enough to include the ball; Atari added two full numeric keypads.



Now and then, *IG* will feature an unreleased game design so unconventional that your average game publisher wouldn't even touch it for wide-scale release. This month, the premise has even more potential than our last featured concept, Niloc's *Celebrity Craps*...



Assault Poker



Run around in casinos from the past, present and future. Choose a caricature from a set of weird stereotypical Vegas patrons. Kill everyone else and take their playing cards. Where are Herb Kohl and Joe Lieberman when you need 'em?

You've played *Doom* and tens of clones. You've played *Virtual Vegas* and a whole bunch of other casino simulators. What would you say if someone told you that you could combine the two genres into one game where a psychopath roams around casinos killing people and collecting their playing cards in an attempt to put together the best *Poker* hand?

Yes, go back and read that last sentence again—it's all of the challenge of a fast-paced *Doom* game with the simple objective of playing a game of cards, and indeed someone has not only conceived of this game but has fully coded it for release. (It's *ElectroMedia*, makers of the *Virtual Vegas* online casino service.) We think that the pictures speak for themselves.

If you have a game concept

that you'd like to see developed or published, or are looking for a title that has the "special qualities" that would make it right for *IG's* *Endnotes*,

contact *Intelligent Gamer* through e-mail at IGLEE@AOL.COM (subject: *Endnotes*)

or in print at 1920 Highland Avenue, Lombard, IL 60148, Attn: *Endnotes*.

Entries can be handled anonymously if so desired, but *IG* requires a telephone number and real name (not for publication) to confirm any submissions. If you are a game publisher interested in any of the unusual concepts submitted to *IG's* *Endnotes*, please contact *IG* at the aforementioned e-mail address and, if possible, we will put you in touch with the ideas' creators.

Next Month in *IG*:

An exclusive preview of Sega's upcoming *Daytona USA: Championship Circuit Edition*, *IG's* full examination of the Japanese launch of the *Nintendo 64*, complete with reports from the world's first post-E³ sit-down sessions with *Super Mario 64* (the world's greatest action game), *PilotWings 64* (the world's most entertaining flight simulation), *Saikyo Habu Shogi* (the worst money we've ever spent on a game that pretended to be a 64-bit title), and much more...





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Proven ergonomic design



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Analog stick plus floating D-pad

Unique design



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