

SNEAK PEEK: SYPHON FILTER 2 REVEALED

Lifecycle 2 Vol2 #2 02/00

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→ NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

QUAKE III ARENA

Is Id's latest worth the wait?
The full review inside

Special

How the games of
2000 will blow
you away

EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

PLAYSTATION 2 Tekken Tag Tournament

How the power of
PlayStation2 means fighting
will never be the same

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PAGES OF
PREVIEWS

PLUS, Nintendo: what's
up with Dolphin? And Sega
on what's next after selling
1,000,000 Dreamcasts

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Dreamcast ■ Nintendo 64 ■ PlayStation ■ PC ■ Arcade ■ Online

SEGA DREAMCAST SCREEN SHOTS



True-to-R/C-racing physics! Objects and surfaces affect the action just like real life!



Wildly interactive environments: museum, cruise ship, ghost town and supermarket!



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4 racing modes and *battle mode!* Go blast away on the blacktop at the playground!

Dream Racer.

Small Cars. Big BAD Attitude.

"4 out of 5 stars...a great job of...RC racing."

Computer Gaming World

"9 out of 10...definite fun factor... will make you come back for more."

Gamecenter

"4 out of 5 stars...tracks are stunning... fantastic visual effects...just plain fun to play."

Gamepen.com

"absolutely breath taking... this game looks sharp...instantly... one of the top Sega Dreamcast racers"

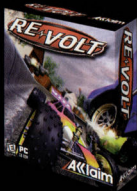
IGN.COM

"Best RC Racing game ever... what racing is all about."

Next Generation Online

"88%"

PC Gamer



Acclaim
www.acclaim.net



Sega
Dreamcast.

PC
CD-ROM

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CUSTOM EDITOR:
Design and trade
your own tracks!

With realistic R/C racing physics, great weapons, awesome environments and eye-spinning graphics, RE-VOLT is racing done right. Only one console system can give you the fantastic visual effects and speed-enhanced gameplay of the critically acclaimed PC version- SEGA DREAMCAST. Rip it up in museums. Trash toy stores. And blast through botanical gardens. All at 300 scale MPH. With two new cars and a new challenging rooftop track only available on SEGA DREAMCAST, RE-VOLT is your dream racer. So think small. Think fast. And RE-VOLT.



RE-VOLT

Radio Controlled Revolution

NextGen

Next Generation Magazine



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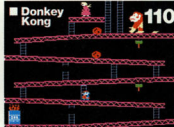
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→ Special

The future revealed

Forget everything you know about what makes a good game: the quality bar is about to be raised to levels you've only dreamed about. The exclusive report.....76

Hey Sega, you've sold a million units. What are you going to do now? The answer revealed.....86

02/00



EDITORIAL

February. The month of kings!



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Essential decompression after a high-pressure gaming experience

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February 2 marks my favorite holiday (no kidding), Groundhog Day. In the movie of the same name, Bill Murray spent an eternity reliving the same day. Sometimes it seems like most movies, books — and yes, even games — are also just new looks at the same old themes. I can't speak for the old, passive forms of entertainment, but thanks to next-generation machines, and next-generation software technology, games are poised to undergo a fundamental shift this year: a shift toward living worlds, populated by believable NPCs and with nearly photo-realistic graphics. We bring you the big picture in our feature on page 76. For in-depth looks at some of the games that should represent this new order, check out our previews of *Shadowbane*, *Eternal Ring*, and *Motocross Madness 2*. Of course, realism isn't always important, as EA is showing with its fun new hockey brawler *Rock the Rink*. Of course, the good games aren't all in the future: Finals this month has the lowdown on several groundbreaking titles you can play today.


Chris Charla



**Now with
300% more
losers!**



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RR64

RIDGE RACER 64

That's right racers, only with Ridge Racer 64 on Nintendo 64



do you get to whup-up on not just one, not just two, but three,



count 'em, three opponents—your pathetic friends!



But hurry racers—losers available only while supplies last.

Only For 2



→ News

Game industry news and analysis



Meet the *real*
Sonic the Hedgehog

Everything you wanted to know about hedgehogs*

*But were porcupined to ask

■ This hedgehog, Sonic, was rescued after being abandoned by his mother. Curious about that console he's sitting on? You shouldn't be — Sega's sold a million of them. Turn to page 96 to read the latest on Sega's plans for Dreamcast — the platform of choice of our favorite hedgehog.

→ You may find it strange that a blue hedgehog has managed to achieve the fame and recognition of Sonic. But considering that his contemporaries include a small, dumpy, mustachioed plumber, an unnaturally orange marsupial, and an adventuresome with-gravity-defying breasts, who's to say what's normal?

But how much do we really know about hedgehogs? **Next Generation** turned to a wildlife expert to answer all your questions about the funny little mammal.

Sonic is blue.

What color are real hedgehogs? Usually grey. They're born pink, but turn grey-brown after about a week and a half. About one out of every 50 hedgehogs is coffee cream, but the majority of them are brown — definitely not blue.

In true Daffy Duck shirt-but-nopants style, Sonic wears big red sneakers but is otherwise naked.

Can hedgehogs actually stand up on those hind legs of theirs? Hedgehogs' front legs are stronger than their back legs. Effectively, they are in front-wheel drive when they dig or burrow. A hedgehog probably wouldn't wear sneakers — unless he wore them on his front legs.

Sonic made his first appearance on Genesis in 1990, so he now must be at least ten years old.

How long do real hedgehogs live? About four years — as long as they survive crossing the road. Hedgehogs take five months to reach full adult size, which, considering that Sonic was fully grown in 1990, makes him technically about to die of old age any second.

Sonic's best friend is Tails, a fox. And his girlfriend Amy is probably a squirrel.

Do hedgehogs, foxes, and squirrels get along in the wild? A fox would probably kill a baby or smallish hedgehog. It's unlikely that a squirrel would befriend a hedgehog. The most likely companion would be a cat. So, if anything, Sonic is only fooling himself with the squirrel thing.

Sonic kills people by rolling into them.

How do hedgehogs defend themselves?

By curling up into a ball. A hedgehog wouldn't attack any other animal. If they come across a nest on the ground, they might eat the eggs or a newborn chick, but they would more normally eat worms, slugs, and snails.

Sonic is one of the fastest videogame characters.

Are hedgehogs fast animals?

Very fast — as fast as a rabbit. They are slow when foraging for worms. But if they need to escape, they can run like the wind.

Sonic is Japanese.

Do they have hedgehogs in Japan?

Maybe. There are funny-looking hedgehogs abroad that look more like rats than the hedgehogs we know and are really long and slim, so Sonic is unlikely to be from North America.

Not coming next month: Bandicoots: Up close and personal with the orange-vest marsupials around

■ SWIMMING WITH SHARKS

Dolphin: the industry's best-kept secret?

→ Sony and Sega. You can see them, two smug divas each singing louder in turn as they claw for the next-generation spotlight. The behavior borders on the absurd, not unlike the "Saturday Night Live" parody of Celine Dion and Gloria Estefan. And then there's Nintendo, still filling moviegoers' heads with larger-than-life trailers for its big N64 holiday hope, *Donkey Kong 64*.

The race for the next generation has already begun heating up, yet the company seems more excited about Pokémon promotions at Burger King than its next-generation system. So what's up with Dolphin?

The company's silence speaks volumes: obviously it doesn't want to confuse the market before Rare's latest arrives, but we're far more interested in the silence coming from the R&D divisions in Tokyo, which are working full-time on Dolphin projects. Although sources tell us Nintendo has learned from the difficult-to-develop-for N64, and that Dolphin development will be far easier, current work is being done on simulators, not final hardware, which means development on the next generation of Nintendo hits is going to take a while. Can the company meet its stated all 2000 worldwide release date? That's still the official date, said technology honcho Jim Merrick in a recent

Is Nintendo quietly waiting for after the holidays, or does it just have nothing to say?

WHAT IS IT?

■ This innovative Blizzard real-time fantasy game started life as a turn-based X-Com clone

interview with IGN64.com. Sources we've spoken to inside the industry (none of whom wanted to be named, for fear of reprisals from Nintendo) weren't so sure: "I think they probably can't make that date, based on what I know, and they're past performance," said one. Another's response was shorter: "2001."

Chairman Howard Lincoln announced Dolphin on May 12, 1999. He intimated that IBM, Matsushita, and ArTX would be the three major business partners in the system development. Since that time, additional business partners have been added, including MoSys, S3, and NEC. Though Nintendo has not announced specifics in relation to its internet/network strategies for Dolphin, the company has confirmed that a network strategy is being implemented.

Nintendo has also struck a deal with California development studio Factor 5, which has proprietary

■ IBM, Matsushita, and ArTX will be the three major business partners in the system development for Dolphin



sound tools and technology working for Dolphin software. Factor 5, which developed *Rogue Squadron* for N64, is also developing its next action title, *Thornado*, for Dolphin.

While all the companies involved have been quiet, there've been some insider speculations that ArtX's graphics processor, being developed by many of the same team members who were at Silicon Graphics and responsible for the graphic architecture of N64. Rumor has it that it's not yet up to snuff. One source (the same who said "2001") denied that speculation. "That's just bullshit. ArtX may not have the final chip ready, but it seems clear they'll be able to deliver what they've promised." Meanwhile,

DOLPHIN: WHO'S ON BOARD?

Nintendo has confirmed the following development teams are on board: Rare, Retro Studios, Left Field Productions, Nintendo Software Technology Corporation (Nintendo of America's internal development studio), EAD (Nintendo Japan's development studios)

Additional publishers who have confirmed support: Acclaim Entertainment, Titus Software, 3DO

all is well with Nintendo and IBM's \$1 billion deal (to have IBM design and manufacture the 400MHz copper-process Gekko CPU (an extension of IBM's PowerPC RISC architecture).

And what about the surprise entry of NEC — the maker of the PowerVR chipset used in Sega's Dreamcast? Don't read too much into it. NEC is a huge company, and the divisions doing business with

Sega and Nintendo have no relation. NEC will be manufacturing the ArtX-designed chip, as well as RAM for Nintendo. While it's still unclear how much system RAM Nintendo's machine will include, an NEC executive has reportedly explained that the graphics chipset will have between 8MB and 16MB embedded DRAM. NEC is spending an estimated ¥80 billion (\$761 million) to construct a factory in southern Japan to

produce these Dolphin semiconductors and anticipates the first batch will be ready in August 2000 (which, of course, strikes us as too late for a fall release). Nintendo has reportedly ordered more than ¥300 billion (\$2.8 billion) worth of chips from NEC for Dolphin.

So, despite the company's silence, it seems things are well on track for Dolphin, although the 2000 release date seems ambitious at best. Although its late arrival didn't hurt N64, Saturn was already moribund by the time it released. If Dreamcast sales continue strongly after the PS2's release, Nintendo may find itself if the toughest console battle ever! We'll have more info next month. **NextGen**

IT IS...

■ *Diablo*, which was turn-based and *X-Com*-like in the original design document

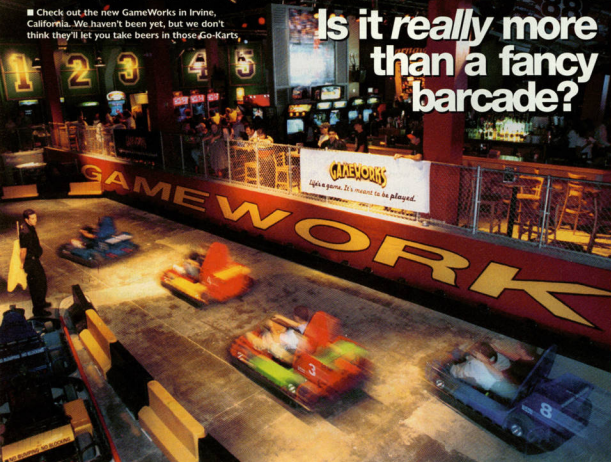
With new locations and a new CEO, there's more in store for the Sega-Spielberg chain of game rooms

■ **TOKENS + BEER = EUPHORIA**

GameWorks

■ Check out the new GameWorks in Irvine, California. We haven't been yet, but we don't think they'll let you take beers in those Go-Karts.

Is it really more than a fancy barcade?



→ Considering the power of the next-generation game systems, the argument for dumping tons of cash into arcade machines is wearing thin. In a time when many arcades are disappearing, GameWorks has just opened two new locations, one in Irvine, California, and one in São de Janeiro, Brazil. How do they do it? We asked new GameWorks President and CEO Ron Bension.

"We see ourselves as the place to have fun," Bension says. "We should be a community for people who enjoy participating in games, who enjoy the social interaction that games provide."

Subsequently, Bension is adamant that GameWorks is more than just an arcade. He cites the venue's continued focus on offering fine food and drink, and admits the company is developing partnerships with Universal's music department, which will soon begin previewing new videos on GIV, GameWorks' in-house entertainment channel.

But what is most exciting is GameWorks' renewed commitment to developing next-level proprietary "attractions," such as *Sky Pirates*. *Sky Pirates* is a retrofit for the aging, and somewhat hokey, *Vertical Challenge* units. (In *Vertical Challenge*, players strapped into a chair that raised or lowered several stories up in the air — based on your performance in a poorly designed first-person shooter).

"Anybody can have the latest and the greatest Sega arcade games," Bension admits, "so what we're doing is creating GameWorks-only attractions that are a little bit bigger than life."

Bension spent years helping to create Universal Studios' theme parks — perhaps that's why he seems unfazed at the threat posed by home machines.

"This is analogous to VH5 and the 'death' of the movie theater," he says. "Year in and year out, theaters continue to have record attendance — the more we can position ourselves as a product that delivers on a full evening's or day's entertainment, the less we will be impacted by what is becoming state-of-the-art home entertainment systems." — Eric Bratcher

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



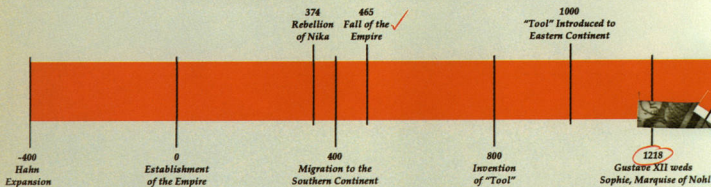
SCREEN GRABS SUCK.
SEE IT FOR REAL AT
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Sega® Dreamcast
IT'S THINKING

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History of the GUSTAVE Empire



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

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



fig. 14: The Royal Family Gustave

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

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

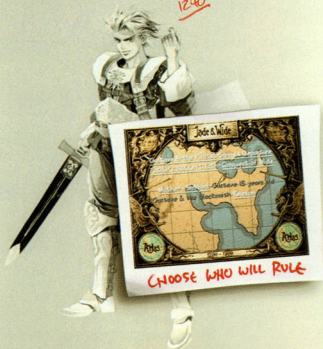
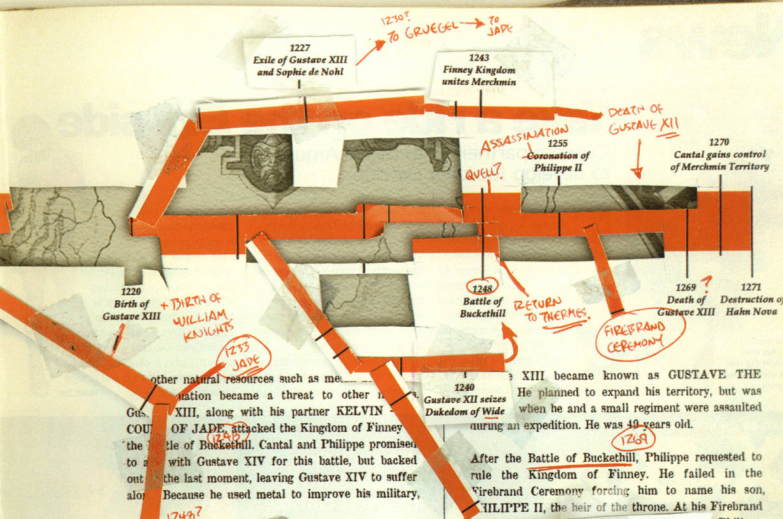


fig. 15: Gustave XIII (the younger) age 15

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

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

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



ALLY WITH
COUNT OF JADE



fig 16: GUSTAVE THE STEEL

SHAPE HISTORY
OR
BE HISTORY

Saga Frontier 2



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■ The motion seats for the *Resident Evil* ride have already been designed

■ FORGET THE FERRIS WHEEL

Take a ride on the *Evil* side

Capcom partners with Digital Amuse to develop *Resident Evil* ride

➔ On November 11, Digital Amuse — a company specializing in 3D movies for theme parks in Japan — revealed a new attraction called *Bio Hazard 4D Terror*. Drawing its inspiration from the *Resident Evil* 3: *Nemesis* scenario, the ride will feature additional scenes and modified segments from the game. The ride will last around 10 to 15 minutes. Capcom is

overseeing the development of the project, and Digital Amuse is also working in close cooperation with VLM, a special-effects company that has worked on several big Japanese movies. (Most recently, VLM was responsible for some high-quality effects in *Gamera 3*, a movie starring Gamera, the giant, Godzilla-like, fire-spitting flying turtle.)

The ride will require spectators to wear special 3D glasses and sit in a dynamic seat that moves and pro-

vides vibrations through a subwoofer. Digital Amuse is also planning to add wind streams and limited water projections. Digital Amuse plans to introduce *Bio Hazard 4D Terror* into 10 locations in Japan and expects more than 200,000 visitors for each location in the first year. The ride will roll out in Japan this June; it will eventually make it to locations in the US and Europe some time after.



NextGen

■ TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

X-Box stunner!

➔ For a system that doesn't even officially exist, everyone at Microsoft seems to want to talk an awful lot about X-Box. Luckily, what they're saying is very, very interesting. To wit: what's better than a DVD-playing, web-surfing, game-playing super-console? How about a DVD-playing, web-surfing, game-playing super-console that can work wirelessly on any TV in your home? That's apparently the latest feature added to the still-in-development box, and it makes a lot of sense: you want X-Box attached to

your main TV for DVD movies, but what do you do when your spouse wants to watch *Ally McBeal*, and you want to play *Quake III*?

According to sources at Microsoft, you'll simply use a wireless adapter (probably done using the 2400MHz frequency) that will transmit video to a secondary TV and input (from a game pad) back to the X-Box, which stays put near your main TV (and a phone line). Wireless home-networking devices are already available from Diamond and other sources for around \$100, and work well in tests

Microsoft fires a major salvo in its covert console war — another Next Generation exclusive

we've done. "Wireless features are something every next-generation system should offer," one source says. If Microsoft can get the price down, it may have added one very killer feature to the X-Box specs list.

So exactly when does Microsoft plan to share information about X-Box with the rest of the world? Rumors have been floating around that the system might have been announced at CES on January 5, during Bill Gates' opening keynote address. But one source suggests otherwise. "If this is going to be a



■ Is Microsoft incorporating HomeFree-like technology in X-Box? The latest rumors from Redmond say "yes"

game machine first," the source says, "then it would send the wrong message to make a big announcement at the Consumer Electronics Show, especially so close to Game Developers Conference and E3."

For the latest on Microsoft's console, make sure you check out the magazine that broke the story in the first place (that's us, of course). Next month, it looks as though we'll confirm some tantalizing new details about the system.

— Chris Charla and Tom Russo

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

➔ **Hurrah for the legal system!** In spite of the fact that 3Dfx has already made its Glide source code and Voodoo hardware specifications open source, the company will continue its legal action against competitor Creative Labs — alleging breach of contract against Creative Labs for its Unified drivers. The Unified drivers allow Creative's D3D card users to run 3Dfx Glide-specific games without owning a

3Dfx graphics processor. **Euro-centric Codemasters recently announced that it was setting up a US publishing and development unit,** taking over some of the staff and actual real estate formerly inhabited by ex-Sierra division Yosemite. Further, the company recently announced that it would develop games for Sega Dreamcast. Although no titles have been confirmed, it's most likely that a DC version of the company's popular

TOCA Touring Car Challenge — and just a little less likely that the innovative *MTV Music Generator* — could make it to Dreamcast. **Proving that *Quake III* wasn't going to take all the sales records during the holidays,** many retailers reported that the slightly less visceral *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* interactive CD-ROM was the biggest selling Windows title, actually selling out in many locations. The game was pretty hard

to find at traditional software outlets, as well as e-commerce sites; "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire" CD-ROM is far and away the best seller at the Amazon.com software store," said Kirk Koeningbauer, general manager of the Amazon.com software store. Apparently the image of Reggie Philbin was less unpleasant than the paddles of gore found in *Quake III*. **Although many presumed that Sony was trying to shaft Silicon Graphics** with the release of its

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

WE'RE NOT CRYING WOLFENSTEIN

→ Eight years after the release of the original *Wolfenstein 3D* (shown here) appeared on PC, DreamWorks' *Medal of Honor* for PlayStation is proving that a first-person shooter in which Nazis are the targets can still be profitable business. As reported more than a year ago in this column, there was talk of the *Wolfenstein* classic is getting remade courtesy of Activision and an external developer. Well, it's definitely happening at Xatrix, and dare we say *Quake III* engine? Still unannounced, expect the game to be ready later this year. Look for an announcement sometime after the *Quake III Arena* madness dies down a bit.



MULTIPLAYER STARS

→ A rumor of a *Star Wars* multiplayer universe has been kicking around the net, and we're hearing that it may be developed externally at, say, a company like Verant. Verant has the technology in place and has already shown its competence with the quarter-million-plus selling *EverQuest*. Considering that Verant is also a 989 Studios/Sony-owned company, could this be a PlayStation2 online game? Maybe we're stretching things — maybe not. If that doesn't get your blood pumping, try this one on: Activision is developing a massively multiplayer *Star Trek* universe. You read about it here first.

LARA GOES TO DREAMCAST

→ *Tomb Raider* for Dreamcast? You bet. Sony's exclusive agreement with Eidos's leading lady expires with the new millennium, and we can all but guarantee you Lara is on the way to Sega's machine.

CAPCOM LOVES PLAYSTATION2

→ Capcom recently released a profile of *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami, listing "a *Bio Hazard* sequel and some other PlayStation2 projects" among his current work. While a *Resident Evil* game for PlayStation2 is a no-brainer, could the "other projects" include a *Dino Crisis* sequel? Absolutely. Capcom of Japan's President Kenzo Tsujimoto confirmed in a Bloomberg report that *Dino Crisis 2* was in development for PlayStation2.

CLICK SWITCH

→ San Francisco-based developer Click Entertainment is still working on its *Diablo*-goes-Samurai title for PC, titled *Throne of Darkness*. But one thing has changed — the publisher. Acclaim has dropped the title, and Sierra has picked it up. It is still due for release later this year.



PlayStation2-based "Tool" graphic workstation, the company has taken a somewhat different strategic approach in Japan. SCEI will actually provide partial funding for a new SGI computer-graphics division that was spun off in Japan on January 1. The new operation will develop films and games using Sony PlayStation2 technology — and Sony will provide 10% of its \$1.9 million capital. SGI Japan will remain a separate entity, handling graphics for CAD

and commercial applications. **We have it on good authority that EA's sequel to *Medal of Honor*, the cleverly-named *Medal of Honor 2*, will appear on PlayStation2, taking advantage of the new technology to fulfill the brilliant promise of the first game. It's also rumored that a multiplayer PC version will appear at the end of the year. **The first company to make truly creepy use of the PS2's Emotion Engine will be Atlus, which is****

planning to release a "girl simulator" called *Primal Image*. The "game" will allow you control of the actions and movements of a lucky young female. The game will be available in March at system launch and the possibilities are endlessly unsettling. **Pernchance to skate, to dream of Dreamcast** — Activision wouldn't admit it at press time, but a Sega version of the eminently playable board-sim *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* is on the way, possibly

with four-player action. Activision already admitted to an N64 version after retailers posted release dates for that SKU, and now similar sources indicate that a DC version is well underway and could be in stores by Q1 or Q2 of this year. Strong holiday sales of Dreamcast probably didn't hurt its chances.

— Compiled by Frank O'Connor, Editor-in-Chief, Daily Radar

ARK Came!



CARRIER

If You Can Hear It... You're Already Dead!

ARK Saw!



ARK Got Its Ass Kicked!

JALECO



www.jaleco.com

Sega Dreamcast



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In the 21st Century terrorism reigns supreme in an ever eroding environment. Aboard the Heimdal Aircraft Carrier, survival is all that matters! It's a new world now – a savage, deadly, wasteland where you save whoever is still alive and to hell with the dead.

Vying for control of Earth, the Southern Cross bombs the Heimdal, setting free ARK – a prehistoric organism. When ARK attacks, it implants itself in humans making them hideous, monstrous drones that carry ARK seeds and infect others determined to eliminate ALL of humanity. ARK breeds, mutates, and insanely lusts for the end of human life.

Even if it looks human, you could be screwed 'cause it may be an ARK drone. Who is friend, who is foe?

You are part of an elite unit chosen to isolate and destroy ARK on the Heimdal Aircraft Carrier before it reaches land. You must fearlessly blast your way through a gloomy labyrinth of hallways, flooded control rooms and security levels, battling sinister mutants, while gaining clues and power as you advance. You never know what's lurking in the murky water or around the next corner. Meanwhile, ARK is gaining power after attaching itself to the nuclear core of the Heimdal. Sheer wit and brute force are all that can save you now.



SCANNING

SAF

"Carrier is light years ahead of the competition in both game play and graphics."

- Silicon Magazine, July, 1999, Issue 12

**IMPORT
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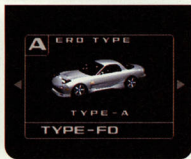
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Arcadia

New titles, technology, and a bad grade from the Senators

MIDWAY REVS UP ANOTHER "OFF ROAD" ADVENTURE

→ Midway's *Thunder* series continues with *Off Road Thunder*, a down-and-dirty racing game, featuring nitro-charged offroad vehicles. This one's presented in an *SF Rush*-type sitdown cabinet with a steering wheel, gas and brake pedals, and two control buttons including a viewpoint shifter. Speakers in the seat (some are behind your head) create an extra-vivid force-feedback simulation. The game offers three basic gameplay modes: a hi-speed version of vehicular tag, a two-on-two team game, and the ever-popular Demolition Derby. Eight tracks can be played (each with a mirror version); there are eight selectable cars and four-six secret cars. See page 72 for screenshots of the DC build.

MIDWAY JOINS INTERNET REVOLUTION

→ Chicago-based Midway Games will launch an updated "WaveNet" modem tournament this winter. This system started with the company's Infinity counterparts and will eventually link "all Midway videos" for both arcade and non-arcade retail locations. Midway is also adopting a streamlined approach to hardware so that future games will include more PC-based coin-op games (fewer titles based on 100% proprietary hardware). Also, Midway will feature a generous selection of classic coin-op games at www.shockwave.com, including Shockwave versions of 10 Midway classics, including *Defender*, *Joust*, *Spy Hunter*, *Moon Patrol*, and *Marble Madness*, with a play experience identical to that of the arcades. After an initial three-month period of exclusivity on www.shockwave.com, the games will also be available on Midway's own site (www.midway.com) and on other major Web sites as well. "The underlying syndication model," said Mike Ribero, Midway Games, "will enable our classic games to live on in much the same way that classic television shows do today."

POLITICOS GIVE ARCADE INDUSTRY A "D"

→ At their now-traditional fall press conference in Washington D.C., Senators Joe Lieberman and Herb Kohl presided as the arcade industry received grades of "C" for allegedly not displaying enough voluntary Parental Advisory System ratings symbols on videogames, and a "D" for not standing guard over red-label games to bar underage gamers from playing them. Grades were issued by a lobbying group called the National Institute on Media and the Family (NIMF), which said only 30% of the locations it surveyed had all games rated and another 50% had "some" games rated.

SEGA'S TENNIS, ANYONE?

→ Originally titled *Power Smash*, Sega's Naami-based arcade tennis game was ultimately released under the title *Virtua Tennis* (part of the *Virtua* franchise of yore). This one is ultra-realistic and addictive, increasing the level of challenge as you boost your skills. Presented on a super-sharp 31-inch hi-res monitor, players control the lifelike action with simple controls: a button for straight shots, another button for lobs, and joystick for shot direction. Two cabinets can be linked for head-to-head combat, as players choose among eight different ATP tour pros, five court locations, and three different surfaces before blistering their way through a series of fast, heated contests.



■ Is this Naami-based tennis game bound for Dreamcast? We hope so

SEGA PLANS NET-CONNECTED ARCADES

→ On November 25, Sega announced that it's breaking up into as many as 10 different independent subsidiaries. Is Sega abandoning the arcade? The answer is "no." In fact, Sega is planning an ambitious leap forward into new technology, linking remote arcades together via fiber-optic cable for multiplayer online capability. No word on just when this will start, but insiders say Sega's already closely studying the track record of previous simulation centers like *Fighter Town* and *Virtual Worlds*. Entertainment had experimented with similar concepts.

GUN GAMES CONTINUE LOW PROFILE

→ Given the continuing uproar over violent videogames, arcade-game makers are sticking to a low-profile strategy for gun games. Namco's *Crisis Zone* and Midway's *Invasion: Alien Abduction* debuted with "sneak-it-to-the-arcade" fanfare — although *Invasion: Alien Abduction* quickly popped up in the industry's Top 10 chart, anyway. Now Konami's following suit with its title *Dark Silhouette: Silent Scope 2*, which was tested in Japan and debuted in London long before its official US unveiling. And what about Sega's *Outridgers*, which features massive firepower and the ever-popular "blow away as many bad guys as you can in the allotted time" mode? It may not ever be brought to the US arcade scene.

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✦ Dark gothic story

✦ No load times



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DATASTREAM

Days between February 1, 2000, and the probable PlayStation2 launch date (9/9/2000 — five years to the day after PlayStation launched): 222. Likely cost of PlayStation2: \$299. Likely cost of PlayStation2 games: \$40. Total cost of PlayStation2 and three games at launch (not including tax): \$410. Amount you need to save per day between February 1 and September 9 to be able to buy a PlayStation2 and three games on the launch day: \$1.85. Price of a large latte at Starbucks: \$3.25.



■ Every year on the Sunday that follows Thanksgiving, Hollywood hosts its annual celebrity parade down Hollywood Boulevard. This year, the cast of *Ready 2 Rumble* floated among the stars, complete with Michael "Ready to Rumble" Buffer himself. Even Tia Carrere stopped by to pose with the pugilists.

Rumble Parade

PS and PS2: Are these numbers real?

The only thing surpassing current sales numbers for PlayStation are the projections for PlayStation2

→ How big is PlayStation worldwide? Try 70 million units. That's the number Sony released on Dec. 6, three days after the five-year anniversary of the system's launch in Japan, on December 3, 1994. According to the release, North America is responsible for the sales of 25.94 million units, Europe for 2233 million units, and Japan for 16.77 million

units. This puts PlayStation just 10 million units shy of Game Boy, which is the best-selling videogame platform of all time.

But Game Boy be damned, according to a November report published by Merrill Lynch: analysts for the investment firm predict that by 2004, PlayStation2 will have shipped 100 million units. These numbers take into account the DVD

compatibility and potential for PS2 to sell to audiences beyond gamers, and the PS2 price drops that are inevitable as the system ages. If these projections hold true, PS2 will prove to be an overwhelming success, the best selling platform ever. Still, this doesn't preclude Sega, Nintendo, and potentially Microsoft, from sharing in what is obviously a growing market. There's also one thing these Wal St. guys can't account for — in the videogame industry, anything can happen, and usually does. — Tom Russo

DUKE NUKEM GOES TO FRANCE

GT submits to Infogrames

French giant ups its US holdings — again

→ As an independent publisher/distributor, GT Interactive was a company on the ropes. Despite continued strong sales of its *Deer Hunter* franchise, and new best sellers like *Driver*, GT was financially overextended. After flitting with both Hasbro and Mattel, Infogrames will pony up a \$135 million investment package to acquire a 70% controlling stake in GT.

Only two years ago — flush

with cash after a string of major hits and a lucrative racking and distribution relationship with Wal-Mart — the publisher was angling to buy MicroProse, which later was grabbed by Hasbro. But earlier this year, GT's fiscal 1999 results came in showing operating losses and restructuring charges to the tune of \$71 million. Infogrames Chairman Bruno Bonnell explains that portions of the investment will be used to buy down GT's

\$125 million credit line, and some will be used to capitalize future game development.

Only last May, Bonnell acquired Accolade for \$60 million — merging the developer/publisher with the French company's existing US office to form Infogrames North America. Prior to snapping up Accolade, Bonnell estimated that proceeds from North American sales amounted to 15% of Infogrames' worldwide business.

After factoring in GT's sales, Bonnell said the projected ratio would hover between 52% and 54% of the company's total business.

"After the Accolade acquisition, we found that we still needed more in North America. With GT, we can leverage our distribution power in Europe in concert with GT's distribution power in the US and Canada," explains Bonnell. — George T. Chronis

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

Sega Dreamcast
IT'S THINKING

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

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MATURE
ESRB
Animated Violence
Blood
and Gore

In late November, Sega organized a major event in Shibuya to promote the release of Tetsuya Mizuguchi's *Space Channel 5* — the funky sci-fi dance game for Dreamcast. (Shibuya is the youth-culture district in Tokyo where Mizuguchi's development team works.) Executive staff, including Sega President Shochoiro Iramijiri, and the Japanese game media were present. After an opening speech from Iramijiri, there was a short presentation of the game by Mizuguchi, accompanied by several of the game's characters. The event was also broadcast on three giant screens in the heart of Shibuya. The game shipped in Japan on December 16; we can expect to see it in the US sometime in March or April.

■ DANCE! DANCE! DANCE!

Space Channel 5: Sega Throws a Party

■ ADVENTURE NAKED

Tabloid shocker: Drakan's Rynn exposed!

Nude patch leaves nothing to the imagination — in a good way

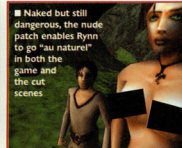


File this one under "horny programmers with too much free time." As if the Lara Croft "nude raider" patch weren't enough, there's been a nude patch created for *Drakan's* Rynn. If you've grown weary of sexy little Rynn running around her chain-mail, head over to www.surreal-news.com for the unofficial nude patch.

Just download the 2292K ZipIt file, uncompress it, and replace the new system.txd file with the old one in your *Drakan's* Common\System folder. (Just be sure to make a copy of your old system.txd file before you replace it so you can restore Rynn to her fashionable goodness when you're done perving out.) Now restart, and bingo, you get Rynn in all her glory — in the realtime gameplay and in the cut scenes. She will remain that way until you either equip the naked lass with some armor or replace your system.txd file. The only negatives are that you can't toggle between nude and dressed Rynn, and the patch doesn't work for multiplayer games. Other than that, this is a fun and easy-to-use patch that just might breathe some more life into *Order of the Flame*. Of course, the developer, Surreal, is "horrified, shocked, and outraged..." but was nonetheless impressed with the quality of the art. — Eric Smith



■ Naked but still dangerous, the nude patch enables Rynn to go "au naturel" in both the game and the cut scenes.



■ SHOCHOIRO IRAMIJIRI

■ TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI

HARDCORE

Remember that plastic glow-in-the-dark rock that came with Infocom's *Wishbringer*? The one that glowed purple, not green? Well, when I was, well, a lot younger, I would charge that rock up every night and lay it beside me on my bed so I wouldn't be eaten by a Grue.

Andy Neal
longtailedweasel@hotmail.com

WISHBRINGER



■ "IN GAMES WE TRUST"

Mr. Kent Goes to Washington

Next Generation correspondent addresses Senator Lieberman; some game grades go up in annual Senate report card



Though the video and computer games did not score straight As, the industry scored fairly well overall in the this year's Report Card — an annual press event held in the Capitol, and run by Senators Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Herb Kohl (D-Wisc.).

Both senators have generally been critical of the industry during this event, but this year's scores were positive on some counts. They gave the industry an "A" for having a clearer and more specific rating system than motion pictures or televisions. They also gave the game makers high marks for labeling all products on the market. (Editor's Note: While the home videogame market scores improved in these regards, the arcade industry wasn't ranked as highly. See Marcus Webb's Arcade, page 17.)

Working with Dr. David Walsh of the National Institute on Media and the Family, Senators Lieberman and Kohl have monitored the way stores market games. Though Lieberman is concerned about the lack of enforcement of the ratings on

the retail level, he commented that the situation is improving, and some retailers are now checking customers' ages. Walsh raised a new concern — toys based on games. Walsh suggested that marketing children's action figures based on such "M" rated games such as *Resident Evil* nullifies the purpose of the ratings.

Other speakers included Doug Lowenstein, the head of the Interactive Digital Software Association, (IDSA) and Steven Kent, a freelance reporter who

■ Senator Joseph Lieberman gives *Sonic* a noogie — and game ratings an A



frequently contributes to **Next Generation**, *USA Today*, and *MSNBC*.

Lowenstein defended the progress of the industry, explaining the complexities of trying to regulate sales. His video of very short clips of top games included everything from *Crash Bandicoot* to *John Madden Football*. (The clips of *GoldenEye* and *Syphon Filter* showed guns — but no shooting. You might have thought that these were games about carrying guns, not using them.)

Kent, who has spoken at the annual event every year since 1997, gave a parent's/gamer's view of the industry's progress.

"This year 20th Century Fox released a movie called *Fight Club*," said Kent. "I did not take my seven-year-old daughter to see it. By the same token, I did not let my children play *Kingpin* or *Resident Evil*. *Nemesis*. These games were designed for

an adult audience, and thanks to the Entertainment Software Rating Board, they are clearly labeled with an 'M' — for mature players."

Kent explained that while the violent games get the most attention, games deemed suitable for players of all ages out-numbered the games for mature audiences by a factor of almost eight-to-one this year. One of the larger problems has been that parents have shown an indifference to videogames over the years, something the game industry has attempted to change with an educational campaign that includes public service announcements and in-store advertisements.

In closing, Kent recognized the efforts made by Kohl, Lieberman, and Walsh who "made sensible efforts to educate the public about videogames. Their efforts have shed light on one of the important issues of our time — the messages we give our children."

NextGen

■ TOKEN GESTURE

Sega shows up

Not much new at Sega's annual private arcade show

Nothing earth-shattering was revealed, and only a handful of new Naomi-based coin-op titles were shown at Sega's annual private arcade show held in Japan this past November. Unfortunately, Sega's *Star Wars Episode I Racer*, being designed for Model 4, was not shown, and will be delayed until the AOU show later this year.

Yet one of the new titles, *Eighteen Wheeler*, was presented with US audiences clearly in mind. The cabinet is designed to look like the cockpit of a truck, complete with a 48cm stickshit, a gearbox, and a woofer-based sound system that simulates the vibrations and shocks of a real 18-wheeler. Players choose one of the four trailers and enter a 10-stage race across the US from New York to San Francisco. The roads are quite realistic and include

dense traffic, so players must drive more cautiously than in previous racing games. The score is displayed in US dollars. Depending on how well players perform, they may receive some items to customize their truck (bandanna, mechanical parts, etc.). First-place finishers will go to bonus stages where

they will have to demonstrate skills maneuvering the big rig.

Also shown was Yuji Naka's *Samba de Amigo*. This latest dancing game (complete with maracas) from the creator of *Sonic the Hedgehog* has not changed since last JAMMA Show, but there was more music available. One of them was the famous *Macarena*. This title looks really fun and could be one of Sega's biggest titles in the arcade for the winter season. *Virtua NBA*, *Virtua Tennis*, and a touch-screen party/trivia game called *Mars TV* rounded out the Naomi cabinet line-up. **NextGen**

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE!

■ Hey kids, can you spot the difference in the two logos?



■ One is black, the other white. In white bold, black, sans-serif letters. Ited negative images of the letters. The ratings logos — replacing the pixel-art effect to testing legibility of the ESRB ratings. The ratings group has changed.



Take a deep breath and read carefully:

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DEAD OR ALIVE 2



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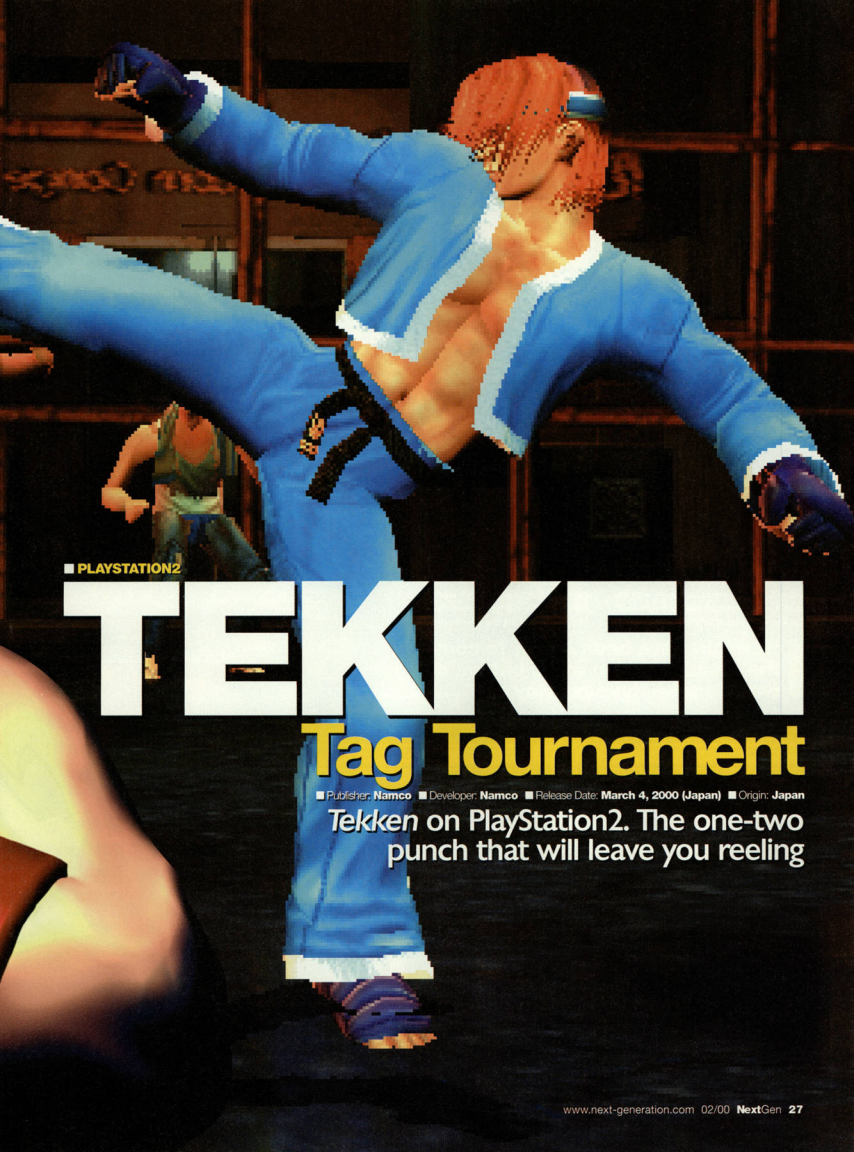


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■ PLAYSTATION2

TEKKEN

Tag Tournament

■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: Namco ■ Release Date: March 4, 2000 (Japan) ■ Origin: Japan

Tekken on PlayStation2. The one-two punch that will leave you reeling

PlayStation 2. Powered by Namco

Tekken Tag Tournament. You know you want it. Taken from the arcades where it existed on the competent, although technologically unimpressive System 12 arcade board, it has been completely rebuilt to take advantage of the most advanced 3D technology ever known. With a fourth-generation fighting engine behind it and one of the most recognizable casts of heroes and anti-heroes in gaming, it promises to be the title on display when PlayStation 2 launches on March 4 in Japan. Can a game this anticipated and hyped possibly live up to expectations? Namco certainly believes it can, and given the company's stunning PlayStation (and Dreamcast) track record, we're inclined to agree.

Behind the scenes

Project Director Kimoto Masahiro knows a good thing when he sees it. "PlayStation 2 expands the limits of hardware performance and makes possible what could not be achieved before," he exclaims when asked about the time he's spent working on his first game for Sony's supersystem. Optimistic? Maybe, but with the help of his team, he's managed to create what could be the technological and visual showcase for the fledgling platform — surpassing the graphics quality of any other system, home or arcade — with less than a year of time on the hardware itself. Luckily with a team approximately 50%



■ *T77* features an unprecedented amount of detail in the background graphics — surpassing even *Soul Calibur* on Dreamcast

larger than any previous *Tekken* team, and with many team members possessing five or six years working on the series, the deck has been stacked somewhat in his favor, but he did know that they had their work cut out for them. "We did the basic study of PlayStation 2 during the development of the



"It might have been easier to convert the arcade version as-is, but we didn't want to take the easy way out"

— Kimoto Masahiro



■ *Tekken 2* vs. *Tekken 3*? Sure. But when a character has been in multiple games, expect to see only the latest version



■ Using the power of PlayStation2, Masahiro and team have been able to rework the characters so they look and feel much more lifelike

“How to make use of a partner with another character’s fighting style is the key to victory”

— Kimoto Masahiro

arcade version and got down to the home version right afterwards,” says Masahiro. “It might have been much easier to convert the arcade version as-is, but we didn’t want to take the easy way out. We look at this as a great challenge.”

Masahiro smiles when asked what new features will make it into the PlayStation2 version of *TTT*. “The number of polygons allocated to models and other graphic elements is increased dozens of times, which enables us to render smooth skin, physical characteristics, and even expressions,” he says. “Even joints and physical build can be rendered almost identically to human detail, producing amazingly natural movements.” The result of this new increased detail is a fighting

game that must be seen in action to be truly believed. Even the screenshots provided here don’t do the game justice when every action — even in an object as tiny as each blade of grass — is a work of art. Check out the flames in the background of one of the downtown levels or the fighters’ distorted reflection in a street puddle, and you’ll be a believer too.

But are graphics enough to justify a new system? Masahiro weighs in with a yes. “I think that the PlayStation2 expands the playability and concept of *Tekken* with its powerful graphics engine,” he says — and even if you were lucky enough to get glimpses of the *Tekken* tech demo shown at the PlayStation2 announcement, you’re certainly in for a treat. “The programming



THE REAL KING OF THE IRON FIST

With 36 characters available, players will be pressed to choose the best one to play. We asked Project Director Kimoto Masahiro which character he thought was the best. His response was a little surprising. “I think it’s Ganryu,” he says, “because while the character isn’t very popular, he is the most varied and improved character in *TTT* — especially in regard to his increased attack abilities. I think he might be the strongest character if you fully utilize all of his moves.” Damn. It figures that the best character is always one we never learned to play.

■ Pick your team wisely to counter your opponent’s fighting style. If all else fails, use Eddy Gordo and pull off some easy combos



■ The *Tekken* series has long been known for its original and painful-looking throws. Here, Xiyao flaunts a move that not only knocks you down, but humiliates as well



WIN 1

■ TTT features even more spectacular lighting and explosion effects than the earlier games and really takes advantage of PlayStation2's graphical prowess



staff says that the tech demo released before might only use as little as 10% of the PlayStation2's power," he confides. Wow.

The last great battle

For those who weren't lucky enough to catch the System-12-powered arcade machine, the gameplay in *Tekken Tag Tournament* may come as a bit of a surprise — especially if you're familiar with the first three *Tekkens*. While the basic

control and feel of each character remains the same, the big difference is the jump from one-on-one combat to the idea of tag-team matches in which players can switch between characters at will. Adding even more depth to the game (as if the dozens of moves for each fighter weren't enough), players can actually switch back and forth between characters mid-combo to create new super-powered combos that feature the benefits of both your

"I think that PlayStation2 expands the concept of *Tekken* with its powerful graphics engine"

— Kimoto Masahiro



■ The same moves you've seen before will now take your breath away with the newer models and animation



■ Some of the most fun you can have in TTT is running at someone, tackling them, and punching them in the face. No one ever expects it

chosen teammates.

Why Tag Team instead of the established format? According to Masahiro, "the individual characteristics, tactics, and playing style of each player can be reflected more in this game. How to make use of a partner with another character's fighting style is the key to victory or defeat." With hundreds of combinations available between the 36 characters (every fighter that has ever been featured in a Tekken game), and several play styles for each character depending on your taste, it's unlikely that you'll get bored of the game quickly. In fact, it's unlikely that you'll ever have time to experience half of what it has to offer.

Unfortunately, since the game features so many characters from different time frames, the storyline has been sacrificed entirely for this version. We don't mind too much (remember all of the nonsensical endings!) and the team is also working hard to include plenty of extras exclusive to the PlayStation2 version. "As you can imagine, the PlayStation2 'extras' are features we want to keep a secret for the moment," confides Masahiro.

"However, I can say that there is a lot that we want to put in. Because of the capabilities of the PlayStation2 hardware, there is a lot we can do that would not be possible on any other system." When asked if there will be any new characters above and beyond those featured in the arcade, Masahiro responded, "We don't have any planned at the moment, but I don't want to limit our options." Since Namco developers have a habit of slipping in fighter from other series (like Yoshimitsu in *Soul Calibur*), we wouldn't put it past them.



■ Each character in Tekken has dozens of moves to master, and you'll need to play more than one to be successful

Perfect!

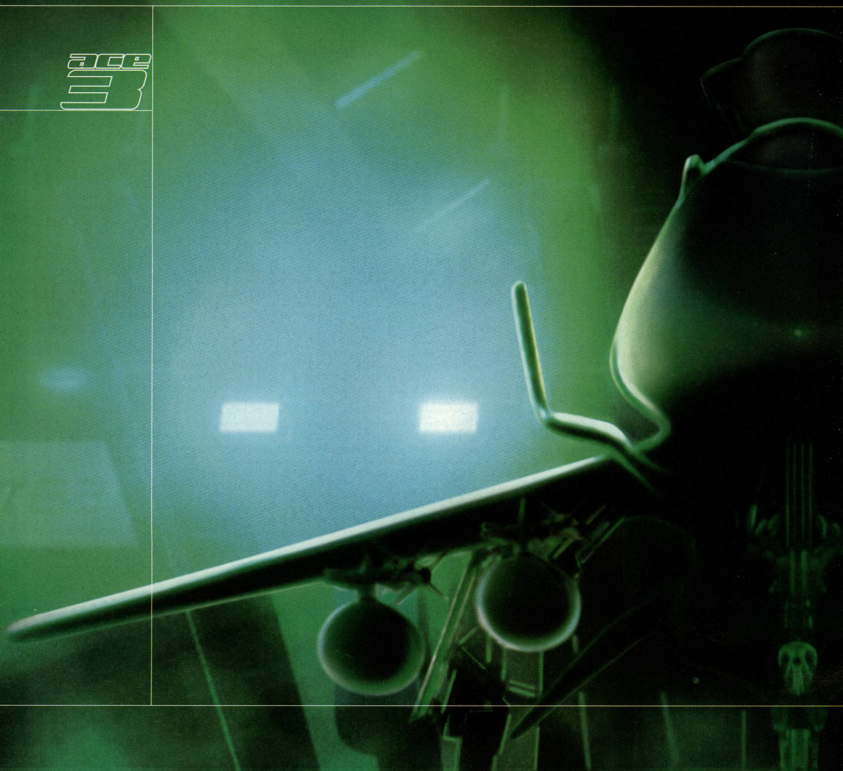
Seeing is believing, and, if we weren't excited before, we're champing at the bit now. With only a few months to go, Masahiro and team have their noses to the grindstone trying to get as many features into *Tekken Tag Tournament* as they can

before the encroaching March 4 release date. Will it be the end-all-be-all for fighting games? Perhaps, but our best guess is that this is just the first brave step into a whole new world of gaming — and that's enough to get anyone's blood pumping. — Blake Fischer



■ The blowing grass and characters cheering in the background show off just how much more powerful the PS2 is than anything else

ACE
3



◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

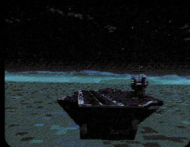
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ENGAGE

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• Night Fight. Instrument Landing Systems and night carrier landings are all mission critical when you're dueling after dark.

Every hunter needs a nice gun rack.

destroy

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ACTUAL IN-GAME SCREENSHOTS



→ Alphas

Your in-depth first looks at next-generation games currently in development



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ETERNAL RING

With its debut PlayStation2 release, From Software takes the *King's Field* saga to bold new horizons

■ Publisher: From Software ■ Developer: From Software ■ Release Date: March 4 (Japan) ■ Origin: Japan



Japan. RPGs. Big heads? Spiky haircuts? Not always. Dungeon crawlers — usually considered a particularly American form of RPG — have always been popular in Japan (in fact, the complete *Wizardry* saga is available on PlayStation there). So it's not surprising that From, creator of the industry-leading *King's Field*, is bringing the game style to PlayStation2. It's also not surprising that given the power of PlayStation2, the company is planning to take the game — and the genre — to totally new heights.

You play a young hero, Kain Morgan, who's been ordered by the recently crowned king of Heingaria to undertake a dangerous mission. A group of "wise men" have sent a secret expedition to the "Island of No Return," and the king wants to know why. Your job is to find out the reason for their sudden interest in the desolate region.

The gameplay follows *King's Field* closely, with a serious technological update. The graphics have been remarkably improved (although over-reliance on a single texture in a few scenes induces a relative monotony at some points). Still, the light sourcing is really beautiful. Harnessing the power

■ So just how many animated, fully articulated suits of armor can you fit into a game? Looks like we'll find out — From Soft is pushing the PlayStation2 hardware to the limit



→ Alphas

■ The intense light sourcing helps make up for the fairly homogenous interior textures



of PlayStation2, times of day and weather conditions are calculated in realtime, with predictable effects on the environments.

The island itself is divided into eight sections, each controlled by a dragon whose elemental loyalty (fire, water, earth, thunder, wind, light, darkness, or ice) is reflected in the scenery — the fire

Elemental magic comes from rings — the thumb ring is dominant, and rings on other fingers enable magic combos

dragon lives in a volcano, etc. Your goal is to find each dragon, and discover its secret. Not too much new there.

What is new is just how interactive

the environments are. In fact, how well you interact with them is key to your success. For example, by causing an avalanche, you may unearth age-old ruins, or you might reach what seems like an inaccessible passage by acting on the surroundings.

The magic system has been revised and is based on Eternal Rings, which must be produced from magic crystals.



■ Characters (and animation) are hand done, which lends a pleasing fantasy look to the game

■ The dragons may be the most impressive (and scary) creatures we've ever seen modeled in realtime — this is well beyond Jurassic Park





■ The external environments of the island are incredibly detailed

Those crystals can be taken from enemies or found hidden throughout the island. According to the element linked to the crystal, the magical power of the ring will be different. You can wear rings on each finger, but it's the thumb that determines the magical power used — the other four fingers enable combinations. For instance, if you wear a fire ring on your thumb, you'll be able to extend its power by adding a wind ring on another finger to create fire tornadoes. Adding an earth ring will create a storm of burning meteorites. Although there are many combo possibilities (including doubling powers by wearing two rings of the

same element), antagonistic elements will weaken the magic — a fire ring on your thumb with a water ring on your index finger is not a good idea.

Needless to say, the spell effects are amazing, but unlike *Final Fantasy*, they're abortable — a very welcome addition. The rest of the animations are up-to-snuff as well. What the game seems to lack in wall-texture variety, it more than makes up for in frames of animation: this is clearly a next-generation game, and the level of animation, as well as the number of enemies onscreen at once, is far beyond what we've seen so far on PC. After the success of the three first

episodes on PlayStation2, From Software has decided to enhance the basic *King's Field* concept rather than striking out in a completely new direction. Still, it looks like there will be more than enough innovation here to satisfy fans — exactly the kind of game Sony needs to show what PlayStation2 can do.

— Christophe Kagotani

YOU'VE BEEN WARREN'D

Desperate for a sidebar for this piece, we trapped Warren Spector (who was at our offices to show off the awesome-looking *Deus Ex*) in our demo room and gave him the following question: *First-person vs. top-down in RPGs. Discuss!* His response: "I just don't get top-down. Why in this day and age would anyone want to manipulate a little 64-pixel guy when you can actually be in the dungeon? That said, when *Diablo II* comes in, all work on *Deus Ex* will cease for a while..." Thanks, Warren!

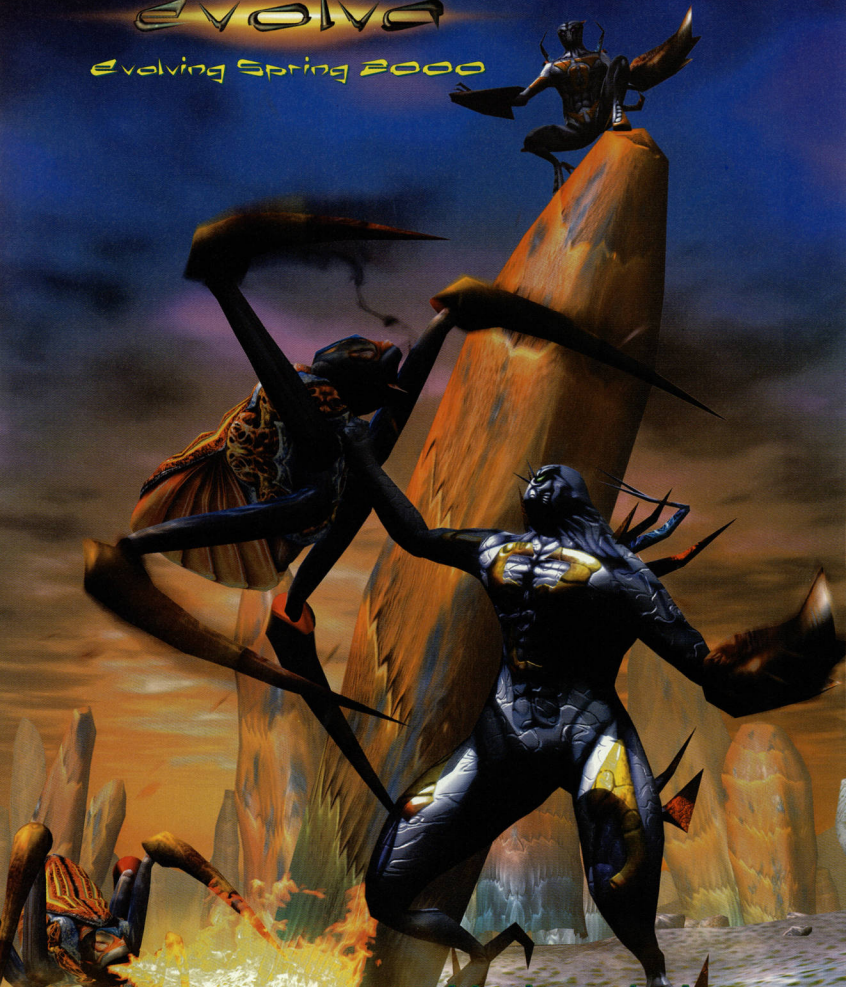


■ The amazing particle-effect flame on the dragon's breath and the smoke help show just what PlayStation2 can do in the right hands



EVOLVA

evolving Spring 2000



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Computer
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JUST THE F.A.K.K.S

So what's up with the title of the movie/game? Well, F.A.K.K. stands for "Federation Assignee 'Ketogenic Killzone'" and is a warning beacon set up to let universal travelers that they are about to enter an area where they are almost certainly guaranteed to die in the most horrible way imaginable. In the movie *F.A.K.K. 2*, Julie, the title character, also takes on this name to use as her own.

■ Monsters on your homeworld are just as deadly as the invading army, so be careful when you leave Eden

■ PC

HEAVY METAL: F.A.K.K. 2

■ Publisher: **Gathering of Developers** ■ Developer: **Ritual Entertainment** ■ Release Date: **March 2000** ■ Origin: **US**

Be it ever so humble, there's no place like the ravaged planet called home



"In the *Heavy Metal* universe, everything is possible, but nothing is expected," says Art Director and Co-Designer Robert Atkins when referring to the scope of design possibilities available to his team with Ritual Entertainment's new game, *F.A.K.K. 2*. In fact, Ritual is actually designing the game as a sequel to the movie of the

same name with the blessing of series owner Kevin Eastman (co-creator of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), who saw some of the original design Ritual was doing and gave the thumbs-up to go wild. "It's fantasy, but not medieval," exclaims Atkins. "So we can go crazy, and not be limited to real environments, and do anything we want."

The result is a third-person action/adventure with a personality that is unmatched in the genre. As Julie, the sultry heroine from the movie, you return to your otherworldly colony of Eden years after the movie takes place for some peace and quiet. Unfortunately, the peace isn't very long lived, as Gith — a very bizarre and malevolent entity who

■ *F.A.K.K. 2* uses a souped-up version of the *Quake III* engine and provides some intense visuals



→ Alphas



"In the Heavy Metal universe, everything is possible, but nothing is expected"

— Robert Atkins, Ritual Entertainment

controls a planet/ship fueled by human souls (see what we mean about personality?) — decides that he'll assimilate the people of Eden to discover the hidden secret of eternal life.

"It's an action game with a lot of adventure elements," says Lead Designer Tom Mustaine. "We do a lot of storytelling, and there are adventure-style quests, but there's a lot more combat than in something like *Tomb Raider*." As the story starts out, you control Julie as she lives her life in the community of Eden, but then things start to go horribly wrong. "In the first part of the game,

you're actually doing a lot of dialogue and establishing relationships which then play an important part in the rest of the game," says Mustaine. "We really want to take this character and humanize her." The team does this by giving the story some real drama in which you play a vital part. Unlike many other games, Julie isn't just a spectator in the events that make up the game, but an active participant. Heroes will fall around her; friends will suffer or escape because of her actions, and at every step you will understand the motivations that will drive her through to the end of the game.



■ One thing Ritual wants to focus on is constantly changing up the pace of the gameplay with a rapid blend of puzzles, action, and story sequences

Of course, in the movie Julie also does a lot of ass-kicking. At the core of this is an easy-to-use combat system that allows players a great deal of variety by allowing each hand to wield an independently controlled weapon. Different situations will call for different strategies requiring all manner of melee weapons, guns, and even shields. "We wanted to eliminate the big gun theory," stresses Mustaine. "You'll still find the big gun in the game, but you'll want to make smart weapons choices." In many cases, for example, the bigger weapons may be too slow, so you'll need to approach your enemies for some close range melee where you can fight it out using the intuitive hand-to-hand combo system.

With some of the sharpest graphics seen to date, an intricate plot, and some wickedly clever level designs, *FAKK 2* looks to deliver a package that ups the bar in the world of third-person gaming. It's good to know that it just doesn't just take a good-looking woman to sell games anymore, but a good-looking woman with a dramatic interactive storyline. Now, that's a step in the right direction.

— Blake Fischer



■ Julie is based upon Eastman's real wife, who's also the star of the film





BERZERK

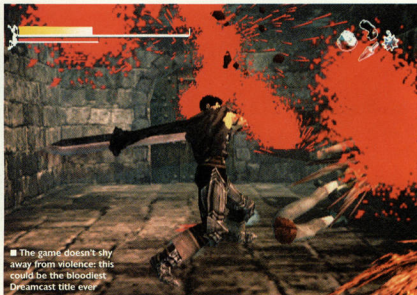
Believe it or not, the original *Berzerk* (no relation to this game other than the sound-alike title), which was released in the arcades in 1980, was the first videogame to ever be linked to an actual person's death. In January 1991, 19-year-old Jeff Dalley died of a heart attack right after playing his favorite game. His score of 16,660 still disturbs some who read a little too deeply into these things.

■ DREAMCAST

BERSERK

■ Publisher: TBA ■ Developer: Yukes ■ Release Date: December 1999 (Japan) ■ Origin: Japan

Stop, chop, and heads will roll



■ The game doesn't shy away from violence: this could be the bloodiest Dreamcast title ever

■ Sometimes there's so much happening onscreen that you just have to hope that all of the blood flying isn't from you



The over-the-top action world of anime is a wonderful breeding ground for videogame ideas. Take, for instance, the sword-swinging tale of the fighter named Gutz in *Berserk*. In a land of misspent power and downtrodden villagers, a disease suddenly breaks out that transforms those afflicted into the Mandragora — horribly misshapen creatures who attack on sight. Gutz — who lugs around a double-sided two-handed sword that would make Cloud Strife blanch — suspects that the recent outbreaks of the disease aren't natural, so he goes on a quest to find the source of the evil and, of course, vanquish it.

While the plot of the game necessarily doesn't follow that of the anime (or the manga series the anime was based on, for that matter), the essence has been kept the



■ In addition to his sword, Gatz will also be able to find extra weapons including small guns, knives, and the occasional crossbow. All are helpful for keeping the evil hordes at bay

same so that fans and newcomers alike can enjoy the title. The storyline will be told through a series of quick in-game cinemas that will help explain the story at crucial points as well as break up the action, and action's what this game's about. Players take control of Gatz in third person, and must go through some of the most wonderfully creepy environments yet realized on Dreamcast, chopping up evil as they see fit. Dark medieval environments help give the game its darker edge, and the low-lying claustrophobic fog keeps players on their toes. Luckily, you play a well-armed killing machine — and, while sword fighting is your specialty, you also have access to all manner

of knives, pistols, and crossbows to take out enemies from afar.

The real draw of the game is the ability to use a gigantic sword to split open all who stand against you. There's a real appeal to effortlessly slicing people open like ripe melons. To succeed in this, players can't just wade into the fray, but must use strategy to overwhelm the countless hordes that surround them. Luckily, there are plenty of moves available to Gatz to keep him ahead of the enemies. For example, you can lure enemies in by parrying and then swing your sword up to block attacks like a shield, and then when you are surrounded you can let fly with a 360-degree spin slash that takes

Sword fighting is your specialty but you also have access to all manner of knives, guns, and crossbows

out everyone around you. The game doesn't look like it will be pulling any punches in regards to violence either — the Mandoragora have plenty of blood and it splatters copiously as you saw through them with your eviscerating fury. As Gatz gets hit, his berserk gauge will fill up slowly and, at its maximum level, he enters into Berserk mode, where he acquires new moves, more power, and lightning speed, ensuring an even bigger bloodbath.

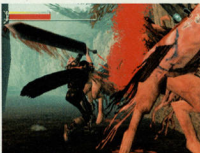
While no publisher has announced picking up this title in the US, it is thought to be a sure pick for some fearless publisher's 2000 release list. With some incredibly slick graphics, a great mood, and some frenetic action gameplay, US gamers are sure to appreciate all this title has to offer. Hopefully, translation is going on right now so that we won't have to wait too long after the Japanese release. — *Christophe Kagotani*



■ From decaying towns to dark torture chambers, Berserk's environments are all suitably creepy for the dark blend of medieval hack-'n'-slash action



■ Gatz has a large variety of different sword swings at his disposal to deal with almost any type of situation he encounters



■ Wade into the fray with your head down and sword swinging — hopefully you'll survive



X *beyond* the frontier

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we are told that space

is the final frontier

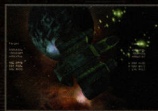
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beyond...

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■ DREAMCAST

SEGA GT

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Sega** ■ Release Date: **February 2000 (Japan)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

■ As has become the tradition in racing games, *Sega GT* features a stunning replay mode that really makes the system shine

Sega gets it in gear and brings hardcore racing to Dreamcast

PlayStation has been built on the back of its top-notch racing franchises. Both the *Ridge Racer* series and *Gran Turismo* have been crucial in driving (no pun!) the system to the phenomenal success it has enjoyed. As Dreamcast enters its second year in Japan and its first here in the States, it has suffered from a gaping hole in the driving

genre, no doubt keeping many on the fence who are waiting for the next *Gran Turismo*. Now, however, Sega launches a pre-emptive strike against the PS2 racing onslaught of *GT 2000* with its own highly detailed racing sim, *Sega GT*.

Surprisingly, Sega has been fairly quiet regarding its potential killer app. So far, more than 100 different Japanese GT cars

will be available including several of the newer 2000 models like the ultra-hot Toyota MR2 Spyder. Since the graphics are all nicely done in high resolution, car enthusiasts should have no problem picking out their favorite makes and models as they blow by on the track. Right now, no "foreign" (non-japanese) carmakers are included in the lineup, but this could change as the game gets retooled for domestic release.

Gameplay is an interesting mix of *Gran Turismo* and, of all things, *R4*. While the driving is very sim-like and will appeal

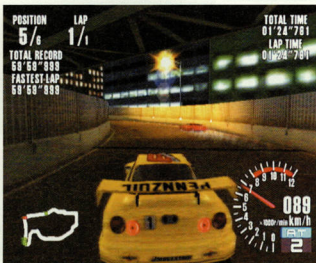
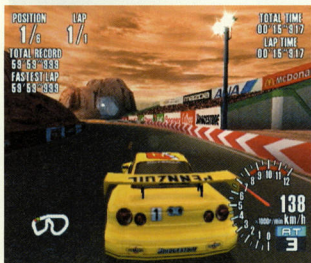
IN CAME THE SPYDER

One of the coolest cars we've seen in a while (and one that you can drive in *Sega GT*) is Toyota's new MR2 Spyder, due out in spring 2000.

According to Toyota's information sheets, the car boasts a 1.8 liter twin-cam 16-valve four-cylinder engine and is rated at 140 hp. All we care about is that it looks awesome — and retails near the price of a Miata.



Sega GT features more than 100 different GT cars, including several of the newer 2000 models



■ After you choose which team you want to race for, you must go about the business of attracting sponsors to keep you going

→ Alphas

to the hardcore racing fan, the game progresses in a very team-oriented fashion. Utilizing the official Japanese GT license, you play an amateur driver who has just made his first bid into the big leagues. After picking a team to represent, you must consistently place in the national races to attract sponsors (and, of course, their freely flowing cash). With more money you can finance your way to bigger, better, and more finely tuned cars until you dominate the circuit. Everything from the chassis to the brakes can be tuned to your heart's wildest desire — so, to ultimately succeed, you'll not only have to have the best reflexes, but you'll also have to be able to tweak your car to perfection. Eventually, after you've earned your way up to the top, you can put yourself up against the league's best in the final championship.

If driving a full season isn't your style, you can always choose your car and track and proceed to race. There's also a handy split-screen head-to-head mode that will allow you to pit your cars and talents against a buddy's (or an enemy's, depending on how you view the competition). Sega has also announced that the game will be supporting some modes over the Internet, but whether they are gameplay modes or just simple uploads/downloads (as has been the case thus far) remains to be seen.

Will this be enough? With Sony



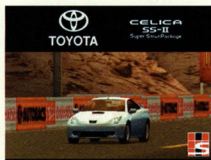
■ The game will feature day and night cycles as well as the actual turning of the seasons while you are in the Championship mode

To succeed, you'll not only need sharp reflexes, but you'll also have to tune your car to perfection

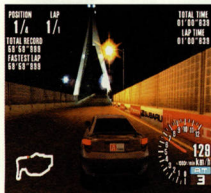
showcasing *Gran Turismo 2000* as a Playstation2 launch title one month after this game's release, Sega may have missed its chance to make an impact in the Japanese market with this high-quality racer. Unfortunately, the graphics, while excellent, also fail to live up to the early

footage shown of Sony's racing masterpiece. Still, as Sega's underdog success story in the US shows, anything can happen with the right product at the right time — so perhaps *GT* will have its day to shine as it so rightly deserves.

— Christophe Kagotani



■ There are more than 100 Japanese cars for players to choose among, and each vehicle can be tuned for maximum performance



■ Many manufacturers have included their new 2000 car models into the game, like Toyota and its MR2 Spyder



"...AN EXCELLENT TITLE TO ADD TO THE [SEGA] DREAMCAST™..."

-Game Informer

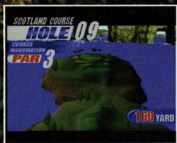
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Sega Dreamcast

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■ PLAYSTATION

SPIDER-MAN

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Neversoft** ■ Release Date: **Summer 2000** ■ Origin: **US**



■ Including web attacks, *Spider-Man* provides players with more than 20 attack moves, including kicking, punches, and even some cool acrobatic grab moves



Can Neversoft and Activision do for the friendly neighborhood web-slinger what they did for skateboarding legend Tony Hawk?



When we first heard Activision had a 3D *Spider-Man* game in development, we were concerned and excited. Concerned that one of the most inspired comic heroes (and a staff favorite) might yet again get lousy treatment in a game, and excited by the prospect that if it was done right, we would finally get to live the dream — what it is to be Spider-Man.

Spider-Man is now nine months into development at Neversoft, and the company most recently responsible for *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* may give you another reason to keep your PlayStation out of the closet a little while longer. In simplest terms, *Spider-Man* is an action/adventure. The game combines some of stealthy 3D adventure found in *Tenchu* and *Metal Gear Solid* with some classic beat-'em-up action straight out of Capcom's Marvel character arcade games.

"We wanted to be true to *Spider-Man*," says Neversoft Lead Designer Chad Findley, "to do all the cool stuff that Spider-Man can do — web-swinging, web-

shooting, acrobatic fighting moves, jerking around the bad guys with your web — and also make it a story. So that you're actually getting involved as Spidey, going through his world and fighting his bad guys."

At this point, all of the moves Findley mentions are in and properly working.



■ More than 270 animations were created to keep *Spider-Man* moving nimbly, and the team is planning on adding more

THE BIRTH OF SPIDER-MAN

He's appeared on practically every game system since Atari 2600, but Spider-Man first appeared in 1962—long before games. The wall-crawler's origins were detailed in Issue #15 of *Amazing Fantasy* published by Timely Comics, which later became Marvel Comics. Of course, the comic was written by Stan Lee, and sold at the newsstand for 12 cents.



■ Spider-Man, a roughly 350-polygon model, swings his way around the city with all the grace and style of his animated shows



Still, bringing Spider-Man to life in a 3D environment hasn't been easy for Neversoft. Remember, he climbs around on and sticks to just about everything. But remarkably, with some smart camera work and transparency effects, the team has managed just that. Spider-Man already moves smoothly and is easy to control whether he is climbing on the exterior of a building or upside-down on an office ceiling. The first level opens with Spider-Man swinging from rooftop to rooftop battling thugs, and then moving inside a bank where our hero must foil a robbery.

Neversoft is closely guarding the plot and some of the later levels, but we can guarantee you that the wall-crawler will be (par for the course) wrongly accused of something, as a "chase level" we've seen has Spider-Man outmaneuvering police helicopters and sniper fire. While Marvel has given the designers some freedom to create enemy characters, the bosses will all be very familiar ones from the Spidey universe, including Scorpion, Dr. Octopus, and



■ Spidey can carry large objects, which become transparent so as not to obscure your view



■ If there are enemies in the area, your Spider-sense may tingle

Rhino. According to Joel Jewett, Neversoft's president, the designers have done their research and are staying as close to Spider-Man's roots as possible so hardcore comic fans "aren't going to be able to pick out any inconsistencies."

In fact, the team is so intent on capturing the Spider-Man experience, they have hired Rino Romano, who does Spider-Man's voiceover for the animated TV series, to do the voice of Spider-Man for the game. And from the in-game cut scenes we've seen so far, they're equally as well directed as scenes from the TV series.

In comparison to some of the new PC, Dreamcast, and PlayStation2 titles we're beginning to see, it's certainly getting much harder to be impressed by PlayStation titles. *Spider-Man* has been built on the *Tony Hawk* codebase, and while it looks very much like a PlayStation game, the engine has been enhanced to include some bezier curve modeling on several characters, specifically Doc Octopus's arms and Scorpion's tail.

Yet, the proof was in the playing. It was thoroughly enjoyable to infiltrate the bank robbery, climb around on the ceiling, and web the robbers from above. Given the team's "focus on fun" as they mentioned about 400 times, and the fantastic control scheme the company delivered for *Tony Hawk*, we're confident that *Spider-Man* will perform just as well (even though swinging from building to building still needed some work.) It wouldn't surprise us if *Spider-Man* was one of the last PlayStation titles you pick up. Oh, and did we mention that Neversoft, which was recently purchased by Activision, also has PlayStation2 kits? —Tom Russo

The bosses will all be very familiar: Scorpion, Dr. Octopus, and Rhino



■ Neversoft has done some remarkable bezier curved-surface modeling on some of the boss characters, including Scorpion's tail



■ Webbing up enemies is often safer than engaging them in combat, but players will have limited web cartridges for use in combat

RENT HERO

A FANTASY ADVENTURE GAME

IT IS A TIME FOR HEROES

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But now chaos threatens our magical island. Tales of the power of the Gloomstones have traveled throughout the kingdom. Pirates and other nefarious characters are converging on Tol Andar to seize the stones.

Dark destruction threatens my enchanted home, but I will not stand idly by and watch my world torn asunder. It is time to make a stand—to finally prove myself as a true hero.

Join me in this great adventure! Together we will outwit pirates and battle dragons. Together we will journey on a quest to solve the mystery of Tol Andar.

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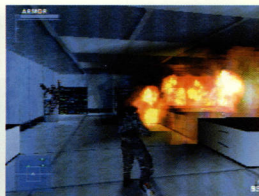
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■ Succeeding takes using your head as well as your gun. Sometimes it's far better to take some risks and avoid a fight than attack an overwhelming enemy force head-on

■ PLAYSTATION

SYPHON FILTER 2

■ Publisher: 989 Studios ■ Developer: Eidetic ■ Release Date: March 2000 ■ Origin: US

A killer virus. A deadly countdown



Syphon Filter was definitely the surprise hit of 1999, combining some of the stealth aspects of *Metal Gear*, an intense plotline, and plenty

of just plain great game design. Due to its odd release time (February) and little advance coverage, the title caught many people by surprise, going on to become

one of the best-selling PlayStation games of the year. Of course, with that kind of success, a sequel is virtually guaranteed — and 989 doesn't disappoint.

Unfortunately, the plot details of *Syphon Filter 2* are locked up tighter than the Secret Service. What we do know is that the game starts off immediately after the first one, and Gabe and his crew are doublecrossed as they try to bring the Syphon Filter virus back into US possession. After a long and thrilling opening cinema, the game opens up with Gabe giving chase to the bad guys for both the Syphon Filter virus and his kidnapped partner, Lian, who appears to have been possibly infected. In an interesting twist, you will actually be able to play as Lian for a good chunk of the game, which should provide a distinct departure from the shoot-first-and-ask-questions-later style you utilize when playing as Gabe.

At its base level, the gameplay remains essentially unchanged. Despite the game's larger size (2 CDs with more than 20 levels), it still seems to follow the same structure of having missions that are broken into separate levels, each of which will contain sub-missions that help to advance the plot. The conspiracy

■ The sniper mode is a must for those who prefer to take out enemies from afar instead of getting up-close and personal



SPOOKED: A TRUE STORY

Ever wonder how close game and movie spies come to the real thing? We asked a Next Gen editor (who shall remain nameless) about his encounter with America's secret forces. "It was a long time ago, during a simpler era, when exploration of the phone system was a kind of hobby of mine. One day this guy came to the front door. I knew exactly who he was from seeing him in tons of movies: trench coat, badge wallet, humorless attitude, introduction simply by saying the word 'FBI,' the works.

It was amazing how much he acted like a TV fed. He asked if a parent was home. I said 'no.' He left his card. I passed it to my mom, but not until every floppy disk in my collection was safely buried in the woods behind my house. It turns out the FBI was doing a background check and someone (who'd applied at the CIA) had listed her as a reference. I think those disks are still buried there."

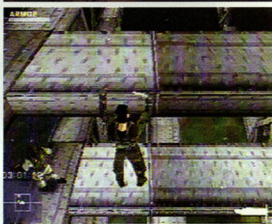


■ Gabe can lock his sights on an enemy while moving, which enables you to dodge gunfire while you stay on the offensive

looks like it goes farther into the US government this time around, though, so you'll be fighting more top agents and possibly even some of the world's top commandos. An all-new scripting system has been implemented as well, so you can expect many of these baddies to put up a tougher, more intelligent fight. Luckily, with the added difficulty also comes the ability to save at checkpoints,

so you won't necessarily have to stay up all night to beat the last part of a level (although you may do it anyway).

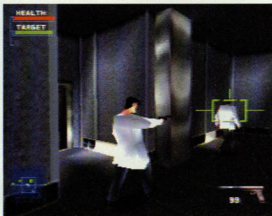
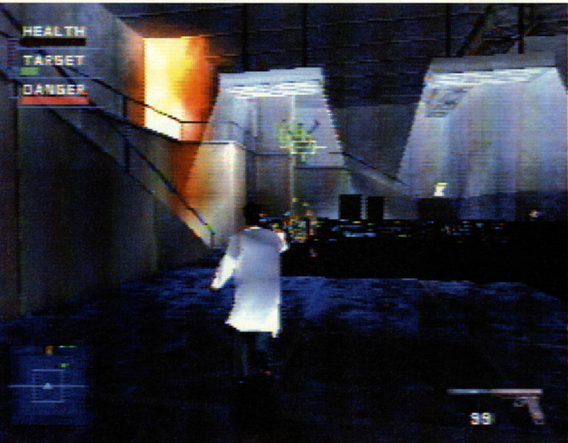
One of the most innovative features of the first game, the ability to lock your sights on a target while you run any direction, was in evidence in the early build played by **Next Generation**, so you'll be able to re-enact your favorite John Woo moments as you dash across



rooms dodging automatic gunfire, returning fire all the while. Intense stuff, and with the new two-player split-screen mode, you can have some dramatic gunfights as you try to prove who is the best agent in one of 15 different multiplayer arenas.

With its dark espionage feel, improved graphics, and lengthened storyline, there's no doubt that *Syphon Filter 2* will be another hit for 989 Studios (especially with its release in the title-shy month of March). Rumor has it that a PlayStation2 sequel is already in the works to continue the story after this game — if that's true, it looks like this franchise will have what it takes to keep moving forward well into the new millennium. — *Blake Fischer*

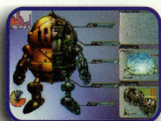
■ Gabe will be able to disguise himself so that he can roam throughout some areas undetected (as long as he doesn't have to talk to anybody)



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Sega Dreamcast.



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→ Alphas

■ Mages in the game actually have the ability to cast spells beyond their power level. For each level higher they go, though, the chance of catastrophic failure increases. Wolfpack members figure that some players will simply use this tactic to enter battlefields and then detonate themselves in the middle of the fray



■ PC, MAC

SHADOWBANE

■ Publisher: **TBD** ■ Developer: **Wolfpack** ■ Release Date: **Late summer 2000** ■ Origin: **US**

Bigger, badder, and now with more backstabbing!

→ Online RPGs are the rage. They're fun, they're addictive, and they provide an experience like no other. The eight-member team at

Wolfpack Studios understands this — with their first product, an online RPG titled *Shadowbane*, they're hungry to push the envelope provided by games such as *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online* even farther than it has gone before.

One problem that must be faced, according to team members, is that many of the facets of the online RPG are still rooted in the single-player world. "We're trying to go against what has been beaten into people's heads by other games," says Executive Producer Todd Coleman about some of the radically different design decisions that make up the core of *Shadowbane*. First and foremost, the design calls for a world where players can't be safe from other players. This shouldn't be the problem that you might imagine, according to Coleman: "We know that, generally speaking, the average player is always going to do what's in their best interest or is amusing to him or

■ Desperate guildmembers draw their bows and prepare to defend their city against a rival faction



■ The monsters in the land are just as detailed as the players, and sometimes a whole lot tougher





■ War is an essential part of the experience here and Wolfpack members have done all they can to help it along. Here, a squad leader arranges his compatriots into an effective battle formation

HELL NIGHT
One of the cooler ideas the team is planning is a monthly "Hell Night" — an evening where players can do whatever they want with no consequences. Basically, the server is backed up and then players can go wild. The lower levels can attempt to take out the bigger characters, players can explore areas they were too frightened to before, and in general chaos reigns. Then, after a few hours, the server backup is restored as if the past few hours never happened.

her at the time," he says. "You really have to design the game with that kind of mentality in mind."

Players enter *Shadowbane* and immediately join a guild — either player- or GM-run — not because they're forced to, but because it's dangerous to be alone and this strategy is immediately perceived as the quickest path to power (playing to that selfish angle). Besides the advantages of having a group for mutual defense, guilds can claim cities in the game and allow their members to train there as well as buy weapons and armor. But there is a catch — there will always be fewer cities than there are guilds, so you'll always have to be vigilant against other guilds to hold on to what you have and stay in power. Driving up the ante is the fact that the longer you hold on to a



town, the more developed your works within will become, so you will also be given access to better armor, weapons, and training — the payoff, of course, is that you'll provide a riper target for others. Sieges of a larger city could take days in real time with enemy guild members trading off in shifts to wear the defenses down. Epic stuff.

Further playing the guilds against each other will be company-run "feature characters" (everything from the Invincible Dragon, to the wise king of the land, to his gossiping jester). "We're thinking that they'll make a deal with one guild and convince them to raid another guild's lands and then turn around and cut



■ Character creation allows for players to look amazingly different with plenty of customizable options including face, hair, and even height

a deal with another guild while you're gone," says Coleman. This kind of political turmoil and strife promotes an uneasy balance and, in the meantime, these feature characters will also be running many of the in-game quests as well as masterminding dark plots against each other. According to company President Josef Hall, the best parts of the roleplaying

You can define yourself into 21 possible character classes plus an extra 53 different subclasses

■ There are lots of races for players to choose from — each with a unique host of strengths and weaknesses. Obviously, the minotaurs have quite an advantage with their size and strength, as these poor humans found out the hard way. Perhaps a more indirect approach next time!





■ In a world of powerful leaders and social institutions, there will always be those who can be paid to take out rivals. This assassin uses his ability to hide in the shadows and then strikes out with a quick backstab to silently take out his prey

experience are "things that allow players to change the world they're in — we'll be doing that a lot."

Roleplaying is also important, and in that vein, players will have unparalleled options with the creation of their character. The list of playable races you can play is among the most eclectic we've ever seen. "I would expect to see a lot of familiar faces like humans, elves, and dwarves," says Coleman, "but also a few that are unfamiliar like minotaurs, centaurs, and the Iroquois — winged birdmen." And yes, the birdmen can fly, and while it was never confirmed, it was strongly hinted that we'll even see a playable race of water-breathing tritons who live in giant underwater cities. Once you pick your race, it will be necessary to further define yourself into one of 21 possible character classes. Even further, you can deck your player out with up to 3 of the 53 available subclasses.

Of course, the game also has the



■ Vast oceans lie waiting for explorers to scope their depths. Along with many hidden treasures and lost civilizations, you'll also find plenty of dangerous creatures who don't want to be disturbed



Sieges could take days in realtime with guild members trading off in shifts to wear defenses down

requisite monsters, dungeons, treasures, and magic that every fantasy roleplayer needs to survive. Each game world will be able to host several thousand people at once, and, in another bold move, characters will be able to jump from world to world with the help of specially trained mages. Each world will be different, too, so while some may have stronger magic, others may have more science or bigger monsters. We'd like

to point out that these worlds are huge and easily compare to those in other games.

There's little doubt that the frontiers of the online RPG will be pushed farther ahead than ever before when *Shadowbane* goes live in the fall. With games like this and *Ultima Online 2*, it's entirely possible that 2000 will be the year that the online RPG fully comes into its own.

— Blake Fischer



■ The team is debating if whether, after a ship-to-ship battle, it would be cool to have the losing ship sink to the bottom of the ocean where it could then be found later... and pillaged

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■ At times, you'll not only have to fight off hordes of small creatures, but you'll also have to deal with bigger monsters who know how to use your distraction to their advantage

■ PC, DREAMCAST

KISS PSYCHO CIRCUS

■ Publisher: **Gathering of Developers** ■ Developer: **Third Law Interactive** ■ Release Date: **April 2000** ■ Origin: **US**



■ All of the KISS comic-book characters are faithfully represented as super-powered heroes with heavy armor and really big guns. This look would probably be a hit at concerts, too

G.O.D. gave rock and roll to you



Let's just answer the question that's on everybody's mind first. KISS? The videogame? Designer Matt Hooper acknowledges that this is important. "When we were first approached to do KISS, we thought to ourselves: A '70s rock band? How in the hell can we possibly make that a game? Then we looked at the comic series and

there was so much cool imagery... It's not really the KISS band, it's just four superheroes who happen to look like KISS."

With this as the launching point, the small team at Third Law Interactive set about designing a game around the dark and eerie world of the *KISS Psycho Circus* comic. "We thought to ourselves, 'Let's make an action game, but a real action game,'" says Hooper — so the decision was made to make a first-person shooter like no other before it. The starting point of the design was the comic itself, where the members of KISS are all set up as action heroes with mastery over the elements. Correspondingly, there are



■ At some points in the game, you will be confronted by hordes of enemies who will try to swarm you under. Remember: even though you have the gun, sometimes it's simply better to run

→ Alphas

OTHER MUSIC GAMING "GREATS"

In the past, there have been a few games that have been based on popular rock bands. The most notable is *Journey*, which had not one, but two, different games based on the band. While we'll pass on the Atari 2600 version, you should check out the arcade version, which is still a favorite in the Next Generation offices (see the spine of our 12.99 issue for proof).

worlds set up for each of the four members, each in his own element of earth, air, fire or water. From there, the design team went crazy. "Pretty much all of the creature designs are our own," says Hooper. "They [McFarlane Comics] are letting us do pretty much whatever we want."

So, besides the dark and twisted creature designs (many based around demonized circus attractions), the Third Law developers felt that their game needed some more creative ideas to keep the title appealing in the already-crowded first-person market. "If there's one thing we get frustrated with — especially with first-person shooters — as gamers, it's that the game gets really stale after the first couple of levels," stresses Hooper. "We're trying to have something new all the way through. This design philosophy has led the team down the unlikely road of using a lot of traditional console-game ideas. "We have levels set up like *Metal Gear* where you need to sneak, and some are like *Zelda* where the door closes behind you and you have to find a way to defeat this boss who is acting in a way you've never seen and won't see again," says Hooper. "Every creature you see, just about everything you fight, will be unique."



■ Many of the creatures you face are twisted versions of something you might see at the circus. This bad boy is based on the fat man that can take a cannonball to the stomach

Another impressive feature is "the horde," which the team is rightfully convinced will be one of the factors that marks their place in shooter history. "We wanted players to be able to just mow through the pack, like in the days of *Doom*," says Hooper — and to that end, the team has created a way for the player to be swarmed by an overwhelming amount of enemies. Trust us, the feeling you get when 50-plus creatures suddenly run toward you is very much akin to real panic, and if you blast one away, two more are always ready to take its place. In

many instances, you will even be forced to fight off a larger creature — say a giant clown/arachnid — while being swarmed by the horde.

With lots of interesting little touches (including several inside jokes that only KISS fans will get), a wildly original game world, and some of the most frenetic action seen to date, *KISS Psycho Circus* looks to make some big waves when it launches in April on PC and Dreamcast. Hopefully, the game will provide some "Crazy Nights" for people everywhere, not just in "Detroit Rock City" — *Blake Fischer*



■ The Lithtech engine enables the game to feature highly detailed enemies that can be dismembered by a few good shots



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PEN AND PAPER

One of the main draws of *Baldur's Gate* was that it strictly adhered to the second edition *Dungeons and Dragons* rules from the pen-and-paper RPG. While the third edition rules (a complete revamping of the game system) will be out by the time *Baldur's Gate II* ships, the game will still feature the second edition rules with just a little bit of third edition goodness. BioWare's other D&D game in production, *Neverwinter Nights*, uses the full third edition rules.

■ You can choose your alignment — good or evil — and whichever you follow will affect your path through the story

■ PC

BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN

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

Journey a little deeper into the Forgotten Realms

→ *Baldur's Gate* is the game that managed to single-handedly pull RPGs from the abyss back into the mainstream. Now, not content with its initial triumph, BioWare is back with a

true sequel that is bigger, tougher, and more detailed than before.

The game picks up after the events in *Baldur's Gate*, so it's your good fortune not to have to play as a weakling low-level character (each player starts off with approximately 80,000 experience points). Accordingly, the level cap has also been raised, and players can now achieve some of the higher-level abilities that make adventuring great. Mages, in particular, receive lots of great new spells that allow for some spectacular magic/countermagic battles (with up to eighth-level spells flying back and forth).

Along your journey (which is an estimated 50 hours longer than the last game), you will meet many old friends and foes — as well as explore many higher-level areas (like hell). One neat twist is the fact that characters can become much more specialized into sub-classes such as Assassins and Blades (Bards who master



■ In *Baldur's Gate II*, you will run into many enormous high-level monsters. Bummer, has it there's even a Beholder waiting in the world for you... somewhere

weapons showmanship instead of an instrument.) As you play through the game, it is also possible to earn a keep. Interestingly enough, your keep will represent a branching in the plot that follows your specific class, so a Mage's keep may hold interdimensional remnants of its previous owners, while a Fighter might have to rally the defenses of his keep against an oncoming siege.

With tons of features (intelligent weapons) and a new graphics engine that supports 3D acceleration for spell effects, this may be a worthy successor to the now classic original. — *Blake Fischer*



■ Mages and Clerics now have access to high-level spells — many of which are accompanied by a fireworks display of spectacular special effects



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■ The game algorithmically determines which plants should go where on the terrain, resulting in environments with a stunningly realistic feel



MORE MOTORCYCLE MADNESS

If you're looking for madness of a different, Snake-River-Canyon-jumping sort, Take 2 may have the game for you — the world's greatest motorcycle daredevil, Evel Knievel, is finally coming to a game.

Perhaps in an effort to stick to technology that was cutting edge in the '70s during the hey-day of his career, Evel is coming to Game Boy Color with a side-scrolling action racing title — think *Excite Bike* with major hang times.



■ PC

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Rainbow Studios ■ Release Date: June 2000 ■ Origin: US

How do you improve on racing perfection? Read on



Last year, *Motocross Madness* (along with *Age of Empires*), helped show that Microsoft Games was for real — the first game to independently model the physics of the driver and bike, it was one of the best-looking and -controlling motocross sims ever.

So what's new this year? "Everywhere in this game, multiplayer is in your face," says Rob Rinard, lead designer at Rainbow Studios. "Last year, only about 7% of players played online multiplayer; I want 25% this year." To increase the personalization, players will be able to pick custom vanity plates for use in multiplayer. Microsoft's Zone will rank the top 100 players, and those players will get their ranking on their license plate.

What else is new? The environment is now almost photorealistic, with plant life appearing in perfect harmony with the altitude and terrain type. The effect is almost perfectly done, and if you've ever been in the desert, you'll find the game almost eerily realistic.

Plus, there's six times the area of *MCM* to explore, with six event types: Baja (open terrain racing with waypoints), the Stunt Quarry, Enduro, Supercross



■ The physics enable amazing tricks, like this desert trailer jump (right)

(indoor tracks), Nationals (outdoor tracks), and Pro-Circuit Career mode.

Packed with licenses, the game relies on help from real motocross celebrities — all the Supercross tracks, for instance, were designed by Stephan Roncada, favored to take the Supercross title this year.

If that isn't enough, Microsoft is planning to include a terrain editor, also. How do you improve a game that seemed perfect last year? Looks like Rainbow Studios is on the right track.

— Chris Charla



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you kill before
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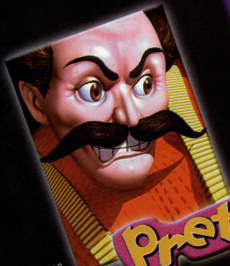


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THE FIRST PORSCHE

Though the Porsche company wasn't established until the 1940s, the first vehicle to bear the Porsche name debuted at the Paris Exposition in 1900. Dubbed the Lohner-Porsche, this battery-powered two-seater used electric motors in the front wheel hubs for the tractive force. At a mere 25 years old, it was Ferdinand Porsche, the founder of the Porsche company, who designed the hub motors.

■ All races take place in Europe; the PlayStation open courses will include Germany, France, Scotland, Japan and the US with multiple zones to race in each country

■ PLAYSTATION, PC

NEED FOR SPEED: NO LIMITS

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **Electronic Arts** ■ Release Date: **April 2000** ■ Origin: **Canada**

EA's fastest gets a whole new spin

→ Six years and ten million units later, the *Need For Speed* series from Electronic Arts has proven to be the most successful racing franchise ever. But, for the first time in its lengthy history, EA is toying with the award-winning formula.

Like it or lump it, the only cars



■ *No Limits* offers a deep customization factor for car tweekers, with at least 80 variations available on the PC and over 50 for the PlayStation version. The full Porsche catalogue will be available, too

available in the latest game will be Porsches. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the largest sports-car manufacturer in the world, *Need For Speed: No Limits* will feature cars ranging from the classic cabriolets and Speedsters of the '50s through its five decades of dominance, ending with the pièce de résistance, the new 911 Turbo.

There's also a financial aspect to the game, as players must buy, sell, and trade cars (and parts) throughout a 50-year Career mode. In this persistent economy, prices will fluctuate based on supply and demand, not to mention the wear and tear on cars intended for resale. For example, if a gamer purchases two identical 356 Spyders and stores one in a garage for ten years, it'll be worth more money than the one used for racing.

And even more so than with last year's game, damage will affect gameplay, rather than serving as only a cosmetic change in



■ The PC and PSX versions of *No Limits* will differ slightly to take advantage of each platform's strengths, and to better suit gamers' needs

the car's appearance. This leads back to the economic model, once again, with the need to purchase new parts in order to race.

While the jury is out on whether or not gamers will enjoy this new spin on the coveted franchise, single races a la past *Need For Speed* games will also be included, and there are even plenty of cop chases to boot... — Marc Saltzman

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→ Alphas

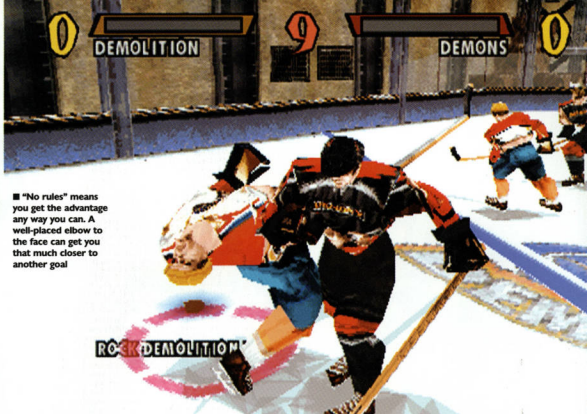


■ Fighting is an essential part of the game, so you can bet that it will be much more involving than your typical hockey skirmishes



→ Let's face it — we all knew a *Blitz*-style hockey game was bound to body-check onto retail shelves soon, but rather than Midway or Acclaim tackling an over-the-top arcade-style NHL extravaganza, EA Sports will step into the rink and deliver the goods first.

Rock the Rink is a three-on-three (plus the goalie) no-holds-barred hockey game with huge hits, crushing checks, and, of course, plenty of fights, complete with wrestling-style finishing moves. In fact, much of the motion-capture data collected by wrestlers while creating last year's *WCW: Mayhem* was recycled for *Rock the Rink*, such as DDTs, helicopters,



■ "No rules" means you get the advantage any way you can. A well-placed elbow to the face can get you that much closer to another goal

■ PLAYSTATION

ROCK THE RINK

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Sports ■ Release Date: March 2000 ■ Origin: Canada

“Oooh, Gretzky takes out Roy with a piledriver and scores the hat trick”

and power slams. And since there are no rules, there are no penalties.

Gameplay will be divided into three modes: a straightforward two-player game with predetermined goals to win (from five to 20); a Championship mode where the player chooses from one of seven fantasy teams and to sweep the series must win stick, gear, and skate upgrades; and a double-elimination-style tourney dubbed “King of the Rink” with up to eight players duking it out for the cup. With the latter two, players can also unlock all 28 NHL teams — plus there's a create-a-team option for custom team names, logos, and even pre-set strategies.

EA Sports took the arcade concept one step further by creating unique hockey arenas and color commentary to suit the teams. For instance, the Brigades' home turf features an army theme with play-by-play and taunts provided by a stern sergeant, while the Demons play in a dark, macabre rink with narration such as “that was a devilish goal!” (followed by evil laughter). This works remarkably well and adds to the replayability.

At roughly 70% complete, *Rock the Rink* is likely to meet its March release date, and despite a few controller issues and random clipping/sticking problems, it's already in great shape for a spring brawl. — Marc Saltzman

THE SOUNDS OF PAIN

Who else would be perfectly suited to perform the *Rock the Rink* soundtrack than the Hansen brothers? Not the snot nosed brats, but the No Means No side project named after the brothers from the greatest hockey film ever, *Slap Shot*, and famous for the *Puck Rock* compilations of punk hockey songs. Hits include “Stick Boy,” “Rink Rat,” “Ring Dem Bells,” and “Third Man In,” to name a few.



■ This game is being developed by the team responsible for *NHL 2000* — a good pedigree



■ A little too much like *Blitz*? Expect teams to literally ignite on fire when they're hot... gee, where'd they get that idea?



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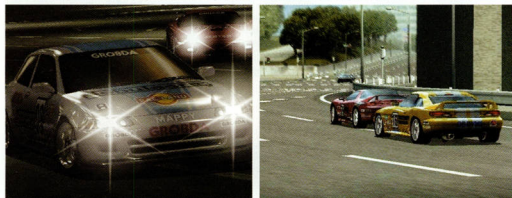
▼ Program is referred to as Web Design & Development.

→ Milestones

Next Generation's monthly update on tomorrow's games



■ Namco's latest round of screenshots focuses on the high amount of detail that goes into each car. With graphics like these and a high framerate, this game is sure to give GT 2000 a run for its money come March 4



■ PLAYSTATION 2

NEW RIDGE RACER

■ ARCADE

VIRTUA NBA



■ Not NBA 2K, but an entirely new basketball arcade experience from Sega. Looks great!



It's only a month or two in, and the new year is already coming on strong! First off, witness the beauty of the latest PlayStation2 and Dreamcast games. Then, when you think you're ready, take a glance at the opening movie to *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, shown below. It's just a teaser, but wait until you see it in action! Finally, check out our sneak peek at the Viking-inspired third-person action/adventure *Rune*. This could be gaming's greatest year ever.

FUJI RHP

FUJI RHP

FUJI RHP

RESIDENT EVIL: CODE VERONICA

S. T. A. R. S. 隠れて

■ DREAMCAST

→ Milestones



■ Midway believes that this off-road racer captures the spirit of *Hydro Thunder* (without the water). Watch out for this one later in the year

■ DREAMCAST

OFF ROAD THUNDER

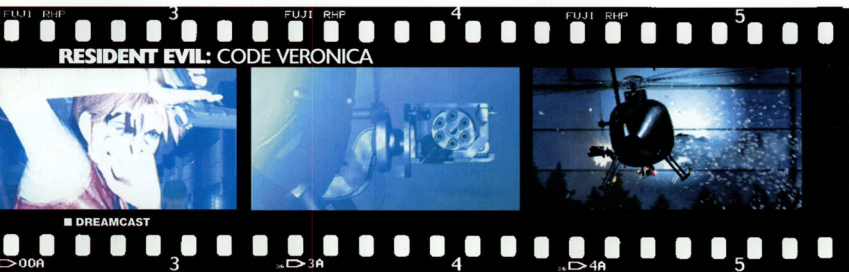


■ The long-awaited port of *Gauntlet* to Dreamcast will have features found in both the first game and its sequel (previewed last issue). It should make its way home in May



■ DREAMCAST

GAUNTLET LEGENDS



RESIDENT EVIL: CODE VERONICA

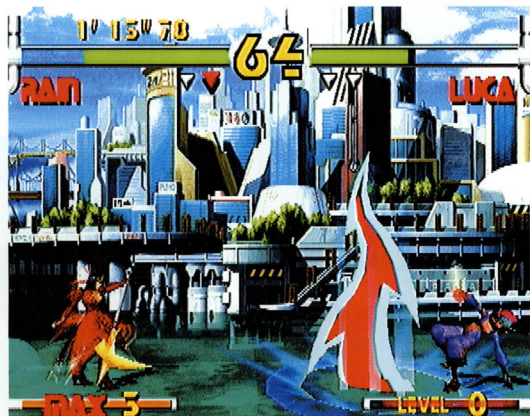
■ DREAMCAST



■ An upgraded version of the arcade game VS2, this will be the best-looking soccer title around when it hits in March

■ DREAMCAST

VIRTUA STRIKER 2



■ Capcom has upgraded this System 12 game substantially on its way to Dreamcast. It should be on shelves in March



■ DREAMCAST

PLASMA SWORD



→ Milestones



04

■ Every time we see this game, it gets even more beautifully bizarre. Even though it's delayed until March, it should be well worth waiting for

■ DREAMCAST, PC

MDK 2



04

■ DREAMCAST TECH ROMANCER



■ Giant robots battle it out in futuristic cities. Look for lots of destruction and insane combos in this anime parody this spring

■ PC

RUNE



■ Third-person hack-n-slay Viking action. Could you ask for anything more?



FUJI RHP

9

FUJI RHP

10

FUJI RHP

11

RESIDENT EVIL: CODE VERONICA



■ DREAMCAST



■ Is your mouth watering? It will be. This game is stunning.

→ 8A

9

→ 9A

10

→ 10A

11

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THE GAMES OF 2000

WILL BLOW YOUR MIND

The techniques, technologies, and titles revealed this year will change the landscape of games forever

In 1899, US patent office commissioner Charles H. Duell said, "everything that can be invented has been invented." Needless to say, he was wrong. It sometimes seems that today's game publishers have the same idea: every game that can be invented has been invented, and all that's left is to refine the genres, mix them up a bit, and add to the graphics. It's an attitude that's about as correct as Duell's contention was in 1899.

However, a pioneering generation of developers has bucked that trend, and with new hardware arriving this year to enable new game types, the games of 2000 and 2001 should radically redefine what gaming is, and what it can be.

In this story, **Next Generation** has identified several new creative techniques and technologies that will dramatically change and enhance what kinds of games we can play — and identified the key games that will lead the way into the next millennium of gaming.



■ She's beautiful, and she's yours this year, courtesy of
Squaresoft's PlayStation2 epic, *The Bouncer*

"It's alive!"

The weird science of living worlds

THE TECHNIQUE: Living worlds (and the new gameplay dynamics they offer)
THE TECHNOLOGY: Advanced processors, GD-ROM/DVD storage
THE TITLES: *Shenmue*, *Munch's Oddysee*



■ In *Munch's Oddysee*, the player can cause significant changes to the environment. Here we see a healthy landscape, but as it is depleted of its natural resources, it becomes a blackened wasteland — all in realtime

Perhaps the most significant change we'll see in games this year is the further implementation of living worlds. Living worlds have long been a goal of game creators, and now, thanks to modern processors and storage technology, games are no longer limited to sparse environments or the duplicitous detail of pre-rendered scenery. The beginnings of the living world can be seen in the recently released *Omikron* for PC, a game that tried, and largely succeeded, in presenting a

With the next-generation consoles, living worlds will inevitably become the rule — not the exception

bustling city teeming with life.

In game development, the term "living world" can mean many things. To **Next Generation**, a living game world implies that the game's world follows and emulates (if it doesn't actually simulate) the natural world. For example, in a truly living world, the weather and seasons change, the sun rises and sets, and there are physical laws. (Gravity need not apply, but if it doesn't, it better not apply to everyone, equally.) A living world is also inhabited by non-player characters (NPCs) endowed with sophisticated AI, each behaving naturally and interacting with one another, not just the player. Ideally, a living world will be rendered in realtime, so it can change in realtime, and the action in the world shouldn't necessarily be scripted to be triggered with every move the player makes. Actions in a living world will occur and may or may not be consequential to the actual gameplay or story.

With the next generation of consoles, living worlds will inevitably become the rule — not the exception. Nowhere is this concept more evident than with Sega's *Shenmue* and Oddworld Inhabitants' *Munch's Oddysee*. The *Shenmue* team has spent five years creating the game, and in that time, the development team has grown to a rumored 200 people. This is a development scenario not likely to be repeated any time soon. Yet with the increase of processing power, as seen in PlayStation2, a smaller team might be capable of developing equally living worlds, not by creating each building from scratch, as in *Shenmue*, but by algorithmically generating the necessary components and letting them run wild. Enter Lorrie Lanning

and his Oddworld team — a team of 60 who are bringing a 3D *Oddworld* to life on PlayStation2.

***Munch's Oddysee* may be the most ambitious game design currently being undertaken in the US**, largely because of the scope of the living world. Demo footage shows a group of Scarabs (a crab-like species) moving in a pack, demonstrating the same kind of "horde AI" already working in *KISS Psycho Circus* (see preview, page 59) and *Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2* (see preview, page 39). Another demo displays a group of Mudokens collecting firewood, independently operating, but performing a group task — it is most impressive. Another demo, which we've shown in the screenshot sequence above, displays changes in the *Oddworld* terrain. At first, it looks to be a simple, and elegant, demonstration of *Munch's* graphical ability to do realtime change of seasons. But this is not case.

According to Lanning, the team is building the world to have two economies, each with the ability to change the appearance of the environment. One economy is a financial economy, which depletes the environment's resources. The other economy is based upon the forces of life, a spiritual economy that replenishes and heals the environment. So what you are seeing in those screenshots is the state of *Oddworld* in several stages — from a healthy, fertile landscape to one ravaged of resources. In the final game, the landscape will be constantly changing depending on how the player is treating the ecosystem.

While the environmental relationship is important, Lanning notes it's more of a backdrop for the action adventure quests



■ This herd of Scarabs displays the kind of deeper AI being developed for *Munch's Oddysee*. Each individual Scarab runs its own course, while intelligently remaining part of the herd



that are at the heart of the game. (In a nutshell, Abe, the hero from the first two *Oddworld* games, returns to rescue Munch, the last of his species.) Even if you're not an environmentalist, you can't argue with Lanning's rejection of the fundamentalist thinking that has limited the creative growth of gameplay.

"Game economies deal with one paradigm," he says, "that is: 'rape the land to build forces to do and conquer an opponent that is going the same thing.' This means two opponents with the same ideology. What we wanted to do was have opposing forces with opposing ideologies — struggling over the same environment for completely different reasons."

"Yet developing this sophisticated world with dual economies hasn't been easy for the *Oddworld* team. It has taken them nearly two years to creatively conjure up and work out the mechanics of such a complex ecosystem. Lanning correctly points out that a slew of great ideas do not necessarily make something fun, and it's tough finding practical gameplay counterparts for highly creative concepts. Evolving the company's codebase to enable these new gameplay elements hasn't been easy either.

"One of the greatest technical challenges is in spending the time not coding," says Lanning, "to figure out how such a complex system should be coded. For larger-scale games, you've got to do mountains of planning. Of course, then getting it to run is always a mother in itself for a zillion different reasons."

Building the landscape for a living world is one thing, and filling it up with intelligent NPCs is another. *Oddworld* has shown the potential of its trademark GameSpeak with *Abe's Oddysee* and *Abe's Exxodus*. Now Lanning insists the company will be further evolving GameSpeak, and characters will have a much deeper emotional system. All of the "inhabitants" can be antagonized into action, impressed or scared into submission, and influenced to be nasty or lovable as a result of how they've been treated or what they've witnessed.

"A system like PlayStation2 affords us the memory to break entirely new ground for more truly emotional gaming," Lanning says. "A big part of our being able to greatly expand the emotional depth of the inhabitants is due to the additional memory available for sound. To really have characters come to life with emotions, they need a much larger vocabulary."

The vocabulary Lanning refers to is both a verbal and animated one. GameSpeak will have full voiceover support. (He refuses to think of text as an option, as it just lacks the effect of hearing something in real time.) *Oddworld* also has big plans for the *Dual Shock2*, which Lanning can't elaborate on yet, but he does say, "the inhabitants will respond to what they're hearing with much more logical and intuitive reactions. You'll also be seeing a lot more of NPCs communicating with one another."

Lanning describes *Munch's Oddysee* as a mix of action, adventure, RPG, strategy, and emulation, with Hollywood storytelling and

production values sprinkled all over it. Despite the contrast between the odd world of *Oddworld* and *Shenmue's* Hong Kong circa 1985, both games are similar in that design respect.

There's nothing really new about the technology of the actual gameplay in Sega's *Shenmue*. What is new, however, is Sega's storage medium, which gives Yu Suzuki the space to create a dynamic, living city of Hong Kong on Dreamcast, which is much further along than the similar systems being incorporated at *Oddworld*.

Thanks to Sega's GD-ROM — and Yu Suzuki's nearly unlimited budget — nearly everything in the world of *Shenmue* is completely interactive, enabling Suzuki to create a dynamic living world that should be incomparable to anything released previously. *Shenmue* enables players to do more in the world they are exploring, but doesn't limit them to interaction only with the things that developers found interesting — the limiting factor that kept traditional adventure games from really evolving.

Rather than merely presenting a big living world, Suzuki may have solved one of adventure games' biggest problems. One of the greatest hurdles for adventure games has been this: while games are expected to have a linear beginning to set up the story, and while linear endings are — like climactic endings to movies — also appropriate, how do you keep the story moving during the

middle, the largest part? Is it possible to move the story forward while maintaining a feeling of non-linearity in the game? Suzuki has a solution. While some (including us) have criticized the *Dragon's Lair*-style of some of the action sequences, that's missing the point: this isn't a fighting game. It's an adventure game, and the scripted action sequences are basically interactive cut scenes, not realtime gameplay.

Currently planned to be sold as 16 episodic Dreamcast chapters, the epic story of *Shenmue* follows Ryo Hazuki as he attempts to solve the mystery of his father's death in the Hong Kong of 1985. During the course of the game, Ryo will come to rely on the help of Rei Shenhua, a woman who aids Ryo in his quest, and becomes his love interest. The demo Sega released in Japan this fall gives players a taste of how big, and lush, *Shenmue's* world is going to be. Players could talk, very naturally, to NPCs in the street or working at local shops, and even buy a soda from a working Coke machine. The goal of the demo was to track down Yukawa Hidekazu, Sega of Japan's managing director, who starred in a run of high-profile Dreamcast television ads.

The first installment of *Shenmue* has seen its Japan release date yo-yo from fall of 1999 to spring of 2000 and finally, back to December 29, 1999. Certainly, if the team manages to make this date, Yu Suzuki and his team will be celebrating more than the end of the year that night.

“PlayStation2 affords us the memory to break entirely new ground for truly emotional gaming”

Lorne Lanning, *Oddworld Inhabitants*



■ *Shenmue* will bring Dreamcast gamers their fair share of combat. But as this adventure is set in a living world (Hong Kong, 1985), we expect the action to be more climactic due to the realistic nature of the environments and characters



Online gaming

It ain't just for PCs anymore

THE TECHNIQUE: Online console games

THE TECHNOLOGY: PC or Dreamcast modem

THE TITLES: *Frontier*, *Phantasy Star Online*, *NFL 2K1*, *NBA 2K1*

The Internet has been a boon to the game industry, enabling developers to bring new multiplayer gameplay experiences to more than eight million gamers, and in turn, enabling them to find up-to-the-second information about games as well. But this year, the web may serve its greatest purpose to gamers when it forms the gene pool where console games and PC games will inevitably intermingle. While it's safe to reason that console online games will remain console-only for the time being, they will not, by design, be typical console games, nor will they likely be the exact mirror of the PC online worlds from which online console designers will inevitably

borrow. Past console-to-PC and PC-to-console ports have been tragically flawed (Ever played *Command and Conquer* on N64, or *Virtua Fighter* on PC?) as developers tried to implement a game mechanic designed for one system on another. Yet console-based online gaming will need to find a solution that allows a traditional PC form to exist naturally on console. Expect the solution to be copied.

Certainly we can expect the persistent online worlds of Dreamcast's *Frontier* and *Phantasy Star Online* to embody some of the qualities that we are seeing in current online only games, as Yuji Naka, director of *Phantasy Star Online*, intimates.

■ Given the looks of this dragon, Dreamcast's *Phantasy Star Online* will hardly be the most peaceful of places



"The system of *Phantasy Star Online*," Naka says, "is more similar to *Diablo* than *Ultima Online* or *EverQuest*."

Just as *Ultima Online* was not a direct sequel to the *Ultima* series, Naka explains that *Phantasy Star Online* won't be a sequel to the previous *Phantasy Star* titles. However, just as *Ultima Online* was to fans of the *Ultima* series, Naka intends to make *Phantasy Star Online* familiar and enjoyable for the fans of the *Phantasy Star* series. While he doesn't give specific examples, in a game designed to designed to last a year or more online, don't expect your characters to level-up every hour. However, in staying true to console-style RPGs, gamers will invariably level-up more quickly than say, characters in *EverQuest* — where newbies are resigned to killing rats for weeks before gaining a level or two. So how big is the *Phantasy Star Online* team? Naka won't reveal the actual size, but he suggests that it's big, and like Blizzard's *Diablo*, the game will feature an offline adventure as well. The team is trying to develop a storyline with the network system as well.

"This is not so easy," Naka says, "but I am willing to utilize the full power of Dreamcast, and I want to feature online playability as much as I can. I think you can expect this title to do things that are entirely new."

While it's obvious that PC online games will continue to change the way console online games evolve, the reverse will also be true. When quick-and-easy-to-set-up online consoles take multiplayer gaming to the living room, the online console games that achieve popularity will ultimately have some affect on the way

online games develop on PC. In fact, according to market researching firm Datamonitor, online console gaming will surpass the PC online gaming community in 2002 — with 29 million users playing online console games, overtaking the 25 million projected to use PCs.

Currently, Sega plans to have the Dreamcast network up and running in the US by the fall of 2000. For now, the company is being very quiet about the US-developed persistent-world game, *Frontier*. However, games such as *Half-Life* and *Baldur's Gate* already have solid multiplayer components in addition to single-player games, so it should come as no surprise to anyone that these titles will probably be the first to put the new Dreamcast network through its paces. But according to Greg Thomas, Sega of America's VP of Production, these PC ports will be the exception to the rule.

"Just like console games and PC games are different, I believe console online gaming and PC online gaming are also going to be different," says Thomas. "Developers have been satisfied with deathmatching for the most part and aren't doing enough to really enhance or create wholly new online experiences. This is what we plan to do."

Thomas is also president of Visual Concepts, the developer responsible for Dreamcast's *NFL 2K* and *NBA 2K*. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that he's backing up the statement he makes above when he mentions the next round of sports of games will feature online play



■ When *NFL 2K* and *NBA 2K* appear later this year, expect them to support the Dreamcast online game network — right out of the box

"Direct head-to-head play is a natural," Thomas says. "There are obviously latency issues, but we are working hard to overcome these as much as possible."

What about downloadable stats that correspond to what's actually happening in the real season? Another "natural," according to Thomas, who says these types of features are also the beginning — unfortunately, some of those ideas aren't "naturals," and Thomas wants to keep them to himself and his development teams for now.

"If you look at all of the differences between console and PC gamers," he says, "that will give you a good idea of the type of thinking that we are applying to online gaming for Dreamcast." Like the slogan says, "it's thinking," and this year, for the first time in console history, it will be thinking online.

Online console gaming will surpass PC gaming in 2002, with 29 million users logging on through a console



■ From lush forests to large cityscapes, *Phantasy Star Online* will offer widely varied and detailed environments — now if they'd only show us some characters



Sounds like a winner

THE TECHNIQUE: **Advanced sound quality and musical score**
THE TECHNOLOGY: **Dreamcast sound chip, PS2 sound chip**
THE TITLE: **Resident Evil: Code Veronica**

When it comes to sound quality, hearing is believing. Sure, general sound quality has been noticeably better on Dreamcast, but it has yet to break out in a dynamic fashion on the next-generation systems. Perhaps we've just had to wait for the right title, and looking back, it makes sense that the man whose games brought sound to a new level on PlayStation would be the same to change the playing field on Dreamcast.



■ The shattering glass sounds all too real when this one-armed mutant from hell comes through window

Shinji Mikami's *Resident Evil* series and *Dino Crisis* delivered such wonderful sound, it was no surprise that when we took an in-depth look at Mikami's latest Dreamcast title, *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, we were treated to the next-generation sound quality we have been waiting for.

"Our goal is to add as much reality into



■ While the ambient effects are much improved, the zombie sounds will truly send shivers down your spine

the game as possible, and Dreamcast brings us even closer to achieving this," Mikami says. "Dreamcast's added audio capabilities have enabled us to produce several high-quality sound effects at one time. For example, it is possible to have the sound of rain, a human voice talking, and the siren of a police car at the same time. Not only can

you do all these things at the same time, but the sound quality is very high."

Mikami is right. High enough, in fact, that the sound of thunder crashing through the windows may make you want to play with the lights on — and the moan of an unseen zombie will make the hairs on the back of your neck prickle up.

The previewable version offered greater ambience, and a suspenseful score that wasn't even fully in place with the demo version we saw. Considering what little we've literally "heard" of PlayStation2 audio, we've no problem going on the record right now with the opinion that *Code Veronica* will be one of the best-sounding games of 2000, and it'll be available as soon as February.

We're of the opinion that *Code Veronica* will be one of the best-sounding games of 2000, and it'll be available as soon as February



■ With *Code Veronica*, you'll hear fire and rain — not exactly the James Taylor version, when you consider some of the fire is gunfire





■ We're not saying *The Bouncer* simulates the real world, but these character models and their realistic movement bring realism to PlayStation2, not unlike a good Hollywood action movie

The real deal

THE TECHNIQUE: **Graphic realism**
THE TECHNOLOGY: **PS2 graphics chip**
THE TITLE: ***The Bouncer***

Since the Atari 2600, every system introduced has lived and died by how many drool cups players filled when first observing its graphical power. Now, for the first time, systems have the power to bring dynamic human movement and realism to realtime gameplay. The 32-bit systems were great for providing realistic pre-rendered visuals, the topper probably being the waltz cut scene from *Final Fantasy VIII*. But now, as was recently proved at Tokyo Game Show, this type of animation can be achieved in

realtime. This is graphic realism — graphics and animation that bring realistic human models and real-world environments to games. Undoubtedly something that will change the way games are perceived by people the world over.

After last E3, no one questioned the fact that the most visually impressive titles on display were *Soul Calibur* and *Shenmue*, largely for their ability to bring human expression to realtime gameplay. As games introduce more realistic models and movement, they enter the realm of realtime cinematics. (You can't compare the intensity found in a final match of a *Soul Calibur* game to the final round of *Karate Champ*, can you?) Human characters are looking more human than ever, and the more human they look, the easier it is for us to identify with them. The more we identify with them, the more we want them to succeed — the more important it is for us to win. Perhaps, in the past, and even still today, gamers didn't need hyper-realistic graphics simply because they had the imagination and willingness to suspend reality when entering the game worlds. With more realism in graphics, hardcore gamers are not only more impressed, but casual and even non-gamers will take notice, and inevitably figure out what it is that they've been missing all along.

Bring on *The Bouncer*, Square's



■ Aside from some fantastic camera work and lighting, Square is using some motion blur and depth cueing effects to bring a rich cinematic flavor to the game

fighting adventure title for PlayStation2. Heck, it may not be much more than a highly-stylized version of *Double Dragon*. But given the visual realism of the characters, we're sure it will catch the eye of a few non-believers. From what little we've seen of *The Bouncer*, we can tell you we've been very impressed with the way the characters gracefully and dynamically interact with the urban environments that set the stage. Characters deftly leap over turnstiles, and fight on subway platforms with such realism the game is likely to see more comparisons to the classic gangland film *The Warriors* than to the classic Genesis brawler *Streets of Rage*. According to Square, the title will be ready in time for the PlayStation2 launch in Japan, on March 4.

A boom with a view

While games like *Munch's Oddysee*, *Shenmue*, and the other games featured in this piece are ones we believe will be real innovators this next year, plenty more are forthcoming. If you saw the November 1999 issue, you'll remember the feature on genre-busters that included such highly-anticipated titles such as *C&C Renegade*, *Deus Ex*, *Team Fortress 2*, and *Halo*, each of which makes some considerable advancements of its own. It's also highly likely that as soon as we put this issue to bed, we'll get wind of more remarkable PlayStation2 titles in the works that could have been included — and we still haven't seen exactly what LucasArts has up its sleeve with *Obi Wan*.

There's also the chance that any of these ambitious titles featured here, when finished, could end up with disappointing gameplay. We're betting this won't be the case, but even still, these games should stand as a testimony to innovation. While we may have panned *Trespasser* for its weak game design and useless interface, we still give it credit for its superb physics engine, which has inspired other designers to bring better physics models to their games. In fact, *Deus Ex*'s Warren Spector admitted as much to us 18 months ago at London's ECTS, while *Trespasser* was still in development.

And although most of these mind-blowing games seen here are scheduled to be released this year, it's highly likely one (or possibly several) of them will slip beyond the calendar year of 2000, simply because of the scope of the projects. Regardless, even if all these groundbreaking titles slip to 2001, these games will still have made their mark this year. Why? As we've just stated, developers and publishers are quick to take notice of titles that successfully evolve gameplay. (Remember all the C&C clones? Maybe not, but you remember games like *Total Annihilation* that advanced the genre.) Any honest developer will admit that their own ideas are often sparked by features, designs, and technologies, they've seen in other games — maybe at a tradeshow, or maybe in a game magazine. Hopefully, as you finish this article, you'll feel that it could be happening right now. — Tom Russo

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Dreamcast's just made it to a million units sold faster than any console in history. The big question on our mind is, of course...

What's next for Sega?

➔ Sega's launch in the US has been an unqualified success — breaking records as well as the company's internal projections. But with PlayStation2 on the horizon, how can Sega keep up its momentum? We talked with Sega's top man in the US, EVP of Marketing Peter Moore, about the sale, the games, and the future.

Next Generation: What was the actual day you hit a million?

Peter Moore: The Tuesday before Thanksgiving, so the 23rd. We got the TRST numbers on Monday, and by the afternoon it was clear from the data that we'd done it. It may have happened over the weekend, but it was Tuesday that we were sure.

Next Generation: And that's a million sold through to consumers, not just sold into stores?

Peter: Sold through! We only talk about sell through at Sega!

Next Generation: How does this fit with your projections?

Peter: Well, Bernie said before the launch that we'd hit 1.5 million by March 31, 2000, the end of our fiscal year. Now we're saying 1.5 million by December 31, and 2 million by March. And again, that's sold through. Quite frankly, we believe the real demand between launch and Christmas is in excess of 2 million units, but we simply couldn't catch up with production.

Next Generation: In the 32-bit era, the "critical mass" for success was a million units. What's critical mass today? Is it still a million?

Peter: No. I think it's multiple millions. That was then, and I think the industry, with thanks to our competitors, has broadened dramatically. We sold a million Saturns, so theoretically we hit critical mass, but I'm more of the feeling that it's the velocity that you hit certain milestones which is important and the momentum you build. But I think the industry has grown so dramatically that a million is no longer critical mass.

Next Generation: Five million? **Peter:** Five million is critical mass! I don't think anyone can turn their back on you, in any industry, if you're talking to 5 million dedicated consumers.

Next Generation: So, how many units do you need to sell to get EA to come to Dreamcast?

Peter: We don't know. We have a cordial relationship with EA, and we're in communication with EA. We're obviously, in some areas, particularly sports, big competitors. They're a great publisher, but you know what? They look at the business a bit differently. They weren't there for PlayStation at the get-go, they weren't there for Nintendo 64 at the get-go, and I think they have a sit-and-wait attitude, and that's fine. I think the onus is on us to actually deliver what they're waiting for, which is whatever


their version of a critical mass is, and that could be 2 million and that could be 3 million.

Next Generation: What about sales for next year? Will you hit 5 million?

Peter: We're committed to our 2 million sold through from March 31. Then we have to go to Japan and work on product planning for fiscal 01. You know what the variables are: it's *if* they launch, when they launch, at what price they launch, what momentum we've got, etc. We do a lot of research talking to consumers and saying: "If 'competitive platform' launches on 9/20 at \$299 and Dreamcast is available for \$199, Mr. Fence-sitter, where's your money?" So we're very bullish that if and when this thing launches, we'll have established a major beachhead in terms of installed base. Now obviously that's going to be millions. Millions upon millions. Exactly what we'll be able to add onto the two million we'll already have had from March 31, I don't know, but it could be anywhere from as low as 3 million to as high as 5 million.

Next Generation: Those kinds of sales mean you should be seeing some economies of scale in production. Can we expect a price drop for the next holiday season?

Five million is critical mass! I don't think anyone can turn their back on you if you're talking to 5 million dedicated consumers



Peter: In the history of the industry, price drops always seem to be strategic. If you have to, you have to, regardless of if you've achieved those price savings at the back end. If you have to drop the price for competitive reasons, then you have to drop the price. We will be where we need to be in relation to the competition through the next fiscal year.

Next Generation: With 1.5 million in sales through the holidays, you've definitely gotten back your core Sega buyer. What are the next steps for Sega? How do you fight against Sony now?

Peter: I think the content does that for you. Look, I can't believe there's one Sega loyalist who hasn't bought a Dreamcast yet. I see it like this — we've thrown the pebble in the pond, and we've got that first ring. Now I've got to fine-tune my marketing mix to not disenfranchise that first ripple — your readers and my core customers, but also to embrace that next ripple, whether it's the younger consumer or the more casual consumer. And I think content does that. When I look at what we have coming down the pike in Q1 — *Crazy Taxi*, I'm just really excited about that, and that will have a huge appeal. *Code Veronica* will add a different group, the *Resident Evil* fans. Anytime we add a separate sports title, you bring in a new core, and *NHL* will do that — and *NHL* is looking fabulous. So it's like biting off bits of the apple. And the content we'll provide over the next 60 days, both *Space Channel 5* and *Jet Set Radio*, is just amazing. The real ace in the hole for us will be the successful launch of the Dreamcast Network, hopefully prior to the launch of PlayStation2. They decided to sit out the narrowband era. We think, quite frankly, that he who builds the community during

narrowband has the competitive advantage during the leap to broadband.

Next Generation: The product mix so far has been good, but where are the RPGs?
Peter: Depends on your definition of what *Shenmue* is. Yu Suzuki has eight words for it all in a row — action/adventure/RPG/forklift driving... There's *Climax Landers*. There are a number of things in the pipeline right now, but *Time Stalkers* will be our first RPG. I don't think in all honesty that answers the question of what your readers want to hear about RPGs. And we recognize that. If we could trade five racing games for an RPG, we would! These questions are not falling on deaf ears. For me, though, *Shenmue* has everything those guys are looking for, and more.

Next Generation: Sega of Japan has announced that it's breaking product development into several independent companies. What are the implications for Sega of America?

Peter: If you read the press

release, everything they are doing makes a lot of sense. It's difficult to have real accountability in a big company, and with Sega, you had a huge company of 2000 people all in this big lump. Mistakes and laxness and inability to hit milestones are always covered up the more bureaucratic the company becomes. The idea was to cut through a lot of the bureaucracy, and make these teams accountable for P&L and for delivering great content. In the old days, if you had a miss, but Naka had a hit with *Chu Chu Rocket* or whatever, then somewhere you're covered. Well now, you're naked and exposed in this situation. Certainly the Tokyo Stock Exchange liked

the decision — our stock doubled in six weeks, even though we announced a major loss. From our perspective here, I agree with it, because all I want is a great game. That's the only deliverable I care about on this side of the Pacific Ocean — where are the games? **NextGen**

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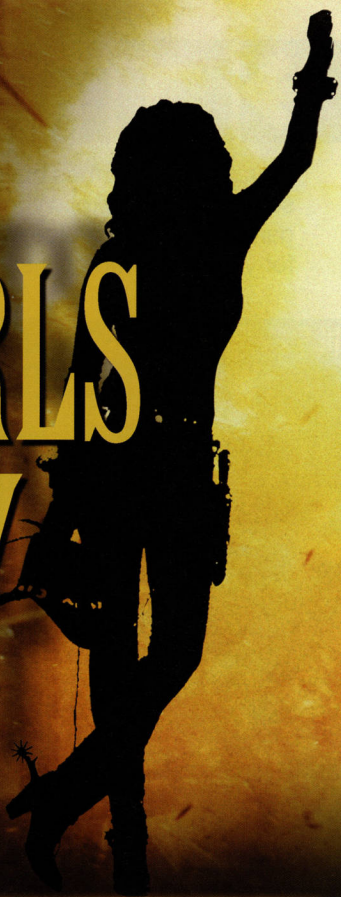


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→ Finals

Morals: some games have 'em (*Ultima*), some don't (*Quake*). Whether you like your games naughty or nice, there's something for you in this month's section



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■ While *Quake III Arena* retains the same weapons as previous incarnations, they are more balanced than ever and add variety to the previously rocket-launcher-heavy gameplay



■ Many of the new levels are huge outdoor arenas with floating platforms and plenty of bounce pads to propel yourself off of



■ PC

Quake III Arena



■ Publisher: **Id Software** ■ Developer: **Id Software**

Wipe them out. All of them.



Quake III is a technological behemoth: an engine that can trample over most others without even blinking. Gorgeous lighting, curved surfaces, and hair-trigger controls are all pieces of what is essentially the world's most optimized PC game platform. As the old adage goes, however, it's

not the tool, but what you do with it (or something like that). That brings us down to the retail version of *Quake III Arena* — a game that has had PC owners slaving for the last two years. It's now at a store near you, waiting eagerly to be adopted into a loving home.

Don't be fooled, though: *Quake III Arena* isn't for

everybody. This time around, Id has decided to forego the single-player game and instead develop for an all-multiplayer audience. The included single-player mode

is best considered a tutorial for newcomers to the genre, and while you do face off against some of the nastiest bots this side of the universe (especially on the

THE REAL QUAKE

Experts agree that Northern California is due for a major earthquake. However, according to maps provided to us by the USGS, Next Generation's offices are built on bedrock — so even though the building shakes when a truck goes by, we'll still be able to publish after "the big one." Assuming we have power, of course . . .

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The Rating System

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

★★★★★ **Revolutionary**

★★★★ **Excellent**

★★★☆☆ **Good**

★★☆☆☆ **Fair**

★☆☆☆☆ **Bad**

● Denotes a review of a Japanese product

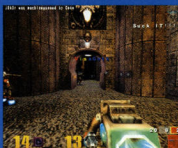
top two difficulty levels), blowing away CPU opponents isn't nearly as much fun — or rewarding — as playing over the net. Plus, the bots sound horribly dumb when they speak to you. At least the taunts in *Unreal Tournament* had some bite to them.

Get online or on a LAN and there's good news — this, without a shadow of a doubt, the most intense deathmatching experience ever delivered. The speed has been upped, the weapons have been balanced better than before (although they're still not *quite* perfect), the control is as tuned as it gets, and the inclusion of dozens of different game models (all with their own animations) and skins enables you to personalize your character right out of the box. The maps you fight on, however, are a mixed bag. While most are loads of fun to play, and balanced very well for deathmatch (including areas in most suited to many different styles of play) some are just so abstract you feel

like you're playing in something out of the mind of M.C. Escher. Also, the whole "look, it's a space dungeon" feel is getting old.

So is it fun? Well, if you're craving deathmatch, then hell yes. Four fantastic Capture the Flag maps have also been included (the final one is the clear winner), and they add some much-needed variety to the mix. Unfortunately, those still stuck at home with 56k modems or slower will feel cheated when playing against lower-ping players with more bandwidth — the game is still playable for these players, but it's not exactly tuned in their favor.

Still, we know that, as a platform, *Quake III* is still the most essential piece of software you can buy this year, and one star of our score is given based on our certainty that amazing mods will soon be available for *Quake III*. By the time *Quake IV* rolls around, we don't doubt that this game will still be



■ Many levels are downright bizarre and unrealistic, but well balanced for fighting



installed on your hard drive and still getting loads of play due to its ease of modification. Id has given players the power to create new and wonderful things; in the meantime, the company provided some diversionary effort in the way of

fun deathmatch maps. In six months, don't be surprised if you see servers offering every kind of first-person multiplayer you've ever heard of, and some you haven't. Hopefully, by then you'll also have that cable modem. — Blake Fischer

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: The best deathmatch yet. Period. End of story. If you want single-player or a storyline, buy *Half-Life*. If you want great DM and near-infinite expandability, *Quake III* is the best in the business.



■ Oooh, a space dungeon! We bet the level designers had to wrack their brains to come up with this unique level design theme (for at least 30 seconds)

This is, without a shadow of a doubt, the most intense deathmatching experience ever



Centipede

Platform: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Hasbro** Developer: **Leaping Lizard**



Centipede evolves into 3D, but this isn't much better than the PlayStation or PC versions

Already available on PC, Centipede is essentially a 3D update of the classic shooter. You now have the ability to move around the complete playfield, and you can rotate your craft 360 degrees. Multiple weapon upgrades are available to the player, and levels are now

mission based. There's even a storyline. You still have to defeat the evil bugs, but you also have to protect villages and rescue stray civilians.

Centipede suffers in part due to the full 360-degree playfield. While it looks great in first person, to actually play it you need to be zoomed out, which is frustrating. Also, the game suffers from a lack of variety. After the first five or ten levels have passed by, you get the distinct feeling that you've seen it all before, although

that may be part of the design's core limitations.

As a bonus, the classic arcade version of the game is included on the disc, and we spent more time with the original Centipede than with the updated version.

We're all for updates of old classics, but the updates need to add something to the gameplay. So, does Centipede pass muster? Barely. On its own, it would get two stars, but the addition of Ed Logg's classic bumps it up to three. — Adam Pavlata



Bottom Line: Centipede may look good in 3D, but the classic version of the game is still more fun.

WWF Attitude

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



Wow, an armbar! This is as exciting as it gets, folks

A hastily ported PlayStation title, what was a half-hearted attempt to represent the chaos and over-the-top antics of the WWF on PSX is an embarrassment on Dreamcast. Although the graphics are hi-res now, the wrestlers still move and act like robots, displaying neither joy at a

win nor pain from a powerbomb. An annoying power meter governs when finishers can be performed and all of a wrestler's moves involve a fighting-game-style memorization of combos.

The roster, fairly current when the original came out in August, is now hopelessly out of date. Sable, who has since left and sued the WWF, is featured prominently in the opening movie, and the presence of superstars like Dr. Death, who has since been fired,

and Owen Hart, who was killed in a tragic accident this summer, just seems awkward.

Even more awkward are the dozen or so modes of play, which all feel the same. Bad. The Career mode is a thinly disguised ladder climb, and the Tank mode is all but unplayable thanks to a complete lack of partner AI. If you pin someone in your own corner, his partner runs to kick the tar out of you while yours does nothing. — Daniel Erickson



Bottom Line: A pathetic port — the only reason this game gets one star is that the jewel case was reusable.

Chef's Luv Shack

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



As trivia games go, it gets the job done, but even South Park fans are likely to get tired of Luv Shack

Every once in a great while, there is a need for the hardcore to have a party game around their home for their less-skilled guests. Chef's Luv Shack attempts to fill this niche by combining a light trivia game with some classic

arcade gameplay. The result is an equally mixed bag.

If you can sit through the terrible, terrible load times, the game is pretty fun. It's set up in a You Don't Know Jack fashion with funny categories and questions based on both real-world trivia and the world of South Park. Between rounds of questions, everybody has to play a classic arcade game re-tooled for the South Park universe. For

example, "Bad Kitty" is Donkey Kong with Cartman at the top while you control the kitty trying to get close to him. It's light-hearted but not especially deep.

Overall, however, unless you're a hardcore South Park fan desperate for trivia, there's not much meat here, and you probably won't be able to sit through the load times (which seem to add 30 seconds to every button press). — Blake Fischer



Bottom line: If you've already burned out on YDKJ, and you need some more game-show lovin', this is your only option, so you're stuck

Dreamcast

Armada

Platform: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Metro3D** Developer: **Metro3D**

RPG + Shooter = Shooter



It's not bad as a one-player shooter-RPG, but this really shines when a few friends join in

A steroid-fueled Asteroids for the Sega Dreamcast, Armada serves as a pointed reminder of what could have been. Built around the notion that players would love to shoot it out in epic Internet multiplayer battles, Armada offers everything an online game should — tight control (taken from a certain Atari classic), simple interface, and engaging play — without, unfortunately, any sort of network option.

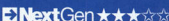
One to four armchair Captain Kirks get to step into Armada's universe, taking to the unfriendly depths of outer space as one of six races, each with its own ship design and inclination toward space battle. Having selected, players engage in frantic 2D space- and planet-based engagements, collect space credits and experience points, buy ship upgrades, and perform various missions against the evil Armada.

Space dust chokes the

outer space environments, and during battle, the various lasers, missiles, floating debris, etc., make determining what's going on an exercise in futility.

Although the game stakes a claim to being a strategic sort of RPG, this notion rockets out the window when enemy ships start swarming with overwhelming numbers, and battle becomes strictly flight, or croak. Death, in fact, is so commonplace in Armada that the game doesn't punish players for it, but instead sends deceased characters back home hale and hearty and with all their ship improvements intact. Although the game works fine as an RPG-lite, its rather straightforward play and endless blow-'em-all-up nature remains a sticking point. The multiplayer mode, however, even sans a split-screen or competitive play option, boosts Armada's appeal immeasurably.

— Greg Orlando



Bottom Line: As a solitary experience, Armada's RPG elements make the game worth a look — and maybe a second one, too. These unfriendly skies (and galaxies), however, are really meant to be traversed in the company of others.

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An evil curse has fallen on the kingdom of Gomar, turning it's inhabitants into vicious creatures. A fearless warrior, female spy and powerful wizard have escaped the fate of their fellow villagers. They must now search for and capture souls in order to reverse the curse.

GAME FEATURES:

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- ▶ Choice of 3 heroes, each with their own set of weapons and fighting style
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- ▶ Attempt to defeat 5 brutally fierce Bosses



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Sega Dreamcast.



Hydro Thunder

Platform: **N64** Publisher: **Midway** Developer: **Atari**



Midway/Atari does out-of-control racing like no one else

This is a near-perfect N64 translation of Midway's awesome arcade racer. The sensation of speed is fully intact as you pilot one of 13 blazing-fast watercraft locations including a crumbling Egyptian temple, a ship graveyard, and New York City after a volcanic eruption. The

framerate is smooth, and the physics model excellent.

Unfortunately, it doesn't have anything beyond the arcade version: once you unlock the extra tracks and boats, that's it. Even the simplest of features that would benefit the home user (ahem: pause button) has been neglected. At the end of the race, you're returned to the title screen and forced to re-choose your track and boat, whether you want to or not.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Even without two-player, this is still a really fun game, though still a bit, um, shallow.

The game lacks even a two-player mode, and our version contained a few glitches: some tracks were misidentified on the selection screen, engine noise sometimes cut out when the boosters shut down, and an intermittent crash-bug surfaced in a sharp corner on the Lost Island track. *Hydro Thunder* is still a blast to play! But this version offers nothing new or different, and its longevity suffers accordingly. —Eric Bratcher

In the Zone 2000

Platform: **N64** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **Konami**



It's not just ugly, it plays bad too. Stay away.

If we followed the credo of "if you don't have anything nice to say, then don't say anything at all," this review would already be over. In *In the Zone 2000* is simply a travesty of a basketball game.

While not quite as blurry as in last year's version, the graphics are still miles behind

the times, with extremely pixelated players and amateurish animations. They run as if their legs are tied together with rope, and it's laugh-out-loud funny to see your player moon-walking as you try to get back on defense. There are so few frames in the dunk animations that it looks more like a slide show than any attempt at portraying fluid movement.

If you can get past the dated look of the game, you'll find the

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: This game manages to eke out a score of one star only because our rating system doesn't go any lower.

gameplay to be heinous. The controls are unresponsive and the CPU players run around like headless chickens. Players fatigue quite quickly, and take forever to recover their stamina, so for most of the game you'll have a team on the floor where every player would come in third in a race with a turtle and a slug.

In *In the Zone 2000* has absolutely no redeeming features, and should be avoided at all costs. —Rob Smoka

Armories: Project S.W.A.R.M.

Platform: **N64** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Acclaim**



Armories is a good idea, but something went horribly wrong

If war is hell, *Armories* is some kind of hideous sub-hell. An FPS based on the *Turok 2* engine, it attempts to re-create the bug-blasting freneticism of *Starship Troopers*, but comes closer to re-creating the feeling of a blow to the head with a blunt object.

Blunt Object #1: Lackluster graphics. The game's high-res mode, enabled by the N64 Ram Pack, goes to waste in level after level plastered with dull, repeating textures. (That said, the bug models are well designed and animated.)

Blunt Object #2: Uninspired gameplay. Levels are linear blast-fests, of the push-the-button-to-open-the-door variety. Interspersed are a few on-rails

shooting sections, which seem oddly misplaced in an otherwise typical FPS. Weapon selection is unintuitive, and the weapons are barely differentiated.

To its credit, *Armories* features a two-player co-op mode. In this mode, two players fight through the single-player game as a team. However, after the novelty of split screen has worn off, there's still not much to like here. —Matt Sammons

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

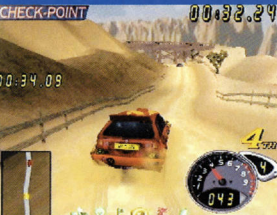
Bottom Line: *Armories* is a great step backward from *Turok 2*. If you're desperate to kill bugs, buy a can of Raid instead.

■ Nintendo 64

Top Gear Rally 2

■ Publisher: **Kemco** ■ Developer: **Saffire**

This is Nintendo 64 rally racing like it should be



There is almost no draw-in in the game, and Saffire has managed to get an impressive feeling of speed from N64

→ We weren't sure what

to expect when we heard Boss wasn't developing this, but we're pleased to report that *Top Gear Rally 2* is an unassuming, but remarkably fun, racing game. You start off the single-player game by going through the ARSG Rally School, where you'll learn the basics of rally racing, like driving forward and hitting the brakes, and eventually have to pass final tests that are far more challenging.

Once training is out of the way, the rally races start, with each leg of the track raced separately at different times of the day. As you go through each section of the race, however, you earn money from sponsors that can be used to upgrade a variety of components on the cars, from suspension to different tires. These adjustments are necessary later in the game, since the physics engine is so precise, even having the wrong tires can mean defeat. This may frustrate some casual



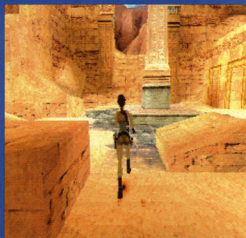
This is a serious challenge to the gameplay of *Sega Rally*



players, but the bottom line is that the realistic physics make the game incredibly fun to play, and as a race continues, damage to the vehicles affects performance on the track. Blow your rear drive train, and you can kiss first place goodbye. Luckily cars can be repaired between legs of the race, but this costs money and time, which may mean a penalty in the next leg. Very fun. —Mike Wolf

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: With 15 cars to choose from, realistic weather conditions that actually affect car handling, a paint shop for customization, shortcuts to find and exploit, and multiplayer support for as many as four players, this game is a must-have for any N64 racing fan.



■ While the return to the classic tombs and catacombs is certainly welcome, this latest *Tomb Raider* provides little innovation over the previous titles

■ PlayStation

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Core Design

Eidos tries to restore *Tomb Raider* to its former glory



Over the past couple of years, the *Tomb Raider* series has strayed from what made the original so good (raiding tombs). Fortunately, with the release of the third sequel, the ever-popular franchise has partially returned to its former glory. *The Last Revelation* has a lot in common with the original game. Exploration has returned, the game is confined mostly to murky tombs and catacombs

(although the green and grey color palettes of the first game have been replaced with tan and brown Egyptian motifs), and the suspenseful "when is something going to jump out" gameplay has returned as well. Puzzles have also been redesigned — forget running around for miles, because everything you need to solve a puzzle is always close at hand.

Despite these welcome improvements, though, there are

■ Swimming plays a much smaller role in *Last Revelation*, but you will still have to get your feet wet from time to time



Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation?

Eidos isn't calling this *Tomb Raider 4* because, allegedly, Core is maintaining that this is the last *Tomb Raider*. Right. Like the 707 was Boeing's last jet, or Apollo 10 wrapped it up for NASA. Not even Eidos seems to take this claim seriously — while it's been played up in the English press, no one we spoke about it in the US would even pretend that this is Lara's last outing.

still frustrations here that Core has yet to address. What's worse, all these bad elements present themselves within the first hour or so of playing. The camera still gets in the way and there are many instances when you won't be able to see below you while hanging from an enclosed ledge, forcing numerous "drops of faith," which sometimes end up being drops of death.

And graphically, the engine is really showing its age. The environments still feature tons of clipping, and textures often just look horrible. Even Lara's character model seems to have taken a turn for the worse — and the "young Lara" in training is

simply butt-ugly.

Part of the problem may be Eidos' desire to ship a new *Tomb Raider* every year — even with multiple teams, the game ends up feeling rushed, and even this year's improvements do little to move ahead the genre. What was once a groundbreaking game is now just a few steps away from mediocrity.

While *Last Revelation* does manage to capture the look and feel of the original game, it ends dangerously close to being too little too late. We can only hope that the young adventurer's first title on the forthcoming PS2 ends up being a lot more innovative. — Stephen Frost

ENextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: If this was the first sequel, we'd be impressed. As it is, we're barely satisfied.

Tomorrow Never Dies

Platform: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **MGM Interactive**



Although the concept is nice, *Tomorrow Never Dies* is too little, too late. This is no *GoldenEye*.

After the success of *GoldenEye*, MGM decided to keep the Bond license for *Tomorrow Never Dies* close at hand. Unfortunately, this is no *GoldenEye*.

GoldenEye succeeded in part because in order to win the game, you had to think like Bond and you had to act like Bond. You

couldn't simply run around shooting things like a madman if you expected to get anywhere. In *Tomorrow Never Dies*, it's possible to play the game as a Rambo super-agent, running in with guns blazing, and still win. For a Bond game, this is totally wrong.

Other problems include length and difficulty. The game is a measly ten levels and presents so little of a challenge that it can be beaten in an overnight rental. An average level will take 15 minutes or less to complete. Control with the

digital pad is decent, but the analog pad is way too jittery. Bond has a tendency to stick on walls, and he has a complete inability to aim his gun — if the levels weren't so short, this would be unplayably frustrating.

There's nothing new here, but the run-of-the-mill. If you're a tried-and-true Bond fan, *Tomorrow Never Dies* is almost worth a rental. Then again, you could always just rent the movie instead. You'd probably have more fun. — Adam Pavlaka

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Take away the Bond license, and what's left is a very basic third-person shooter with little innovation.

Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon 2

Platform: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Square** Developer: **Square**



OK, you're a chicken. Get past that, and the game is really fun.

Just as Square is pushing the definition of what an RPG is with the *Final Fantasy* series, it's remaining true to the genre's ancient roots with *Dungeon*. This is role-playing at its most basic: explore randomly generated dungeons, kill enemies, collect treasure, level-up, and find the

next staircase down.

Of course, this is Square, so the ASCII warriors of *Rogue* have been replaced by the company's trademark super-deformed characters. Chocobo is the hero, but he leads around a succession of sidekicks through the game.

In addition to spells, there are magic items to pick up (like cards that reveal the level's map), food, secret floor panels that either offer a small enhancement

(invisibility) or curse (disappearing maps), and a few more tidbits.

Overall, the game never really challenges anything beyond the primitive gamer's brain on NES or 2600, but that isn't necessarily a bad thing. There's a reason *dungeon crawlers* are so compelling, and with today's interactive movie-style RPGs, it's sometimes nice to go back to the origins of the genre. — Chris Charlta

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom line: If you're looking for something new, look elsewhere. If you're looking for something classic done with more advanced graphics, you've found it.

Warpath: Jurassic Park

Platform: **PlayStation** Publisher: **EA** Developer: **DreamWorks**



Warpath features one of the worst fighting engines out there — almost as bad as *Rise of the Robots*. **Abused**

Every once in a while, we have to wonder if publishers and developers actually play the games they're releasing. Ostensibly a fighting game, *Warpath* takes the premise of dinosaurs duking it out and runs with

it. The problem is, it doesn't actually run very far. This isn't a fighting game, it's just a pointless button-mashing exercise.

Worse, the size of the dinos has been wildly altered. Instead of giving each reptile advantages and disadvantages based on their size and weight, the developers simply made all of them roughly the same size. A T-Rex should not be the same size as a raptor. This may have solved a few design problems, but it doesn't

make the game terribly interesting — many of the critters just plain look alike.

DreamWorks did include a small "educational" section of the disc covering the history of the dinosaurs involved. It's amusing, but nothing more, and we doubt most folks will even give it a second look. If you want a fighting game featuring dinosaurs, go dig up a copy of *Primal Rage*. It was much better than *Warpath* will ever be. — Adam Pavlaka

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: History has shown that the *Jurassic Park* license spells doom for any game it touches, and *Warpath* is no exception.

PlayStation

NBA Live 2000

Publisher: **EA Sports** Developer: **NuFX**

EA delivers another slam-dunk hoops title



PlayStation is looking older every minute, but that doesn't mean you can't still have fun with a well-done title like this.

No one can accuse EA Sports of resting on its laurels with this year's version of the long-running *NBA Live* series. It's good-looking, feature-rich, and the gameplay has been fine-tuned to deliver a very respectable facsimile of the sport of basketball.

What benefits the on-court play of *NBA Live 2000* the most is the giant stride the EA has taken. The CPU-controlled players now have a real understanding of the finer points of offense and defense, and those unfettered, turbo-charged trips through the lane for a dunk have become a thing of the past. Competing and winning on the higher difficulty levels requires you to move the ball, find the open man, and concentrate on the defensive end.

Complementing the vastly improved gameplay is the inclusion of 60 legends of the game from the 1950s to the 1990s, including

Michael Jordan. The new One-on-One mode lets you pair up any two players for a street-court scuffle. In order to play as Jordan, though, you'll need to beat him first. Similarly, unlocking the legends for use in all modes of the game requires you to complete certain requirements, some of which can be quite difficult (i.e., winning a championship on the higher difficulty settings).

One of the few complaints is with the new Franchise mode. You can guide your team through 10 seasons, but the lack of a rookie draft means the rosters remain pretty static, although this is tempered somewhat by the fact that you can create players and add unlocked legends to the squads.

It may not have the looks of *NBA 2K*, but the gameplay here is as solid as you could ever hope for. Excellent. — Rob Smolka

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This is as good as a basketball game gets on PlayStation.

■ PlayStation

Silhouette Mirage

■ Publisher: Working Designs ■ Developer: Treasure/ESP

From the platform to the edge of sanity...



■ OK, we know Japanese software can be weird, but this is like, really weird. Cool, but weird

→ A two-dimensional drug trip, *Silhouette Mirage* stands as a monument to the Land of the Rising Sun, where game developers slam together every bizarre notion they've ever had and then ship it off as entertainment. *Mirage*, a platformer that saw action on the dearly departed Sega Saturn, takes a turn on PlayStation, complete with new tweaks and analog control.

Expect to choke on the game's saccharine-sweet, anime-style heroine Shyna Nera Shyna as she plows her way through seven competently rendered 2D worlds, plunking away at hordes of frowning green apple men, cute little girls, and — we are not making this up — giant killer florists. Shyna controls parasite weapons that can be shot into various destructive forms, and utilizes two forms of energy, "Silhouette" and "Mirage."

Depending on the bent of her enemies and the energy type she uses, Shyna can alternately reflect energy-based attacks, steal power from, or kill, her foes. Up close and personal, our heroine can bash her foes so they spit coins and even employ a series of non-damaging tosses and throws.

Brightly colored and chock full of weirdness (one battle requires Shyna to push enemies into soup), this inspires naught but goofy grins which aren't easily displaced. Sure, the game reeks of oversaturated cuteness, and adheres firmly to the annoying school of thought that says the characters should announce the name of their move every time they perform it (Shyna's mind-shriving tendency to bark into "Reflector!" may induce psychotic behavior), but it's all in exceedingly good fun. — Greg Orlando

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom line: Befuddled baseball player Richie Ashburn once quipped, "I don't know what it is, but I know I've never seen it before." He might as well have said it while jamming away on the eminently quirky and playable *Silhouette Mirage*.

Fighting Force 2

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Core

We'll be the first to admit that *Fighting Force 2* was clearly intended to rectify many of the problems that we had with the original, a pure beat-'em-up with few frills. The game design is far stronger; the graphics are far better; and the gameplay features much more variety. However, in making this giant leap between sequels, it looks like Core has still stumbled in creating a compelling experience — despite the sheer amount of content.

We just can't shake the feeling that the game isn't finished. The engine is solid, and you can control your main character just fine as you beat the heck out of

thugs, or take them out with the large variety of weapons scattered around each level — but that's all there is. The storyline never enters more than the periphery of the player's vision, and it certainly doesn't affect gameplay at all. The best you can hope for are glimpses of what the story was supposed to be like in the quick intro movies before each level (which includes nothing) or the long interludes of scrolling text.



■ Everything looks and plays better, but there's still no real motivation for all the fighting

It's better, but without some reason for the fighting, we're still not satisfied. — Blake Fischer

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom line: Solid, but ultimately uninspiring. You'll burn out on this game long before you beat it.

Pong

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Hasbro ■ Developer: Supersonic

At first glance, *Pong* appears to be nothing more than some good, dumb fun. And actually, it is nothing more than good dumb fun. At the heart of the game, *Pong* still remains faithful to the 1970s original that inspired it. Basically, all you do is control the paddle at one end and reflect the ball back at your opponent. To keep things interesting, the folks at Hasbro have designed several different variations. One round may have you dodging monkeys in the middle of the board, and another may have you playing a two-paddle soccer variant. Some variants are really out there, too (like *Pong* fishing).

Still, at its core, the game remains just as addictive as the original game, which still manages to captivate the NG staff whenever it gets played (after all, we can even beat Nolan Bushnell at the original).

There are a few control issues that get in the way of this being perfect — the DualShock is no paddle controller — but, other than that, that's the game's a blast. While it's not going to replace *Tony Hawk* or *Metal of Honor* on



■ Yes, it's Pong. Yes, we liked it. Wanna make something of it?

your must-have list, if you give this game a try, don't be surprised if you find yourself pleasantly hooked. — Blake Fischer

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Good dumb fun that will keep you hooked for hours at a time. Just don't tell anybody.

Wu-Tang: Shaolin Style

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Paradox

This may be the Dr. Frankenstein of fighting games. Built around the solid *Thrill Kill* fighting engine, it has Tekken-like controls, *Mortal Kombat*-style fatalities, and a story mode first found in *Soul Edge*. Does it work? Yep. The game is quite fun and stands on its own as a quality fighting game.

In the story mode, you take control of one of the nine members of Wu-Tang in an attempt to rescue your sense. The cut scenes are remarkably well done, and the music, which includes three exclusive tracks from the band, is ideally suited for cracking heads. Each of the nine characters needs to finish the game and meet certain goals

to open up all the extra characters, costumes, and other bonuses. Beware, though: the single-player mode is insanely difficult, and will likely frustrate anyone but the most seasoned fighting veteran.

Characters are detailed (although arenas are a bit bland), and there are other nice touches, like more than 50 fatalities and a cool *Matrix*-like freeze-frame pan during the final hit in a fight. Although this won't



■ Hey, that looks like *Thrill Kill*. Wait a minute...

win any points for originality, fans of either hardcore fighting games or Wu-Tang should find it thrilling. — Jim Preston

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A decent fighting engine, a great soundtrack, and a little ultra-violence are sewn up into a very respectable game.




■ The monsters of *Ultima: Ascension* are as beautiful and varied as in any game ever released. Each requires equal parts strategy and skill to defeat

■ PC

Ultima IX: Ascension

■ Publisher: **Origin** ■ Developer: **Origin**

Oh so far, and yet, so very, very near

 This wasn't supposed to happen, right? A game takes over four years in development, and it's bound to completely suck. They almost invariably do. It's a rule.

Guess some rules were meant to be broken.

One thing, just for the record: the signs this has been in development for ages are, on a

technological level, all too obvious. First, there's a variable quality to the 3D models and textures, so for everything that's almost breathtakingly detailed, there's something that's smeared and blocky sitting right next to it — and we mean *right* next to it.

There's also the odd time while accessing the next bit of data on the disc that practically grinds

DRAGON EDITION

In stark contrast to the usual oversized PC packaging is the amazing *Dragon Edition* of *Ascension* packed in an oversized box is a 16-inch cloth map of Britannia, Virtue tarot cards, leather-bound manuals and spellbooks, a soundtrack CD, a metal Arkh pendant, a small poster, and *Ultima: I-III* on CD. It's well worth the extra \$15.

■ The Guardian has stolen the virtues from the land, so everyone you meet will act accordingly evil



■ Old *Ultima* standbys like the hot air balloon are back again, this time in 3D





■ Bandits roam the countryside looking for innocent people like you to loot

everything to a halt. Last (and worst), while *Ultima IX* runs just fine under 3Dfx and Glide (doubtless the best, most natural option back when this engine was being tuned), the Direct3D renderer was clearly tacked on, yielding a hideous, unpredictable framerate that makes it a sheer frustration to play at times for anyone with a TNT2 or GeForce.

Thing is, after a surprisingly short time playing, all this begins to really not matter.

Ultima IX, the last of Richard Garriott's seminal and long-running RPG series, is easily the deepest, most fully realized

entry in its history. Maybe he and everyone else at Origin learned something from the painful birthing process of *Ultima Online* — or maybe they just had so long to think about it, they could simply keep packing things in. Doesn't matter. The result is the same. *Ultima IX* is as close to an interactive masterpiece as it's possible to find.

This really is the be-all and end-all of a completely realized, classical RPG world. Practically everyone you stop to talk to has their own story to tell (and their own crisis that you alone can solve — hey, who said it was



■ The game's camera is incredibly well done. It just always seems to be in exactly the right place, a welcome advance to the third-person genre

easy being the hero?). There's definitely a main plotline to follow, but it's just as possible to spend hours following the myriad sub-quests that are everywhere, each of which is nearly as compelling as the last. However, despite the vaguely adventure-game-ish trappings imposed by the 3D environment, make no mistake — the only real puzzle to solve here is how much you want to accomplish, how many "smaller" lives you want to touch. Even stranger, you get the oddest sense of satisfaction helping out everyone you come across.

See, it's relatively simple (although voraciously time-

consuming) to get through this game, but it's difficult to do it exactly *right*. Which brings up the most interesting point: like every entry in the *Ultima* series, *Ascension* has a definite moral center, a way of looking at its own world that rewards the particular path of righteousness that you have to consciously choose at the beginning. Britannia is a big, big place, full of both opportunity and temptation. As you begin your quest to "reclaim the virtues," you need to realize this means more than lip service. You have to actually *play* a role — no one else is going to do it for you.

— Jeff Lundrigan



■ Britannia is teeming with life — It's the closest anyone has come to a virtual world. Unfortunately, it's sometimes marred by chugging framerates and freezes



ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: The best PC RPG ever made. Poor performance costs a star, but here — ★ — add this to the rating after EA patches it up some.



■ Diplomatic relations play a large role in *Age of Wonders*. Break a treaty! Declare war! The choice is yours — as are the consequences

Similar in many ways to games like *Master of Magic*, *Warlords* and New World Computing's *Heroes* series, *Age of Wonders* doesn't break a lot of new ground in fantasy turn-based gaming, but it does bring the best elements from all these games together in one truly amazing package.

AoW has a deep storyline, and unlike a lot of games in the genre, this one's a real grabber. At the beginning of the single-player mode, you can choose to be on either side of the Light Elf/Dark Elf conflict, following the path of peace or the path of destruction. This greatly extends the life of the single-player game since both sides play out differently and utilize a different combination of the game's 12 races. And while a random map generator would have extended the game's life even further, *AoW* does ship with an editor



■ Cities are where you build up forces

■ PC

Age of Wonders

■ Publisher: **GT Interactive** ■ Developer: **Triumph Studios/G.o.D.**

Triumph Studios finally finishes its masterpiece

that enables you to make your own maps; it also includes a plethora of ready-made maps ready to go right out of the box.

True to its roots, *AoW* puts you in control of various heroes that can gain power, weapons, and artifacts over time, but as a nice change of pace, non-hero characters can also be grouped together in stacks and can then traverse the land on their own. Plus, regardless of your affiliation (good or evil), you'll eventually have access to over a hundred beautifully rendered spells covering eight disciplines.

Games can be played in either standard turn-based mode, or a simultaneous mode (a feature that we hope will be adopted in all games of this ilk going forward) in which all players move at the same time.

Either way, Triumph has delivered a turn-based (or simultaneous, see sidebar) masterpiece. — *Greg Vederman*

AGE OF CHOICE

In *AoW*, battles can be fought in tactical mode where you've got control over each unit (below), or in an automatic mode where the computer "rolls the dice" and leads your forces into battle for you (similar to the *Warlords* series).



ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: *Age of Wonders* stands tall as one of the best games of the year. So, unless you're big on self-deprivation, go out and purchase this right now!

■ PC

SWAT 3

■ Publisher: Sierra ■ Developer: Sierra

Sierra SWATs down the competition in the squad-based action genre



■ This is squad-based combat (and brinkmanship) at its white-knuckled finest

→ With *SWAT 3*, Sierra has done something that *Red Storm* singularly failed to do: take a long, hard look at what made *Rainbow Six* a great game and improve upon it.

At the end of the day, *Rogue Spear* just continues the simplistic theme of "go in, shoot everyone, get out." *SWAT 3* takes the genre to another level. And the reason can be summed up in a single expression: AI. Your teammates won't shoot you. They won't block you in. They clear rooms on their own, slicing the pie. They will return fire when fired upon. They can take down terrorists and secure hostages unaided. And then they'll report back to you and tell you what they've done. In short, watching your element team go to work in *SWAT 3* is a bloody marvel. More complex than both *Rogue*

Spear and *DF2*, in *SWAT 3* you have proper interaction with NPCs: innocents scream when frightened, hostages whimper when rescued, terrorists quip sarcastically as you cuff them. Missions are lifelike representations of real SWAT activity — which is to say that you're most successful when you complete them without a shot being fired.

Occasionally, of course, you'll take out some guy waving a gun around at you, but it does mean that gamers looking for the more visceral action of *Quake* and its cronies may be disappointed. On the flip side, however, this allows for much more variety in the takedown, something that is vastly enhanced by the fact that hostages, terrorists, and your men react differently in every run of the same scenario. — Max Everingham

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: *SWAT 3* offers a superb gaming experience. *Red Storm* may play the realism ticket, but Sierra is the one to have nailed it.

Sim Theme Park

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: Bullfrog

The long-awaited sequel to Peter Molyneux's brilliant amusement park simulator, this takes

everything that the original did right then adds a 3D world, easier controls, and a less buggy interface. Bullfrog also thankfully removed the more tedious aspects of the original (namely buying land and trading stock).

Players maintain every aspect of a park, from the amount of fit in the burgers to the speed of the Tilt-a-Whirl. There are four different themes to choose from, giving massive replay value. Random challenges from the computer and the need to earn golden tickets for great feats (like

building the tallest coaster) in order to unlock new rides and parks, provides more goals.

There are as many variables for the coasters as in *Roller Coaster Tycoon*, but the parks are more creative and detailed. Each theme has its own strengths and weaknesses, and trying to build a park that runs smoothly is incredibly challenging. As in the original, players are responsible for hiring staff, managing ticket prices, and cleaning up an



■ Fountains make your park more beautiful, which encourages guests to stay

astounding amount of vomit. This is one fun ride (pun definitely intended). — Daniel Erickson

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Hardcore sim fans might miss having to trade stocks and manage land grants, but everyone else is in for a treat.

Delta Force 2

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Novologic ■ Developer: Novologic

Make no mistake: *Delta Force 2* is not a mindless first-person shooter. This is a thinking man's action title, where a single shot can end your life, and tactical strategy is required for success.

As a member of the elite *Delta Force* (evidently the unpopular one who draws all the dangerous assignments), you go through forty single-player missions, ranging from stealthily sniping enemies in the arctic to charging into a desert stronghold like Rambo. The action takes place in some of the most realistic topography this side of Rand McNally: winding jungle rivers, snow-capped mountains,

and hills lush with tall grass are beautifully realized. Many missions require close quarters action as well, so forget about sniping your way through the whole game. These missions are designed to take you a while.

There are a few weak points. A finicky damage model makes head shots when sniping nearly impossible. The Voxel Space 32 graphics engine uses, well, voxels, and is only good with 32-bit graphics cards, so all you 3Dfx



■ Voxels create a great look owners might as well have jammed a grilled cheese in there. Notable perks include a free headset microphone and mission editor. — Eric Bratcher

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Not quite as tense or pretty as *Rainbow Six*, this is still a great game for Green Beret wanna-bes.

Abomination

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Hot House

We loved *X-Com*, and frankly, we're suckers for *X-Com* clones, which this is. Unfortunately, while there's a lot to like here, there's even more to dislike. Set in a dystopian future where a plague has wiped out most of civilization and a cult is rapidly enslaving the rest, your small team of highly trained... Fell asleep? Us too. But what *Abomination* lacks in an original storyline, it makes up for in graphics: this game has some of the best and most detailed 2D art we've ever seen. The engine is really nice too — fast and tight.

Unfortunately, that's where the good stuff ends. While you can choose characters who have

specialized abilities, in actual practice the missions are so dull (rescue this guy, kill these people, etc., etc.) that you never even need to use them. The co-op AI is also irritatingly weak.

While the multiplayer is nice, the one-player game is so tedious, we doubt you'll even find many people willing to play it. A great engine and great graphics do not guarantee a great game: there was simply not



■ It's a shame: this looks great, but plays blandly and badly

enough thought put into the mission design here. Disappointing. — Chris Charla

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: As much as we liked the look of *Abomination*, the sad reality is that it simply isn't much fun to play. If you can find a few copies in the bargain bin, though, multiplayer is well worth a try.

Spec Ops II

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **Ripcord** Developer: **Zombie**



What happened? *Spec Ops* was fun, but this is rubbish!

With sequels, the least you can reasonably expect is that it's as good as the original game. *Zombie*, the developer of *Spec Ops II*, however, bravely eschews this tired old convention and delivers a second effort that, stupefyingly, manages to be far worse than the first.

Assuming you get past the

woefully inadequate manual and coerce your graphics card into working, you'll be met by all the familiar old rogues. Highlights include unbelievably idiotic AI, a useless map, magically disappearing corpses and equipment, and sub-par graphics. Up to four buddies now accompany you, but you'll soon wish they hadn't despite supposed improvements, they still fall off low ledges and die, get continually left behind, blow themselves up and, the pièce de

resistance, shoot you dead. Ultimately, it's more effective — not to mention safer — to run through the game solo.

Mission briefings are inadequate; enemy soldiers in plain sight can't be shot but can kill you; and soldier movements are forced and unnatural. On the plus side, character animations are better; the weapons modeling is excellent, and the sound effects are decent, but that's not even close to enough to save this. — *Max Everingham*

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Don't waste your money — there are much better games of this type out there.

Omikron: The Nomad Soul

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **Eidos Interactive** Developer: **Quantic Dream**



The world of *Omikron* has plenty of things to do and see. Your wife is pretty excited to see you when you return home

With *Omikron*, Quantic Dream attempted to create a virtual world for players to explore, filled with people, shops, cars, deceit, mystery and intrigue. On the surface, it seems as if you can go anywhere and do

anything. Hungry? Go to a restaurant. Looking for some action? Go to the sex shop.

While the story is well-written and the scripting engine is quite comprehensive, there are a number of minor problems that keep *Omikron* from really standing out, and the biggest problem is the scripting engine itself. While it does serve a purpose, at times it's a bit too obvious that everything is

happening off of triggers. Play through any section of the game more than once and "random" encounters are no longer random. Additionally, certain triggers, such as the elevator buttons in the police HQ, have a very small active area. This results in a bit of frustration when you try to press a button, and you character says you can't. Unfortunately, little things like this ruin the magic. — *Adam Pavlicka*

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom line: *Omikron* is a valiant effort, and well worth playing, but it just isn't cohesive enough to draw you completely into the world. You are always aware that it is just a game.

Interstate '82

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Activision**



The graphics remain true to the low-poly look of *I-76*

It seems much has happened since the conclusion of *Interstate '76*. Groove Champion has disappeared while working undercover for the Auto Vigilante Guild. His sister Sloye has come to you, Stampede, for help in tracking him down. Thus begins

Interstate '82. The clothes and music may be different, but the action is still the same.

Interstate '82 is deeper than any console car-combat titles. You only have one playable character but he is able to drive any car you come across. Don't think the pick-up is fast enough? Get in a head shot to your opponent, and steal his "Potomac Pan Am" (Gee, what could that be modeled after?). You can also customize your car's weapons,

armor, performance, and paint job. The single main character also makes possible a complex storyline that'll keep you guessing.

Still, the game isn't perfect. *Stampede* is difficult to control outside a car, collision physics are rubbery, and graphics suffer from serious draw-in. This is nearly compensated for by a promising online Deathmatch mode, entertaining voice talent, and music by Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh. — *Eric Bratcher*

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Some of the '80s nods may be missed by those who weren't paying attention back then, but the game is still fun.

■ PC

Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned

Publisher: **Sierra** Developer: **Sierra**

Here's one game that really makes tracks



The 3D engine is one of the better ones we've seen lately, smooth and stable

→ One thing you can say about the third in the *Gabriel Knight* series: it sure is complicated. And we mean that in a good way.

If you're a fan of this series, you're used to a few things — the weirdly self-referential stories, the recurring characters you have to like (however grudgingly), the convoluted puzzles, the romantic tension between the two leads. Part three pushes all of these to their limit.

There have been a number of stabs at moving adventure games into 3D over the last year or so, but maybe this is the one that comes closest to actually getting it right. Perceptively realizing that direct control of a character isn't really what an adventure game needs, *GK3* has an oddy abstract interface. You simply control the camera, from a first-person perspective, free to fly around the world at will, clicking on any object or person, then pulling up a pre-determined selection of actions that can be performed at that given time in the story. Once selected, either Gabriel or his (ahem) partner, Grace, amble over and do whatever it was you

thought was best (you need to interpret the results).

The story picks up somewhere in the middle, and gets more complicated from there. The central mystery, that of Rennes-Le-Chateau in France, is a genuine one from real life, something real people have been puzzling over for literally a hundred years, and yet you're supposed to figure it out. No biggie. In fact, if you click on the "Think" icon, the clues are almost too plentiful. Which doesn't mean this isn't something of a treasure hunt; like all adventure games, at times you resort to just clicking on every possible combination of available actions, no matter how unlikely, until you find the right one.

Still, the mystery is compelling, the characters interesting, and the voice acting is (mostly) terrific. Tim Curry is back playing Gabriel, and he's incredibly versatile: droll, cocky, not exactly likeable, yet impossible to dislike. The combination of his voice and writer-director Jane Jensen's words are, again, a rare match in any medium. — *Jeff Lundrign*

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's a cliché, but: if you really are into adventure games — and one heck of a puzzle solver — man, is this a rare treat.



■ An expansive world awaits you



more popular it becomes.

Most of the game is spent in dungeons leveling up by hacking at weak enemies. You choose the stats to raise with new levels, which lends variety to the game. When the dungeon hunting is over and it's time to return to town, you'll find groups of people sitting around trying to get other players to wear fealty to them, or discussing the finer points of the game's intricate interface.

There's more roleplaying here than in other games, but the mechanism to deliver it can become frustrating quickly. The game has a lot of great features, but in the end there are other online RPGs (namely *EverQuest*) that, while not as complex, offer a bit more when it comes to socializing and getting sucked into a world completely unlike the real one.

— Michael Wolf

■ Advertising without ever seeing others may be more realistic, but it turns out to be a lonely way to play

■ PC

Asherons Call

■ Publisher: **Microsoft** ■ Developer: **Turbine Entertainment**

Microsoft's online RPG will be far from a monopoly

➔ You're exploring your planet, Ispah, when you come across a glowing spiral of light and color. Do you jump in? If you're playing *Asherons Call* you do, and end up transported to Dereth, where you can be a fighter, magic user, thief, or anything in between.

Microsoft's new online RPG contains all the needed elements for roleplaying fun: spells,

weapons, a large world to explore, and plenty of nasty creatures to hack and slash. The game even contains an innovative allegiance system that lets you swear fealty to others, who trade the added experience they get from your loyalty for advice, weapons, money, and anything else you can talk them into. The graphics are stunning, and the world can be traversed

without a single zone load.

Sound good? Well, the actual execution leaves something to be desired. The world is so large you can wander for hours without seeing another player, which lends a rather lonely feeling to the game. The interface has a steep learning curve, and until you figure out how to use macros and hotkeys, frantic clicking is the order of the day. Combat and magic work well, with the added benefit of a spell system that tracks how often a spell is used and lessens the spell's effect the



■ The face maker is nice (above, left), as is the innovative spell system



■ The graphics are state of the art for online RPGs, with nary a load in sight

ASHERON'S CALL OR EVERQUEST?

Trying to decide between the two? Well, while both games require lots of low-level creature killing, *Asherons Call* has more complex spellcasting and combat. *EverQuest* is much more visceral and simple to get into. They both look good, and are worlds apart, but the choice between the two has more to do with the preferences of the player. If you want complexity, go for *AC*. If you prefer quick action and lots of people to talk to while you slay, check out *EQ*.

ENextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A deep, complex game for real RPG buffs, but not as easy (or fun) as *EverQuest*.

Revenant

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Cinematix Studios**



It looks like *Diablo* and it plays like *Diablo*, but *Revenant* isn't at all bad, just unoriginal

Recently, games like *Legacy of Kain* and *Shadowman* have featured characters comfortable on both sides of the grave. The trend continues with action/RPG *Revenant*, where players take control of a mysterious warrior, Locke. Shuffled back onto the mortal coil by a suspicious

wizard, Locke is being forced to save an island from an evil cult.

Gameplay is instantly familiar to *Diablo* fans. Early in the game, there's an equal balance between the action and RPG elements, but about a third of the way through, the game dramatically shifts to emphasizing pure hack and slash. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, as gamers who prefer blasting and smiting will enjoy the many gruesome ways there are to dispatch enemies.

The graphics — especially the

magic effects — are crisp and colorful, but the voice acting is laughably melodramatic. Yet despite the high production values, the game has a feeling of being incomplete. The story is over all too quickly; there are NPCs who promise to join you later but never do, and it does have an occasional bug. It's a testimony to *Revenant*'s solid gameplay that it succeeds at being fun despite some significant problems and a less-than-original premise.

— Jim Preston

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: *Diablo* fans who need a quick fix will enjoy it, but it doesn't do much to transcend its genre.

Wheel of Time

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **GT Interactive** Developer: **Legend Entertainment**



Fans of Robert Jordan's novels will find a few recognizable items and places here and there

Wheel of Time is based on Robert Jordan's fantasy novels of the same title, but surprisingly, rather than offer an RPG or adventure game, Legend has turned Jordan's complex spellcasting world into a first-person shooter. Not a bad FPS,

to be sure, but it's an odd choice nonetheless.

The game uses the original *Unreal* engine, which brings its own pluses and minuses. On the up side, it looks great, with detailed textures and huge, atmospheric levels. This brings up a problem, though: unless you've got a tremendous amount of horsepower, you're unlikely to appreciate the beauty as you struggle with an unpredictable

and choppy framerate.

The gameplay is less inspired than the level designs, hewing closely to standard FPS action — hunt for power ups (spells, or 'Ter'angreal, as Jordan dubs them), kill monsters, and find the right switch to open the door. Enemy AI ranges from plain dumb to tenacious, with a few critters proving to be as challenging a puzzle to figure out as some of the mazes.

— Jeff Ludrigan

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom line: Overall, this is a more-than-competent effort, which keeps the flavor of its source material while providing a decent challenge.

Oidium

Platform: **PC** Publisher: **Monolith** Developer: **Metropolis**



It doesn't play quite like anything else, but if you can look past its birth pains, *Oidium* is a gem in the rough

Oidium is a surprisingly successful attempt to meld the urgent horror of survival games with the elaborate battle plans and evolving multiple characters of an RPG.

The isometric *Oidium* begins

with the now-cliché 'there's something strange in the town of Wherever' set-up story. You command a NATO combat unit (composed of an American, a Frenchman, and a Pole) sent in to straighten it all out. The game is the familiar bug-and-treasure hunt, but the genre crossbreeding shows when you encounter enemies: instead of realtime melee hijinks, an elaborate turn-based battle

system ensues which rewards chessmaster-like maneuvering, shrewd management of resources, and wise selection of which qualities to enhance at level-up time.

There are a few weaknesses typical of first-generation hybrid games (resources are a bit too thin, and stats are somewhat unbalanced), but overall, this is an impressive step forward.

— Eric Bratcher

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A groundbreaking title kept from four-star status only by the at-times unwieldy mechanics and some minimal balance issues. Try this.

PC

Pharaoh

Publisher: **Sierra** Developer: **Impressions**

Don't call it *Sim Pyramid* — just start playing



Plazas make your city look nice and improve land value for an exceptionally reasonable price

Anyone familiar with Impression's *Caesar* series will find this latest example of city-building strategy immediately familiar, yet highly challenging. The basic interface is the same, encouraging players to pander to the people while still attempting to curry favor from government officials. Proper city planning involves making sure that people have access to food, entertainment, and governmental services. This benevolence must be balanced, though, with some clever hoarding in order to fund your armed forces as well as any recover from any disasters that may occur.

And disasters will occur: The gods of Egypt are even more fickle than those of Rome, and the challenges of living life on the Nile are what makes this game more than just another *Caesar*. Plague, pestilence, and drought ravage the land at every turn and in a society where survival hinges on the fickle floodplains, a drought is paramount to a death sentence for millions. To avert this sort of horror, all of the gods, from powerful



The 2D isometric graphics are incredibly detailed

patron gods to simple local deities, must be appeased. Festivals, shrines, and temples, as well as the sprawling temple compounds, ensure that the weather stays beautiful and that the life-giving floods are regular.

Pyramid building, however, is *Pharaoh*'s most unique new wrinkle, showing the sheer insanity of attempting to build monuments to yourself at the expense of your people's welfare. Still, you gotta do what you gotta do. Unlike most strategy games, the monuments (which can take hundreds of years to complete) are shown brick by brick as they are constructed, as opposed to just having a few set stages of animation. Only the lack of customizable scenarios keeps this from being the last word in the genre.

— Daniel Erickson

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Pyramid building and floodplain management come together for a brilliant city builder.

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Left Field Productions

Left Field Productions is once again looking for new members to add to one of the industry's best known all-star teams. We have just completed *NBA Courtside II* featuring *Kobe Bryant* and will be releasing the much anticipated *Excitebike 64* early next year. We are located in sunny Southern California and we offer competitive salaries, great royalty packages and excellent benefits. We are looking for motivated and talented individuals to work on cutting edge technologies for the next generation Nintendo system.

Producers
Programmers
Artists
Designers

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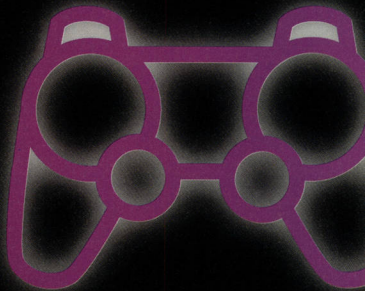
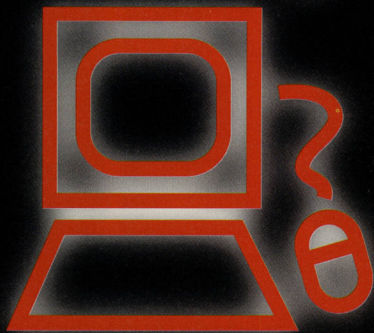
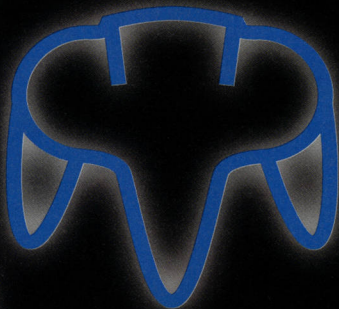
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Rational discourse is the basis of civilization. Let's get civilized!

→ I heard that Sony will be releasing two different PlayStation2s — one that plays games and DVD movies for \$299 and another version that only plays games for half the price. Is this true? That would be cool.

totally_paulv@excite.com

It might be cool, but it's not true.

→ My friends and I have been wondering if PS2 will come with a remote for DVD play or if one has just been overlooked.

mhansen@connected.bc.ca

We asked Sony's Phil Harrison about this, and he said, "Well, the controller is a remote." Right. To us that indicates that Sony isn't planning a wireless remote for the system, but we expect that an accessory company like InterAct or Pelican will deliver one as soon as the system ships.

→ In your last issue, you showed a few pictures of PS2. I noticed that the memory card was a little different — it is more squared than rounded at the end like the original PSX ones. Does this mean that the original memory cards won't work with the new PS2?

ruffian21@yahoo.com

Old cards will work on PlayStation2, but PlayStation2 cards won't work on PlayStation.

→ I recently received my December 1999 issue of **Next Generation**, and I was shocked to see you describe the "baggage" of "a disappointingly blocky version of VF2 for the Saturn." I distinctly remember the absolutely glowing five-star review

you gave this game back in 1995. In the December 1996 issue, you applauded the "nearly flawless arcade translation" and state that "a year later, the still impressive *Virtua Fighter 2* has yet to be surpassed on Saturn."

What gives?

GOATMEAL2@aol.com

Oops. We meant to say *Virtua Fighter*, which was blocky, not VF2, which was one of the high points of Saturn. To remind the editor of the difference between one and two, we cut off two of his fingers.

→ I enjoyed your recent feature "The War for the Living Room." Having said this, I feel it is my duty to point out to you an error made on page 93, where you stated that Nintendo had innovated with "the first analog game pad, [and] the first four-port system." Actually, that honor belongs to Atari 5200, if one counts analog joysticks, which that console's stock controllers were. The second model of 5200 also had four controller ports. Technically, the very earliest systems also had analog controllers — the paddle dial controller is of course analog — but this is quite far removed from the term "game pad," so I won't take you to task on that one.

dulcinea061992@webtv.net

Thanks for the letter. To remind the editor in question about the importance of paying attention to history, we punished him the old-fashioned way — by branding him on the face with a 5200 joystick dipped in molten lead.

→ I was just wondering when Nintendo decided to make Mario's voice terrible? As soon as



■ Hey, why is that controller plugged into the third port? Weird

Dreamcast: can it last?

I know PS2 will be much more powerful than Dreamcast, but the Dreamcast games look great and so does the price. My only concern is that when PS2 and Dolphin come out, Dreamcast will be forgotten (remember Saturn). I don't want a system that will be outdated in a year. Do you think Dreamcast has what it takes to compete with PS2 and Dolphin?

borg@tech-center.com

Even if no other software ever came out for it, Dreamcast is a good deal. That said, enough software is coming out for the system, and the early sales are so strong, that we think Dreamcast will be a viable system for some time to come — even though Dolphin and PlayStation2 will surpass it technologically.

I started playing *Mario 64*. I noticed the strange voice, and it was in a TV ad the other day, too. I remember back when they actually had TV shows starring Mario, and his voice was deep, and sounded like he was from Brooklyn, where Mario is from. Now it's high-pitched and squeaky! That's no good. I know good voice acting is expensive, but surely they could spend the few bucks to make Mario sound like a guy.

DoggieCool@aol.com

Nintendo has been working on cutesifying Mario almost since day one, and the apparent emasculation of his voice just seems to be the latest step.

→ What's with the smattering of Japanese that plagues every issue? It's bad enough we have to play games with the Japanese dialogue intact (or suffer further when it's translated!), but why does a North American magazine need Japanese snippets? Almost every issue refers to "Mr. X" as "X-san,"

but the one that pushed me over the edge was page 6 of **NG 12 99** — the Tokyo Game Show blur with a heading of "Chotto Omoshirokunai." For the benefit of my fellow readers who don't understand Japanese (99.9%), this translates roughly into "Not Very Interesting." Yes, I speak Japanese — if I didn't know Japanese, I'd have thought "Chotto Omoshirokunai" was **NG's** Japanese correspondent!

sjd@interlog.com

We intended to translate the header in *Backwards Compatible*, but we ran the Atari vs. PlayStation2 shot instead. As for "san," our style guide calls for "Mr." or to simply use the last name — sometimes a "san" slips by unintentionally, though.

→ I get the feeling you guys aren't as excited about Dreamcast as I am. It has already sold one million units (compared to PlayStation selling that same amount in one-and-a-half years), its library is growing larger than

I was just wondering when Nintendo decided to make Mario's voice terrible? It's high-pitched and squeaky! That's no good

N64's by the minute, and the addition of console online gaming is exciting. Yet any time you guys throw some form of compliment at Sega and Dreamcast, it is usually followed by a statement proclaiming that it will look worse compared to PS2 a year from now. Your reading audience knows Dreamcast won't have graphics as good as PS2's a year from now! There's no need to turn a compliment into an insult! I really disliked that comment you made in the November editorial, where you said Playstation2 is "the best videogame system ever." Not a good way of showing your bias. It hasn't even been released yet, but you still make such uneducated comments. Well, in my opinion, a system launching at around \$300 with only two controller ports is not my idea of "the best videogame system ever." However, a system with four controller ports, more than ten games at launch, and a modem packed right in it (a.k.a.: Dreamcast) 'IS' my idea of a great system. The best? Nah. Five years from now, it will be pitiful compared to Sega's latest offering. Just like how five years from now, Playstation2 compared to something new will look awful. Hopefully by that time, you guys won't still consider it the very best.

AlexJ31106@aol.com

Saying "the best ever" comes with the implicit assumption that someone may (and probably will) do something better down the road. That should be obvious. Second, our comment about Playstation2 was not an uneducated comment. It's our job to know a lot about game systems and make predictions about their future potential. We've played games on PS2. It is a more powerful system than Dreamcast. Don't get us wrong — Dreamcast is a fantastic system, but facts are facts — technology moves forward, and by releasing its system 18 months later, Sony can (and will) deliver a much more powerful machine. That doesn't mean the games will necessarily be better, but they certainly have that potential. Third, in our

opinion, cost doesn't have anything to do with how good a system is. What matters is the level of interactive experience it can enable. Look, we've been supporters of Dreamcast since the beginning, and we remain supporters, but we are not going to just deliver hype. If you only want to hear that everything Sega does is wonderful, with no mention of what else is happening in the game industry, you are reading the wrong magazine.

➔ I have a little question about *Sonic Adventure* for Dreamcast. I was wondering if *Sonic Adventure* is one of those *Super Mario 64*-type games. Ya know, the type of game where it takes like a YEAR to beat! I myself have played Mario and I do not want to dedicate a year to one game ever again! When you said in your critique that *Sonic Adventure* will take a day or two to beat for expert gamers (me), is that true? It better be, I'm not wasting my time with another game like *Mario*. Thanks for your time, guys, I love the magazine!

Gar311@aol.com

To beat every level took one of editors six hours, then another two or three to beat with all the characters. That doesn't include finding every secret, however.

➔ In your 12.99 issue, you reported that *No One Lives Forever* is coming to Playstation2. I e-mailed Monolith and they replied saying that they had no plans of bringing it out on the Playstation2. Did the person replying just not know about it? Has it actually been confirmed? I also remember you saying that a *Shogo* port for Dreamcast was in the works. Haven't heard about that for a while? Why don't you follow up on your stories and admit when maybe you got carried away with speculation? If *No One Lives Forever* is not coming to Playstation2, how can we trust any of your other "next-generation console" news?

lacey@cgocable.net

We frequently hear from sources that a game is in development for a system

PlayStation2? A system launching at around \$300 with only two controller ports is not my idea of "the best console ever"

before the publisher or developer want to announce it. If we feel the source is credible, we print it. For both the *Shogo* rumor and NOLF, we felt totally justified in printing what we did. As for *Shogo*, it looks like it (and

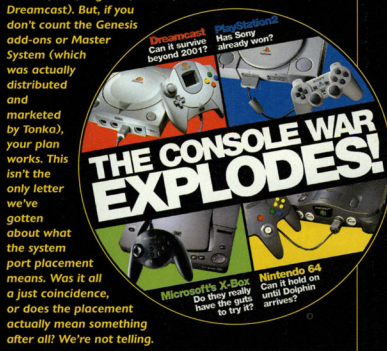
Monolith's plan to bring *LithTech* to Dreamcast) is on hold. As for NOLF, we're extremely confident the game (and *LithTech*) is in development for Playstation2, even if Fox and Monolith haven't announced it yet.

Conspiracy corner

After looking at your new cover with the systems war on the cover, something was nagging me about it. Then it hit me. It's the location of the controllers in the systems' ports. After looking at them, I saw a pattern. For whichever port the controller was in, it coincided with how many systems that company had released in America. Sega's DC had the controller in port three, because DC is Sega's third system in America. Same with Nintendo. Sony's had it in port one, since Playstation is its first system. And finally, X-Box did not show the controller plugged in at all because Microsoft has never released a system. So when Playstation3 hits, Sony had better get more than two ports, or I don't know what they will do in press shots. And yes, I am fully aware that I have too much time on my hands.

Y_GOUKI@YAHOO.COM

Of course, if Sega really got a port for each system it released, Dreamcast would need a multi-tap (Master System, Genesis, 32X, Sega CD, Saturn, and Dreamcast). But, if you don't count the Genesis add-ons or Master System (which was actually distributed and marketed by Tonka), your plan works. This isn't the only letter we've gotten about what the system port placement means. Was it all a just coincidence, or does the placement actually mean something after all? We're not telling.



Next Generation Letters,
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Note: email is vastly, vastly preferred

→ Retroview

February 1982

Nintendo's first hit readies for release on a home console

→ February 1982: It wouldn't be released until summer, but the power of ColecoVision was already dominating the game world: fueled by a Z-80 processor and 16K of VRAM, ColecoVision could produce near-arcade-level graphics, as fans of *Donkey Kong* (the pack-in game) would quickly discover. While the system would be wildly popular among hardcore gamers — who particularly liked the 2600-compatible expansion pack — the crash of 1983-84, which occurred at the same time as a shakeout in the computer industry, and Coleco's ill-fated attempt to add a PC add-on (ADAM) meant ColecoVision would never see the success it deserved.

Donkey Kong was still huge in arcades in 1982 and it was clear the creator — a little-known Japanese



■ The ColecoVision pack-in game, *Donkey Kong*, was close to perfect

company called Nintendo — was destined for great things. Elsewhere, Atari inched closer to destruction: the 5200, or Project X, was delayed again and again, and worse, Atari's president Ray Kassar was seen talking to *E.T.* creator Steven Spielberg. It wasn't all bad on 2600, though: Activision's *Pitfall* was well on its way to release in February.

VIDEOGAMING FOR THE REAGAN YEARS

→ NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

■ How high can you go?

KONG KOMES HOME!

Coleco's revolutionary ColecoVision will bring arcade quality to your TV!

32 sprites! 16 colors! Too good to be true? We've got the screens to prove it!

SPECIAL REPORT:

"Japan no threat to US console dominance," says Atari

PLUS

Will Mr. Pac-Man 2600 make up for the bloody horror of the original!



Apple ■ Atari ■ Commodore ■ Coleco ■ Intellivision ■ IBM PC ■ Odyssey

What we were playing

1982: When arcade quality at home was still just a distant dream

■ MS. PAC MAN



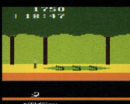
■ System: Arcade
■ Publisher: Midway

■ DONKEY KONG



■ System: Arcade
■ Publisher: Nintendo

■ PITFALL



■ System: 2600
■ Publisher: Activision

■ NIGHT STALKER



■ System: Intellivision
■ Publisher: Mattel

■ FROG BOG



■ System: Intellivision
■ Publisher: Mattel

1982 at the box office

Rank	Title	Domestic (in millions of \$)
1	E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial	399.8
2	Tootsie	177.2
3	An Officer and a Gentleman	129.8
4	Rocky II	122.8
5	Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan	78.9
6	Polltergeist	76.6
7	48 HRS.	75.9
8	The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas	69.7
9	Annie	57.1
10	The Verdict	54



...and in the real world

■ Mitch Kapor, spreadsheet pioneer (and the product manager for the original commercial version of *Zork*) bypasses DOS to get Lotus 1-2-3 to run well. Ironically, by bypassing its clumsy and slow OS, Lotus helps ensure the success of the IBM PC.

■ Time names the PC "machine of the year"

■ Two Cray XMP supercomputers, running in parallel operating mode, achieve 420,000,000 million floating-point operations per second (megafopts). (This is about 1/150th the claimed speed of PlayStation2).

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DEFEAT

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PARTY

MARIO
PARTY 2

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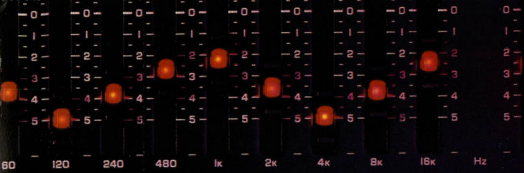
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EVERYONE



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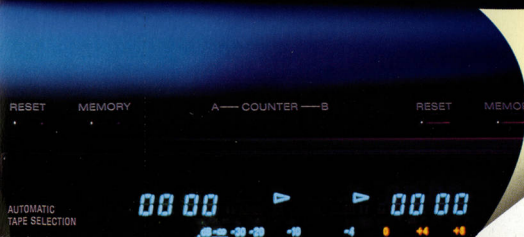
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