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→NextGen

Next Generation

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INSIDE

PSX: Final Fantasy VIII, Dino Crisis, Legacy of Kain, Tomb Raider 4
N64: Quake II, Tonic Trouble
PC: Heavy Gear 2, Kingpin, Indiana Jones, MDK 2, Grand Theft Auto 2
DC: Sonic, NFL 2K, NBA 2K, Mortal Kombat Gold, Hydro Thunder
Plus tons more games!

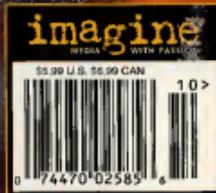## Microsoft's New Game Console
World exclusive report inside

DREAMCAST:

KILLER APP

Will Sega's Shenmue make you forget about PlayStation 2?
The complete story on Sega's biggest game ever

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

THE NATIVES ARE RESTLESS.

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→NextGen

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Sega's Great Gamble

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that will shape the games
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coverage to date of Yu
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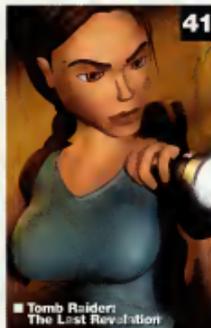■ Sonic Adventure

We've had a lot of developers in the office this month, showing off final versions of holiday titles. It seems like everyone who saw our in-progress cover said something like "Oh, man, I first saw that in 1996, when it was *Virtua Fighter RPG* for Saturn. Yu Suzuki had 50 people on it then." By the time it comes out, *Shenmue* may have more man-hours devoted to it than any videogame in history. What will Sega have to show for the effort? Brilliantly rendered characters, a fully realized city environment, and enough different types of gameplay to practically define the term "genre-buster." But will it be any fun to play? Has the massive development time ensured a gem, as with *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, or has time passed the game by? The answer is crucial for Sega: *Shenmue* is its last chance of success in Japan and key to its US strategy. Associate Editor Blake Fischer has spent the past month researching the game and its hope for success. The story starts on page 30.

Chris Charla

➡Finals
We play 'em. We rate 'em

➡Ending
Letting you down easy and sending you off gently

After a Mission
Like This Comes
All the Paperwork.

Borrring.

■ FIRST PERSON

QuakeCon
It don't hurt
till it hits the bone

→ After four months of planning,
and nearly 100 man-hours building
and testing, the network powerful
enough to support a company of 5,000
employees was in place. But this isn't
another tale of fantastic growth for an

Quake Con

Microsoft to Introduce Console

Sources close to Microsoft claim a games-only "set-top box" is in development in Redmond

Although Microsoft representatives have explicitly denied it, several sources close to the company have told **Next Generation** that Microsoft is, in fact, developing a set-top game-playing console designed to compete with PlayStation 2 and Dolphin. The code name? X-Box. Although there is no word on whether or not Microsoft would market the box as a game console or as a do-everything set-top box à la 3DO or CD-i, our sources say the system is basically a game console. When will it be out? Fall 2000, in time to go head-to-head with Sony and Nintendo. "They're terrified Sony is going to own the living room," said a source.

Although X-Box is still early in development, preliminary specs call for a 500MHz Intel processor (Pentium or Celeron), paired with high-end graphics technology like nVidia's new NV-10 technology or 3Dfx's Voodoo 3. According to our sources, industrial design will come from Microsoft's well-respected hardware group (responsible for, among other things, the excellent

Sidewinder joysticks), but manufacturing will be farmed out to one or more major PC manufacturers like Dell or Gateway.

The most likely scenario, according to our sources, is that Microsoft will provide hardware specs for the system, but will allow some flexibility in the actual components used. So, it might be possible to buy either a 3Dfx or an nVidia-powered system. Either way, Microsoft will require extensive testing to ensure console-like ease of use. The system will have USB ports for controllers, and an internet hookup is "likely"

When will it be out? Sometime in 2000, in plenty of time to go head-to-head with Sony and Nintendo

---

internet start-up, this feat was accomplished purely for the benefit of the 1,000 gamers who attended QuakeCon '99. (And the network's power was put to good use: the average ping was 10.)

For three days in August, while the temperatures outside hit an unbearable 104 degrees, the air conditioning system of the Mesquite Arena cooled the tense brows of some of the hardest of the hardcore Quake players in the country. They'd traveled from such farflung locales as the Czech Republic and Boise, Idaho to downtown Dallas to worship at the shrine of Id Software.

The tournament itself drew some

512 eager competitors of varying abilities (selection was done on a first-come-first-served basis), who had their every frag, every armor shard pick-up, and every kill trucked
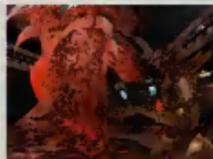
■ Quake III, Quake II, and, for some diehards, Quake and Doom were the order of the day in Dallas

by NetGamesUSA's amazing new tourney-tracking software. Only nervous energy and the nearby massed audience kept the two finalists — DieharD and II34-Bane — warm against the biting air conditioning. After a grueling showdown, where, at one point, Bane led 4-0, 31-year-old DieharD (Canadian George Myshkyayev) emerged with a 18-5 victory.

But this was almost a sideshow to the other near-500 ardent gamers who lugged their computers from home for the BYOC (Bring Your Own Computer) LAN party. These ardent fans also attended workshops from Id's 3D modeler Paul Steed (who

obliged the testosterone-driven crowd by bringing a bevy of Hooters babes to the proceedings) and level designer Paul Jaquays, as Id, confirmed the company's support of (if not reliance upon) the mod authoring community.

As Id co-founder and legendary programming guru John Carmack is so fond of explaining, the revolutionary QIII engine is merely an efficient triangle pusher, but those triangles — particularly the bloody glb parts — are sufficient to ensure the loyalty of some of the planet's toughest gamers. For this lot, QuakeCon 2000 can't come soon enough . . .

Like the Dreamcast, the system will have its OS (a WinCE variant) on discs. The system will use DVD discs and you will be able to watch DVD movies using the system. It will certainly use DirectX as its graphics API. Although there may be a 3Dfx option, sources indicate nVidia is the target graphics platform, since the NV-10 is unique among PC hardware 3D solutions (for now, anyway) in that it does all the geometry calculations on the card, meaning that with a 500MHz Intel chip, PlayStation 2-like results will probably be possible.

How far along is the system? According to our sources, work has been proceeding on the console for several months, but it has been kept under wraps to avoid damaging the company's relationship with Sega during Dreamcast's launch phase.

Lots of things at a company the size of Microsoft get designed without being released. What are the chances X-Box will come out? "I'd say at least 80%" said one source. "They're really serious about this."

What's it all mean?

First off, this news should kill the rumors about Microsoft buying Sega — although it might explain the sources of the rumor, especially if people at Microsoft have been asking

▪ This artist's conception of X-Box shows a top-loading DVD player done with Microsoft's traditional hardware styling

a lot of "So, what would you like to see in a first party?" questions at major publishers like EA and Sega.

If Microsoft decides to market X-Box itself, it could radically change the company's delicate relationship with existing PC hardware manufacturers (and, possibly, the trust-busters at the FTC). Which is why, as noted above, smart money is on one, or multiple, PC makers releasing a Microsoft-specced (and designed) machine.

Will the system be an open platform like PC, or will Microsoft charge licensing fees and approve content as do Sony and Nintendo? Microsoft's history suggests the company will favor an open system. An open system means more development, more hardware sales, and, ultimately, more sales and ubiquity for Microsoft's Windows OS. While a closed system would allow the company to collect lucrative licensing fees and ensure only family-friendly content, the company is more likely to take the long view and go for long-term OS sales over short-term licensing fees.

Either way, X-Box is bad news for PlayStation 2 and Nintendo Dolphin. With X-Box, PC, and Dreamcast all sharing basically the same architecture, developers can deploy the same content across these platforms with little porting effort, while

PlayStation 2 and Dolphin will require specialized development efforts, making development for those systems less appealing. In fact, it's possible that X-Box games will run on PC without modification.

What about cost? Our sources say "well under $300" is the target mark, with a release date scheduled for sometime in fall 2000. Sources also say the marketing budget is designed to "beat PlayStation 2's."

As for Microsoft, we should note that a representative described our story as "dubious. It sounds like some ISVs and graphics card makers got up to wishful thinking."

We'll have more as soon as we can, but even with this limited amount of information, one thing is for sure: If X-Box is real, the next-generation console war just got a lot more complicated.

— Tom Russo and Chris Charla

NHL 2000 for PC, "you're in the game"

Think real hockey players are too pretty? Add your mug

▪ It's been coming for a long time. But now, thanks to EA's PC NHL 2000 development team, you can finally do it. Do what? Well, map your face right into the game.

"What makes Face in the Game so cool," says PC Producer Dave Warfield, "is the fact that

now any gamer that has a picture of himself or anybody else, can put that face onto a created player and be out on the ice with his favorite NHL players. The import process ties the face into our facial animation system, and you will see your created player out on the ice, smiling and cheering

while celebrating goals, discussing penalty calls with the referee, and grimacing in pain after being body-checked into the ice."

Warfield explains that a player can create a line of their best friends, or start a career and try to win the Calder trophy as the best rookie in the NHL. **NextGen**

▪ Once a picture is imported, it must be cropped to fit the polygonal model...like this, and...

▪ Boom! You're in the game

After it
takes over
your television,
it's ready for the
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AT&T WorldNet® Service. Now
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playing the hottest Sega Dreamcast
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worldnet
service

Plug Sega into AT&T and it's a whole new game.

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att.com/sega

Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral will be open to virtual tourists, thanks to the United Nations and the *Unreal* engine

■ MODIFY-IT-YOURSELF

Unreal Architecture
The *Unreal* Engine Invades Real-World Applications

→ It's been licensed for over a dozen games, everything from *Nerf Arena Blast* to *Werewolf the Apocalypse*, and it's not stopping there. The *Unreal* engine has found its way into several real-world applications.

The noblest cause to be powered by the *Unreal* engine is a virtual walkthrough of Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral, being created by Florida-based Digitalo design, and funded by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural

Organization's World Heritage branch, which is devoted to preserving historical and culturally significant structures. The realtime reconstruction will be complete with a virtual multi-lingual guide (we'll call it a tour-bot), and players running *Unreal* will be able to log on to the Digitalo server and experience it for themselves. The beta should be live by the time of this printing (visit http://digitalo.com/deleon/vmcl. No rockets, please.

Three other companies have also

Zen Tao interactive is utilizing the *Unreal* engine to create an interactive martial-arts tutorial

Notre Dame sure is pretty. Now if it could be modified for deathmatch...

harnessed the *Unreal* engine for practical purposes. Zen Tao Interactive is combining the *Unreal* engine with world-class martial-arts champion Sifu Michel Orchard to create an interactive encyclopedia-style tutorial designed to teach the martial arts fundamentals of Wing Chun Kung Fu.

While Zen Tao interactive will be developing 3D models to illustrate martial-arts forms, HKS Inc., an architectural firm in Dallas, is exploring the engine's architectural strengths. The firm sees the engine as a tool to help architects solve structural problems, as well as enabling clients to virtually tour the models of a proposed building.

And finally there's Unrealty, which was started by programmer Vito Miliano, who's harnessed the engine to re-create commercial real-estate properties for virtual tours. You can check it out at www.unrealty.net. Again, no rockets, please. **Next**Gen

There's no place like home — unless, of course, there's a virtual replica of it on the Web and you're trying to sell it

"Sayonara, Stolar"
SoJ axes Sega of America chief on eve of U.S. launch

→ In a stunning announcement, Sega of America announced that Bernie Stolar, the architect of the Dreamcast launch and the man many called "Sega's best chance at success in the U.S.," has left Sega on the eve of the launch. His abrupt departure before the launch seems to be the result of friction between him and his Japanese bosses about the strategy for the launch. His last interview, conducted with Next Generation's sister magazine Games Business, illustrates that friction: ". . . I fought because Ito got the modem in that machine, at launch, and at that $199 price point. A lot of people in Japan hate me for that." Presumably, his bosses also weren't impressed by admission that "Dreamcast has to date been a failure in Japan," or that if the launch succeeded in the U.S., that CSK (Sega's parent company) would let him run Sega of America as an almost independent venture.

Whatever the reason, the news isn't good for Sega. "I think it's a shame," said Sega's former VP of development, Eric Hammond. "The way Sega handled [Bernie's departure] was in extremely bad taste." That said, Hammond, now at Fox Interactive, was vocal about Sega's strengths, particularly its marketing team, headed by Peter Moore.

While Sega was also quick to point out that the rest of the senior management team (minus by Stolar) was still in place, and that the key retailer and third party relationships necessary for a good launch were assured, the mere fact that the president left only days before the launch shows that all is simply not right at Sega. If the company was looking for a way to boost confidence before the launch, this wasn't it.

No word yet on what's next for Stolar, but with X-Box in the wings, Microsoft may be hiring...

‹ SONIC HAS A NEW
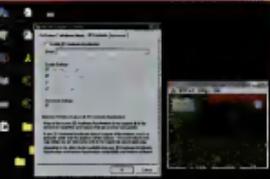LIGHT SPEED DASH

SONIC ADVENTURE | Sega⊙Dreamcast

IT'S THINKING

‹ TOO BAD YOUR LAME-ASS
REFLEXES ARE THE SAME

Yuji Naka's warp speed 3D adventure through 40 expansive worlds of bonus rounds and minigames!!!
6 playable characters snowboard, play pinball, fly and even talk, moving 360° never felt so good. • sega.com

SONIC ADVENTURE

■ Although a D3D-enhanced PlayStation game may be tempting, Bleem! is not yet the answer

→ Bleem!, a consumer software package that aims to make PlayStation games playable on your PC, shipped to retail stores near the

■ THE LATEST CRASHWARE

Bleem!

Commercial PlayStation emulation fails to impress

end of July. It was, by nearly any measure, a resounding failure, with limited PlayStation compatibility, barely passable framerates, numerous bugs, and a marked tendency to crash. A patch, v1.0b, has eased some problems, but many, many more remain.

Although Bleem! LLC, makers of Bleem!, has admitted publicly that

Bleem! is a work in progress, the box itself only makes note that "We're constantly working to make Bleem! better" while trumpeting its Direct3D enhancements and the idea that it's "perfect for every gamer." Although we're sure the small number of emulator enthusiasts out there might have fun trying to run it successfully, the average consumer will probably feel confused, frustrated, and like they want their money back.

Perhaps around the time of v10.5, Bleem! will be a viable consumer product. Until then, steer clear. **NextGen**

DATASTREAM

Number of PlayStations sold in North America: 15,040,000.

Length of a PlayStation: 10.31 inches.

Distance all North American PlayStations laid end to end would reach: 2,468 miles — the distance from Sony's Foster City, Calif., HQ to Atlanta, Georgia.

Kilobyte, Megabyte, Gigabyte, Terabyte. Next in the series? Petabyte. Number of bytes in a petabyte: 1,125,899,906,842,624, **or 1,000,000,000,000,000, depending on whether you count a kilobyte as 1,000 or 1,024 bytes.

Number of petabytes it would take to store every word spoken by every human since the dawn of time: 5,000. Scientists' estimates of when we will see home systems with petabytes of storage space: never. Next past the petabyte? Exabyte.

■ TOM RUSSO'S

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

10/99

DREAMCAST MARCHES ON

→ In the "Guess what's coming to Dreamcast?" department, Acclaim has announced Dreamcast versions of three of its current franchises *Shadow Man, Jeremy McGrath Super Cross 2000,* and *WWF Attitude.* (We think *Turok* will remain exclusively with Nintendo, after *Rage Wars,* he should reappear on Dolphin, a system Acclaim has already announced it will develop for.) Iniguranes has announced a Dreamcast version of its RPG-adventure title *Silver,* due fall 2000. And in a surprise move, Ubi Soft and 3DO have joined forces to bring *Heroes of Might and Magic III* to the new console. Ubi Soft is developing the title, which it has licensed from 3DO. *Heroes* is due out in the second half of 2000.

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

→ While former id designer John Romero is up to his neck in Daikotano, another former id designer, American McGee, has joined Electronic Arts to create *American McGee's Alice.* The game will take a darker approach to the already twisted tale of *Alice in Wonderland.* Players will assume the role of a third-person Alice for single-player games, but will play in first-person perspective during multiplayer games. EA has kept its internal development team's technology under wraps, but Alice is rumored to be powered by the *Quake III* engine. (As if McGee would settle for anything less.) *Alice* is scheduled to arrive for the holidays — holiday season 2000, that is.

THE MUSIC IN SPORTS

→ Three-letter companies MTV and THQ have announced their first game project, *MTV Sports: Snowboarding* for PlayStation. (The two companies inked a four-year licensing deal earlier this year at E3.) The title is being developed by Radical, which developed last year's *ESPN Pro Boarder* for Electronic Arts. While a key designer has left that team, and the MTV game will not feature the real riders, the game will feature music by Mixtery, Blink 182, and Fear Factory, among others, as well as a create-a-park feature in which players can design their own board parks and save them to their memory card. Expect to see it before the holidays.

MTV MUSIC TELEVISION   THQ   ESPN SNOWBOARDING

TAXIING IN

→ The rumors could be true that a completed Dreamcast port of arcade game *Crazy Taxi* is sitting in Japan, but that's not what's going to come to the U.S. Sega VP of Development Greg Thomas says that they "will be looking at [making improvements and/or additions to] *Crazy Taxi* in order to give the game more longevity on the Dreamcast." It should be noted that Thomas, who also heads Visual Concepts, has a *Crazy Taxi* machine in his offices there.

In real life, Lara Croft would beat the living !@#?% out of you for looking at her like that.

Real life sucks:
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The "kill-zone" as seen by the
1000 dpi razer boomslang.

karna
The razor of perception

A TALE OF MONEY AND TIME

PlayStation 2 — too much?

The system's power may prove to be an initial turnoff for publishers

→ With Sony's PlayStation 2 coming closer and closer to being realized, the new machine's power is becoming increasingly apparent. Which may, in fact, be a bit of a double-edged sword for publishers who will foot the bill for developing PlayStation 2 titles.

After a developer's conference held this past July, several sources close to **Next Generation** all

brought back essentially the same story: the hardware is amazing, the games will be incredible, and it will take hiring a couple of dozen more programmers to handle the complex and unconventional new

> **It will only take hiring a couple of dozen new programmers to handle it**

architecture. The simple fact is that PlayStation 2 is going to be a computational monster, capable of crunching through not only a very impressive number of polygons, but highly complex physics models and sophisticated AI as well.

Obviously, while this is exciting new territory for development teams, publishers looking at the bottom line are a little more leery.

The amount of resources required by a sophisticated system like PlayStation 2 is shaping up to be vastly more than for any previous console, and with important details like the new system's price point and on-sale date still very much up in the air, some publishers are either scaling back the number of planned titles, or quietly taking a "wait and see" attitude.

Of course, for major publishers with deep pockets — the Electronic Arts of the world — there's no question of whether to begin work on PlayStation 2 titles. But for mid-sized and smaller publishers, less-expensive platforms like Dreamcast or the original PlayStation are, according to our sources, beginning to look more attractive.

Still, this is very early in the development cycle of PlayStation 2, with software toolkits and programming libraries still in their infancy. A well-implemented developer support program could easily offset difficulties in coming to grips with a new system, and wrestling with the problems of real-world physics. This is certainly a story **Next Generation** will be watching closely. **NextGen**

■ The resources involved in making graphics this lush in-game is staggering — and scaring off some lesser publishers

■ Although these screens from Koei's upcoming PlayStation 2 game, Kessen, are pre-rendered FMV, rumor has it PSX2 graphics may only be slightly less impressive

Dave underestimated the party guests' hatred of charades.

Don't let this happen to you. With the new YOU DON'T KNOW JACK®, your PlayStation® game console may just be a life saver. Not to mention, one of the greatest party games ever invented. (Nude twister comes in a close second.)

One, two or three players at a time get scorched by JACK's sarcastic game show host. You and your friends wrestle over more than 1,400 seriously bent trivia questions on two CD's, while the rest of the party cat-calls, taunts and fights over who gets the controller next. So next time you throw a party, get YOU DON'T KNOW JACK and nobody gets hurt.

If only he'd suggested YOU DON'T KNOW JACK.

This is no time
second-

2 Player Split Screen Mode

MTV
MUSIC TELEVISION®

S P O R T S

■ MARCUS WEBB'S
Arcadia
The latest news from the coin-op front

SNK KICKS BUTT

→ Contrary to scurrilous rumors that were making the rounds this summer, SNK of America's arcade division is alive and well and kicking butt with its new 16-bit Neo Geo game, *King of Fighters Millennium Battle*. "It's no secret that SNK shifted manpower and resources to gear up for the Aug. 1 launch of our handheld Neo-Geo consumer product," SNK's Tim Jackson told *Next Generation*. "However," he said, "with something like 60,000 coin-op Neo Geo systems in the field, we would be silly to walk away from the arcade market."

EVEN MORE FIGHTERS

SNK released *King of Fighters: Millennium Battle* the first week of August. Graphics are surprisingly good for a 16-bit game. The storyline continues the popular *KOF* saga with a new hero, six new characters (out of a total cast of 30), and some surprising plot twists. This game focuses on a white-haired "human weapon" named K' (K Prime) who was created and is manipulated by a secret syndicate. K' can shoot flames out of the ends of his hands. But who knows... we got the feeling K' might turn on his own bosses one day, if they turn out to be the bad guys. Other new combatants include Maxima, one of his allies; Whip, a female who fights with a bullwhip; a "psycho soldier" named Bao; a fierce surfer-type fighter named Jhun Hoon; and a femme fatale named Li Xiang Fei. Players will also get a kick (no pun intended) out of Kyo-1 and –2; they're clones of Kyo Kusanagi from the earlier *KOF* games (but feature different models and moves).

KONAMI ROCKS ON

→ Lately, arcades in Japan have enjoyed the same kind of frenzy normally reserved for Ricky Martin music concerts, thanks to a new (and innovative) family of music-themed games from Konami. Now three games are coming to U.S. arcades, so wannabe music mavens and performance artists can dance, play guitar, or be the world's coolest DJ with Konami's *Bemani* games: *Dance Dance Revolution*, *Guitar Freaks*, and *Hiphopmania*. The three games feature a dedicated dance floor, a guitar, and a keyboard and turntable as controllers, respectively.

■ LIKE A ROCK...

SONY, NINTENDO DROP PRICE

Last-gen systems drop to $99 on eve of Dreamcast launch

→ PlayStation and Nintendo 64 have dropped to $99, and although both Sony and Nintendo maintain the individual-ity-stretching position that it is merely coincidence that their systems dropped in price just days before the Dreamcast launch, the move was an obvious attempt to make sure that casual, price-conscious buyers wandering into EB or Wal-Mart will go with the cheaper option rather than Sega's system. For its part, Sega says it's unconcerned: It's looking for hard-core gamers, not casual buyers. Either way, at $99, PlayStation and Nintendo 64 are now basically impulse buys, meaning the mass market is about to get a lot wider. *NextGen*

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE
News Bytes

→ **Grand Theft Halo.** What a crazy summer it was for Chicago's bad boys, Bungie Software. First, co-owner and game guru, Jason Jones (*Myth*, *Marathon*), stole the MacWorld keynote out of Steve Jobs' vice-like clutches by revealing his next game, *Halo* — a gorgeous action title that left crowds slack-jawed (see *Milestones*, page 89). Then Bungie's other owner and business impresario, Alexander Seropian, denied a deal with Take 2 (a.k.a. Rockstar Games) to distribute Bungie titles at home and abroad, except in Bungie (Take 2 now owns 19.9% of Bungie — the highest possible non-controlling stake), and publish console versions of Bungie's games. The first move ends two years of fan speculation as to what Jones' next project would be; the second ends over a year of industry gossip that Bungie was up for sale. **Dolphin specs revealed?** They may be. At least, the graphics chip's specs may be on display Oct. 6 at the Microprocessor Forum in San Jose, Calif. Nintendo has partnered with ArtX to design the system's graphics engine —

which has a brawny piece of silicon to compete with Sony's Graphics Synthesizer. ArtX is going to reveal a PC graphics chip, the design of which is "paralleling ArtX's work on Nintendo's Dolphin video-game console." **In the United States, Sega is going online with AT&T.** Before he very public ouster from Sega, then-COO Bernie Stolar announced SoA will offer online service for the Dreamcast through AT&T's WorldNet. The service, called the Sega Dreamcast Network, will run gamers $19.99 for (60 hours of service, $22.95 for unlimited access. **In Japan, Sega is following railway lines for broadband connections.** In one of those peculiar "cross-business segment" deals, Japanese railway lines are entering the cable business by running fiber optics through their tunnels. Sega is getting into the action, offering the Dreamcast as the terminal system for the digital data running on those cables. Sega's top brass says that the deal is a practice run for the company's plans to get into the broadband business around

the world. **At the Gen Con Game Fair this August,** the game industry had its biggest showing in the history of the consumer event. Though the Fair was created for pen-and-pencil RPGs, computer and video games stormed the floor and nudged aside the Kingpins and pewter figurines to make way for world premieres. *EverQuest* maker Verant unveiled its persistent-world, massively multiplayer, realtime strategy game, *Sovereign*. And, in the first-ever simultaneous announcement of a paper-and-pencil game system and a computer game based on that game system, Wizards of the Coast revealed *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, 3rd Edition*, backed up by *Bioware's 3rd Edition* rules-slingin' *Neverwinter Nights*. *Nights* is a single- and multiplayer RPG that will allow gamers to make elaborate dungeons for their friends. Gairoz, Orc Slayer of the Fourth Circle, could not be reached in his mother's basement for comment.

— Compiled by Aaron John Loeb Editor in chief *Next Generation* Online

---

SERIOUS CRIME...

DESERVES SERIOUS PUNISHMENT

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5 heavily armed vehicles

Twice the firepower of the original

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Drop and give me twenty

Hollywood's leading military consultant takes the *Medal of Honor* team to boot camp

■ Dye on the set of *Private Ryan*, with his trainees that included Tom Hanks, Tom Sizemore, Matt Damon, and Ed Burns. Pretty but isn't uniform design a game.

→ Capt. Dale Dye is dressed in fatigues and ready for business when **Next Generation** enters Electronic Arts' makeshift war room. Dye and his company are responsible for the authentic look of war in the films *Saving Private Ryan* and *Platoon*. But for DreamWorks Interactive, Dye has crossed mediums, consulting for the *Medal of Honor* development team as they try to bring realism to this first-person WWII shooter for PlayStation.

"I was a little leery," Dye says about being approached to do the project. "While I applauded what they wanted me to do, I was skeptical... they went through a lot to prove me wrong."

■ CAPT. DALE DYE

Dye's involvement with the project ranged from conceptual level planning to leading the training exercise in the Nevada desert in order to familiarize them with the weapons that would be used in the game. Dye's crash bootcamps are known in Tinseltown for bringing famous actors to tears. He put the *Medal of Honor* team through a similar, but

compacted, session.

"When they screwed up," Dye says, "they got punished. They had to do push-ups." Occasionally, Dye admits, he might have had his boot on the back of their necks. "They had to understand," he continues, "there were consequences for their actions."

So how did this team of game developers stack up against the onscreen elite?

"The neat thing about this team," Dye says, "is they never let their eyes glaze over. I expected to run into pencil-neck geeks, but I didn't. There never was a point where they shut themselves down."

Dye expresses that in some ways, working with the design team was very similar to working with actors and directors. But what impresses Dye is the amount of detailed information the team keeps calling him for.

"I get calls," Dye says, "like 'how far does this weapon recoil?' They

keep tweaking and keep tweaking this game."

As a former Marine Captain with three tours in Vietnam and one in Beirut, Dye explains that when preparing for *Private Ryan*, he had to change his mindset entirely. "You throw out modern options," Dye says, "and think in a different fashion." Something we hope will translate well into *Medal of Honor*.

Next Generation mentioned to Dye that clearly the sugarcoated nature of violence in videogames contrasts deeply to the horrors of war seen in *Platoon* and *Private Ryan*. And while Dye forthrightly states he will never make a movie glorifying war, he and the DreamWorks team feel that games as a medium are not the most appropriate form to express those horrors.

"We want to make it fun and educational," says Dye. "There's nothing glorifying in war, but there's a lot to learn from it." **NextGen**

> "When they screwed up, they got punished . . . there were consequences"

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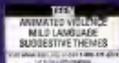
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PlayStation

SHENMUE
SEGA'S GREAT GAMBLE
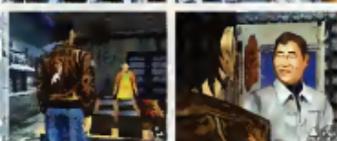
With everything on the line, can Sega's number-one visionary bring back the glory?
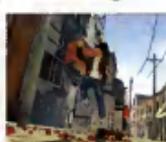
Can a game be too ambitious? Certainly, many games have crumbled under the weight of their aspirations, but when the man making the promises is Sega's superstar developer Yu Suzuki, people are bound to take him seriously. His latest project, *Shenmue*, attempts to do nothing less than create a fully realized virtual world where players can interact with everything they see. Wrap this feat around an epic storyline about love, betrayal, and murder, and you can see why Sega is counting on *Shenmue* to change the gaming world forever.

■ Yu Suzuki

→ Special
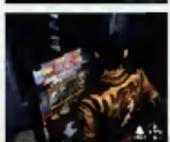
PROJECT BERKELEY: THE STORY SO FAR

Shenmue is nothing if not ambitious. In development for more than five years under the codename of "Project Berkeley," the project was originally conceived by Suzuki as a "*Virtua Fighter* RPG" for the now-defunct Saturn. Despite his work on other high-profile projects such as the new *F355 Challenge* arcade game, *Shenmue* has remained Suzuki's pet project — this is what he wants to go down in history for. But vision isn't cheap, and there are only a few people in the world that can utilize the resources that Suzuki has brought to bear on his auspicious game design. Currently, the team is rumored to be over 200 members strong (Suzuki has said that the ending credits take more than ten minutes to scroll through), and the game budget has already hit an astounding $20 million.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA

Shenmue started with the most basic of concepts: Yu Suzuki wanted to tell a story. But when asked today, he doesn't know how to categorize the framework in which the story is told. "It is difficult to explain what type of game *Shenmue* is," says Suzuki. "In

a nutshell, *Shenmue* is a cinematic adventure game set in China. The game themes — love, courage, friendship — are universal; they're standards around the world." The story takes place in 1985 and revolves around two main characters. Ryo Hazuki, the character players control throughout the game, must explore Japan and China trying to solve the mystery behind his father's recent death. While in Hong Kong he meets Rei Shenhua, his future love interest, who aids him in his quest.

In order to bring his vision to life and turn the story into an actual game, Suzuki and his team faced the daunting task of re-creating a virtual copy of each city for the game to take place in. Over 1,200 separate locations have been modeled down to the tiniest of details. Neon signs buzz overhead, street signs clatter in the wind, and pieces of trash clutter the streets. To achieve the type of precision Suzuki demands, the team members did thousands of hours of research in order to accurately portray the world of 1985. The team even went so far as to research the weather patterns of the time and work them into the game, helping to create the most believable game world yet seen.

■ The graphic style of the characters is dead-on mid-1980s. Yu Suzuki hopes players will find this look retro-hip

■ Alleys, warehouses, and outdoor markets are typical of the gritty street environments you'll traverse in Shenmue as you try to learn about your father's fate

Step into the world of the game and you'll be fascinated to see that the streets around you are teeming with life

Staggeringly, even the smallest of details has been put into the game to ensure that players are involved. If you walk into an arcade, you can sit down and play actual arcade games (which consist of some Suzuki classics like After Burner and Space Harrier). Unlike a traditional adventure title, which would simply play the game for you and tell you how you did (or maybe just say "you had fun"), players actually get to play these games as if they were in an arcade — right down to the cigarette burns on the cabinet. Likewise, when Ryo goes into a pub, he can actually pick up and play darts as a separate mini-game.

Step into the world of the game, and you will be fascinated to see that the streets around you are teeming with life. People are walking around the streets minding their own business, and you'll even see an occasional biker speed by. If you want to stop and talk to someone, the game seamlessly segues into dialogue. Gone are the days of characters pivoting and then speaking to you. If you walk up to a woman at the market and say "hello," she will look up from what she's doing and acknowledge your presence, then proceed to converse with you in a natural manner. In another nod to the absolute realism that the game is attempting, characters will actually all speak in their native languages. "In terms of making [Shenmue] more popular across the world, the game's characters will speak in different languages, just like in a real movie," says Suzuki. "For example, Ryo, the main character, will say 'Bonjour' or 'Bonsoir.'" Accordingly, Suzuki indicates that much of the dialogue in the final game will be subtitled during localization, not dubbed.

THE "VIRTUA ADVENTURE"

Technological feats aside, though, what really interests gamers is how the game will actually play. Unfortunately, much of this subject is still in doubt since the game has not been shown in any near-completed forms. Even the recently released Shenmue demo only showed a small sampling of the number of types of gameplay reported to be in the final game. Most of what's been shown publically so far are mini-games, and a few small action sequences.

The primary mode of gameplay will use a third-person viewpoint similar in feel to many of today's action/adventure titles. You control Ryo as he walks around each city, speaking and dealing with people around you, from what you learn, you will be able to solve puzzles, make new contacts, and bring yourself closer to the answers that you are looking for.

At times, your investigations will lead to events that must be navigated as action sequences. This is where the game appears to falter a bit. Controlling a character walking around a city can be done with the standard controls, but to achieve the kind of realism Suzuki wanted for certain action sequences, he had to find new way control method. Why? Suzuki realized that real-world action sequences are very dynamic and fluid — not at all like the close-in, set-up confrontations portrayed in normal fighting or adventure games. In order to keep this same feeling of involvement, then, Suzuki was forced to simplify the controls in the action sequences so that the game could be played by the masses and not just the most adept of joystick jockeys.

One scene shown at the Tokyo
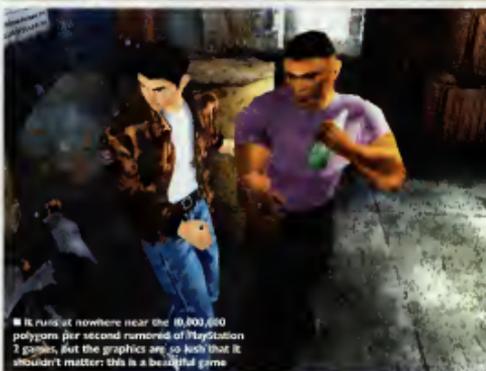
■ It runs at nowhere near the 10,000,000 polygon per second rumored of PlayStation 2 games, but the graphics are so lush that it shouldn't matter: this is a beautiful game

■ Extensive attention has been paid to choreographing encounters between Ryo and the many inhabitants of Hong Kong that he will interact with

Game Show last spring had Ryo talking to some ruffians who then attack him. In the course of the fight, Ryo throws some boxes, ducks under kicks, and grabs the attacker's leg, generally acting like a martial-arts master. The way this scene is controlled, however, is through a sequence of prompts that tell you to hit the gamepad in a specific direction at a given time. If you miss, bad things happen to you (although many are recoverable); if you get the moves right, you win the fight. It's fun to watch and definitely exciting the first time through — but hardly state-of-the-art in interactivity. However, if the rest of the game delivers in-depth interactivity, even hardcore gamers will likely forgive these linear, *Dragon's Lair*-style modes, especially if they help move along a compelling story.

There is also a mode in which you have full control of Ryo as he fights against enemies. This mode, a cross between *Virtua Fighter* and *Final Fight*, is far more interactive than the other, but the tradeoff is that it isn't anywhere near as dynamic-looking. Still, with a large variety of kicks, punches, and throws at your disposal, this looks to break up the pacing of the game in a fun manner. And, as previously mentioned, there are

dozens of mini-games ranging from darts to gambling to classic Sega arcade hits, all of which have their own rules and unique control schemes.

So, despite what we might expect from Yu Suzuki, it seems that the primary focus of the game will be adventure, not action. Although action parts are primarily what has been shown thus far, we're guessing that they are not the majority of the gameplay.

LAST MAN STANDING

While many were skeptical after playing the linear sequences shown at Tokyo Game Show and E3 this year, it's important to remember that we've barely seen anything yet. The pressure is on for Suzuki to make this the game to end all games — or else Sega of Japan could quite possibly have a dead system on its hands. If *Shenmue* doesn't persuade an already-skeptical Japanese public that Dreamcast is worth buying, it will certainly fail before the perceived might of the upcoming PlayStation 2.

If *Shenmue* is successful, though, look for many of the Japanese developers who have been sitting on the fence to turn at least some attention toward

The pressure is on to make this the game to end all games, or Sega could have a dead system on its hands

Dreamcast, Third-party support is definitely what Sega needs, and this game could be the proof that the system has enough power to create state-of-the-art games (although cynics will point out that the cost of making a game like *Shenmue* is prohibitive to all but the largest of companies).

Stateside, *Shenmue* will have a different impact. While the success of the system in Japan will mean more quality games will be made overall, N64 has shown us that a system need be a success in Japan to make it in the US. But, as many gamers will agree, a lack of Japanese games certainly hasn't helped Nintendo 64 at all. Although there will be a big Sega marketing push when the

title comes out, Ryo doesn't have the accessibility or market appeal of a Link or Mario, so don't expect the title to be an incredibly huge seller at release (although word of mouth may drive it during the all-important holiday season). What the title can do for Sega is show off its power against PlayStation 2's first generation of titles. With a title like *Shenmue* in Sega's corner, Sony, with its relatively short window of time between dev kits going out and the system launch, may be hard-pressed to match the sheer scope of the game during the 2000 holiday season. If the title slips, however, Sega will have a hard time playing catch-up because — as *Panzer Dragoon Saga* showed with the Saturn —

an incredible game won't do anything for system sales if the public has already moved on.

HOW WILL IT END?

The clock is ticking. Suzuki and the *Shenmue* team must meet their goals in the next few months or risk losing their window of opportunity. In Japan, the game has been split into two parts for release: the first half is scheduled to ship in October and the final half will follow in December (the US version will provide both halves at once).

With Suzuki and team in 24/7 crunch mode to finish what could be the most revolutionary game in history, Sega, and the rest of the world, are holding their breath in anticipation. Will the five years Yu Suzuki has dedicated to *Shenmue* be the crowning achievement of his career, or a vainglorious waste of time? The world will know soon.

— *Blake Fischer*

■ Although some parts of *Shenmue* will have traditional fighting-game control, for stylized fights like this simplicity will be the order of the day

■ To achieve fluid motion and continuity in expansive action sequences, *Shenmue* forsakes traditional controls for simple button presses. Suzuki hopes that during these sequences gamers will be so caught up in the story that the simple gameplay will feel natural

02:54:03
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Excessive Speeding 2:54 a.m.

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■ In this planetarium, Lara must use the stars mapped on the ceiling and move the markers on the floor to solve the puzzle

■ PLAYSTATION, PC

TOMB RAIDER:
THE LAST REVELATION

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Core Design** ■ Release Date: **November 1999** ■ Origin: UK

Britain's bad girl goes back to basics with what will be her final PlayStation installment

In last year's preview of *Tomb Raider 3*, **Next Generation** pointed out the name "Tomb Raider" itself was becoming more a misnomer with every version. Lara's adventures in London and the Antarctic were about as distant as one could possibly get from mythical webs of chambers stretching deep beneath civilization's most ancient soil.

We pointed out this problem to Core Design's Adrian Smith when he visited us last year with *Tomb Raider 3*, just about the time *The Last Revelation*

> **"There'll be a Jeep chase through the streets of Cairo, and there's a motorcycle chase as well"**
> — Mike Schmitt, associate producer, Eidos

■ Not unlike the *Resident Evil* inventory system, Lara will now have to combine items in her inventory to solve puzzles. For example, two pieces of an artifact may need to be combined before Lara can plug them into the wall to open a door. Other objects, such as the flashlight and canteen, will also figure into several puzzles

was starting development. But we're sure it's just coincidence that *Tomb Raider* has gone back to its roots, as this game takes place entirely in Egypt, and mostly in tombs.

"Egypt was one of the most popular locations in the first game," says Eidos US Associate Producer Mike Schmitt. "We can do some more graphical tricks, so it will really look nice this time."

The graphical tricks Schmitt refers to are the bump-mapped environments (at least on PC) some new spot-lighting effects, and higher-poly environments. Subsequently, the tombs breathe with new life — gorgeously-lit textures display walls adorned with elaborate hieroglyphs, and statues and large pottery pieces fill rooms that would have been barren in Lara's earlier adventures.

In the latest installment, Lara's inadvertently released the spirit of an evil Egyptian god while exploring a

■ Puzzle-solving returns as a big part of the gameplay. Some are simple floor triggers, but others are more complex — this room requires Lara to solve a torch-lighting puzzle

■ Using Egyptian mythology as a launching point, Core is throwing some serious supernatural enemies in Lara's path, including skeletons and statues that come to life. Of course, there will be some human adversaries and pesky wild animals, too

Gorgeously-lit textures display walls adorned with elaborate hieroglyphs, and statues and large pottery pieces fill rooms that would have been barren in Lara's earlier adventures

tomb. Over the next dozen-plus levels, she must conjure up the spirit of another Egyptian god to re-imprison the one who plans to (shocker) end the world. Following the formula of the original *Tomb Raider*, the gameplay is largely set indoors, and solving puzzles to gain access to new parts of the tomb is once again a large part of the gameplay. Yet combat and negotiating the physically challenging environments still play a big part of the design, and Core hasn't abandoned the use of vehicles either.

"There'll be a Jeep chase through the streets of Cairo," says Schmitt. "There's a motorcycle chase as well."

What won't be returning are the non-linear level paths and large outdoor environments that Schmitt admits confused a fair amount of *TR3* players. "I think the objectives," he says,

"will be much more set this time." And don't expect as many puzzles to require precise running, jumping, and twisting to grab a ledge.

"There's kind of an effort to get away from that," Schmitt explains, "back to the feel of the puzzles of the first game." Design concepts aside, Core has continued to make improvements to the game, including some new moves, new weapons, and even some new help from the camera.

"We're using transparencies on Lara now," says Schmitt, demonstrating for **NG** on his PC. "When you actually pull the camera back, she becomes transparent, so you can get a much better view. You can line up your jumps and see objects better."

We could make the joke about a translucent-clothing option, but we refuse to further salivate over Lara in front of our readers. But as to be

■ Tomb Raider shipped in software (a hardware patch came later)

■ A much smoother-skinned Lara, in Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

■ All-new moves include the ability to shimmy around corners, swing on vines, and climb poles

expected, the superbly aerobic Ms. Croft adds several new moves to her repertoire. Lara now has the ability to climb and slide down poles, to swing and jump from ropes, to perform a shoulder barge attack, and when hanging from an edge, she can now shimmy around corners. While these are all fairly major new gameplay moves, Schmitt mentions that there are plenty more subtle ones, such as opening a door properly, opening trap doors, and several waiting animations.

Both the PlayStation and the PC

versions are now using a skinned Lara model, which plays a major part in her smoother overall look. Gone are the angular joints associated with most 3D figures, and even Lara's face has been re-mapped.

"Core is actually playing with some features," says Schmitt. "Lara blinks, and it's likely her lips will move in the cut scenes."

And expect to get your fair share of those cut scenes as well. "The guys at Core were really impressed with Metal Gear Solid and Final Fantasy VII,"

■ Lara's range of animations has really been improved over the last year — now she'll grab and pull objects, open trap doors, and even float in a pool of water more realistically

Schmitt says. "The way the FMV and cut scenes kind of morphed right into the gameplay. They've gone in and changed the code in the Tomb Raider game engine to support those kinds of transitions. Hopefully, all the loading screens will be eliminated."

Dramatics aside, Lara brings some new weapons as well as a new targeting system that enables players to aim any weapon in any direction. But her targets won't be limited to enemies.

"One of the weapons they're going to give her is a crossbow with a laser sight," says Schmitt, "so she'll be able to pick off a switch on a wall that opens door."

All of which rounds out what will be the final PlayStation Tomb Raider title. But wait, did we mention the training level? While it has traditionally been set in Lara's mansion, it has been moved to a Cambodian temple, and features — ready for this? A 16-year-old Lara Croft. Oh, to be a young archeologist.

— Tom Russo

■ Expect a variety of new weapons, including a crossbow with laser sight. Of course, traditional weaponry like the double pistols will return
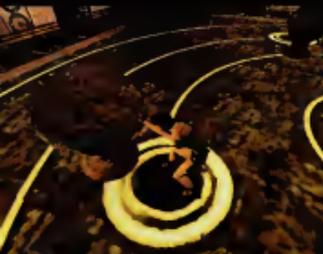
■ At times, players will use binoculars to get a good look at distant objects

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THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2   Sega Dreamcast

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■ Whether you are using it to swing over deadly traps or to disarm enemies, the bullwhip is Indy's most versatile survival tool.
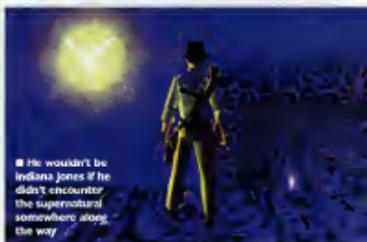
■ He wouldn't be Indiana Jones if he didn't encounter the supernatural somewhere along the way

■ PC, PLAYSTATION

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

■ Publisher: **LucasArts** ■ Developer: **LucasArts**
■ Release Date: **November 1999 (PC), Q1 2000 (PSX)** ■ Origin: **US**

Can LucasArts' veteran adventurer keep up with the young and dangerous Ms. Croft?

The moment comes about five minutes into *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, when Indiana Jones claims the golden idol and escapes alive: without any mention of the phrase "tomb raider" he secures the title unto himself in the minds of moviegoers everywhere — but we're not talking about movies. When it comes to games, Indiana Jones stands in line behind pioneer adventurer Pitfall Harry, and, more recently, a lovely and nimble rival who's more or less run away

with the archeologist's crown in three successive titles.

But do we really need to compare Indiana Jones to Lara Croft? The term

"tomb raider" is perhaps too limiting a description for a man who has unearthed the lost ark, rescued the Sankara stones, and sipped from the Holy Grail. It's unlikely that Indiana Jones will fail in anything, least of all his first 3D realtime adventure, and certainly not if LucasArts Producer Hal Barwood has anything to do with it. Although it's nearly a year behind

Indy's adventure will bring him closer to the supernatural world with every level completed

■ Indy's machete comes in handy when it's time to cut the bridge out from under your pursuers, or when you're swimming with sharks

"Indy and realtime 3D just go together like ham and eggs"
— Hal Barwood, producer, LucasArts

schedule, Barwood's focused team (we had to really twist their arms to stop production long enough to take new screenshots for this article) has ensured **Next Generation** that the PC version will not go out the door this fall until perfect.

"I've got nine level designers," Barwood says, "struggling because we're working a level of sophistication that is beyond any game that we've done in the past."

The 17 levels feature mine-cart rides, jeep chases, and white-water rafting, as well as traditional exploration and combat with bad guys.

"Indy and realtime 3D," Barwood says, "just go together like ham and eggs. It could not be a better fit."

He is right. This latest quest takes place post-WWII, when Indiana Jones is persuaded by Sophia Hapgood (Indy's partner in the PC adventure *Fate of Atlantis*) to help the CIA discover why the Russians are digging up remains of the Tower of Babel. It turns out the Soviets

are attempting to rebuild the mysterious and dangerous machine housed inside the ancient tower. Sure enough, Indy's quest to secure pieces of the machine thrusts him into a race around the world to locations such as Babylon, King Solomon's mines, and the ancient Olmec homeland of Mexico.

And true to the story-progression of the films, Indy's adventure will bring him closer to the supernatural world with every level completed. Early game

■ Players will be able to do more than get behind the wheel of a jeep — vehicular action includes a wild mine-cart ride through the fabled mines of King Solomon

enemies will include animals and Russian soldiers, but they later become otherworldly types.

"The Jones approach to fantasy" Barwood says, "is to make it more attractive as it seems to grow out of reality. So we try to ground everything in some historical background."

As one would expect from a third-person adventure, Indiana brings with him a variety of moves any tomb raider will be familiar with, including swimming, jumping, crawling, and shimmying across ledges, "and obviously using the whip," says Wayne Cline, production manager. "You can use it as a weapon, you can also use it to whip and swing across chasms, you can climb straight up it, you can use it to disarm enemies, whipping pistols out their hands, and you can also use it to solve puzzles. Say there's a gap, with a switch across the gap that you can't reach — you can use the whip to flip the switch with it."

As it's Indy's trademark item, Cline says they spent plenty of time making sure it works really effectively — although his list

of weapons is fairly extensive, including grenades, satchel charges, a machete, a bazooka, a shotgun, several handguns, and automatic rifles.

But don't go thinking this is some kind of Indy frag-fest — quite the opposite.

"I'd say the whole game is about 75 to 80 percent puzzling and discovery," Cline says, "and 25 percent is action-based, fighting enemies."

Puzzles are fairly straightforward, requiring players to find items necessary to open doors, or fix a bridge. If players get stuck, they can get hints, but this will cost them IQ points. If the game is played perfectly players can earn a perfect score of one thousand points.

"Every time you drop the difficulty level down," says Cline, "you'll lose IQ points. You get points for finding treasures and defeating enemies."

After completing a level, treasures can be cashed in to buy health packs and ammo. Cline also hints at a map, which, if purchased, brings you to a bonus level.

Part of the reason for Indy's delays had to do with much of the rescripting of the Jedi Knight engine (according to Cline,

only 5 to 10 percent of the original engine remains), and gone with that code is the multiplayer component.

"The logistics of figuring out how to do a story-game with multiple players was just mind-boggling," says Cline. "Basically, we were going to have to come up with two completely different games."

Instead the team has opted to make one deep and compelling adventure.

"I think realtime 3D is a wonderful way to tell stories," Barwood explains. "But the player is expected to forge his own way... he's a partner in the storytelling."

Come November, adventurers should find their partnership with Barwood everything they hoped it would be. He's even considerate enough to let you wear the fedora.

— Tom Russo

■ The obstacles Indy must overcome are many, including gun-wielding communist guards, spiked wall traps, and ubiquitous pools of lava
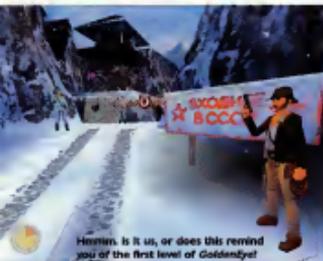
■ Hmmm. Is it us, or does this remind you of the first level of Goldeneye?

■ Sometimes the whip is useful for obtaining items, such as this statue's arm, which is needed to solve a puzzle

■ It seems these Egyptians couldn't map out anything without a glowing red beam of light [right]. Of course, Indy must also consult the kindhearted locals for help with his quest [above]

THE FIRST **GO** ANYWHERE

GRAB ANYTHING

FIGHTING GAME ON THE PLANET.

Murder, Death, Kill? Millions of Dead Krill? Mountains of Damp Knishes? Whatever it stands for, it's coming to Dreamcast

■ Kurt, the strangely Geigeresque gunman, is back to take out the strangest biomechanical menaces the future has to offer. Is it us, or is this a little weird?

With the first glance at MDK 2's esoteric game world, you can tell that the developers at Bioware have put a lot of effort into replicating the exact feel of the first game. Every nuance of MDK's dark and angular vision of the future has been kept intact for this next-generation sequel, but this time — with hot new technology and a brand new gameplay spin — the game looks even better.

The main difference between the original and the sequel is in the storyline. "We felt that a strong underlying story would help to complete the ultimate single-player experience," says Dr Gregory Zeschuk, president of Edmonton-based Bioware. "One of the largest areas we're going to push is in character development and humor." With this in mind, the storyline is played out in a combination of realtime and pre-rendered cut scenes. Humor is a key factor in these because, says Zeschuk,

■ Zoom in real close with Kurt's sniper rifle and nail that nasty right between the eyes
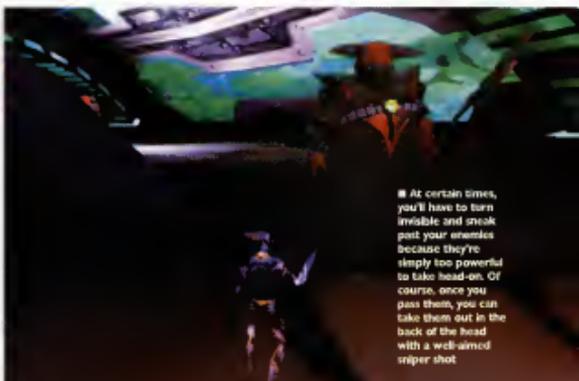
■ At certain times, you'll have to turn invisible and sneak past your enemies because they're simply too powerful to take head-on. Of course, once you pass them, you can take them out in the back of the head with a well-aimed sniper shot

"there is a dearth of humor in the videogame market — especially on the PC side." With character names like Schwang Schwing (one of the main baddies), nuclear-powered leaf blowers, and an alien race that appears to communicate via flatulation, it looks like *MDK 2* will definitely have the pieces for a funny ride.

To go along with the new storyline, the gameplay has also been twisted around quite a bit. Now, you not only play Kurt the bio-armored gunman with a sniper rifle, but also as Max the six-armed robotic dog "with an attitude" and the eccentric Dr. Fluke Hawkins. Each character has their own unique play mechanic. Max's levels are very action-based (you just need to shoot everything in sight), Kurt's levels are more stealth-based and you do a lot of hiding and sniping, and Dr. Hawkins' levels are almost adventure-based with lots of logic puzzles and clever gadgets to build. Each character's level will immediately lead into the next character (for example, on one level, Kurt might go in and then get captured, so Max must go in and rescue

him. Unfortunately, for the rescue to be completed, the doctor must then create some gadget that will allow the two to get away. It's this new synergy of gameplay styles that really gives *MDK 2* its punch.

Aiding in all of this are some astounding visuals. The team has done an excellent job of re-creating the feel of the original game but with new higher-poly visuals. "We were able to get ahold of a

good portion of [the original dev team's] pre-production materials as well as talking to Dave and the Planet Moon fellows," says Zeschuk when confronted with the obvious similarity in the look of the two games. "We love to pick their brains about where the *MDK* ideas came from so that we can better understand the game." Of course, Zeschuk admits, "we're able to push so many more polys and do so many more effects [on the sequel] that we can really go over the top with everything we do."

With the most powerful console system on the market at their disposal, we'd expect nothing less. — Blake Fischer

As the professor, it is your job to raid the kitchen and then fashion what you find into usable weapons. Just think of him as a modern-day polygonal MacGyver

> **With nuclear-powered leaf blowers — and an alien race that communicates via flatulation — *MDK 2* will be funny**

WHAT THE HECK IS *MDK*?

The first *MDK* was conceived as being the exact opposite of Shiny's cutesy *Earthworm Jim*. With this in mind, the team chose the darkest name they could think of: *Murder Death Kill*. The new team at Bioware swears that the title now stands for "Milk, Dumplings, and Kielbasa (a meal that they enjoyed as children)". Sounds like a copout to us.

Just remember, whatever happens, KEEP PEDALING.

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RISING ZAN
THE SAMURAI GUNMAN

"...QUIRKY LIKE NO OTHER GAME WE'VE EVER COME ACROSS"
–Next Generation

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–Official PlayStation Magazine

"THIS GAME SEEMS TO HAVE IT ALL..."
–PSM

"QUIRKY, OFFBEAT, UNUSUAL, BIZARRE, ODD, STRANGE, PECULIAR..."
–PS Extreme

■ Boom! The game captures all the showtime appeal of the NBA with excellent player models and amazingly detailed animation

■ DREAMCAST

SEGA SPORTS **NBA 2K**

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Visual Concepts** ■ Release Date: **November 1999** ■ Origin: **US**

Can Visual Concepts do with the NBA what it's done with the NFL?

When Greg Thomas, president of Visual Concepts and Sega's new VP of development, mentions that Sega's NFL 2K uses every bit of space on the one-gig GD-ROM, it's hard not to get excited. NBA 2K only adds fuel to the pre-game bonfire.

As was evident in the early days of NFL 2K development, NBA 2K already brings next-generation graphics to the sport. And, Thomas confesses, "our initial focus was really on visuals. Specifically, we wanted arenas duplicated accurately, down to the seating chart, down to where guards stand in the aisles, down to the coaches and scorers."

And, down, of course, to the players themselves. The player models have been revamped as many as 10 times to make them as lifelike as possible, giving them fully animated faces with blinking eyes and working jaws. Expect nothing less than full facial expressions, which are often visible, and not just in replays. A player may express an angry look and raise his arms in reaction to a ref's call — just like in the real NBA. (No word on coach-choking animations, though.)

According to Thomas, every player on every team will be modeled, and "the only

■ Visual Concepts takes crowd animations to the next level: the developer can control the individual animation of each person in the stadium. The programmers can bring one person (or the entire crowd) to their feet — it's completely up to them

Here's a screenshot of Hakeem Olajuwon dunking, and here's a snapshot of Hakeem Olajuwon dunking — you make the call.

players we haven't modeled," he says, "are the rookies who aren't signed yet."

In an interesting side note, Sega has the rights to use all of the NBA coaches. Play against Indiana, and you'll see a fully 3D Larry Bird walking the sidelines.

The raw visual presence of the game is only part of the magic, as the animation brings these pros to life unlike any previous hoop game. "We focused a lot on the intricacies of movement," Thomas says, "the intricacies of playing defense as well as the moves on offense."

Sure enough, details that went missing in 32-bit sport titles have been motion captured and are already working, from jump passes to players scrambling for, and accurately picking up, loose balls. Low-post fighting has accurately been modeled as well, enabling players to push back and forth against each other in the war for

■ This perfectly round rim was created by VC artist Matt Crysdale. It has only 51 polygons. Clever stuff, Matt

■ Brian Grant of the Portland Trail Blazers lands this dunk as the Houston Rockets bench looks on helplessly. The animated benches, complete with 3D player models, will react realistically to what's going on in the game

"The only players we haven't modeled are the rookies who aren't signed yet."

— Greg Thomas, president, Visual Concepts

key real estate. The offensive moves are there as well, including dunks that rock the physically modeled backboard.

"People want excitement when they play a basketball game," says Thomas. "Consumers will say, 'I just paid $49.95 for the game, I want to jam on this dude's head.' And we're not making Showtime or Jam, but we definitely want to make sure that you can drive."

And at 60fps with steady controls already implemented, you can already drive the lane. But the realism of the NBA is going to be there — these virtual teams will play like their real-life counterparts, says Thomas. The Lakers, with hotshot Kobe Bryant, are more likely to play a drive-the-lane game, whereas conservative teams like the Jazz will

pound it in to Malone. Yet even as Kobe himself, the AI won't make it easy to dunk every time, and seasoned players will quickly learn to use the advanced play-calling system. NPC teammates will feature improved AI as well — toss the ball up to one by the rim, and he'll bring down the alley-oop. Miss a free throw, and an AI-controlled teammate might, in one motion, secure the rebound and put back for two points.

Of course, a few things were missing from the game at press time, including the play-by-play commentary and the create-a-player option. But Thomas and his team at Visual Concepts are closing in his goal — and from what's already in there, hoop fans certainly have a reason to get excited.

— Tom Russo

■ While the close-up screenshots reveal the game's high level of detail, the shots to the right and above more accurately reflect the gameplay camera

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"This game has unbelievable graphics that, in my opinion, easily rival that of the Gran Turismo 2 demo"
-SEGANET.COM

"Graphically, this game is better than any console racing game to date...period."
-GAMEFAN ONLINE

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Sega Dreamcast.

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■ Big air dunks, blocks, shoves, and steals remain the foundation of the arcade gameplay

During its first twelve months in arcades, Midway's NBA Jam made one billion dollars — 25 cents at a time. Revisions and unofficial sequels to the series followed, inexorably leading us to NBA Showtime: NBA on NBC — a game with enough similarities to the original NBA Jam to be considered a sequel, although evolved just enough to warrant a new moniker (not to mention that Acclaim now owns the license).

Just like the arcade version, NBA Showtime for Dreamcast already features fast framerates and gorgeous 3D graphics. As the game was written in C for the arcade, the developers have

NBA SHOWTIME:
NBA ON NBC

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Avalanche ■ Release Date: Q1 2000 ■ Origin: US

Can Midway's spiritual successor to Jam recapture the series' glory on Dreamcast?

actually re-used the same code for the Dreamcast version. Yet the arcade machine features a Mips R-5000

The game will be a direct port — both good news and bad news for Dreamcast early adopters who may be disappointed by the lack of added goodies

■ Showtime brings over arcade features such as distinguishable player heads and realistic rim physics

processor with a 3Dfx Banshee chipset and custom sound hardware from Midway, so porting the graphics display engine and sound present the most difficult technical hurdles for the team. Because of this, the sound was almost non-existent in the version that we played.

Ultimately, the game will be a direct port without much added functionality. This is both good news and bad news for Dreamcast early adopters who will be amazed by the faithful re-creation of the arcade version (including the 60fps animation) but may be disappointed by the lack of added goodies.

As in the arcade game, special characters including team mascots, design team members, and classic horror movie characters can be drafted for the Dreamcast version. The powerful create-a-player feature will also be supported, but you won't be able to take your Dreamcast-created characters into the arcade by way of the VMU. Additional functionality added for the Dreamcast version will include adjustable difficulty levels and time periods, and vibration support for the jump Pack. — Jeffrey Adam Young

THREE'S A CROWD

NBA Showtime got its start as a three-on-three basketball game, but the game was too hard to control when running at its current speed. Additional buttons were going to be required, and the players were often offscreen, complicating matters. The design team chose to jettison the extra players rather than slow the game down.

The Sicker the trick, the sweeter the win.

actual game screens

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CLOCKWISE FROM THE TOP RIGHT.
BRONX SLAM. ZAK T. LAYS DOWN THE SICK HEELFLIP LUGE INTO A LUGE 360 AND FINISHES WITH A HEADSPIN FLIP.

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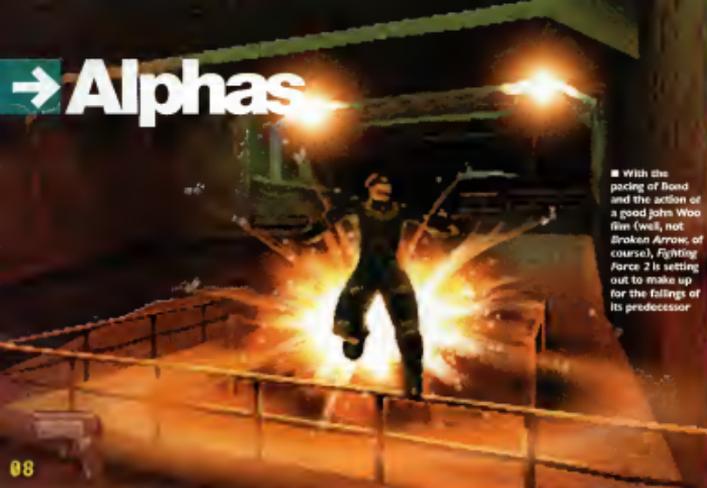
■ With the pacing of Bond and the action of a good John Woo film (well, not *Broken Arrow*, of course), *Fighting Force 2* is setting out to make up for the failings of its predecessor

■ **DREAMCAST, PLAYSTATION**

FIGHTING FORCE 2

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Core** ■ Release Date: **November 1999** ■ Origin **UK**

Less fighting, more force

→ The original *Fighting Force* didn't make it anywhere near *Next Generation's* top 50 games of all time, and with good reason. Generic to the core, the original game featured average graphics, a cookie-cutter plot that barely entered into the game, and about an hour's worth of beat-'em-up action before it was finished. That all said, however, with the second installment of

▲ A fully destructible environment means that strafing the enemies will also cause an extreme amount of collateral damage

■ Hawk now has a greater variety of moves at his disposal, which will help him through the more treacherous environments

■ Each of the nine levels in the game is as big as, if not bigger than, the entire original game

the series, Core has done an excellent job of re-vamping the concept, the graphics, the game design, and the pacing to compete with the next generation of console games.

The first major change is in the actual format of the game. Now, you can only play as Hawk (who was a character in the first game), a covert operative bent on destroying the components and

personnel involved in an evil corporate super-soldier project. Core has also upped the scale of the game considerably this time around, and each of the nine levels in the game is as big, if not bigger than, the entire original game. The levels are mission based, and Hawk must run through missile silos, corporate offices, and even an underwater lab in his quest to take down

→ Alphas

the evil behind the project. The new third-person camera, placed directly behind the character (à la *Tomb Raider*), gives the game a more modern feel than the original, which was comfortably close to *Final Fight* in its style.

You still have more than 30 different fighting moves to take out enemies at close range. Also available, however, is a large variety of range weapons including flame throwers, rocket launchers, and even a sniper rifle. What this means is that the gameplay now focuses on careful planning and sneaking around rather than simply walking into a room and beating everyone up.

Unfortunately for you, the enemies are now far smarter and they will react to your presence appropriately. Shoot a guard and his partner may dive under the cover of a nearby box — or he may try to dash to the nearest alarm. Other obstacles such as chain guns that drop from the ceiling must also be dealt with by shooting them down or finding a way

■ In his quest to take out the Super Soldier project, Hawk will have to travel all around the world to "decommission" labs and project leaders. With extreme prejudice

to deactivate them.

The overall pacing of the game's storyline is remarkably similar to 989 Studios' *Syphon Filter* (not a bad thing) — objectives are given out at the beginning of each level with special submissions given out mid-level to keep the

Shoot a guard and his partner may dive under a box — or he may try to dash to the nearest alarm

■ Hawk may not have had such a great go of it with the original *Fighting Force*, but by the looks of things, he's in much better shape for this return trip

tension high. Using both pre-rendered cinematics and some in-game movies, the plotline will be gradually revealed to players as they get to certain points in the game. While many of the key points were hidden from **Next Generation's** prying eyes, we expect plenty of sinister twists along the way to keep players on their toes.

Right now, the game is due for simultaneous release on both PlayStation and Dreamcast. Other than differences in resolution and some higher texture quality on the Dreamcast version, the two builds remain virtually the same. It is our hope that Core will be able to follow through on its promises and make this the action/adventure game to watch for this holiday season. — Blake Fischer

■ Hawk must raid a base in the middle of the jungle. This shot almost makes it look like he's some sort of, uh, tomb . . . raider

■ Lasers! Explosions! Swinging double fists! This game doesn't have it all, but it's still got a lot

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■ Not only will players have to watch their own step, but also those of their team members. Hopefully Dreamcast gunners will welcome the game's very "PC like" gameplay

■ **DREAMCAST, NINTENDO 64, PLAYSTATION**

RAINBOW SIX

■ Publisher: **Majesco, Red Storm** ■ Developers: **Pipe Dream Interactive, Saffire, Rebellion** ■ Release Date: **Fall 1999** ■ Origin: **US**

Red Storm's *Rainbow Six* gears up for a stealthy commando-style raid on Dreamcast — and every other platform under the sun

With Dreamcast's off-the-shelf architecture, it's fast becoming the platform of choice for PC-to-console ports. Edison, NJ-based publisher Majesco has kept the development of Rainbow Six tightly

■ The tactical nature of the game and seamless progress between indoor and outdoor environments separated Rainbow Six from other first-person shooters on PC. It should do the same on the FPS-poor Dreamcast

under wraps, but the result is what one would expect from a Dreamcast conversion: clean and virtually identical graphically to *Rainbow Six* running on a 3D-accelerated PC, with the interface slightly modified to appeal to the console gamer.

Kevin Mitchell, head of development for Pipe Dream Interactive, explains the game's very faithful conversion. "Because *Rainbow Six* is very much a Microsoft DirectX application, we chose to utilize the Win CE Dragon environment to ease porting. The fact that the majority of the Windows functions used by *Rainbow Six*

are available in the Dragon tool kit left us in a good position to work on finding replacements and work-arounds for the missing tools."

At press time, the developer was still working to include network functions to make full use of the system's modem — let's hope that the game will support it eventually.

Identical in gameplay to the PC version — Pipe Dream plans "to make the lack of a keyboard as painless as possible" — the game puts the player in command of an anti-terrorist task force and spans more than 17 missions. In a

The night goggles make the graphics look surprisingly pixelated. Let's hope that Pipe Dream will sort that out by the game's release.

ROGUE SPEAR

■ Publisher: Red Storm   ■ Developer: Red Storm   ■ Release Date: Fall 1999   ■ Origin: US

Chuckle at the unwitting double entendre, then check out this sequel to *Rainbow Six*

■ Hmm, hunting a terrorist through a jumbo jet, with tight quarters and difficult lines of fire — we suppose that could be tense.

➡ Last year's *Rainbow Six* for PC was an interesting (and popular) new wrinkle in the evolution of first-person games. Based on squad-level assault and infiltration, one of its overarching tenets was realism — a single shot could, and often did, mean death, which also meant that a lot of stealth, teamwork, and careful planning were required to successfully complete a mission.

For the upcoming sequel, *Rogue Spear* (the title is a variant on the military code Bent Spear, which indicates a "nuclear weapon incident" — and neither term means *anything* else), developer Red Storm has retained the core game engine from *Rainbow Six*, but upped the level of detail in the graphics and added new effects like rain and snow. Other key

■ If approaching a mansion in *Rainbow Six* was a challenge, try sneaking up on a castle. Good thing there's a sniper coming along

upgrades include a more human and realistic AI (hostages can panic, enemies can make mistakes, and team members move better and are less prone to get stuck in close quarters), and snipers. The snipers

have necessitated the addition of sniper weapons, a sniper skill, and sniper commands to both the action and planning phases of the game — snipers should also give more obvious players some fun new ideas for multiplayer matches. Also, thankfully, it's now possible to move while crouching, and you can look around corners without moving the character's whole body around them.

The original *Rainbow Six* was a deserved hit, and there seems little reason to believe that *Rogue Spear* won't be able to follow squarely in that tradition. The missions are spread out over a number of different world-wide locations, giving it an exotic edge the original lacked. This one should be tasty indeed.
— *Jeff Lundrigan*

Producer Carl Schnurr explains, "For technical reasons too arcane to go into, our engine doesn't deal very well with characters that aren't contained within a vertical cylinder. From characters don't follow this rule at all, which causes all sorts of bizarre effects in the game. In the end, we weighed the benefit of prone characters (realism, additional gameplay) against the cons (lengthy engineering time to implement) and decided on a compromise: the sniper crouch. This is a cross-legged sniper position that real snipers use, adds the desired gameplay effects, and requires far less time to implement."

■ While the core technology remains the same, you can still expect the graphics to look much better for this sequel — there's a better variety of locations as well
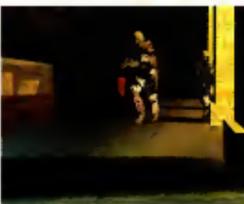
■ For the N64 version, Red Storm is trying to sell *Rainbow Six* to the same folks who bought *GoldenEye* in such record numbers

> ## "The quality of the development kits and Sega's helpfulness have made Dreamcast development a pleasant experience"
> — Kevin Mitchell, Pipe Dream Interactive

welcome move, Majesco decided to add five additional missions from the Eagle Watch mission pack, including more "exotic" levels based around Taj Mahal and Big Ben.

With the impending release of the PC sequel to *Rainbow Six, Rogue Spear*, it looks like a Dreamcast version of that game is not too far away, either. Jesse Sutton, president of Majesco and Pipe Dream, says, "I think *Rainbow Six* fans will be pleased when [future] announcements are made."

However, Dreamcast isn't the only console to be graced by the game's presence. There are also versions for every other current machine, including Game Boy Color, but that's another story altogether (see sidebar).

The differences from the Dreamcast version to the PlayStation are about what you'd expect. The graphics are less ambitious, but most of the gameplay is intact. New additions for PlayStation include a night-vision mode, plus the option of sniper fire (although the latter is certainly less involved than its implementation in *Rogue Spear*). Once again, the controls have been adapted from keyboard and mouse to a gamepad, and some parts of the planning and strategy segments of the game have been slimmed down for a console audience.

There are no multiplayer options, but that's about the only notable omission, and the game's 14 missions include two new

■ The PlayStation version offers fewer commandos per team, but it will let you snipe at enemies

specifically designed for PlayStation. Looks good.

The Nintendo 64 version makes use of that console's strengths — in other words, expect 4MB expansion pack and Rumble Pak support. While there is a night-vision mode and a zoom, there's no sniper fire. However, the cart will include 12 missions, ten from the PC original, plus the Senate Wing and Houses of Parliament levels from the *Eagle Watch* mission disk. Also, the N64 version will feature multiplayer support in the form of a two-player deathmatch or cooperative mode. Further, the N64 version will allow you to control a squad of up to four commandos — one more than PlayStation's three.

Whether an action-hungry console audience will cotton to the more strategy-and-stealth-oriented *Rainbow Six* remains to be seen. However Red Storm

is not doing this by halves, and the individual developers working on each version are working to the strengths of each platform — a major point in their favor.   — Jorg Tittel and Jeff Lundrigon

ALL THE COLORS OF THE RAINBOW

Believe it or not, there's also a Game Boy version of *Rainbow Six* in the works. As you might imagine, most of the gameplay does not use a first-person perspective, substituting a top down view instead. Fair enough, but there are 14 missions, and a nominal first-person view for "when the action heats up." Due out this fall along with PlayStation and N64 builds, it's looking surprisingly faithful to the original game.

■ *Rainbow Six* is coming to Game Boy — as you might expect, most of the action will be seen from the top down

THIS IS THE HEART.

Sega Dreamcast

THIS IS THE SOUL.

SOULCALIBUR

namco

■ There are plenty of tricks to pull off — just make sure you're back on the bike before the bike hits the ground

Acclaim may have Jeremy McGrath and THQ may have Ricky Carmichael, but don't count out 989's 16 licensed pro Supercross riders or 989's passion for accurately capturing the thrill of every sport it tackles.

With three bike classes, it's off to the races on 125s, 250s, and 400s as you compete on outdoor motocross tracks as well as on indoor Supercross tracks. 989 has licensed the blueprints of nine Supercross tracks directly from the designers to make the tracks as realistic as possible. There's plenty of licensed equipment, too, including bikes from the major manufacturers, Fox racing gear, and Pirelli tires.

The player competes against seven simultaneous riders in career mode, which follows the standard formula of requiring players to spend their winnings on bike upgrades and modifications. Beat the career mode, and players will unlock not only a bonus free-ride mode, but also a free-ride track editor.

Early gameplay shows promise, specifically a dropping-the-clutch button command, which players need to time before jumps to get added air, just as the

■ PLAYSTATION
SUPERCROSS 2000
■ Publisher: 989 Studios ■ Developer: Idle Minds ■ Release Date: November 1999 ■ Origin: US

With every publisher racing to market with a motocross game, can 989 take the lead?

■ Adjustments you'll need to make on the bike include the engine, exhaust, suspension, and tires

■ The game supports terrain deformation — after several laps on a muddy track, ruts will build on the course

pro riders do. While the engine, controls, and animations aren't quite as robust as those in THQ's nearly-finished Ricky Carmichael game (see NG 09/99), 989 stresses that there's still plenty of fixing planned before the game goes to beta,

and subsequently to store shelves, for a November launch.

Considering how revved-up 989 Studios seems to be for capturing the authenticity of Supercross, if it can make the adjustments it says it can, the company will certainly have a chance at the Supercross title — no Jeremy or Ricky required. — Tom Russo

> **989 has licensed the blueprints of nine Supercross tracks directly from the designers to make the tracks as realistic as possible**

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■ PC

NEED FOR SPEED —
MOTOR CITY

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **EA Seattle** ■ Release Date: **TBA** ■ Origin: **US**

American Graffiti online? EA takes its persistent-world racing game to a whole new level

■ Ice al physics make the wheels hang down when this '69 Pontiac GTO Judge catches some air off of a curb.

Need for Speed hasn't changed much over the years. Oh sure, the graphics engine and gameplay have improved, but the original concept of giving players a chance to drive outrageously powerful sports cars hasn't wavered. Until now. With *Motor City*, EA is taking *Need for Speed* into territory previously charted only by fantasy role-

"*Motor City* is Disneyland for hot rodders" — Peter Royea, product marketing manager

■ The game will feature full support for 3D cards with reflections and smokeclouds, including separate Glide and D3D versions

playing games, creating a persistent online world populated not by orcs and necromancers, but by classic muscle cars from the golden age of cruising.

"It's Disneyland for hot-rodders," says Product Marketing Manager (and admitted gearhead) Peter Royea. But the game isn't set in the past — it's set in a playland that is designed to look like the

past, with samplings of the coolest hot rods and car culture from the late '40s to the early '70s. Royea has licensed Ford and GM cars for the game, with the Chrysler license (imagine a retro car game without the 300 series or souped-up Chargers) still pending.

Unlike most racing games, players don't choose cars by going to an options screen and selecting make, model, and color; instead, you must find a car by visiting various used car lots around town or buying a car from another player through *The Gazette* (*Motor City*'s version of *Auto Trader* magazine). Players start

■ A gas-station chatting area that will be populated with cars in the final game. This is where players will chat, share tips, and challenge each other to races

MOTOR CITY IN THE MOTOR CITY

Wondering how *Motor City* would do in the real Motor City, we took a trip to the Detroit area to find out. "It sounds cool," said Robert Bailty, who we found at classic car hang-out Wooly Bully's in Nortbville, Mich. "It will be good in winter when you can't really take your car out, or race." Larisa Breton wasn't so sure: "Why would I go online and pretend to buy cars and fix them up if I spend all my time doing that in real life?" The last word goes to Michael Mika, a tech director at Ford Motor Co., and an active gamer: "Wow. All the guys at Ford will play it, that's for sure."

with a set amount of money to purchase a garage and a car. At first, you'll only be able to afford a low-end stock version of a car, but as you win races, you'll earn cash to upgrade your cars with new parts and other modifications. Races come in two flavors: sanctioned and illegal. Sanctioned races pay out cash to drivers who finish in the top few positions, while the stakes in the illegal races that come from challenging other players' races range from bragging rights to pink slips.

Not ready to enter the mean streets of *Motor City*? There's an offline version of the world populated by AI characters where drivers can familiarize themselves with the various hang-outs and tracks of *Motor City* as well as the real-world economy that exists in the game.

Much of the action in *Motor City* will happen off the track in exchanges between live players in chat. But these aren't static screens with 2D avatars. they're polished theme locations — retro diners and gas stations — that feature the

■ Some sanctioned races take place on closed-off city streets, while others happen at speedways with dragstrips and a variety of ovals, depending on your racing style

actual 3D customized cars owned by each player. There are a limited number of parking spots, so the first players in a lobby will be represented by their cars parked in the spaces. Additional players in that lobby will appear as cars cruising by the location. Click on a car, and you'll get info such as the driver's license, reputation, and racing class. Other stats on opponents, such as engine modifications and car performance, won't show up

until you have raced against them a few times to gain that knowledge.

It remains to be seen whether *Motor City* will attract the crowds that have graced *Ultima Online*. But if current retro trends and the resurgence of hot-rod racing are any indication, EA may be sitting on a gold mine. — *Jeffrey Adam Young*

■ Challenge races occur during the middle of the night in seedy parts of town like this toxic spillway (reminiscent of the LA River). Challenge races will also feature the possibility of being chased by cops
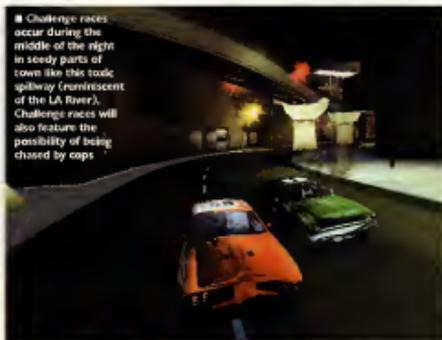
■ Races no longer happen just at brightly-lit high noon. Instead, you'll see a variety of dusk, dawn, and night races as well as changing weather patterns

■ Part manuals will feature generic and licensed parts to customize your hot rod. Players can also search junkyards for rare, or lower-cost, parts

■ Cool details like this repair estimate will add realism, and the in-game radio features four genres (surf, oldies, classic rock, and R&B) of originally composed studio-recorded music . . . not a synthesizer in sight

■ The game boasts an extensive build-your-own-boxer mode. Once built, players will begin their climb up a 30-man ladder to challenge the champ. As in *Ready 2 Rumble*, players now feature facial damage [right]

■ **PLAYSTATION, NINTENDO 64**

KNOCKOUT KINGS 2000

■ Publisher: **EA Sports** ■ Developer: **EA Studios (PSX), Black Ops (N64)** ■ Release Date: **September 2000** ■ Origin: **US**

After last year's glass jaw effort, can EA's developers knock out something worth playing?

➜ Call it a comeback. *Knockout Kings* drew in the masses with all the muscle EA applied to licensing boxers, but sadly the gameplay delivered all the punching power of back-to-back *Barney* episodes.

On the record, everyone at EA is quick to point out how well last year's PlayStation effort sold. Off the record, those who play games at EA recognized the title's shortcomings and have agreed that our two-star review of the title was justified. Fortunately, EA took note. We waited until the N64 version was good and playable before previewing it, and

can now wholeheartedly breathe a sigh of relief. With the help of Black Ops, EA appears to have gotten it right.

The Nintendo 64 version features a heck of a lot more snap, and the gameplay is on the arcade side, with some exaggerated moves and flashy effects. The analog controller makes footwork faster and smoother, and

response time has been improved as well — arcade flash or no arcade flash, it simply plays better. Also, each boxer has several signature moves (pre-set combos) on the C buttons. And just like the classic *Punch-Out*, players who land successful combos may be awarded a one-time-only power punch. The create-your-own-boxer option provides almost

> **We waited until the N64 version was good and playable before previewing it, and now EA appears to have gotten it right**

RAY LEONARD   OSCAR DE LA HOYA   MARVIN HAGLER   RAY LEONARD

■ The PlayStation version is starting to show promise — the boxers are textured and more lifelike than last year's effort
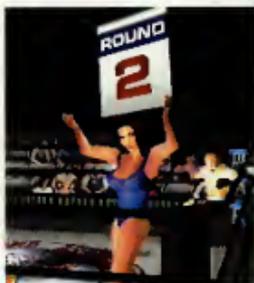
as many options as those found in Acclaim's WWF games for N64, including selectable signature moves, but the game only features 25 licensed boxers.

This year, the PlayStation version adds Joe Frazier, Floyd Mayweather Jr, and Oba Carr to last year's roster for a total of 50 licensed boxers, and the game now includes a biography of each. EA was still in negotiation with another very high-profile boxer — we Roy-ally bugged Producer Rick Gioito to tell us who it was, but while it was obvious he was Jones-ing to disclose the info, he couldn't.

Unfortunately, the PlayStation version was trailing the N64 version by a couple of months and wasn't playable during our visit. EA has opted to take the PlayStation development internally with a team of 30, who have done away with the textureless, single-skinned models of the previous engine. The new characters aren't as smooth as the old ones but have better-looking textured skins and more-lifelike faces that aid in color damage. It will support the Dual Shock controller, and hopefully the analog control will mirror the quality the N64 version already provides.

Of course, we can expect better

■ Thanks to Black Ops, the ring-card girls are looking better this year

music out of the PlayStation version. EA has signed co-promotional deals with Hollywood Records that include rap artist "Q," who has done a special "Knockout Kings" title track for the game.

Both games will feature the career mode, and new interactive training sessions (mini-games) in the Nintendo version let you build three different attributes (speed, power, and stamina), while the PlayStation version offers five (speed, stamina, heart, chin, and cuts).

■ Successfully complete a training mini-game and you'll be rewarded with extra attribute points

The PlayStation version will also feature seven different gyms from around the world to train your boxer in, including several licensed gyms from authentic boxers. The PlayStation version will also add a "classic match" mode, which Gioito describes as your chance to repeat or rewrite history in bouts such as Robinson vs. Lamotta or Frazier vs. Ali.

Sure enough, Sean O'Grady and Al Albert will deliver the play-by-play, and Mills Lane will referee again. While these trappings lend to the overall experience, it's the re-investment in the actual gameplay, not the licenses and promotional partners, that is most encouraging. EA is convinced it has two winners on its hands, and like *FIFA*, *Knockout Kings* is a rare property with global appeal. With the world waiting, we can only hope that EA continues to nurture this new franchise in the way it so rightly deserves.
— Tom Russo

A "classic match" mode gives players the chance to repeat or rewrite boxing history

■ As always, players can match up classic rivalries such as Hagler vs. Leonard. Each pro boxer has at least one signature move, including Leonard's bolo punch or De La Hoya's flurry of bodyshots

■ Both versions will add new fight venues, including London's Wembley Arena

The city has been divided into three different zones, providing hundreds of miles of city streets to create mayhem in

PC, PLAYSTATION

GRAND THEFT AUTO 2

Publisher: Rockstar Games **Developer: DMA Design** **Release Date: October 1999** **Origin: England/US**

Rockstar Games is gearing up to launch its next crime-'n'-chase game. Can it outrun GT's *Driver*?

In the original *Grand Theft Auto*, crime paid. Perfecting a one-man crimewave rewarded players with uniquely libidinous gameplay. The sequel brings more of the same, dropping players into the heart of a new gang-ridden metropolis.

The game's biggest change comes in the form of seven distinct gangs that populate the city. Developer DMA Design has conceived a complex criminal infrastructure that adds some diplomacy to the franchise. With three gangs ruling each level, players will constantly tackle conflicts of interest when choosing which mob to work for.

Subsequently, three mission arrows now guide the player through the city streets, but gameplay isn't limited to GTA's "go to a phone booth, get a

The city architecture is now polygonal, complete with beautiful realtime lighting and subtle 3D elements such as ramps, cranes, and roofs. Cars and pedestrians remain sprite-based

mission assignment, and follow it" pattern. Onscreen "respect meters" display how favorable a player's position is with each mob. Want to get in with the Zaibatsu? Try running over or shooting some Yakuza gang members.

But the game's real advances come in the form of police AI (read: lots of wild chases, both by car and on foot) and lifelike civilian behavior.

"Pedestrians will walk short distances," explains Rockstar Producer Dan Houser. "For longer distances, they might take a bus or a cab. And if you steal a taxi, a pedestrian may get into it. He'll increase your points, give you a tip, and may give you a secret mission?"

Houser also says that not all NPCs will be timid civilians. Players will have to deal with the occasional car thief and other rogue low-lifes, in addition to ruthless mobsters and cops. But hey, that's life in the big city.   — Jorg Tittel

The addition of an energy bar, "respect meters," and three directional arrows opens up totally new gameplay perspectives

CRIME & PUNISHMENT

A typical mission in GTA 2 might involve a carjacking, gunning down a rival, running over 10 pedestrians, and delivering some drugs. In the game, it gets you a high score. But what about in life? According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, here's how much time you can expect to spend "inside" for the following crimes (in years): Auto theft: 1.8; Murder: 19.8; Manslaughter (each count): 3.9; Drug trafficking: 6.8; Firearms used in above crimes: 6.2 (per count). Grand total: 69.8 years. And that's just level one . . .

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NINTENDO 64

PlayStation

GAME BOY COLOR

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RP

■ As expected with a late-generation PlayStation title, Vagrant Story is chock-full of high-resolution textures and tons of swell lighting effects

➔ With its collective eye always toward being on the cutting edge, Square gussies up its 3D skills with the upcoming *Vagrant Story*, which is being pitched as more of a 3D adventure game than one of Square's traditional RPGs. The background story is hopelessly convoluted (and the barely translated text in the beta version we saw didn't help), but the basic idea is that Ashley Riot, a "Risk-Walker" is trapped in a maze-like mansion with its attendant dungeons and gardens, hot on

■ **PLAYSTATION**

VAGRANT STORY

■ Publisher: **Square** ■ Developer: **Square** ■ Release Date: **November 1999** ■ Origin: **Japan**

RPG giant Square moves further into the world of 3D action

the trail of a cult leader with apocalyptic delusions of grandeur.

You know: within a completely 3D environment, although the mansion is broken up into relatively small, interlinked rooms. The rather modest polygon requirements of each room, however, enable the designers to use some very pretty textures and higher polygon-count monsters and

■ The combat system lets you hit enemies in specific body areas (handy when a monster is way bigger than you). You take specific damage, too, which means wounds to the arm will decrease your fighting ability, for example

characters than usual — some of the monsters are downright huge.

The combat system is perhaps the game's most interesting feature, as it resembles an upgraded version of the one found in *Parasite Eve*: you control the character, running around in 3D in real time until you push an attack button, which stops the action briefly and brings up a wireframe sphere showing the range of your weapon. Further, you can then select a specific body part to attack — head, leg, arm, etc. Since different monsters have different weak spots, sometimes a superior opponent can be defeated just by knowing the right spot.

Although the limited amount of the game shown by Square was good for little more than a first impression, *Vagrant Story* certainly looks good. Also, the fleshed-out combat system and numerous weapons and items show promise as well. Definitely one to watch as its release date approaches. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

VOICE BUBBLES:
THE SPAWN
OF SPAWN

One odd thing you may have noticed about Vagrant Story from the pictures is that instead of voiceovers, the game uses comic-book-style voice bubbles for character dialogue — very non-anime voice bubbles. Yasmi Matsuno, the game's producer and director, has made it clear where the influence for this came from: he and his team are rabid fans of American comics, especially Todd McFarlane's Spawn. So there.

■ In addition to the dark and dank dungeon interiors, the game includes some fairly impressive-looking exterior game locations

Overlays
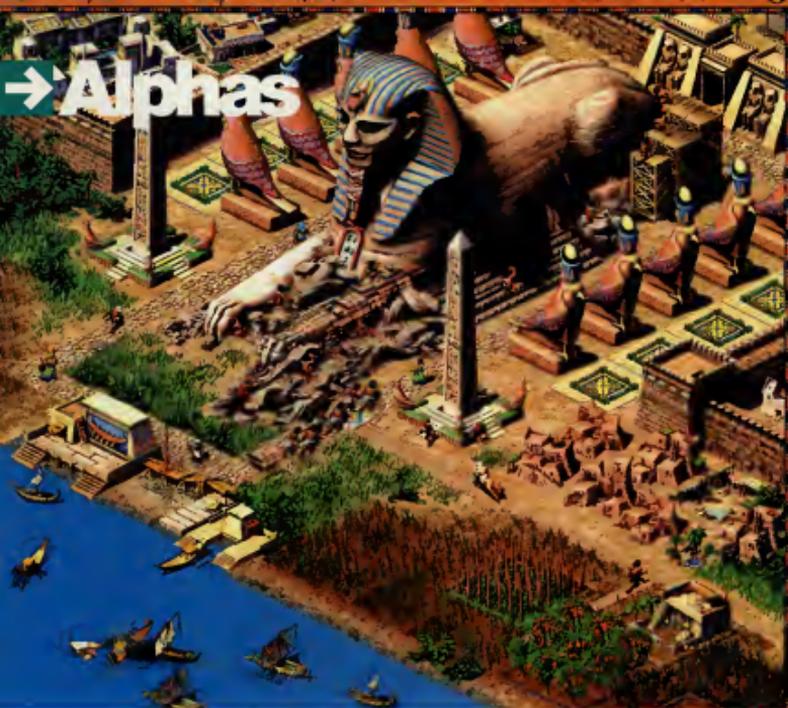
■ If your city prospers, you can set your citizens to work building wonders like the Sphinx or perhaps a pyramid

■ PC

PHARAOH

■ Publisher: **Sierra** ■ Developer: **Impressions** ■ Release Date: **November 1999** ■ Origin: **US**

If you build it, they will come. (A pyramid, that is.)

People have been building virtual cities since SimCity, but what about virtual cultures? With a heavy dose of realism and just the right accent on realtime strategy gameplay, Impressions (the developer behind Caesar III) hopes that Pharaoh will bring Egyptian society home.

In Egypt, life focused around the ebb and flow of the Nile River, so it is only appropriate that the game does so as well. Every game year, the Nile floods its banks and then recedes, marking the passing of the harvest seasons. When the tide is down, crops can briefly be sown in the fertile soil, so you must build up

agricultural resources quickly. After the harvest, the Nile sweeps in again for several months, leaving the society to other pastimes. Poor crop management can mean starvation for your growing city.

In the off time, you must train your citizenry in a variety of pursuits in order to build landmarks such as pyramids as well as expand your city. Since the game develops in realtime, pyramid building is especially fascinating to watch, as you can see the workers building the ramps and hauling the stones to the top. In fact, detail is key in this game, and once you get going, there are dozens of things to watch. Wars, for example, can be fought entirely on the river, and if you don't feel like raking the enemy boats with arrows, you can have your slaves pull you up to ramming speed and bore holes in the enemy watercraft.

Although it's just a glimpse of Egyptian life, Pharaoh's authenticity and addictive gameplay should provide a unique experience this fall. — Blake Fischer

■ Manage every facet of construction when building a pyramid, and with luck you'll be able to finish it off in just 20 to 30 years

■ The Nile is important for both commerce and transport, but you have to be sure that you also have some war galleys for defense
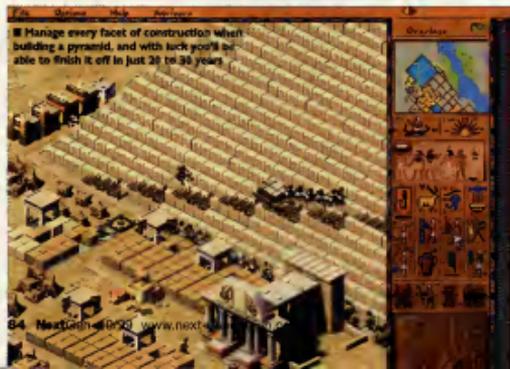
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All of the wrestlers come out with their own theme song and customized special effects

BIG SEXY — MYSTERIO JR.

The motion capturing for special moves is some of the best we've ever seen. Although, as these PlayStation screens attest, if you're tired of body slams and piledrivers, you can break out the bats and folding chairs

■ NINTENDO 64, PLAYSTATION

WCW MAYHEM

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **Kodiak Interactive** ■ Release Date: **October 1999** ■ Origin: **US**

Spandex, sweat, and the suplex — can EA bring home the mayhem?

Love it or hate it, professional wrestling is one of the most popular spectator sports in the world. Wherever wrestling goes, shows sell out, ratings skyrocket, and pay-per-view companies rub their hands in glee. For years, THQ has been quietly making truckloads of money from the WCW

There are more than 50 WCW superstars, including many secret wrestlers, to be unlocked

license — at least until EA bought it out from under the company last year.

EA's first game to sport the WCW license, WCW Mayhem, is already shaping up to be a really fantastic game. Even in the early stages, it is very playable and fun, backed by a solid graphics engine and some new features never before seen in

a wrestling title.

All of your favorites from the WCW are here: Macho Man Savage, Goldberg, and, of course, Hulk Hogan. There are more than 50 WCW superstars in the game, including many secret wrestlers that must be unlocked by accomplishing certain feats of extreme violence. All of the wrestlers' moves have been carefully motion captured to emulate the real thing and they've had their faces mapped onto the models for maximum realism.

Add onto that a magnificent create-a-wrestler mode, great sound, and intuitive controls, and you've got one of the best wrestling titles we've ever seen. Whether or not you think wrestling is staged, Mayhem's gameplay already feels realistic. What more is there? — Chris Jakubowski

MAYHEM?

The American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition defines mayhem as: "1. The offense of willfully maiming or crippling a person. 2. The infliction of violent injury upon a person or thing; wanton destruction." The entry immediately following mayhem is maying, which is defined as: "The gathering of spring flowers, esp. during a May festival." Don't expect to see WCW Maying anytime soon.

Beating on the other guy when he's down is half the fun. As seen in these N64 screens, some of the matches' finer points in unorthodox locations, like this back alley

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RICK STEINER — BIG POPPA PUMP

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➡️ Milestones

Next Generation's monthly update on tomorrow's games

■ PC

HALO

■ As these screens prove, Bungie's massive sci-fi title for PC has the legs to battle the next wave of super consoles

➡️ Each game lives a development lifecycle all its own. Sometimes amazing technology emerges first; *Halo* (right) is still more of a tech demo than game, but it's certainly worth a look. Other titles evolve over time, warranting another look even after we've written a story (see *Force Commander*, next page). And, well, other titles explain themselves with a few quick screens: just check out *Cool Boarders 4*. Milestones captures all of this, providing a snapshot of games on the road to completion

■ *Halo*'s futuristic yet familiar plot pits humans against aliens on a faraway ring-shaped world. In multiplayer battles, teams of three players will ride in the armored vehicle (above). One player drives, one controls the large gun, and one rides shotgun
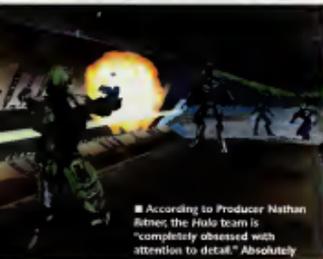
■ According to Producer Nathan Bitner, the *Halo* team is "completely obsessed with attention to detail." Absolutely

■ Using three-dimensional the 3D-point Force Commander has re-emerge's allo y 3D to-base strategy game above in the case

TR-5D

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COMMAND PTS 10

■ PC

FORCE COMMANDER

AT AT

COMMAND PTS
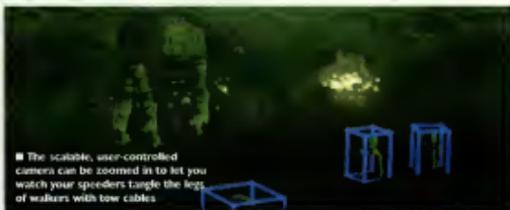
■ The scalable, user-controlled camera can be zoomed in to let you watch your speeders tangle the legs of walkers with tow cables

■ *Force Commander* will feature more than 25 single-player missions. Multiplayer games (up to four players) have 40 missions, spread across many *Star Wars* planets

COOL BOARDERS 4

■ In an effort to make Cool Boarders cooler, the company has added 19 licensed pro riders to this year's game, which includes boards from eight snowboard makers

■ We've wondered how much one game can evolve on a single platform, but 989 found something new for Cool Boarders 4 — try jumping through a moving freight car [above left]

THRASHER — SKATE & DESTROY

■ Thrasher is street skating, with 12 levels set in skate locales from London to San Francisco. The soundtrack includes artists Run DMC and the Sugar Hill Gang, and the game is due this November

DEER HUNT CHALLENGE

■ "Sshhhh. Be very, very quiet — I'm hunting deer. Wait, hold on! Where's that wwacky Wabbit?"

■ EA's realtime, hardware-accelerated hunting game features a funtastic terrain generator: This fall, players can hunt across six worlds

SHEEP

■ Call it a next-generation Lemmings. Players must protect their sheep from many obstacles, including sheep-munching hay-balers [below]

■ This wacky "herding game" puts you in charge of a bunch of sheep, imbued with "artificial stupidity." Sheep is due out this fall

■ PC
DELTA
FORCE 2

■ This sequel is shaping up nicely with the new Voxel Space 32 engine Novalogic has provided it. This fall, expect new bullet-penetration physics, new weapons and gear, and a more cohesive story

■ A new "tall grass" feature enables players to crawl undetected through the high stuff, pop up, and snipe away

■ PC
TACHYON

■ Explore the galaxy as a rebel pilot or a corporate pilot. Not new, but Tachyon boasts cool non-linear game design and up to 120 simultaneous multiplayers

HOORAY FOR HOLLY

As gaming heads into a new era, two basic principles — story and emotion — look set to redefine game development.

Can game creators learn much from the classic cinema model? **Next Generation** investigates

What would happen **if interactive gameplay was fused with visuals** and storytelling as strong as in a Hollywood movie? **And what stands in the way?**

HOLLYWOOD. The mere mention of the word sends shivers up the spines of gamers who remember the movie industry's failed attempt to make games in the mid-1990s. While terms like "Siliwood" and "interactive movie" looked nice on the pages of mainstream magazines, the only thing the "merger" of games and Hollywood proved was that movie makers knew nothing about making interactive entertainment, and game makers knew very little about telling interesting stories.

Even those developers who took the right approach — Universal and MGM Interactive — have had to fight an anti-Hollywood stigma to succeed in the game industry. But today, in 1999, with the threat to games posed by armies of venture-capital-backed visionaries and their FMV "masterpieces" long over, it's worth taking a step back and asking again if there is something games can learn from Hollywood.

Certainly, the answer to that question is not "how to make a great game," but that doesn't mean, at all, that the movie industry has nothing to offer. The things movies are best at — eliciting an emotional response from viewers — is something that most games still struggle with. Interactive entertainment is so much more immersive than film that eliciting emotional responses with games seems like it should be a no-brainer, but few games rise even to the level of B-movies when it comes to really forging emotion in the players. While the reaction of some may be "so what," it's worth noting that those games that do manage to create emotions in players — *Final Fantasy*, *Resident Evil*, *Zelda*, and *Metal Gear*, to name some of the better examples — are some of the greatest games ever created.

As the game industry moves into the next generation of systems, the ability to create emotion will be what separates the great games from the also-rans. And for a how-to on creating an emotional response, there is no better teacher than Hollywood.

"Computer entertainment — what we call 'games' now — is changing to become a real entertainment medium," says Lionhead boss Peter Molyneux, who recently took part in a seminar in the UK about games and movies. "Because of that, the skills that we need are just terrifying. Not only do we have to make a great game now, but we have to make that great game with emotion, with morals, and with great cinematography.

"We technically know how to

■ Despite the accomplished animation that is being celebrated in *Black and White* (above), Disney's feature film *A Bug's Life* (below) far outstrips its achievements in terms of quality and atmosphere

Cynical game developers, look out. The film industry started as a fairground attraction. Like games, then, moving pictures were pigeonholed as an amusement

While games have produced their own "stars," such as Lara, Cloud, and Sonic, the art of storytelling and evoking real emotions is still largely the preserve of the cinema format. This could be about to change as the 128-bit era approaches

put these sprites and polygons onscreen, but we haven't even begun to think about the emotions we're trying to portray in our games and what we're leading people into."

Such talk from a game developer, coupled with emerging technology such as Sony's Emotion Engine, suggests that the curtains could be soon be closing on the first act of videogames. But what can you hope to see when they part again? And who will be taking all the credit?

THE LAND TIME FORGOT

Compare a movie with a videogame and the yawning gulf between the mediums is immediately clear: It's not just cinema's rich emotional content — it's more superficial than that. While even your mother might now recognize *Gran Turismo* as a game involving cars, the visuals of, say, *Zelda* or *Final Fantasy* still fall way short of even animated fare like Disney's film *A Bug's Life*.

But what's often overlooked by pessimistic pundits is that movies started humbly, too. The Frenchman Louis Lumière is credited with inventing the motion picture camera in 1895; mechanical devices had already set the tone for early moviemaking. Lumière mostly produced dull three-minute

documentaries of picnics and the like, but most picturegoers went for quicker visceral thrills.

"The film industry started as a fairground attraction," explains British filmmaker Sir David Putnam. "That's where the technology seemed to be best equipped to deal with the limitations of early filmmakers. For the most part it was exploding policemen, boxing kangaroos, and cops chasing each other around in circles."

Just like games are now, moving pictures were pigeonholed as a lowbrow amusement. Cynical game developers (and others who think games are nothing more than 'kids' stuff'), look out: as the medium progressed in 1920 with D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and Abel Gance's French masterpiece *Napoleon*, the inventors of motion-picture technology were dismissive and even hostile toward the idea of film as an emerging high art form. They were also quickly sidelined.

Within 20 years, cinema had become so potent that President Woodrow Wilson described it as "watching history written in lightning." Wilson founded the Motion Picture Association of America to ensure that the US would dominate the cinema and transmit "the American way" to other nations' filmmakers.

Putnam believes videogames have reached the same juncture: "What's needed now is the next big move into narrative, into emotions, into something far deeper and more important and possibly more fulfilling than the industry has challenged itself with so far."

SEX, LIES, AND DVD

It isn't president to say games are going to ape skills from the movie industry — it's happening. Titles like *Half-Life* and *Metal Gear Solid* would be unthinkable without the inspiration and understanding of

action films. Improving visuals — particularly 3D graphics and the arrival of the external camera in games — have driven these cinematic incursions.

Metal Gear Solid creator Hideo Kojima's ambition is to direct movies. He freely admits to the huge debt he owes to film, from the camera work and lighting in his games to his homage to films like *Escape from New York* and *2001*. "You know how humans are 70 percent water? I am 70 percent movies," he half-jokes. Kojima believes games are serving the same function for today's youth as movies did for his generation. A view which is shared, incidentally, by Putnam.

Metal Gear Solid is surely the most cinematic game yet made. But, like *Final Fantasy VIII*, most of the zooms, fades, and cuts take part in the lengthy pre-rendered sequences. A crucial step will be to incorporate similar techniques into the interactive sections of the game.

"Camera freedom has previously only been possible at the expense of graphics," says Charles Cecil of Revolution. "The arrival of PlayStation 2 will allow us to control the camera while displaying very high-quality graphics."

Cecil is at pains to stress that the search for "emotion" shouldn't come at the expense of gameplay. But better camera work is a must, whichever direction the industry takes. "The camera as conceived by *Mario 64* and *Tomb Raider* reflected the excitement of what we could do in an interactive environment," he says. "It didn't matter that it broke all the rules of cinematography. But in the new age it will be too crude. We have to learn our own art of cinematography."

Bil Scanlon's company, The Film Factory, created the special effects for sci-fi blockbuster *Lost in Space*. While he's used to working with the very best of equipment, he's still impressed by the possibilities opened up by PlayStation 2, predicting the console will ultimately be "the future of home entertainment."

"If it does anything close to what they promise, PlayStation 2 is going to allow graphics in real time superceding what I would have thought good enough for animated TV content," he says. "Soon game companies will employ scriptwriters, digital cinematographers, performance animators, post-production and visual effects supervisors. These talents will enhance the stones and the characters to provide a truly immersive experience."

The problem will be paying for it. The ten minutes of special-effects footage in *Lost in Space* took a fluctuating team of between four and 30 people 18 months and $3.5 million to create. That's about

■ Cost is one of the major concerns facing developers. At $20 million, Shenmue [above] is one of the most expensive games to date, while just ten minutes of a film such as *Lost in Space* [below] costs $3.5 million

the cost of developing a whole game today. Even with powerful realtime technology like PlayStation 2 (or its successors), this new vision of Hollywood-level graphic fidelity isn't going to come cheap.

Steve Nesbit is part of Kickstart Films — a new studio that has made arrangements with *Aliens Vs. Predator* creator Rebellion to develop feature films and computer games in tandem. He stresses that developers shouldn't necessarily think in terms of the photorealism that excites Hollywood. "Developers must get away from the stereotype that they are creating for themselves that they are relying on the most convincing, or the most highly rendered, blink of an eye," he says.

"It's digging a grave, genre-wise. Use the interactivity to create some alternative form of the suspension of disbelief to that which the movie industry relies on. The easing in of film business skills won't happen with visual effects," he predicts. "It will happen instead with the use of narrative and cinematography."

VIDEOGAMES KILLED THE MOVIE STAR

"To make a great movie, you need three things," said the late, great director Alfred Hitchcock. "A great script, a great script, and a great script." After the debacle that was the interactive movie, there is probably a diminished appetite for Hitchcock's maxim in the game industry today. But remember, it was mainly Hollywood — not game developers — that gave us the interactive movie. What if game developers find better ways to tell stories that suit games, and weld it to interactivity, like Square's latest *Final Fantasy* titles?

Cecil says developers must strive to wring emotion from the audience. Walt Disney once dreamt of making the first cartoon that would make people cry a concept that was as radical then as the idea that a game could make someone cry today. But the goal is a smart one. A game that had the power to evoke tears would not only be incredibly powerful, but it would also go a long way toward bringing in people who just don't find fulfillment in games today. But rather than just copying the mechanics that jerk tears in the movie theaters, developers need to clear their heads of the tricks of film.

Why? Many of cinema's strongest narrative tricks are
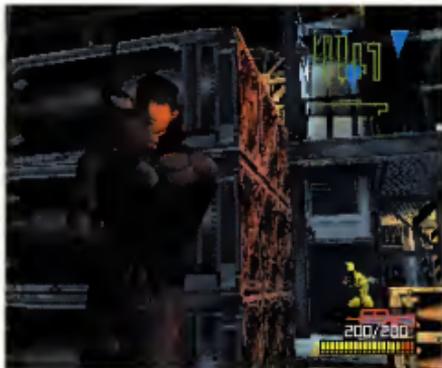
■ *Metal Gear Solid* [above] holds the title of one of the most cinematic game yet made. But, like the upcoming *Final Fantasy VIII* [below], most of the zooms, fades, and cuts take part in the lengthy pre-rendered sequences, not during gameplay

effective precisely because the viewer isn't in a position to change the outcome. A move can set up a scene in which the audience sits on the edge of its seat wondering if a concealed bomb will destroy the movie's hero. By contrast, any gameplayer would feel pretty short-changed if he wasn't given the opportunity to simply get away from the explosion.

"Movies have learned lots of techniques that suit their medium," admits Cecil. "That example works because our empathy for that character makes us care whether or not he gets blown up. In an interactive gaming environment, we have the opportunity to build a different type of empathy with our characters. In many ways, we should be able to identify more closely with the character under our control." Again, it seems the Japanese lead the way here.

According to Molyneux: "I know for a fact [that Square] employs psychologists to help it decide when to introduce certain elements into the game.

"Showing people blood and gore is relatively easy," he continues. "What is far more difficult is to make them really care about things so they don't want everything killed and blown up — and that means we do need psychologists and others with similar skills.

"I don't think seeing something blow up frightens people — that's just the payoff instead, 'what is going to happen next?' is frightening. It can be terrifying to know that there's a splinter in the floor if you've got no shoes on."

THE NEVER-ENDING STORY

According to Cecil, a satisfying gaming experience comes from a

■ Shinji Mikami, creator of the Resident Evil series (left), claims to be inspired by films such as Night of the Living Dead (right). Narrative devices such as fear and suspense are still relatively new in games, however

combination of traditional storytelling elements such as visuals, story, and sounds, and the newer mechanics of gaming. Metaphorically speaking, games need to show Molyneux's splinter on the floor, but leave you to wonder exactly where it is — and how to avoid it. That's the essential difference of games compared to films: interactivity and unpredictability.

"If you run down a corridor away from an alien and turn left, something will happen that wouldn't have happened if you'd turned right," says Kingsley by way of illustration. "If you play the game twice and run down the same corridor twice, you might not see the alien a second time. An interactive product, a game product, isn't a linear narrative; (ideally) it may have a branching narrative or an infinite number of branches."

What the film industry can't seem to grasp is the compound effect on budgets of each non-linear branch, particularly if you're using traditional Hollywood techniques and yet still hoping to produce a vital interactive experience. The math can begin to look daunting.

"If you're going down the route of pre-designing each of those sequences and if it branches every three minutes — well, I don't know what that cost comes to, but it's a huge amount of work," says Kingsley.

So how can we get Hollywood's empathic characters, storytelling, and emotions? Does every developer in the world have to work together to make the same two-hour-long game?

"We have to get programming teams to make characters that react depending on what you do as

New studio line

Hollywood might teach developers more than how to make smiles or tell stories. Just as the creative side of the film industry took years to reach Gone with the Wind, the current Californian studio money machine took more than half a century to fine-tune.

Lone creative mavericks dominated early "film" making. It wasn't until the late 1920s that Hollywood's studio system hit full steam. Motion pictures by legends such as Frank Capra (It's a Wonderful Life) and Victor Fleming (The Wizard of Oz) were made during a regime of complete studio dominance.

Stars such as Humphrey Bogart, Shirley Temple, and Gary Cooper, and even directors such as Fritz Lang and Elia Kazan, were contracted to work full time for 20th Century Fox, MGM, and the other leading studios.

Films were made on a production line. Bogart churned out four movies in 1943, but posterity only remembers Casablanca. Stars were even loaned to other studios, like an empty set or camera equipment. The studios also owned the movie theater chains around the US, guaranteeing lucrative audiences. While there are huge differences between Hollywood then and games today — chiefly the latter's reliance on technological advancement — it is the era of '30s Hollywood that gaming most resembles.

Today, in-house teams produce games under one roof, whether it is a publisher's or that of an independent developer. And Sony, Sega, and Nintendo's format ownership (which makes publishers pay to release games on their systems) is somewhat analogous to the ownership of theater chains — which, incidentally, the studios were forced to divest themselves of in 1949 after accusations of monopolistic trading.

Hollywood's studio system finally dissolved in the '50s in the face of the growing status of directors, the freedom of stars to pick their own projects, and the rise of television. Today's blockbusters are put together not by huge companies, but by loose-knit teams of free agents — from actors and cameramen to special effects experts, set designers, the casting team, and the caterers who make the coffee.

The studio's role is primarily to kickstart the movie, fund it, and to take the biggest cut of the profits. Studios like Paramount or New Line have few internal titles in production, and concentrate instead on rights acquisition and exploitation.

Many observers suggest that a similar shift is coming in the game industry. The increasingly specialized roles required for game development, the scarcity of hits, the rarity of individuals with track records, and ballooning costs may all lead to games being assembled by partnerships of independent companies, if not individuals.

"Developers need to ask, 'Are we the best in the world in all areas of game development?'" says Chris van der Kuyl of VIS Interactive. "If

"We know how to put sprites and polygons onscreen, but we haven't even begun to think about the emotions we're portraying in our games and what we're leading people into"

a player," explains Kingsley. Like a great novelist, a developer's characters must literally come to life. Again, it won't be visual effects that do this, but interactive programming — AI — that will make this work.

Of course, there are limits, as Kingsley discovered when making *Aliens Vs. Predator*. "The predators and aliens all have their own intelligence. The problem was that when we started they all killed each other, so you were left to wander around gore-filled corridors. They were much more efficient at killing each other than chasing you. It was a bit like watching a disaster movie after it's all over"

21st CENTURY BOX OFFICE

At the height of Hollywood's incursion into videogames at the start of the '90s, a certain British developer was invited to an awards ceremony in Los Angeles to present a prize to one of the blighted products. To show just how hip and high-tech Hollywood was, the awards ceremony used a freshly manufactured Apple Newton to relay the winners to the announcer on stage.

It was worse than a gimmick. The developer found that when he arrived on the podium, the Newton wasn't even switched on. Sticky-taped across its display was the winner's name. It stands as an apt metaphor for Hollywood's

botched attempt to appropriate the bare bones of game technology and slap some content on top.

This time, it's different. Games are evolving beyond our expectations. Developers are coming up against the limits of their skills and looking for answers. Public outrage at the nihilism evident in many games may even make a concession to morals and emotional content a must. And technology is slowly (so slowly) making the impossible possible.

Interactive movies made gamers cry, but for all the wrong reasons. The next time you're weeping over a console, it might just be for the very best ones.

NextGen
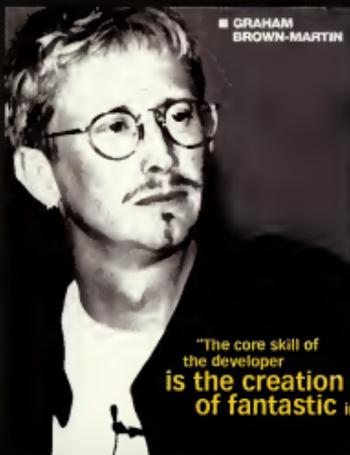
■ **GRAHAM BROWN-MARTIN**

"The core skill of the developer **is the creation of fantastic interactive ideas. Without this core skill, there is nothing**"

the answer is no — which for virtually every honest company will be the correct answer — then they need to ask, 'Okay, is it critical to our future success that we become the best in all these fields?' Our fundamental skill is in game development — not software, art, or music."

It's a view shared by Graham Brown-Martin, whose Soho-based Digital Arts is already providing graphics and animation expertise to a number of players in the game industry. "The core skill of the developer is the creation of fantastic interactive ideas and brilliant computer programming that realizes the idea. Without this core skill, there is nothing."

But beyond that,

developers are better sticking to the basics. "Having graphics, animation, sound, and video teams in-house may fatter the corporate ego, but does it make good business sense when there are better team outside that can be switched on and off as needed?" he asks.

But just as game developers should concentrate on the interactive elements of their products, so they shouldn't set themselves up as project managers any more than Sean Connery would demand to oversee the hiring of a set designer.

"If a developer is going to contract out part of the creation of a title, then they had better find someone to

manage the contractors on their behalf," warns Brown-Martin. "Typically, this person is a producer. It is important that they have a clear grasp of what the developer is making and the processes that the contractor uses."

Graphic design, in-game animation and FMV, live-action direction, music, and voiceovers are already being outsourced by some developers. And if professionals such as scriptwriters and psychologists are tempted into the industry, they will be most likely to arrive on a per-project basis.

"In the future, technology and tools will be much more flexible, and a small number of engineers will be able to drive the product," predicts van der Kuyl. "But don't think that this will make things easier to manage. Just look at the credit list on a movie."

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~SARGE

→Finals

As the Dreamcast train gets its momentum, a familiar face comes back after a long absence. Oh, and the 3D dinosaurs and mechs (sorry, "gears") are pretty nifty, too. Read on . . .

TIME 02:30:34

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■ You've got to hand it to Sega — the switch to 3D hasn't hampered the creation of the kind of colorful, lush environments Sonic is known for

■ A single funnel cloud isn't likely to get this spunky hedgehog worried — well, maybe just a little...

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■ Dreamcast

Sonic Adventure

■ Publisher **Sega** ■ Developer **Sega**

Sega's spiny blue mascot returns

■ Most of Sonic's traditional co-stars show up, along with some new ones

With the release of every new system, there are certain games that show off the promise of the new technology to hordes of eager gamers. Heralding in this next generation are an unprecedented number of titles that show off what Dreamcast can do visually, but as Sonic Adventure demonstrates, looks can't get you all the way to a five-star rating.

Sonic Adventure actually has everything you need to sell a system. It's got a hip mascot, incredible spectacle, and even some nostalgia value for those gamers that grew up in the age of 16-bit. The problem lies within the concept of Sonic himself — or more accurately, his trademark speed, and the way that works in 3D. In order to move quickly, the camera has to pull way back from the action

Where Sonic succeeds completely is in creating an insane amount of spectacle

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

A Sonic is punctuated by moments of breathtaking digital clarity. This is one gorgeous game

■ And, of course, no Sonic game would be complete without a host of giant, vaguely mechanical and also organic enemies and bosses to smash up

TOO MANY EXTRAS!

In addition to all of the mini-games included in the main quest (snowboarding, flying an airplane, and bumper-car racing, just to name a few), Sonic also has a very complicated and engrossing mini-game that can be played on the VMU involving all of the cute animals you rescue in-game.

to allow you to see where you're going. This means that you end up in one of two situations: you're either in a static area with lots of platforms, or you're racing through beautiful landscapes simply by pushing forward.

Also worth mentioning are the numerous instances of pop-up, slowdown, bad camera angles, and funky collision detection. While Sega promised that these would all be fixed by the time of the US release (and to Sega's credit, some were), there are still enough bugs that all but the most uneducated of gamers will notice them. The Egg Carrier level, in particular, is so plagued by bad camera and slowdown that it quickly grows frustratingly difficult.

Negatives aside, however, Sonic Adventure is still one intense ride, and discovering what lies around the next corner will keep you playing for at least a few sleepless nights. Levels range from grassy plains to the obligatory ice level to an exciting run through a pyramid. Variety isn't a problem with the game, and several

of the levels even have sub-games like riding on a snowboard or racing in a bumper car.

Where Sonic succeeds completely is in creating an insane amount of spectacle for players to gawk at. From being chased by a killer whale to sliding down a series of pulleys

■ To Sega's credit, some of the problems found in the original Japanese release have been fixed, but there are still moments of slowdown

through mountain peaks, the game never lets players catch a breath. The only respite you get is the strange overworld hub that you must wander to get between each level.

The addition of several different sub-characters also adds a nice spin to the series and allows players to

explore the game world in a variety of unique methods. For example, play as Big the Cat and you go to each level and fish (what is it with Japanese games and fishing?), but play as Amy and you must run through levels trying to dodge the evil robot henchman. Each of these extra characters (there are six total) is unlocked as you get farther into the game with Sonic, and if you beat the game with all of them you get to fight a final boss as "Gold Sonic."

Sonic Adventure has its share of problems, but it does succeed at what it was created to do: show off the power of a new system. The game is fun to play, is accessible to almost anybody, and is chock full of memorable gaming moments. Expert gamers may beat the game in a only a day or two but, even then, the ride is worth the price of admission. — Blake Fischer

Bottom Line: Admit it — you were going to buy this no matter what we said.

NextGen ★★★★☆

Hydro Thunder

- Platform: **Dreamcast**
- Publisher: **Midway**
- Developer: **Eurocom**

It looks good. It plays good. Any questions?

The arcade version of *Hydro Thunder* was surprisingly energetic and fun, not only fast but beautiful, with every race course crammed with odd little details. It was, in a phrase, *SF Rush* on water, and we're pleased to report that the Dreamcast version is just shy of being a perfect conversion.

True, it does lose a little something when you don't have seat-mounted speakers blaring in your ears or a sub-woofer rumbling the cabinet around you, but you can hardly blame anyone at Midway or Eurocom for that. In the home version, all but the "easy"-level tracks are disabled and you have to earn the rest by winning races. This was, arguably, a mistake (at least until some cheat codes surface), but on the upside, there are a few extra courses above and beyond the ones found in the arcade. The environments are lush and glossy, with nary a hint of draw-in, and the build looks pretty much identical to the arcade original.

The only other minor gripe is that the boats don't seem to have quite the same weight and momentum as in the arcade — collisions just don't have the same "oomph" somehow. However, you'd have to be a real anal hound to notice. As it is, this is great, great stuff — *Jeff Lundrigan*
Bottom Line: Buy it. You won't be disappointed.

NextGen ★★★★☆

Mortal Kombat Gold

- Platform: **Dreamcast**
- Publisher: **Midway**
- Developer: **Eurocom**

"Finish h..." Ah, just forget it

Much like some of the undead mutants it features, the *Mortal Kombat* series shuffles on, refusing to die. Basically, this is *Mortal Kombat 4* (a game that's going on two years old, remember), and really looks it) with additional fighters and a few extra bells and whistles.

It would be grossly unfair to go on without admitting that the characters all

look really, really good. High-polygon models and digitized textures make them practically photo-realistic, and it's pretty darn impressive — until they start moving, anyway. To say the animation lacks flair is an understatement, and the simple game mechanics and all-too-familiar fighting moves are downright primitive compared to other Dreamcast brawlers like *Power Stone* and *Soul Calibur*.

Which is really the point to be made: This is *Mortal Kombat*, and very little about the series has changed in over five years, despite the move to 3D or other mostly cosmetic "enhancements" like weapons. For all its notoriety no MK game has ever been innovative, and although that might not have mattered for an installment or two, by now you know what to expect before you even remove the shrinkwrap. — *Jeff Lundrigan*
Bottom Line: *Mortal Kombat Gold* goes a long way towards confirming that this series peaked with MK2, and it's been in steady decline ever since.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Dreamcast

Sega Sports NFL 2K

- Publisher: **Sega**
- Developer: **Visual Concepts**

Sega and Visual Concepts raise the bar for what a football game should be

Hands down, this is the best-looking football game ever. The number of animations is astounding, and the way players interact is stunning — a hit to the right leg causes a stumble to the left. Watching a great receiver like Herman Moore reach over his shoulder to grab a ball, get hit, hurdle a would-be tackler, and then run for ten yards is amazing.

But how does it play? Great, but not perfectly. While the number of plays is impressive and the passing game is very well balanced, especially in the advanced mode, the running game comes up short. Even in rookie mode, it's almost impossible to run for more than four yards. Sure, most NFL runs are about that length, but the inability to ever break out for a 20-yard run is frustrating, and it cost the game a star.

That and a couple of other minor bugs aside (slowdown on a PAT, a bad out-of-bounds call or two), this game has tons to recommend it. The interface is amazing, as is the ability to use the VMU to call plays in secret. Stats tracking is good, there are

> **Hands down, this is the best-looking football game ever ... the animation is astounding**

Not only does the replay mode look great, it's also an essential trash-talking accessory for multiplayer games

Although close-ups look great (top), gameplay looks damn good (above)

almost no loading times, custom plays are easy to create, stadiums are modeled well, and player trading and fantasy team options are all what you would expect.

And don't underestimate the graphics: while the play is what counts, the graphics make the game so immersive that we would rather play this than last year's five-star *GameDay*. — *Chris Charla*
Bottom line: A visual masterpiece, and a great football game that will, and should, sell systems.

NextGen ★★★★☆

Frame Gride
- Platform: **Dreamcast**
- Publisher: **From Software**
- Developer: **From Software**

■ Pretty, ain't it? Comes with tons of options, too. Makes it worth the pain . . . well, mostly

Frame Gride will doubtless remind you of Sega's *Virtual On*, but developer From Software earned its mech credits as creator of the cult series *Armored Core*, and *Frame Gride* takes *Virtual On* to the next level (in fact, Sega will be publishing this when it comes to the States). It ain't perfect, but it's a heck of a ride

The graphics are rock-solid and gorgeous, the pace is frenetic, and the enemy AI is fairly tenacious. Most impressive, the mechs — or "knights," as they're called — are almost infinitely customizable. The game begins with an *Ultima*-style quiz to determine what kind of warrior you are (whether you favor offense over defense, that kind of thing),

then gives you a basic frame to suit your style. You can then modify the knight as you battle through level after level, and there are over a hundred different pieces of armor, as well as dozens of different "squires," smaller bots you can unleash to distract or attack an enemy, that you can use. Armor and squires are earned by collecting gems from destroyed enemies, and the gems are then mixed and matched to build the equipment.

Most tantalizing, however, are the options for modem play, which promises head-to-head two-player combat. Sadly, we can't really comment on this, since a modem hookup wasn't possible at the time of the review, but the split-screen two-player option wasn't bad at all, with nary a hint of slowdown

The game's weak spot is in the control. It's responsive, but the analog stick is used for moving the view (a necessity with swarms of enemy squires coming at you) while the D-pad moves the mech, which takes some getting used to, to say the least. Further, locking onto an opponent is a somewhat scattershot proposition at best, since the lock defaults to the main enemy — *Jeff Lundrigan*

Bottom Line: Ah, if only it hadn't twisted our thumbs with the control layout, it would have been true love. As it is, we're stuck with sore hands and a happy infatuation.

■ **Next**Gen ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

CART Racing
- Platform: **Dreamcast**
- Publisher: **Sega**
- Developer: **Sega**

■ If you have to have a CART licensed game for your Dreamcast, this is it. If you don't, why bother?

CART Racing is as close to a true racing sim as you can get for Dreamcast. It carries the official CART license (the only Dreamcast sim so far that does), so you get all 19 tracks and every one of the 27 drivers from the 1998 season.

In championship mode, it's an anal-retentive's dream, since a large chunk of time and effort is expended in tuning practice laps on each track, carefully tweaking everything from tires to gear ratios to aerodynamic surfaces to get exactly the right configuration that'll shave the precious seconds off your lap times that spell the difference between taking the checkered flag and merely placing. True, there aren't as many

options for doing this as in a typical PC sim, but for a console title, the level of customization is still pretty impressive.

The game runs at a solid 30fps, and as far as it goes, it includes most of the graphic tweaks of many Dreamcast racers — appropriately colored clouds of dirt and grass fly up from tires, there are nice lighting effects, and the draw-in horizon is a respectable distance in the background (and special kudos for the nice touch of having the driver periodically wipe his visor in the cockpit view).

The control is about what you'd expect, which is to say it's extremely realistic and very demanding — casual racers need not apply if you've never played a CART title before — or in fact, any realistic open-wheeled racing sim — you'll likely just get frustrated slamming into walls and spinning out at the drop of a hat. But then again, that's the sort of thing sim fanatics live for.

At the same time, though, the game is also kind of boring. It's no different from — and arguably not as deep as — CART games for other systems, and the courses are visually bland, as if once the track was the right shape, the surroundings were fleshed out over a weekend, which was a disappointing finish to the game — *Jeff Lundrigan*

Bottom Line: A competent CART title, but nothing beyond what you'd expect.

■ **Next**Gen ★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

Quake II
- Publisher: **Activision**
- Developer: **Raster Production**

The undisputed king of first-person shooters blasts its way onto N64

■ In the time since its release, *Quake II* has established itself as the benchmark by which all first-person shooters must be judged. The gritty graphics, well-balanced weapons, and an instantly gratifying multiplayer mode allowed players to more

■ Yes, it's better than *GoldenEye* — there is no deathmatch like a *Quake II* deathmatch

than forgive the uninspiring single-player experience. So when we heard news of *Quake II* coming to N64, we were cautiously excited.

Within minutes of tearing off the plastic wrap, however, caution was cast to the wind as the fragging began in earnest. Sure it's not the PC version. You can't play with 20 other people at once, play full screen while deathmatching, or keep your opponent from glancing at your half of the screen to see where you are. That aside, however, there has still never been a

■ Blazing framerates and a frenzied pace is what makes this experience so sweet

All Star Tennis '99

- **Platform:** Nintendo 64
- **Publisher:** Ubi Soft
- **Developer:** Smart Dog

■ Players who dive on hard surfaces suffer no apparent head trauma

Tennis fans looking for a true re-creation of their sport should steer clear of All Star Tennis. Despite the inclusion of licensed pros like Michael Chang, All Star Tennis '99 quickly loses its appeal with an age-old control problem: the same stick used to run the player around the court also controls shot direction. When making a diving save to the right, it is nearly impossible to hit the ball cross-court to the left to keep it within the lines. After shot swerves are available with L and R buttons, but the game should have used the control stick to handle shot direction and the analog stick for player movement to better define controls.

In an apparent attempt to make tennis more exciting, there are two special moves that can be charged-up by hitting a series of winning shots. One is a bionic power-swing, the other move sends the ball through a wormhole entrance above the net and changes its trajectory on the exit. In an annoying twist, the special moves can be turned off for human players, but not computer opponents.   — Jeffrey Adam Young

Bottom line: For tennis purists, this game is a net loss — for gamers looking for a good time, the control issues make the game unacceptable.

■ NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Shadowgate 64: Trials of the Four Towers

- **Platform:** Nintendo 64
- **Publisher:** Kemco
- **Developer:** Kemco

■ Dark and dreary atmospheres set the tone of the game

■ Not content with dark corridors, Quake II displays some very pretty environments

better multiplayer shooter for N64. Players pick their own skins, type in their names, and set all of the preferences for their characters, which are then saved to memory card. In addition to the standard deathmatch, Quake II offers capture the flag, team battle, and highly frantic "odd man out" modes, which combine to make the game infinitely replayable. And with the 4MB expansion pak, four players can frag to their heart's content with all the speed that makes the Quake II experience so compelling.

As a nice addition, the single-

Shadowgate 64 is the retelling of a classic story in the same vein as Super Mario and The Legend of Zelda. Like many of the less-successful games that have been reworked, Shadowgate 64 exploits N64's technology but doesn't necessarily add anything new.

You control a halfling named Del Cottonwood whose traveling caravan is assaulted. Thrown into the dungeon of the Shadowgate castle — which has long become a sanctuary for thieves and bandits — Del must use his wits and magical abilities to escape. Not surprisingly the Shadowgate castle is also home to some form of shadowy menace seeking to overthrow the world. If Del could also manage to stop him on his way out — well, that'd be just dandy.

Fans who enjoy locked-key puzzles intertwined with a compelling narrative will delight in the continuing story of the Shadowgate castle and the evil within, but gamers who are looking for more inspired upgrades like Ocarina of Time should look elsewhere. The graphics are bland and repetitive, although at least the musical score is haunting and sufficiently ethereal.   — Doug Trueman

Bottom line: Nothing especially wrong here, but nothing you haven't seen done before (and better).

■ NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Superman

- **Platform:** Nintendo 64
- **Publisher:** Titus
- **Developer:** Titus

■ "Damn. I left my S on my other cape."

Titus's new Superman title is essentially a cross between Pilotwings and a third-person exploration game. As the mighty Superman, players maneuver through Lex Luthor's "virtual world" disarming bombs, finding keys, and saving the staff of The Daily Planet. But this job might prove too big for our hero because the controls are so clumsy and erratic that one wonders if the cartridge is made of Kryptonite.

The 3D environment vaguely representing Metropolis scrolls by at such inconsistent speeds and is so hampered by inappropriate camera angles that navigation becomes more of a chore than entertainment. Use of Superman's signature abilities (X-ray and heat vision, superbreath, and superspeed) is limited and, oddly, they can only be used after

finding the appropriate power-up. The ambient sound effects and character animations are uninspired and in no way help support the belief that Kal-El is an intergalactic hero. Making matters worse is the repetitive soundtrack that would likely annoy the real Superman's enhanced auditory sense to the point where he would strip the Earth of its atmosphere layer to avoid hearing it again.   — Doug Trueman

Bottom line: Hands down, the worst game in years. Everyone even remotely connected with this should be banished to the Phantom Zone and all existing cartridges hurled into the sun.

■ NextGen ☆☆☆☆☆

Tonic Trouble

- **Platform:** Nintendo 64
- **Publisher:** Ubi Soft
- **Developer:** Ubi Soft

■ Eat some magic popcorn and become the oafish "Super Ed"

Ubi Soft, the company that brought you Rayman, seems to have a thing for game characters with unattached appendages. Its latest example is Ed, the all-eyebrows-and-bow-tie star of the 3D action/adventure Tonic Trouble. Ed accidentally spills toxic space goo on Earth, which changes plants into monsters and generally morphs the planet into a trippy, psychedelic playland.

Exploring that playland is surprisingly fun. It freely mixes the action of a platform game with exploration and puzzle-solving elements. Responsive controls, physical gags, and a fair amount of variety make this an enjoyable and expansive title. We're not talking an epic on the scale of Zelda here, but Tonic Trouble is a twisty catacomb of rooms divided into 11 different areas. In addition, you must gather a pre-set number of items and bring them to a mad doctor who uses them to build gadgets to do things like fly, pogo-stick around, swim, and shoot bees from a blowpipe.

On the downside, some rooms offer poor camera angles and the environments often feature blunt edges, especially where the rainbow-swirled water meets land.   — Jeffrey Adam Young

Bottom line: This isn't a masterpiece, but it is still a brilliantly colored, light-hearted distraction.

■ NextGen ★★★☆☆

player adventure is actually fun for N64, with original levels that are both addictive and compelling. The monsters are a little lacking in their animations, and both weapon effects and blood are horribly pixilated, but we'd still rather play them than the PC missions any day.   — Daniel Erickson

Bottom line:
A good first-person shooter with a great multiplayer mode. GoldenEye is no longer the only game in town.

■ NextGen ★★★★☆

■ The T-Rex is as malevolent an adversary as you're likely to see in any game this year. Even worse, he can kill you with one bite

Dino Crisis

■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Capcom**

Girls, guns, dinosaurs. Any questions?

→ Creating real horror is an art. It takes an incredible amount of skill to truly scare someone — and by "scare," we don't mean merely startling them, but causing them to react with real fear. No developer in recent memory has understood horror better than Capcom, whose zombie-laden nightmares have sold millions worldwide. The success of these titles is based partly on expert storytelling, partly on gameplay, and mostly on the ability to truly put players on edge.

Dino Crisis is Capcom's latest foray into the realm of fear, and this time, instead of undead horrors, there's a totally different crop of dangers to deal with. You play Regina, a member of an elite task force dropped onto a mysterious island to locate and evacuate a key researcher. What starts off as a rescue mission soon becomes a desperate, disorganized struggle for survival as the team runs into a compound crawling with man-eating dinosaurs.

The biggest departure for this game is that Capcom has dropped
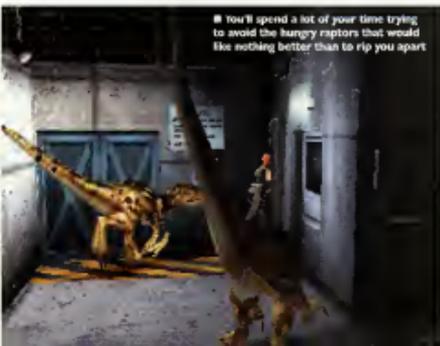
■ You'll spend a lot of your time trying to avoid the hungry raptors that would like nothing better than to rip you apart

Dino Crisis **is one of the few titles that has the ability to truly put players on edge**

MAKING IT TOUGH

pre-rendered backgrounds in favor of a completely 3D environment. There are still fixed camera angles, but the camera can swoop and pan in certain areas to create even more dramatic effects.

Though the premise is familiar (at one point, a team member even exclaims, "This is just like that movie!"), it quickly turns into an original and compelling plot as the remaining team members work together (most of the time) to complete their mission and get off the island. While the plot sounds rather simple, let us assure you, it isn't — there are plenty of twists and turns to the storyline as well as some great surprises. Much like previous Capcom horror
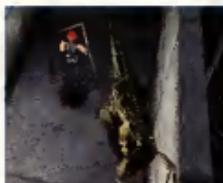
productions, the voice acting in Dino Crisis won't win any awards, but luckily it's never bad enough to detract from the plot.

Puzzles have also been dramatically altered from the Resident Evil series. The designers have put a lot of effort into making sure the puzzles are a logical part of the plot — there are no doors with

■ Even though the environments are now realtime, they are intricately detailed

■ Wow, those creepies sure are cute... until they all gang up and start biting you, that is

Seem familiar? At one point, a team member even exclaims, "This is just like that movie"

strangely shaped keys or other nonsense. What you do need to worry about is cracking into computers and hacking locking mechanisms, which is a bit more intellectually challenging because you don't just need to find the pieces, you need to learn how to use them. Thankfully, though, Capcom has made sure that there are plenty of clues (usually in the form of memos found on bodies) for you to find and read. A word to the wise: Take notes. Frequently.

Where the game really shines is in its excellent sense of suspense and pacing, just like in the movie Aliens, intense action sequences are broken up by moments of quiet before the next storm. Just when you think that you've escaped, something will come bursting through the door after you — paranoia will serve you well and keep you alive that much longer.

The real stars of the game, however — and what will immediately grab your attention when you start playing — are the dinosaurs themselves. Velociraptors move with an almost eerie realism as they hunt you down, pterodactyls take convincing swipes at your head, and the pad even rumbles with the T-Rex's lumbering approach. As adversaries, they are far deadlier than the usual zombies Capcom serves up, and twice as devious. Don't expect to take these guys out with just a head shot, either. Unless you find some tranquilizer darts, you can expect a dinosaur to take several good hits before it goes down — and the T-Rex takes far more than that. — Bloke Fischer

Bottom line: Addictive and suspenseful, Dino Crisis is one of the hot titles to get this winter.

NextGen ★★★★

■ The dinosaurs are incredibly vicious. If you aren't careful to tranquilize them or keep some sort of barrier between you and them, there will be serious trouble

Renzokuken

Squall
Quistis 436h

Zell 3499
Squall 765
Quistis 5082

■ The battle animations are impressive, but excessively so. There's no way to skip the elaborate sequences, making nearly every battle a lengthy proposition

We used to joke that a so-so RPG from Square was still better than almost anyone else's best effort — now it's official. Don't get the wrong idea. On many levels this game is utterly breathtaking, featuring high-polygon — and at times startlingly human — virtual actors who express and generate a wide range of emotions, from excitement to genuine pathos. Their world consists of painstakingly realized prerendered vistas, and the view is far from static, with sweeping camera work and FMV blending seamlessly with real-time 3D characters — in fact, the animation here is about the best we've ever seen. Taking the battle scenes of FFVII to the next level, FFVIII boasts a variety of elemental spells, any one of which could easily stand as the climax of a feature film.

Which, oddly, is where the problems lie. It's symptomatic of what's amiss that while these spells will take your breath away the first ten times, by the fiftieth they're beyond tedious. Repetition and anal-retentive stat managing have been standard RPG fare for a

■ **PlayStation**

Final Fantasy VIII

■ **Publisher:** Square Electronic Arts ■ **Developer:** Square

And lo, the Mighty have sunk to Merely Great

dozen years, but that just means it's high time for something new, which preferably wouldn't involve doing and watching exactly the same thing over and over again and Square has a well-deserved reputation for innovation, but it just isn't as apparent here as it should be.

It also doesn't help that the story itself is, for perhaps the first time ever in this series, a bit lacking. The lead character, Squall, is an abrasive jerk for most of the game, but the reasons why he's that way are thinly written and lack much emotional punch. And at the risk of giving anything away when you've got a love story at the heart of

things, somebody had better say "I love you" at least once, don't you think?
— Jeff Lundrigan

Bottom Line: A great game. But from Square, from whom we routinely expect brilliance, a merely great game is something of a letdown.

→ **NextGen** ★★★★☆

■ Square's graphics are amazing. The art direction is never short of superb, and the FMV and other animation sequences are about the best you've ever seen

THE HELL IS THIS?

GETTING CARDED

One of the hallmarks of a Square RPG, especially Final Fantasy, is the sheer amount of not-so-obvious and outright-hidden stuff lurking on the game discs for fans to obsess over. FFVIII features a card-based sub-game (which isn't on hard as it looks, really), and within the game, cards can be transformed into a variety of items. Already, dozens of FAQs dot the Web, detailing not only card-game strategy but cataloging crazy known and rumored card and what can be done with it. There are dozens, if not hundreds. This will go on for years.

Zell 4232
Squall 745
Quistis 6597

Rising Zan: Samurai Gunman

- Platform: PlayStation
- Publisher: Agetec
- Developer: UEP-System

Goofy only goes so far – you've got to be able to see the action to follow it, which Rising Zan just doesn't do

Every so often you come across a game that you really, really want to like in spite of everything, and Rising Zan is just this kind of shaggy dog. Sure, the textures are sorta chunky, and it isn't the prettiest game on the planet, but the play control is decently smooth and flashy, and who could resist the unmitigated goofiness of its lead character and production design, a bizarro mix of six-guns and swordfighting. Heck, Zan's ("I'm the super sexy ultra hero!") theme song, "Johnny No More," is almost worth the price of admission alone. You want to keep playing just to see what weird thing it's going to throw at you next.

But it's hard to overlook the fumbles, and the one that really drops the ball is the camera. It's almost never pointing in the right direction on its own, and the mechanics involved in swiveling it around in the middle of a battle against multiple (and moving) opponents are an object lesson in raw frustration. The game also includes something called the "All Button Event," or "push the buttons as fast as you can," but unless you're a speed typist on crack, it's almost impossible to do it fast enough. — Jeff Lundrigan

Bottom line: You want to like it, but it's just not as fun as it ought to be.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Tarzan

- Platform: PlayStation
- Publisher: Disney Interactive
- Developer: Disney Interactive
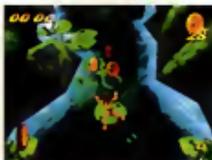
An average platform game, Tarzan stands out mostly for its exceptional graphics

With every new Disney animated movie comes a Disney Interactive game. This time around it's Tarzan, a very so-so platformer with aspirations of repeating Crash Bandicoot's success, but never quite delivering.

The movie is easily one of the best-looking Disney animated films yet, and the game continues the movie's visual brilliance. The environments, characters, and effects are all stunning, making full use of PlayStation's pixel-pushing might. Load times are long, but the levels themselves are quite large and beautiful. The cut-scene animation is at least as good as Saturday morning cartoons and definitely evokes the film. It's all based on.

It's unfortunate that the game design doesn't live up to the graphics. Gameplay is so typical that if you squint you can convince yourself you're playing almost anything else. Levels are made up of a series of skip-scrolling or top-down jumping and avoiding puzzles that are competently implemented, but something even the most casual gamers have seen before. — Rick Sanchez

Bottom line: Tarzan is a solid, if uninspired, title that gets by mostly on its looks. Serious gamers won't find much of value, but it might appeal to the kiddie set flocking to the film.

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver

- Publisher: Crystal Dynamics
- Developer: Eidos

Bite in and suck up the atmosphere, Kain's back . . . with a vengeance

In this, the sequel to Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain, you're cast as Raziel, one of Kain's vampiric minions who's been wronged by the evil über-vampire. Your goal is to exact revenge by destroying both your undead creator as well as hordes of other bloodsuckers. Played in the standard third-person adventure-game perspective, the game is split between the material plane and the shadowy spectral plane, forcing you to constantly shift between the two to avoid obstacles and solve puzzles.

One of the game's most welcome features is that not only is there no load time while shifting between planes, there is no load time to speak of at all. In addition, Raziel can't actually be killed, merely forced back to the spectral plane, eliminating any need to reload the game when you mess up.

Graphically dark and brooding, the backgrounds are lushly detailed and masterfully designed, but the levels are confusing, and the lack of a map makes for a great deal of backtracking. There's not much variety to the vampires that are thrown against you, although the bosses are huge, well animated, and worth the effort it takes to get to them. Exceptionally good voice acting and music round out the wonderful atmosphere, but they're hurt by some minor bugs that can cause sound glitches. — Daniel Erickson

Bottom line: Difficult puzzles and the omission of a map make this stylized game for hardcore adventure-gamers only.

You'll run into Kain more than once during your journey, and he's never in a good mood

Just like Raziel, your enemies can't be killed by normal means. Impale them, drown them, or burn the bastards

NextGen ★★★★☆

Championship Motocross featuring Ricky Carmichael

- Platform: **PlayStation**
- Publisher: **THQ**
- Developer: **Funcom**

▲ A single moment of lost concentration can literally jolt you from first place to last

▶ Not to put too fine a point on it, *Championship Motocross* has one of the better physics engines we've come across on a console title. It's one of those games that simply *feels* right. It offers three different classes of bikes, from the tiny 125cc up to the 500cc, and there's a definite difference in the way each one drives.

Overall, the game looks really good for a PlayStation title, and there's a lot of variety in the tracks on the circuit as well, from sandy Melbourne to Chicago's indoor stadium. In a single-player race you compete against eight other drivers, and you can even pull tricks while airborne for an extra thrill. It's a hoot.

On the other hand, it's also got a very steep learning curve, and it takes skill, determination, and more than a little luck to place better than dead last. For one thing, the AI of the other racers doesn't make any attempt to avoid collisions, and a single bump can leave you at a dead stop. — *Jeff Lundrigan*

Bottom Line: The high level of difficulty will likely frustrate many, but man, what a ride.

NextGen ★★★★☆

Chocobo Racing

- Platform: **PlayStation**
- Publisher: **Square EA**
- Developer: **Squaresoft**

▲ The game is sickeningly cute, and that will surely appeal to some people — not us, but some

▶ The newest attempt to milk the popularity of the *Final Fantasy* series takes the form of a kart-racing game starring the ever-lovable Chocobo and other characters from the world. Featuring a dead-boring story mode in the form of pop-up book animation that follows Chocobo's attempt to collect pieces of a mysterious blue crystal, most of the game feels rushed and uninspired.

The racing engine is seriously flawed, with horrible sorting errors that make walls and objects disappear whenever you get near them. Worse still is the complete lack of the ability to powerslide or muscle through turns. Instead you must hold down the gas and tap the brake repeatedly to "drift" around corners.

Otherwise, you get kart-racing fare that is standard but lacking the deathmatch-type courses that made *Mario Kart* so enduring. In fact, the only innovation boasted by this meatoo clone is the ability to choose which power your character will use on each track. Unfortunately, this actually ruins the multiplayer races, since the powers are horribly unbalanced. — *Daniel Erickson*

Bottom Line: Wait for *Crash Team Racing* to fill your PlayStation kart-racing slot.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Omega Boost

- Platform: **PlayStation**
- Publisher: **SCEA**
- Developer: **Polyphony Digital**

▲ If only it played as good as it looked . . .

▶ *Omega Boost* features such a fundamental disconnect between the plot (go back in time to prevent an evil vacuum tube from poisoning the mind of ENIAC, the first computer) and the gameplay (giant robots fighting in space), that it may as well not even have a story at all.

Which means you're left with the giant robots. Although the 3D graphics are brilliant, when the game shipped in Japan it could be beaten in about 90 minutes (and for the first 45, you could practically just hold down the fire button while looking away from the screen!)

It's harder now, but still remains oddly uncompelling. Shooting a giant ship in space, watching progressively larger pieces fly off until the ship itself is split in two should be fun to do, or at least to watch, but it just isn't. Maybe it's the unbelievably rote play shoot, avoid being shot for a minute, shoot more. The whole game just feels like beating an endless succession of 16-bit shooter bosses. Not even the amazing graphics can save this snore-fest. — *Chris Charla*

Bottom Line: The textbook definition of a two-star game: competent, but totally uninspired.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

PlayStation
Sled Storm

- Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
- Developer: **EA Canada**

Think snowmobiles are the racing equivalent of *Deer Hunter*? Think again

▶ A snowmobile racing game, *Sled Storm* gives you the ability to upgrade your snowmobile with prize money, race a single track or a full season, and adjust all the options you'd expect (laps, sound effects, etc.). But that's not what makes the game special.

What makes it special is the absolutely amazing racing engine. You constantly feel on the white-knuckle edge between control and chaos — as though you're as much reacting to what the snowmobile is doing as telling it where to go. That said, there's never any frustration in the control, which is responsive with the analog or digital pad. Add well-designed tracks and rock-solid graphics to the mix and you've got a standout in the always crowded PlayStation racing field.

Tracks come in two varieties: open mountain, which are large circuits with tons of shortcuts and alternate routes, and SnoCross, which are tight MotoCross-style tracks with plenty of jumps for tricks. There are a total of 14 tracks, not counting hidden ones. You can upgrade your 'mobile with prize money from racing, as well as from points you get for doing tricks during jumps (and also, a little disconcertingly, from running over animals in your path). The icing on the cake? The excellent four-player mode. — *Chris Charla*

Bottom line: An amazing physics engine combined with the novelty of snowmobiles makes this the most unique PlayStation racer since *Jet Moto 1*. A must-buy.

▼ Our only question: Why release a snowmobile game in September!

NextGen ★★★★☆

■ Gears are small and agile, which can be vital in the heat of battle

■ The HUD display, as usual, is key to survival

■ PC

Heavy Gear II
■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Activision**

Gearing up for success

Woe fell unto Activision when it lost the *MechWarrior* license, yet it valiantly soldiered on, coming out with a different sort of giant robot game, *Heavy Gear*. Alas, while it had its good points, ultimately it just couldn't play with the big boys.

Well friends, come out from the darkness and believe again — *Heavy Gear II* is a whole new game.

This is a big, splendid mech sim, with lots of depth and excellent balance between action and strategy. There's a full load of well-rounded missions, from training sessions to an immersive campaign full of twists and turns. You also get eight single-unit historical missions and an instant action mode, plus team combat for as many as 10 players. And if you like fiddling with weapons and armor get ready to gorge yourself on more than 80 different weapons systems.

Every part of this game works together beautifully. The music gets your blood churning. Sound effects are creepy. Even the voice acting is believable. Then there are the visuals, which suck you in right away as you fight through a spectacular electrical storm. Unlike the "brown or green" blandness of the original, you'll fight on snow and ice, through cities and forests, across swamps and wastelands, and in zero-gravity space. The pace is non-stop and stealth is an important ingredient. Your squadmates are actually helpful, just as the enemies are dangerous and unpredictable.

This runs using the "Dark Side" engine, which pulls textures and graphics directly from RAM, with noticeably smooth framerates. In theory you need 64MB of RAM, but we tested it with 32MB and it ran

■ Fighting in the zero gravity of space forces a change of tactics

just fine. Load times may be slower, but the action rolls right along.

In fact, *Heavy Gear II* is darn near perfect. If there is a knock, it's that you can only save the game at the end of a mission, but sims rarely permit in-level saves, and it's a small

price to pay for the game's many splendors.   — John Lee

Bottom Line: With this mechanized battle jewel, Activision is back on top.

■ ▶**Next**Gen ★★★★★

■ Views can be switched from inside to out by hitting external tracking keys

GEAR VS. MECH

Because of the history and the close proximity of release dates, one can't help matching *Heavy Gear II* against *MechWarrior 3*, but the comparison is fruitless. Mechs are giant walking tanks, towering fifty feet above the battlefield, while Gears are customizable suits of battle armor. Mechs lumber and crunch things underfoot. Gears run, crouch, lie prone, and even extend wheels to skate at high speed. Trying to compare them is like seeking similarities between a fork lift and a 50-foot crane. They both handle massive weights, but they're different machines for different jobs.

You can hire a couple of thugs and send them out to do your bashing

Kingpin: Life of Crime

■ Publisher: Interplay ■ Developer: Xatrix

The most reprehensible game of the year? Probably, but it's still kinda cool...

→ *Kingpin* is a dark and gritty game, but do Interplay and Xatrix seem to be just a trifle — you'll pardon the expression — gun shy? *Kingpin* was meant to be bloody and foul-mouthed, but that was before a flood of current events threw a shadow across violent games.

A full-screen caution flashes up and says, "Warning. This product contains graphic scenes of extreme violence and explicit language. Due to its adult nature we ask that anyone under the age of 18 please cancel the install process immediately."

Yeah, right.

So how bloody is it? Wall-to-wall. *Kingpin* is a non-stop

The flamethrower is the ultimate weapon, if you use it right

shooter with a trace of adventure and mild RPG elements, using an enhanced *Quake II* engine, which offers seven lengthy episodes of toe-to-toe butchery. It's bloody, loaded with four-letter words, and definitely for a mature crowd. And, let's face it, it's kinda fun.

It looks great, if grim: slums, street litter, brick textures, no-neck brutes, and foul-mouthed women — your typical crime-ridden neighborhood. The game is filled with quests, heists, and one-on-one mayhem. Weapons range from lead pipes to Tommy guns and rocket launchers (although the absurdity of bringing a rocket launcher to a street fight seems lost on the developers).

And yes, every opponent in *Kingpin* is set up with 15 points of locational damage. Smack an opponent's head, the head bleeds. Shoot him in the leg, the leg buckles. Or just keep your gun in your pocket and try reasoning with him. A solid AI allows thugs to respond in a variety of ways, depending on your approach, and this is arguably the best thing about the game. After all, how often does an opponent try to get away by jumping out a window?
— John Lee

Bottom Line: Although it doesn't exactly stick to its theme of street-level crime, there's more than enough action and shocks to keep your interest.

➲ NextGen ★★★☆☆

Corsairs

■ Platform: PC
■ Publisher: Microids
■ Developer: Microids

→ *Corsairs* has promise — who can resist a pirate game? But while it looks good and sounds good, it sure doesn't play good.

The biggest problem is the absolutely terrible unit AI. For example, when two ships collide and the game switches to

These corsairs do a great job of just standing there, staring into space

"boarding" mode, it's not unusual to see men standing around doing nothing. Not flanking around and attacking the enemy, but just standing there, waiting to be attacked. Winning a battle requires heavy micro-management.

Worse, once the game switches to the boarding mode, no other ships can affect the battle — from a strategy standpoint, this is ludicrous. If two of five ships reach an enemy flagship a little ahead of the pack, the remaining three

ships can't be used in the battle, no matter how long that battle takes. Basically, the extra ships just stand around watching. If you're clever, you can even use this to capture a whole fleet with a single ship. Dumb. — Adam Pavlacka

Bottom Line: If a little more work had gone into polishing the gameplay, this could have been a real gem. As it is, it's a lump of coal.

➲ NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Dungeon Keeper 2

- **Platform:** PC
- **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
- **Developer:** Bullfrog

Dungeon Keeper 2 — while the visuals may be enhanced, the gameplay is all too familiar

Bullfrog is known for its offbeat game ideas, masterfully designed interfaces, and quirky sense of humor With a Bullfrog game, half the fun comes from the fact that you're playing something entirely different from most everything else. With this is mind, it's easy to see why *Dungeon Keeper 2* seems to have that "hot so fresh feeling" when compared to the original title.

While the game features an enhanced graphical engine, a tightened interface, and a few new room types and baddies, the game feels essentially unchanged. Once again, you play the keeper of a dungeon, and your job is to lay the place out and lure in nasty critters to help you slay the guardians of good. While fun for a while, the concept grows tiring, and there isn't enough variety to the game to warrant extended play. For those who have been patiently waiting for the last two years to play even more *Dungeon Keeper*, this is a great thing, but for anyone expecting something new and better, well, you're out of luck. — *Blake Fischer*

Bottom line: Although still fun, *Dungeon Keeper 2* is nowhere near as inspired as its predecessor.

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Re-Volt

- **Platform:** PC
- **Publisher:** Acclaim
- **Developer:** Acclaim Studios

That's right, it's little R/C cars right on your very own PC's it's pretty accurate, and a surprising amount of goofy fun

For those who spent the best days of their adolescence meticulously constructing (and subsequently repairing) model radio-controlled (R/C) cars, Acclaim's *Re-Volt* is sure to bring back some happy memories This R/C simulator not only looks great, it feels surprisingly like the real thing

The graphics are exceptional, with real-world scenes modeled in convincing detail The seven environments are diverse, thoroughly authentic, and colorful. The special-effect quotient is also high- light reflects off cars in a way that closely matches the plastic casing of real R/C automobiles

Visuals aside, at the heart of *Re-Volt* is a superior physics engine. Cars respond to the road, and to each other, very realistically. Realistically, that is, for little plastic cars — an R/C car that weighs barely a pound does not handle like an actual car. Thus, like the real thing, a certain amount of finesse must be cultivated to navigate the buggers through the suburban mazes, as the cars bounce and bump against obstacles and each other like, well, little toys across a kitchen floor. Those with a lot of patience will find Acclaim's *Re-Volt* to be a very accurate little R/C simulator, and a rewarding game. — *Jeremy Williams*

Bottom Line: Rumors to the contrary have been greatly exaggerated. Really, this is quite a good game. Go there.

NextGen ★★★★☆

Official Formula 1 Racing

- **Platform:** PC
- **Publisher:** Eidos
- **Developer:** Video System

Don't expect much scenery in F1 Racing — the tracks are all fairly standard

The good news: Video System is no stranger to the F1 license, since it's been producing F1 games since the 16-bit days. The bad news: F1 racing is F1 racing, and it's hard to make a new revision stand out.

Official Formula 1 Racing has all the necessary bells and whistles. It's got the complete set of cars and tracks from 1998, hardware acceleration, multiplayer support, good visuals, and respectable hardware requirements, running smooth

as silk on a P200

The simulation mode strives to accurately portray the experience of driving an F1 car, complete with touchy steering and the ability to spin out on a moment's notice — racing fanatics will love it. Everyone else will appreciate the inclusion of an arcade mode that tones down the accuracy of the car handling, and for players who need even more help there are "driving assistants" that put certain things like braking under CPU control.

The only problem with the game is the predictability of it. Strangely enough, there are few crashes or eliminations, and computer-controlled opponents rarely try to overtake you unless you make a mistake — not very realistic. — *Adam Pavlacka*

Bottom line: The game is solid and the graphics decent, but there isn't anything groundbreaking — or especially exciting — here.

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Ring

- **Platform:** PC
- **Publisher:** Red Orb
- **Developer:** Cryo Interactive Entertainment

Talk about non-intuitive: you have to avoid clicking on this mermaid to successfully complete the game

An interactive adventure in the style of *Peal* and *Riven*, *Ring* attempts to capture the atmosphere and majesty of Wagner's operatic *Ring Cycle*. Except it falls miserably.

Playing as one of the last survivors of humanity, you go back and delve through the mythos of Germanic creation stories to better understand the flaws that brought the human race to the brink of extinction, all the while being immersed in music from the opera.

However, the story becomes mere background for a series of puzzles that range from juvenile to simply impossible. The puzzles, unfortunately, have nothing to do with the actual story (The Mighty Odin commands you to solve this sliding-tile puzzle, mortal scum!) and ruin any atmosphere in the game. Graphically dark and stylized, the game looks very pretty except when anything moves. But luckily, this is rare, as you spend most of the time staring at backgrounds with

spot ammunition on one character's mouth. Add to that a keep-inducing, point-click-die-and-reload interface, and it becomes an exercise in pure tedium.

The music's nice, though — *Daniel Erickson*

Bottom line: Even if you're a fan of adventure games, opera, and Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, you'll still hate *Ring*.

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Total Annihilation: Kingdoms

- **Platform:** PC
- **Publisher:** Cavedog Entertainment
- **Developer:** Cavedog Entertainment

The original Total Annihilation was pretty good. The sequel is just OK

Cavedog's RTS *Total Annihilation* was a hit with gamers because of its massive number of units, well designed maps, intense multiplayer mode, and frequent unit updates on the Internet. Cavedog is attempting to repeat this success with *TA: Kingdoms*, a fantasy-based RTS that uses the *Total Annihilation* engine

Gameplay is very similar to *Total Annihilation*, with the main strategy being to send wave after wave of units at the enemy There are some differences, however. Cavedog has radically simplified resource acquisition to a simple "capture a power source and defend it" tactic, placing the emphasis on combat and opening the genre to less-experienced players. In a unique twist on loyalty as the game progresses, the player switches back and forth from playing the good guys to the bad guys and is exposed to more units and mission types.

Kingdoms' minimal resource management and fantasy setting immediately calls for comparison to Bungie's *Myth* series and leaves the player wanting. Adding some of *Myth*'s features, like formations and a more intuitive camera control, would have made this outstanding — *Rick Sanchez*

Bottom line: *Kingdoms* is a well crafted, if a little dumbed-down, RTS title that offers good gameplay but not genre-advancing game design.

NextGen ★★★☆☆

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→Letters

The bizarre writes and writuals of the Next Gen reader

I for one am not a big advocate of change, but let me say that the new style of Next Gen is a fantastic improvement. Everything's organized much more concisely and professionally, and information is much easier to find. I love these nifty little arrow thingies for every new story, by the way. But where's the trademark NG at the end of every article?

And of course the reviews are nicely well done. I especially like the way you gave a bad game like Duke Nukem: Zero Hour a big review to trounce its unplayability. This is a welcome sight for all horrible games that deserve punishment. And let's hear it for the bigger, better pictures and that cool Backwards Compatible section at the end. Outstanding.

I really can't express how much I like all the new features about Next Generation. I'm just extremely thankful that you've managed to traverse into a different style of presentation but that you've managed to keep the content of your expert magazine intact. (Especially the random banter in the staff box on the last page). Well done, guys.

Sean Reid
Jpn6686@aol.com

The new logo is bad. It is evil. Evil to biblical proportions. Although it doesn't suck, the old logo was so much better it gives the universe when changing it. PLEASE consider going back to the old logo, if only for the front cover. Also the inside is now flashier and dumber than ever. I don't mind the little arrow graphics on every header, or the ridiculous layouts, or any other thing about the new design (save the new front-page logo), but when I look back on the perfect, sophisticated look of the first 10 or so issues I have, a

tear comes to my eye. Now, except for the strong cover, your mag blends in with all the other immature-looking, bland mags on the rack.

Sam Sandy
Zenogas@aol.com

Thanks for all the letters on the redesign. Although there are still adjustments to be made: (look for changes appearing next month), we're pretty pleased with the redesign, and so are most readers. Feedback is currently running about seven to one in favor of the new design.

Sam's letter is pretty typical of the negative responses. Sam, the old design, as great as it was, was five years old and starting to look really tired and dull, which isn't the way a magazine devoted to the next generation of games should look. The new look is designed specifically so that we can showcase the next generation of games in the way they deserve: with big, bold screens. This doesn't mean we're sacrificing on text, either: we get the exact same number of words on the page. As for the new cover logo, we felt it was important to a) reflect what everyone calls the magazine, anyway and b) to create a unified look with the page and section markers inside the magazine. And if you really think the new Next Generation looks like other game mags, well, maybe you haven't been to the newsstand lately.

The bottom line is that however it looks, the other thing that won't ever change about Next Generation is our editorial mission to provide the best coverage on the best games for smart, sophisticated readers who demand more from a game magazine.

You guys are good. Really good. You should have seen me scream like a little girl and jump 20 feet in the air when I received NG 09/99 in the mail and saw the cover. That thing scared the hell out of me! Even though I have read the issue front to back, I have to keep it in my closet face down under a pile of other Next Gen issues so, you know, things won't happen. How did you guys come up with something like that? You sure know how to hit home. Keep up the good work.

Roy J. Padgett
MZ135736@aol.com

That pact with Satan just keeps working better and better…

A few months back I sent a letter about the game in the Tiltpak ad. My letter was published, and NG said that the game shown in the TV does not exist. However, someone by the name of Josh

Martin pointed out to me that the game in question was in fact Star Soldier. It's a rather weak-looking old-school shooter, but it does feature Japanese mecha, and the screenshots resemble the game in the ad very closely. The website's article said that the title was extremely scarce and there was virtually no promotion for it at all. At any rate, I thought this warranted a mention and a bit of investigating. Too bad the game sucked. Man, wasted drool. I hate that.

Jonathan Ma
Jonjonm@uno.com

Bad info and a too-trusting fact checker to blame here (he's since been sent to "management training," where he learned to manage the pain of being hobbled at the ankles with a sledgehammer, Misery-style). In our defense, the image was box art, not a screenshot. (That's why we didn't finish him off.)

Sex, lies, and PC games

When my father and I recently went to buy the newly released PC game Kingpin: Life of Crime, the salespeople started telling us how there is an extremely graphic rape scene that included a twelve-year old girl. I was really surprised, and my father refused to get me the game. He knows about the extreme violence that the game supposedly contains, but the rape was too much. My question is: were those pesky salespeople telling the truth?

Zack Epcar
sepcar@VentanaPS.com

For cryin' out loud, absolutely not! This is one of those bizarro rumors that can't be denied emphatically enough. First of all, there isn't a single character in the whole game that isn't clearly an adult, much less as young as twelve. Second, while there's a lot of gore and some very rough language, the violence does not, repeat NOT, include rape.

Come on, folks, the industry as a whole and this game in particular have enough baggage to carry. Hysteria won't help.

◄ KINGPIN

You should have seen me scream like a little girl and jump 20 feet in the air when I received NG 09/99 in the mail and saw the cover

I'm glad you guys are cleaning up the feel of the mag to keep up with the industry. I just have one question about your review policies. Why did you give the Japanese release of *Power Stone* only four stars, but in your current issue you give the American release five? Same goes for *Get Bass* — not three months ago it received a perfect score, but now it only gets four! My philosophy is that the review should only change if the game has been changed for the American release: i.e., *Tenchu*. Just wondering, although *Power Stone* deserves all the praise you can heap on it. The game really is incredible!

Lars Bakken
Product Analyst, Eidos Interactive

OK, you caught us. *The fact is that* Power Stone *just got better and better the longer we played it, while it became clear that the original reviewer of* Get Bass *was just a rabid bass enthusiast. Since we were starting with a clean slate in September — new design and all — it was felt revising an opinion or two wouldn't be out of line, or frankly, noticed. Silly us.*

But, if you prefer, just chalk it up to different reviewers taking different substances. That works.

Warning! If you rent the Dreamcast, prepare to put a "For Sale" sign on your N64 and PlayStation, because after Dreamcast you will never want to look at them again. After playing *Sonic*, the graphics, sound, and speed made me realize how much this system has to offer (the actual game is only OK, but then I never liked *Sonic* anyway). In my opinion, the Dreamcast's only rental teaser pays off. Just rent Dreamcast and look at three important things: one, the detail in the environments; two, sometimes you don't even know when a cut scene finishes and gameplay begins; and three, look at the dust that's already on your N64 and PlayStation — will you ever turn them on again?

Michael Fidler
chulo0423@hotmail.com

Well, there's one satisfied customer. Only 999,999 more to go worldwide and Sega meets its sales predictions for 2000.

OK, there has been a large error. I was looking through some of your recent magazines, reading the letters, and I noticed that you had killed four of your

editors in the last few months. Then I looked and I saw your editorial intern had stayed the same for a while. And even weirder, no one on the actual staff had changed. So either you're covering up a murder or someone in your editorial staff should pay for this mistake!

RW8Steven@aol.com

See, the intern usually does the masthead as soon as he's done dealing with the mail. Since errors get pointed out in the mail, he's usually dead before he gets to the masthead. Hence, the masthead doesn't change. And please, we'll never "cover up" a murder.

I hate your magazine. Your magazine is what the videogame-magazine economy needs less of. I think that you like PlayStation and PC better than N64. In the last issue, I saw the N64 games you reviewed were scored much less than the PSX and PC games you reviewed. N64 is my favorite system, and it should gain more respect. Also, you call games by their Japanese names instead of their American names. I have a suspicion that you also review illegal games. Game magazines like this appall me.

Gyarados38@aol.com

We review all the games we can get our greedy little hands on. We call games by their Japanese names because we frequently preview or review them before they come out here, so we don't know what the U.S. name will be. As for illegal games, we have never used nor received an illegal copy of a game — why should we, since every publisher sends them to us for free well before they're released? Feel free to hate us — we thrive on it — but pick better reasons next time, OK? Thanks.

Undo:
The September issue of *Next Generation* contained a review of *NetVolt* from Acclaim for PC. Unfortunately, an unfinished version of the game was accidentally reviewed. For a

review of the finished game, see this month's finals section. We apologize to Acclaim and to you, our readers, for this error.

In some fit of madness, we made not one but two errors in our review of *Rich Diamond* in NG 08/99. Its publisher is Core Concepts, not Ubi Soft, and the game is for PC, not N64. Our apologies to Ubi Soft, Core Concepts, Nintendo, and the clerks who will have to field questions about this. The people responsible have been bled with leeches to remove the ill humors that we think caused the errors.

BUSTY BOOTH BABES

VIDEOGAMING FOR THE NINETIES

→**Next**Gen

Next Generation Magazine

October 1990

Genesis comes into its own with a brilliant platformer

→ Fall 1990: On PC, Sid Meier's *Railroad Tycoon* was making waves. On console, chinks were appearing in Nintendo's armor: while the company spent millions of dollars suing rental outlets like Blockbuster to make sure gamers would actually buy *Super Mario 3* (a pretty safe bet, even without the suits), Turbo Grafx 16, with its new Bonk mascot, was building an impressive fan base (well, it seemed like that at the time, anyway). And over at Neo Geo, $199 would buy an actual arcade game on a home cart (once you'd paid $700 for the system, that is).

The real action, though, was on Genesis with Capcom's *Strider*. The first 8-megabit cartridge offered one of the most complete and accurate home conversions

A Giant robotic apes. They just don't make bosses like this anymore

ever done at the time. Gamers led the ninja-like Strider Hiryu in a sidescrolling, sword-slashing, platform-hopping adventure through Russia. Along the way, players were treated to interactive environments (nothing beat jumping off the walls), huge enemies (remember the giant robotic ape?), and some of the tightest gameplay seen on 16-bit.

Interviewed: Sid Meier
How will he ever top *Railroad Tycoon?*

Capcom's finest hour

Strider redefines home gaming — complete review inside

Countdown to Super NES:
Mode 7 revealed

Are there too many Ninjas in games today?

What we were playing

They don't call it the golden age of platformers for nothing...

BONK'S ADVENTURE	REVENGE OF SHINOBI	SUPER MARIO 3	CADASH	MAGICIAN LORD
■ System: Turbo Grafx 16	■ System: Genesis	■ System: NES	■ System: Turbo Grafx 16	■ System: Neo Geo
■ Publisher: Hudson Soft	■ Publisher: Sega	■ Publisher: Nintendo	■ Publisher: Taito	■ Publisher: Alpha Denshi Ltd.
■ Developer: Atlas, Ltd.	■ Developer: Sega	■ Developer: Nintendo	■ Developer: Working Designs	■ Developer: Alpha Denshi Ltd.

Top 10 movies of '90

1 Home Alone
2 Ghost
3 Dances With Wolves
4 Pretty Woman
5 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
6 The Hunt for Red October
7 Total Recall
8 Die Hard 2
9 Dick Tracy
10 Kindergarten Cop

Was this concept really original enough to merit two sequels?

...and in the real world

■ The NC-17 rating is created so films can be shown in respectable theaters but still feature naked people having sex.

■ The crash of '70s child stars begins with the arrest of *Diff'rent Strokes* star Todd Bridges for assault with a deadly weapon — "Give you all my crack? Whatcha talkin' about Mr. Drummond?"

■ Luther "Luke Skywalker" Campbell,

front man for 2 Live Crew, pays George Lucas $300,000 for taking the name of Lucas' "moral, wholesome" character in vain. Through a series of subsequent trials, 2 Live Crew becomes the most unlikely of free speech advocates.

■ *The Simpsons* is given its own holiday special, and subsequent series, after *The Tracy Ullman Show*, which spawned it, is cancelled. Merchandising will soon follow.

BackwardsCompatible

If you're 18-26, your subscription copy may soon be coming to an APO box, if the senators who run our nation's fighting forces have their way. Find out the frightening details on page 64. **Our first and probably only Game Boy preview ever. Page 70.** Game magazine or recipe guide: our mouthwatering kielbasa- and knish-filled preview. Page 51. **First, think up an LL Cool J pun, then turn here to see how yours compared to ours. Page 78.** Is it just us, or does this girl look exactly like Shannen Doherty? Page 99. **Is it just us, or does this screen look exactly like the first level of GoldenEye? Page 47.** Is it just us, or do funny things come in threes? Page 127. **Our calls to San Francisco's attorney general went unanswered, but before we could commit the crimes ourselves to find out the penalties, Imagine Media's crack legal staff came through. Page 80.** How did the editor try to justify making Imagine Media pay for his flight to a wedding in Detroit? Find out on page 76. (FYI: it didn't work.) **This page has a lot of interesting words on it. "Sex." "Drool." "Sledgehammer." The editors deal out the punishments you've come to know and love on page 124.** Not true: shaken Capcom staffers got the idea for this game when actual fossils were discovered under their Osaka office after the Kobe Earthquake. **Your single best chance to get your twitching hands on a free Dreamcast is on page 120.** If you laid all the PlayStations ever sold in North America end to end, how far across North America would they stretch? **Next Generation** does the math on page 14. **Hardcore Hello Kitty? Page 10.**

NextMonth **PlayStation 2**

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